

Friends of the Rail Trail

A Committee of the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy

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www.MohawkHudson.org



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Dear Friend of the Rail Trail:

We have some exciting news to share with you. **Albany County closed on the purchase of the property for the Rail Trail** from Canadian Pacific Railway!

The County officially took title to the 9-mile corridor on December 30, 2009. Thanks to generous funding from Scenic Hudson and a grant from the NY State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, the \$700,000 land acquisition was made. Please join us in taking a moment to celebrate this important milestone that has been over a decade in the planning.

As you know, the Friends of the Rail Trail (FORT), a committee of the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy, was formed a year ago to support and promote the Rail Trail. What you might not be aware of, is that this committee represents a synthesis of three existing groups' efforts over the past several years. **And all that hard work is beginning to pay off!**

FORT had a busy year in 2009. With the assistance of a start-up grant from Parks and Trails New York, we spread the word about the trail project through numerous community events and in the local media, created print and electronic outreach materials, and helped assure a standing room only turnout for the County's public meeting about the Rail Trail last summer.

Our most important role, however, has been to gather input on the trail's design and use from people like you, and share that information with members of the County planning staff. FORT's planning sub-committee submitted a series of written recommendations and met with the County on multiple occasions. We were fortunate to have been included in the design process early on, and have already seen several of our recommendations added to the draft design documents as they continue to be developed. Albany County is working quickly, with a goal of completing final design by this spring.

However, our work is far from over. While the Rail Trail property is finally owned by Albany County, and the trail's design is well under way, funding for constructing the trail remains a significant barrier. During the protracted property purchase negotiations with the railroad over the past decade, construction costs have increased and major structures carrying the rail bed over major roadways have deteriorated. As a result, the initial funding committed—approximately \$3 million in federal transportation funds—is no longer sufficient to build the project. The County estimates that approximately \$4.8 million in additional funding is going to be required.

There are a few potential sources for the balance of funds needed. For example, we partnered with Albany County to apply for an Energy Efficiency and Conservation Block Grant through the Department of Energy in December. However, no one source is a sure bet, and we will need everyone's support in assuring that adequate funding is secured.

That is why we need your help advocating for the trail. Our County Legislators and County Executive need to hear from you, their constituents.

Please write a letter, send an email or make a call to your County Legislator and the Executive. First thank and congratulate them on this wonderful accomplishment, then let them know that you feel the Rail Trail is still a high priority for funding. **In fact, this trail makes good sense, especially in a time of economic crisis, and here's why:**

- The Rail Trail is far more than *just* a long-anticipated, unparalleled opportunity for recreation in the heart of our community. It will also establish vital connections between communities and neighborhoods.
- It will provide sustainable commuting and recreational transportation opportunities that can improve the health and fitness of local residents while reducing fuel use and harmful emissions.
- The trail will make exercise an organic activity. With nearly one-third of children today overweight – and more than half of adults in the same boat – exercise is an important tool to fighting the heart disease, cancer and diabetes that result from obesity. Adding exercise to today’s already-busy schedule can be difficult, but becomes easy if people use the Rail Trail for errands, commuting, social visits, or other trips they’d already be making.
- The Rail Trail will help form the backbone of an expanded regional bicycle and pedestrian network, connecting the Village of Voorheesville, the Town of New Scotland, the Town of Bethlehem, and the City of Albany, as well as other smaller communities throughout the County.
- Users of the trail will provide an important boost to the local economy by supporting nearby businesses and tourism. The Rail Trail will have numerous economic benefits to businesses and jobs. For example, a 2009 study of 14 trails in the Northeast found that an average of approximately \$4.14 million dollars per trail, per year was spent by trail users on “soft goods” alone (non-durable, consumables such as a food). Studies across the U.S. have also shown that communities with a rail trail have seen an increased value in their homes.
- The trail will provide significant energy savings. The Capital District Transportation Committee estimates that trail users are expected to make approximately 255,930 trips during a 190-day peak period each year, resulting in an estimated savings of about 18,800 gallons of fuel per year.
- Several portions of the trail also have great scenic value. The trail travels through picturesque woods and offers views of the Normanskill Creek, passing through steep gorges which rival those in the Helderbergs or Adirondacks.

And yet there are those that believe constructing a Rail Trail right now is a frivolous use of funds. **If you instead feel that the trail will provide vital benefits to our community, please make your voice heard! Please send an email or letter to your County Legislator and the County Executive by January 26th.** It is crucial that they hear from you, and know that the Rail Trail should be a high priority for funding.

We are grateful to everyone who has supported FORT’s work. Your generous contributions have allowed us to make great strides in our efforts to make the Rail Trail a reality. As a new year begins, please consider a tax-deductible donation to FORT so we can continue our work on behalf of the communities of the Capital Region that will benefit from the Rail Trail. Please return your contribution, payable to Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy indicating “FORT” in the memo line, in the enclosed envelope.

I am confident that together with your help, we will soon realize the successful completion of the Albany County Rail Trail.

Sincerely,



Dan Rain, Co-Chair, FORT

P.S. Enclosed is a sample letter and contact information for the Albany County Legislature and County Executive for your convenience in contacting them in support of the Rail Trail.