



PRESS RELEASE

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Time is Now for Creation of the Hudson River Bike Trail

A tremendous opportunity exists for the communities in the southern Adirondack Park to build what would be one of the great multi-use public recreation trails in New York and the eastern U.S.

Protect the Adirondacks is advocating for the transition of the dormant 55-mile-long Saratoga and North Creek Railway to a public multiuse trail that would connect more than a dozen communities between Saratoga Springs and North Creek.

More than 30 miles of this trail would be located along the Hudson River, where each bend in the river provides a different great view.

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Hudson River Bike Trail

Protect the Adirondacks supports transition of the 55-mile-long Saratoga and North Creek Railway to a new public multi-use recreation trail. Given its location, the dominant use would be as a bike and walking trail. This new public trail from Saratoga Springs to North Creek would connect dozens of small communities such as Lake Luzerne, Hadley, Stony Creek, Thurman, Riparius, The Glen, and Warrensburg, among other hamlets and businesses, along the rail line. We believe that this new trail would be very popular and heavily used. It could stimulate new opportunities for communities and businesses up and down its route. Running on the banks of the Hudson River for more than 30 miles, this trail would delight as one of the loveliest public trail systems in New York, bringing people through scene after scene of wild natural beauty. From bases in Saratoga Springs

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or North Creek, bicyclists and walkers, among other users, would enjoy a stunning trip with long unbroken sections at the north end.

Currently, the Saratoga and North Creek Railway corridor is owned by Warren County and the Town of Corinth. These municipalities own not only the rails, but also the lands underneath them. They have previously leased the railroad to a private company, which unsuccessfully operated tourist and commuter trains. These efforts have all failed and the last rail company that held the lease defaulted and no new railroad company is currently interested in leasing the line. Last week, a Warren County Board of Supervisors Committee voted to begin abandonment proceedings for the 55-mile-long Saratoga and North Creek Railway.

“The possibilities and benefits of a new recreation trail from Saratoga Springs to North Creek and then possibly north to Newcomb are immense. This trail would fast become a popular biking route for local cyclists and bike-riders from across New York and the Northeast USA. Many businesses along the railway would spring up and this public recreation trail would be a shot in the arm for the towns and hamlets along the way. The idea of converting this rail line is an idea whose time has come. A transition will not be quick. This is a long-term investment to build a long-term asset for the region,” said Peter Bauer, executive director of Protect the Adirondacks.

In an oddity of history, two separate and distinct railroads meet in North Creek. There is the 55-mile-long North Creek and Saratoga Railway that runs to the south and the 29-mile-long Tahawus Railway that runs north from North Creek to the Tahawus Mine in Newcomb. These two lines, though linked together, have separate histories and different current legal status.

The last railroad operator who leased the Saratoga and North Creek Railway had also purchased the Tahawus Railway easement in 2011 and tried to link the two railroads into one cohesive commercial enterprise. All business efforts failed. With its railroad ventures in the Adirondacks crumbling in 2017, the railroad company gambled on a controversial move to import used oil tanker railcars for indefinite storage on the Tahawus Railway. The company planned to store 2,000-3,000 used oil tankers on the empty tracks between North Creek and the Tahawus Mine in Newcomb. In 2017, over 100 oil tanker railcars that were transported into the Adirondacks for indefinite storage and were placed on tracks on the banks of the Opalescent and Boreas rivers. The section on the Boreas River was in the Forest Preserve. In 2017 and 2018, Protect the Adirondacks and others campaigned to stop long-term storage of used, out-of-service oil tankers on the Tahawus Railway.

In 2017, state agencies intervened to stop oil tanker railcar storage after Governor Andrew Cuomo announced his opposition to the plan. The last railcars were removed in 2018. Since the oil tankers were removed, the 29-mile Tahawus Railway has been dormant. The company has never figured out a viable or profitable way to haul materials from the Tahawus Mine in Newcomb.

To permanently stop the possibility of oil tanker railcar storage on the Tahawus Railway, the State of New York started formal “abandonment” proceedings at the federal Surface Transportation Board (STB). In October 2019, the NYS Attorney General submitted a letter to the STB formally requesting “voluntary abandonment” of the Tahawus Railroad.

The state did so after reaching an agreement with the private company Iowa Pacific Railroad. The voluntary agreement accomplished three things. First, the voluntary agreement permanently prevents the rail line from being used for storage of railcars. Second, Iowa Pacific bought itself some good will with the state. The company is teetering on the edge of bankruptcy and is looking to sell its ownership of the Tahawus Railway corridor. Third, voluntary agreement will keep the rail corridor intact in the highly likely event that Iowa Pacific goes bankrupt, which would enable the possibility of converting the railway to a public multi-use public trail. It is expected that the STB will approve the voluntary abandonment.

“Now is the time to start planning for the future of this 85-mile rail corridor that runs to the heart of the central Adirondacks. Now is the time for local communities to begin the process of envisioning new uses for the railroads and to take a hard look at conversion of this railway to a multi-use public recreational trail. Now is the time for state intervention to partner with local communities to create the Hudson River Bike Trail,” said Peter Bauer.

Protect the Adirondacks

Protect the Adirondacks is an IRS-approved non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation and stewardship of the 6-million-acre Adirondack Park. Our mission is to protect the Adirondack Park’s wild character for current and future generations. PROTECT pursues this mission through a combination of advocacy, grassroots organizing, independent public oversight, research, education, and legal action. Protect the Adirondacks was formed in 2009 as a result of a merger between two long-standing environmental conservation groups in the Park, The Resident’s Committee to Protect the Adirondacks and the Association for the Protection of the Adirondacks. Protect the Adirondacks is managed by a 21-member Board of Directors of Adirondack leaders in state agency management, environmental law, local government, Adirondack environmental and cultural history, and small business. Protect the Adirondacks maintains an office in a 100% energy efficient, solar- and wind-powered office in Johnsbury in the central Adirondacks. For more information see www.protectadks.org and [@ProtectAdkPark](https://twitter.com/ProtectAdkPark).

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