



Adirondack Recreational Trail Advocates
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Steven Englehart, Executive Director
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Amy Catania, Executive Director
Historic Saranac Lake
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Dear Mr. Englehart and Ms. Catania:

We understand that “Adirondack Architectural Heritage has joined Historic Saranac Lake in its opposition to the removal of tracks and ties because the Remsen-Lake Placid corridor is listed on the state and national historic registries”. We are writing to suggest that whatever legal advice you are getting on this issue appears to be wrong, and as a result your position takes on a political nature which we believe is inconsistent with your mission. In fact, many of our over 1200 members are supporters of AARCH and/or HSL, and a number have asked us to write to disabuse you of the idea that national historic registry listing prevents a change in use or of structure within the rail corridor.

We have been given solid legal advice on this issue and would be happy to have our attorney talk to whoever it is that is advising you. The following is an extract from his longer briefing to us on this subject:

“The proposal to convert the rail right of way into a multi-use recreational trail and to remove the rails and ties to improve its usability has generated a lot of misinformation both about the corridor's status as public land within the Adirondack Park and its listing on the National Register of Historic Places...”

...Arguing over whether the rails and ties themselves are part of what is listed on the National Register of Historic Places is a red herring. It doesn't matter.

Because the entire right of way is listed as a Historic District, any "project" that involves state agency action within the listed right of way will require going through a process set up by the New York State Historic Preservation Act of 1980. The listing does not prohibit the removal of the rails and tracks, nor does it prohibit turning the right of way from one used by trains to one used by bikes, snowmobiles and pedestrians. It does require touching bases inside federal and state government, giving notices, documenting conditions, preparing reports and doing things like posting informational signs, taking pictures, moving artifacts to museums (or displaying them at or near the listed area, etc. State DOT, which currently manages the Travel Corridor, is very expert in working transportation projects that affect historic resources through the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to get the desired changes accomplished while complying with the State Historic Preservation Act.

At the end of the day, the Historic District, and its historic resources, will be better protected and enhanced by an invigorated multi-use recreational trail than by neglect or the continuation of the current poor quality and inadequate use and maintenance of the right of way. And, this means that the SHPO should be very favorably inclined towards its restoration and preservation as an intact travel corridor.

There can be an intelligent disagreement about what use of the right of way is most in the public interest. But it should be based on facts and an accurate understanding of applicable laws and regulations.”

If you have a differing opinion of the law or of procedures we would appreciate hearing from you with references or with a request to have the experts come to a common understanding. If, as we suspect, you are acting on misinformation we think your members would appreciate a clarification from you rather than from us.

Sincerely,

Steering Committee, Adirondack Recreational Trail Advocates [ARTA]

Dick Beamish, Hope Frenette, Tony Goodwin, Lee Keet, Jim McCulley, Joe Mercurio

c.c Susan Arena, Program Director, Adirondack Architectural Heritage, susan@aarch.org
Mary Hotaling, Historian, Historic Saranac Lake, freshair@CAPITAL.NET
Press list