

VIEWPOINTS

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EDITORIAL

It's time for an Adirondack rail-trail

While rail-trails all over the country draw thousands of bicyclists to little-known places, New York is fiddling away the opportunity to create what could be one of the premier such trails in the United States.

The trail would run from Lake Placid, already a world-famous resort and a mecca for athletes, to Tupper Lake — a distance of about 34 miles. Eventually, it could continue all the way to Old

Forge, making it 90 miles long and one of the longest such trails in the country.

It will be, no matter what, one of the most beautiful such trails in the country, running through mountains and fields and along lakes and through wetlands of the Adirondacks.

Rail-trails are old railroad tracks that have been converted to use as recreation trails. Usually, the tracks are torn up, and a hard surface, such as crushed stone, is put down.

A trail in the Blue Ridge Mountains, the Virginia Creeper Trail — also 34 miles long — has revived a couple of sleepy mountain towns with about 250,000 trail riders a year. These people rent bicycles from local shops by the

OUR VIEW

The state of New York should support the path concept along its right of way in the Adirondack Park.



COURTESY PHOTO

A portion of the Virginia Creeper Trail is seen. A proposed rail-trail would run from Lake Placid to Tupper Lake and down to Old Forge, and would be one of the longest trails of its kind in the United States.

tens of thousands; they eat hundreds of thousands of snacks and meals; they stay in local hotels.

Although Lake Placid is already busy with visitors much of the year, Saranac Lake and Tupper Lake are not. They need the business.

Now, in the summer, Adirondack Scenic Railroad runs tourist trains between Lake Placid and

Saranac Lake, which is the northern end of the rail line, and between Utica and Old Forge on the southern end.

The state right of way the train uses would be better used as a rail-trail, with bicyclists and hikers on it in the summer, snowmobilers and cross-country skiers in the winter.

Bicycle tourism is not limited to the Tri-Lakes, or

even to the Adirondacks. Throughout the upstate region, trails are being developed, and as soon as they're ready, they are being used.

The train trip is a novelty ride that the occasional tourist likes to take once or twice. But biking is an activity that people make a regular part of their lives. Bicycle tourism, which combines low expense with

beneficial exercise and natural beauty, has become an enormous business.

Across Lake Champlain, the 14-mile-long Island Line Trail runs north from Burlington along the shore of the lake, over a causeway to several islands. It follows an old railroad bed and is the most popular recreation trail in Vermont, drawing about 150,000 visitors a year.

Biking is a good fit for the Adirondack region, because people already come here for hiking, skiing, canoeing, kayaking and other healthy outdoor activities. The natural beauty and serenity of the extensive Adirondack wilderness is perfect for outdoors and adventure-oriented tourism.

Lake George is busy in the summer and Lake Placid is busy year-round. Beyond that, the region's potential as a tourism destination, especially when compared with places that are busier but far less spectacular, is largely unrealized.

It's not enough for the state to run TV ads showing pretty video of the Adirondack Park. To draw visitors, the state needs to make available to visitors the sorts of experiences they're seeking — experiences like biking through the wilderness on a wide, safe path.

New York officials have been delaying for years a decision on what to do about the railroad right of way. Meanwhile, other regions have been developing rail-trails and attracting visitors by the hundreds of thousands. It's time for the state to put its support behind an Adirondack rail-trail, so we can draw those visitors here.

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