



**Testimony of Parks & Trails New York  
to the Joint Legislative Public Hearing  
2013-2014 Executive Budget Proposal  
Transportation**

*Respectfully submitted by  
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Thank you for the opportunity to speak out on behalf of New York's thousands of miles of greenways, trails, canalways, and bikeways and to ensure that New York remains a national leader in active transportation.

I am Frances Gotcsik, Parks & Trails New York's Director of Programs and Policy. For more than 25 years, Parks & Trails New York has been the leading advocate for parks and trails throughout the state. We have worked with hundreds of community organizations and municipalities to envision, create, promote, and protect a growing network of parks and more than 1,500 miles of greenways, bike paths, and trails, helping to bring important economic, public health, tourism, and quality-of-life benefits to New Yorkers across the state.

We have been fortunate that for more than two decades federal transportation bills have provided New York communities with the funds to build bicycle and pedestrian paths, sidewalks, bike lanes, and other infrastructure that promotes complete streets, safe routes to school, and greater bicycling and walking. These projects have served as a catalyst for community revitalization, attracted knowledge workers, improved quality of life, and made New Yorkers healthier by

making it easier and more enjoyable for people to engage in bicycling and walking. However, the current federal transportation bill, MAP-21, has not only reduced support by 30% for these popular programs but it has also eliminated their dedicated funding, giving New York the ability to direct these dollars to other programs.

### **Ensuring New York's leadership in active transportation**

In spite of this reduction in resources, we believe New York can continue its leadership role in active transportation. **We urge the Legislature to:**

- ***Ensure the state's full measure of federal funding is directed to building community infrastructure and trails that encourage safe bicycling and walking.***

An estimated \$30-50 million in federal Transportation Enhancements Program funds from the prior transportation bill is still unspent. By law, these dollars must be dedicated to trails and bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure construction. Throughout the state many communities have projects planned and are waiting to access these dollars but NYSDOT has not held a funding round since 2009. If these dollars are not made available soon, New York State may lose them.

Even though New York has greater flexibility in how to spend its Transportation Alternatives (TA) funds with MAP-21, in light of the 30% reduction in TA funding the state must commit all its TA monies to helping communities build trails, bike paths, and complete streets and undertake safe routes to school programs.

- ***Award higher ratings to NY Works transportation projects that include complete streets and other infrastructure that support active transportation – trails, bicycle and pedestrian paths, sidewalks, and bike lanes.***

Multi-modal active transportation infrastructure helps attract knowledge workers and ensures that persons of all ages and abilities have more access to a broad range of housing, employment, shopping, and low-cost recreation options. And, as was demonstrated in the wake of Superstorm Sandy, non-motorized transportation options preserve the ability for people to safely get to work, school and shops when storms and other disasters interrupt motorized transportation.

- ***Include a dedicated line in the state budget so that communities can more easily invest in trails, complete streets, safe routes to school, and bicycle and pedestrian projects.***

Local governments often have a difficult time with matches and upfront costs required by Federal programs. A loan fund or state grants for federal project matches would help local governments avoid the costs of bonding and provide an incentive to invest in infrastructure that promotes bicycling and walking.

- ***Complete the five remaining gaps in the 361-mile Erie Canalway Trail.***

Stretching from Buffalo to Albany, the Erie Canalway Trail is the backbone of the state's trail system. With 277 miles now open to the public, the Erie Canalway Trail is more than 75% complete and on its way to becoming a premier tourist destination for cyclists and other outdoor enthusiasts as well as the longest, continuous intrastate multi-use trail in the nation.

The opportunities for economic benefit are great --- touring cyclists often spend \$100 to \$300 per day or more. However, the Erie Canalway Trail can neither realize its full potential as a world-class tourism destination nor offer maximum economic benefit to the more than 200 communities along its length until it is finished from Buffalo to Albany as a continuous off-road trail.

- ***Acquire new Amtrak passenger rail cars that will accommodate bicycles.***

As New York State assumes greater financial responsibility and control over Amtrak operations beginning in October 2013, any new cars purchased must include provisions for accommodating bicycles. Presently, because Amtrak serves Buffalo, Albany, and all the major cities along the Erie Canalway Trail, we receive many inquiries from cyclists about taking the train back to their starting location. Unfortunately, despite the fact that bicycles are allowed on trains in other parts of the country, Amtrak prohibits bikes from being rolled onto the Maple Leaf, Empire Service, and Lakeshore Limited trains.

Because of the growing popularity of the Canalway Trail and the Hudson Valley as bicycling destinations and the higher income level of many touring cyclists, the lack of roll-on service between Buffalo and New York City is a lost opportunity for everyone.

