

Rail biking vs. real biking

As submitted to the Adirondack Daily Enterprise, October 27, 2015

To the editor:

"Rail biking with good buddies" was the headline over Chris Mele's glowing commentary (Oct. 19) about riding rail bikes along the 6 miles of rail corridor between Saranac Lake and Lake Clear. "It was a day punctuated by ceaseless, chop-busting laughter bordering on tears, and great company," the writer reported.

Well, if that experience was such a delight, I can only say that the best is yet to come. When the tracks are removed between Lake Placid and Tupper Lake, and the corridor becomes a year-round, multi-use recreation trail, Chris and his good buddies will be able to have even more fun together. They can ride real bicycles as far and as fast (or as slow) as they wish. They can stop to yuk it up, fish, swim, picnic or contemplate beavers and birds. They can exit the corridor whenever they feel like it and ride on a network of scenic backcountry roads. They can stay out for a few hours or a few days.

All at no charge and on their own schedules.

The Great Debate of recent years concerns the best use of the Remsen-Lake Placid rail corridor. The idea is that this extraordinary public resource, which has been sitting largely idle for decades, should be used in a way that provides the greatest good for the greatest number of people.

As novel and newsworthy as it is, the Rail Explorers rail biking operation between Saranac Lake and Lake Clear would prevent an array of more beneficial uses. Same with the proposal to extend the Adirondack Scenic Railroad from just north of Old Forge to Tupper Lake. There is no market for excursion trains that go more than 60 or 70 miles. Shouldn't it be obvious to our decision-makers that stretching the Adirondack Scenic Railroad way beyond its current length of 62 miles (Utica to Big Moose) would be a misuse of public funds?

Conversely, the rail-to-trail conversion linking our Tri-Lakes communities will provide something for everyone, including riding bicycles and tricycles, walking, running, operating wheelchairs, bird watching and improved snowmobiling in the winter.

There are now 22,000 miles of rail trails in the United States, and the number is growing rapidly. By facilitating a range of outdoor activities, rail trails have proved beneficial in three ways:

1. Positive economic impact
2. Improved public health from regular exercise
3. Recreational enjoyment for all ages and physical abilities. (Free of traffic and being generally level, rail trails are of special importance for young children and seniors.)

Let us hope that the Adirondack Park Agency acts in the public interest by approving this "adaptive reuse" of our Adirondack travel corridor at its November meeting.

Dick Beamish

Saranac Lake