

Adirondack Daily Enterprise

Breaking ground on the Rail Trail



Tupper Lake village Mayor Paul Maroun stands Thursday in the overgrown railroad tracks that are being taken up as part of the development of the Adirondack Rail Trail. (Enterprise photo — Amy Scattergood)

TUPPER LAKE — After years of negotiations that were often as stalled as the trains that used to run on the now-overgrown tracks between Utica and Lake Placid, the New York State Department of Transportation finally broke ground on the Adirondack Rail Trail this week.

The \$1.9 million initial part of the project removes tracks from Tupper Lake through Saranac Lake to Lake Placid, clearing the way — literally — for it to be converted to a shared-use path for skiers, hikers, bikers and snowmobiles. A second \$19.1 million project is also beginning that will rehabilitate 45 miles of tracks in the other direction, between Tupper Lake and Big Moose, connecting to Utica, over 100 miles away.

“This has been the most heated issue in the Adirondack Park,” said Tupper Lake village mayor Paul Maroun on Thursday as he walked the tracks near the Tupper Lake railroad station, which was rebuilt in the 2000s after being demolished decades before.

“They’ve started taking up the ties,” he said. *“They’re drilling new holes for the spikes.”*

Maroun, who grew up in Tupper Lake, used to ride the train and shoot pheasants on the tracks. *“It was a beautiful ride to Utica,”* he said fondly.



The overgrown railroad tracks connecting Tupper Lake and Lake Placid will soon be taken up as part

of the development of the Adirondack Rail Trail. (Enterprise photo — Amy Scattergood)

The 34-mile Adirondack Rail Trail will go in one direction, while what's billed by the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation as the longest scenic (i.e., not high-speed) railway in the country will extend in the other direction. Both will use Tupper Lake as a hub, which will upgrade the existing railroad station, put in a yard to restore engines and locomotives, and build a modern round house for the new tracks to loop around.

"When? That's the next question that I don't have the answer to," said Maroun. *"A couple of years. Things will happen rather quickly. Right now we just want to get it going."*

Both the rail trail and the new railway are part of the 2020 Remsen-Lake Placid Travel Corridor Unit Management Plan, which aims to bolster tourism and outdoor recreation along the 119-mile travel corridor. That corridor follows the path of a rail line that was built in 1892 and operated until 1972. The state of New York bought both the line and its right-of-way in 1974.

Maroun was for bringing back the train on the entire route.

"I really thought, for the economics and dynamics of the North Country, it should have gone to Lake Placid," he said. *"Once you tear up a rail, you're not going to put it back."*

This is not to say he's not happy — very happy — about the new plan, which he says has already brought new business to the village. *"It was this or nothing, and it's better than nothing. It's been so long in the making. And for Tupper Lake, it's really a win-win."*

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