Clearly, developing accommodations for roll-on service would be a wise investment for the economic future of Amtrak and the communities that Amtrak serves as it will attract more cyclists who will spend their dollars not only on a train journey, but also on restaurants, entertainment, and lodging.

### **Investing in active transportation is good for business, tourism, and the health of New York citizens**

There are many excellent reasons why investing in community infrastructure that supports active transportation is good for jobs, tourism, quality of life and the health of New York's citizens.

- ***Bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure projects create jobs - more jobs per federal dollar than road-only highway construction.***

A recent University of Massachusetts study demonstrated that “road-only” projects created 7.8 jobs per \$1million spent, while “bicycling only” and “pedestrian-only” projects provided 11.4 and 10 jobs, respectively, per million dollars of spending.<sup>1</sup>

- ***Trails, bike paths and walkable, bikeable communities are key assets in helping the state and localities attract tax-paying businesses and a high-quality workforce.***

From small business owners to Fortune 500 senior executives, the recreational opportunities, such as offered by trails and bike paths, rank high as a factor for determining business location. Portland, Seattle, Austin, Denver, and San Francisco are among the top cycling cities; they also are among the leaders in knowledge workers.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Garrett-Peltier, Heidi, *Pedestrian and Bicycle Infrastructure: A National Study of Employment Impacts*, Political Economy Research Institute, University of Massachusetts Amherst, June 2011, [Pehttps://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/americanbikes/pages/199/attachments/original/1343930066/PERI\\_Natl\\_Study\\_June2011.pdf?1343930066](https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/americanbikes/pages/199/attachments/original/1343930066/PERI_Natl_Study_June2011.pdf?1343930066)

<sup>2</sup> American Planning Association. *How Cities Use Parks for Economic Development*. <http://www.planning.org/cityparks/briefingpapers/economicdevelopment.htm>

- ***Sidewalks and other places to walk such as trails rank as one of the top priorities with home buyers.***

The 2011 Community Preference Survey, conducted on behalf of the National Association of Realtors, found 77% of those polled considered having sidewalks and places to take a walk one of their top priorities when deciding where they would like to live.<sup>3</sup>

- ***Trails and bike-friendly, walkable communities are a major tourism attraction.***

Data from other states indicates that bicycle tourism can make a substantial contribution to the state and local economy. A survey of three Orange County Florida trails indicated that trail users spend on average \$19 per visit which supports 516 jobs and produces an economic impact of \$42.6 million.<sup>4</sup> Bicyclists using trails in Minnesota trails spend \$2.4 billion annually, adding \$1.5 billion to the gross state product and supporting an estimated 30,900 full-time and part-time jobs.<sup>5</sup>

- ***Trails and community infrastructure that promote bicycling and walking contribute to healthy communities and lower healthcare costs for individuals and local governments.***

More than 60% of New York adults and 32% of New York children ages 10 to 17 are overweight or obese. For obese adults in New York State, health care costs were an estimated \$7.6 billion in 2008 after adjusting for inflation. About 80% of these expenses were publicly funded through Medicaid and Medicare, a percentage far exceeding the national average of 52%. New York State spent nearly \$12 billion on adult obesity-related health problems in 2011<sup>6</sup> and will spend \$136.3 billion over the next 10 years.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> National Association of Realtors, *2011 Community Preference Survey*, conducted by Belden, Russonello, and Stewart, March 2011.

<sup>4</sup> *Economic Impact Analysis of Orange County Trails*, East Central Florida Regional Planning Council, 2010, <http://www.ecfrpc.org/Document-Library/Environment/Economic-Impact-of-Trails-in-Orange-County.aspx> 5

<sup>5</sup> Venegas, E., "Economic Impact of Recreational Trail Use in Different Regions of Minnesota," University of Minnesota Tourism Center, November 2009. <http://atfiles.org/files/pdf/MinnesotaTrailEconomicImpact2009.pdf>.

<sup>6</sup> Office of the New York State Comptroller (2012). *Soaring Health Care Costs Highlight Need To Address Childhood Obesity, October 2012.*

<sup>7</sup> Schoen, C., & Commonwealth Fund. (2007). *Bending the curve: Options for achieving savings and improving value in U.S. health spending*. New York, N.Y.: Commonwealth Fund.

## **Closing**

Active transportation must be an essential element of the state's historic commitment to a transportation system that supports business and economic expansion. An investment in active transportation --- trails, including a completed Erie Canalway Trail, bicycle and pedestrian paths, sidewalks, bike lanes, and other infrastructure that supports and encourages bicycling and walking --- will ensure an improved quality of life, a healthier population, more local travel choices, an attractive climate for business and increased tourism, all heralding a bright future for New York's cities and towns.