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## Rail Trail Commentary: Get To It, Tupper Lake!

by [Pete Nelson](#)



With the Adirondack Park Agency (APA) having [signaled its inclination to support the proposed amendment](#) to the Remsen – Lake Placid Travel Corridor Unit Management Plan that would refurbish the rails between Big Moose and Tupper Lake and replace the rails with a multi-use trail between Tupper lake and Lake Placid, the time for endless argument over the merits of this proposal needs to come to an end. Instead it is time to begin the work to

maximize [the great economic potential of this project](#). That's right, Tupper Lake: I'm talking to you.

I do not mean to exclude other worthy communities on the route, all of whom will benefit, but I have a special affection for you, Tupper Lake. I've been hosted and wonderfully treated by some of your civic leaders, who wanted my wife and I to see the value and importance of your community. I've been invited to participate in town meetings and planning sessions. I have good friends in Tupper. I love the Wild Center. I love the Lumberjack! I'd love to see you transform yourself, Tupper. No kidding: here comes your best chance to do that in more than a century.

Let the naysayers doubt what a world-class recreational trail served by either automobile or train can do for you. In my experience the potential draw of this trail will make the optimistic hopes some communities have for an economic boost from the Essex Chain look like nothing. The key is to leverage your unique position as a hub for both the rail and the recreational trail – and to recognize that in this hub you possess an asset with national appeal – that's right, national appeal (and don't forget Canada while you're at it).

Why am I so confident? Because I already know the proposed Adirondack Recreational Trail has national appeal. A few years ago, when the trail concept was being developed, I had two meetings with Trek Bikes, a little bicycle company with billion-dollar revenues and sales in 90 countries. Trek took the meetings, offered support if the trail came to pass and made suggestions because they knew it was a project that had real potential. That's right, they were interested in an Adirondack trail: imagine that. As the trail moves forward Trek's dealers in the Park will have an opportunity to engage one of the world's largest bicycle companies in taking advantage of the business this trail will bring. That kind of attention doesn't come with just any project.

Tupper, you have a chance to help develop a national marketing initiative for a trail that will appeal to people from coast to coast. Doubters have charged that estimates for economic gain from the trail are inflated, that there is no comparable trail with which to make projections. They're right about that: there is no comparable trail in the United States. If done right, this trail,

passing through one of America's truly wild jewels, connecting resort communities, museums, historic areas and Olympic facilities while intersecting with myriad other recreational opportunities, will be an incomparable trail.

You can be at the center of that, Tupper. And when naysayers pooh-pooh your initiative, politely remind them that you will be directly appealing to a recreation sector that is both one of the most popular and one of the fastest growing activities in North America. How much opportunity does that represent? We're not even throwing in the increase in snowmobiling you're going to get.

Thanks to Next Stop! Tupper Lake you have a beautiful depot with which to anchor the expanded train service on one end and the trail on the other. You're not starting from scratch. So first, consult with ROOST. Develop an aggressive plan to market the combination of train and trail to a national audience. You can help to accomplish that by taking advantage of the various networks of recreational bicycling enthusiasts that can be found on the Web. You can talk to bicycle clubs and dealers. You have a huge audience out there: go after it.

Then get ready to put a restaurant, an outfitter that sells equipment, snacks and supplies and a bike shop that does repairs in or near the depot. Don't wait for legions of bicyclists to magically appear, draw them with infrastructure. Jim McKenna of ROOST is right in his philosophy, especially in the case of promoting an asset like this rail and trail hub: build it and they will come. Build this stuff and then blow your horn, Tupper. Bill yourself as a recreational bicycling capital.

Be on the leading edge of ecotourism, too. Educate green-conscious tourists (another sector with double-digit growth) that they can lose their car down-state, load their bikes on a train, come to Tupper and have the low-impact recreational experience of a lifetime. You can establish an electric vehicle (EV) shuttle to take green vacationers back and forth between the train, the trail and your fine lodging and eating establishments. You can implement a smart-phone CO<sub>2</sub>-counting app that shows folks how much carbon they're keeping out of the atmosphere on their trip. In an era where climate change will come to dominate the national zeitgeist don't think for a moment that a strategy like that isn't smart.

The nattering nabobs of negativity will say all this optimism is a fantasy. Don't listen, Tupper Lake. I've seen recreational trails transform whole communities. You have to do it right, though. The naysayers will have the last laugh if your plan to promote this project consists a couple of ads in the local paper and some nice signage. You'll need to really market this – and not just to North Country residents and other New Yorkers. You'll need to create some buzz. You'll need to open some businesses that can support a first-class recreational bicycling experience, like the restaurant and the bike shop.

In short, you'll have to make some investments, Tupper Lake. You'll have to have a smart strategy and really mean it. But it's worth it. Ask Sparta, Wisconsin. This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, Tupper. So get to it! Build it and they will come. A lot of them.

*Photo: Tupper Lake Depot. Photo courtesy the Adirondack Explorer*