

For a rail trail, civilly

November 28, 2015, as submitted by **CAPERTON and WILL TISSOT**

It is unfortunate that a civil discussion about the rail/train at times deteriorates into personal Facebook insults and attacks expressed by a few individuals. Good folks can have opposing views and still respect one another. Before we state our own opinions, we would urge that civility be restored to this debate.

We believe in bringing back train transportation where viable - between larger and distant cities, for example. However, as has been shown, the Adirondack Park does not have the population to support a passenger or freight train, especially one that travels at only 30 mph. One might ask, what tourists will choose to sit for hours on a slow train, bypassing any possibility of exploring the Park, when they can more speedily drive their own cars and stop where they want? If they should opt for a train, auto transportation will still be necessary on their arrival in order to travel to any specific destination.

Those trains which have tried to operate in our area, including the Saratoga-North Creek one, have done so at a financial loss. A region like ours will be better served by developing energy-efficient engines and non-polluting fuel for vehicles which run on existing roads.

Therefore, we strongly support the proposal of the state Department of Environmental Conservation and Department of Transportation to convert the 34-mile section of rail corridor connecting Lake Placid, Saranac Lake and Tupper Lake into a year-round, preferably paved, multi-use recreation path. Boosting local business is a major goal. Our patient and loyal downtown merchants deserve a turnaround in their customer base. Developing this kind of trail has brought that break to numbers of village businesses nationwide which lie near many of the rail trails we have biked in the last several years.

While the newly arrived rail bikes have enjoyed success this past season, the cost is high for a ride between Saranac Lake and Lake Clear (\$100 for a family of four), thus limiting their use to those who can afford them. Nor do we see why a private company should be allowed to monopolize a rail trail which could otherwise allow hundreds, if not thousands of folks to enjoy such a path for free - be it for walking, jogging, biking, bird watching and, if paved, rollerblading and skateboarding. For those who prefer a pedal car, such can be fitted with rubber tires and pedaled on the rail trail without the need for tracks, which exclude all other uses.

In the winter, this trail will provide snowmobilers with a better alternative to that of using off-limits forest ski trails, which now happens way too often. The trail can serve to channel snowmobiles away from the "forever wild" Forest Preserve onto a wide, straight, smooth corridor best suited for this kind of motorized recreation. And not to forget, snowmobilers bring good business to restaurants and shops along their routes.

Rail trails provide excellent opportunities for historical groups to post interpretive signage, as is often done elsewhere, informing users of the historic role of railroads in opening up the

Adirondacks, the history of the Adirondack Park and Forest Preserve, and the inspiring story of our pioneering health care industry. Signage can include interpretations of our natural history as well, highlighting the ecology of the region, various landforms and the presence of wildlife. This information could not be read by looking out the window of a passing train.

We urge that any costly continuation of the tourist train tracks from Utica to Tupper Lake be delayed until the recreational rail trail has first had a chance to prove itself. This rail trail is the only recreational amenity lacking in the Adirondack Park, where we are otherwise blessed with abundant opportunities for hiking, paddling, climbing, skiing, fishing, hunting and enjoying the natural blessings of the region. It is time we catch up with what is widely popular in the rest of the country, an environmentally friendly, healthy way to enrich the quality of life for local residents and to stimulate our tourist economy with a world-class biking and multi-use trail.

Caperton and Will Tissot are member of Adirondack Recreational Trail Advocates