

Many reasons to build the trail

November 28, 2015, as submitted by HOPE FRENETTE

I would like to address Gail Brill's recent concerns, as expressed in her letter of Nov. 23 ("Many reasons to keep the rails").

- The tracks are supporting two businesses. Wow! We should keep these outmoded and underutilized tracks in place because of two businesses? What about the 400-plus businesses that have already stated their preference for a trail? It seems to me that a public asset like our travel corridor should be used to benefit as many businesses and people as possible.
- Handicapped and disabled citizens will be left out if the tracks are replaced with a trail. Not so fast. There are many of the disabled and handicapped who have been demanding exactly this type of trail so that they may recreate safely at a venue that enables them to ride a bike or scooter outside of traffic. Should their needs and wishes be ignored?
- Climate change may warm up the Adirondacks so our region will be as warm as South Carolina or Georgia in 65 years. Maybe so, but that's all the more reason to build a world-class recreation trail for biking, walking, running and otherwise enjoying our unique environment. If snowmobile season eventually disappears, that means the trail will be available for warm-weather recreation year-round. I don't think that we should limit a venue's opportunity to enhance the present population's economic vitality because of something that might happen in the future. If the demand for rail service is there, it can return. Keeping 19th-century technology in place in case we need 22nd-century transportation is not a reason to keep the tracks. If there is a need and demand for rail service through the Adirondacks in the future, modern rail infrastructure can easily be restored on a well maintained railbed.
- The rail-trail will be dangerous without reliable cell service in case of injury. Current cell service is spotty in many areas of the Adirondack Park, but that does not keep people from hiking, paddling, skiing, etc. You could be in a car on one of our highways and not have cell service. Does that mean we shouldn't drive through those areas? Lack of cell service cuts both ways. What happens when a train derails in the middle of the wilderness? Who's running back to the station for help? While a cellphone is convenient, it is not absolutely necessary. There are many safety communication devices that can be purchased or rented that can be used when cell service is lacking. Fact is, on our Tri-Lakes rail trail there will be a steady stream of recreationists to help out in case of injury, and there will be easy access by motor vehicle for any necessary rescue operations. It will be far safer than hundreds of miles of hiking trails throughout the Adirondacks.
- Managing and maintaining a rail-trail will be problematic. Why should it be? Consider what is happening right now on the corridor. Adirondack Scenic Railroad does rail maintenance and is reimbursed by the New York state taxpayer. New York State Snowmobile Association does snowmobile trail work and grooming and is reimbursed by New York state funds which come directly from the registration fees collected from the snowmobilers themselves. The state will likely manage the rail-trail in similar fashion, with volunteers eagerly helping out as they do for rail trails all over the country. No, it

will not be necessary to bicycle in with a chainsaw to clear the trail, as Ms. Brill suggests, to clear fallen trees. State Department of Environmental Conservation personnel will be able to drive their motor vehicles on the corridor to do this type of maintenance.

- Restore this "precious (railroad) infrastructure" so "my great-grandchildren will be able to travel through the Adirondacks with ease." Seriously, you have no idea what your great-grandchildren will want to use as transportation in the future. There is no actual transportation being proposed here, just a scenic ride through the woods. It is the lack of physical activity and regular exercise that has contributed to a national epidemic of obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular disease. One of the most important gifts we can give our descendants is a safe, easy, scenic, accessible recreation trail that connects our villages.

The corridor has been languishing for far too long. The tourist train has had almost 20 years to prove itself since the state opened the entire corridor to its use in 1996, and it has not delivered. The tracks are preventing far more beneficial uses of our travel corridor. It is time to move on and try something that has proven beneficial to other communities. We have a great opportunity here to vet both options rail and trail. Let's see what shakes out.

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