

Towns finish study for large Hojack trail

\$4M project set for 6.3-mile pathway

MEAGHAN M.
MCDERMOTT
@MEAGMC

A railbed walking/bicycling trail that would link the village of Hilton to Greece and points beyond is the latest in an array of trail systems proposed to boost active transportation in the Rochester region.

The village of Hilton and towns of Parma and Greece recently wrapped up a feasibility study of what they call the Hojack Trail, a proposed 6.3 mile multi-use pathway along the former Hojack Line that would run from Canning Street in Hilton to the Route 390 Bike Path in Greece.

That project, with an estimated cost of at least \$4 million, would dovetail with ongoing efforts to expand the local trailway system by linking the Route 390 Trail with the Erie Canalway Trail and the construction of the Eastman Trail that would eventually knit the Route 390 Trail with Lake Avenue and the Genesee River Trail System.

"In our region, generally, trails are pretty well received," said James Stack, executive director of the Genesee Transportation Council. That group is a federally-mandated metropolitan planning organization that is tasked with producing and main-

taining the region's long-term transportation plan, the unified planning work program and the transportation improvement program. "What we're finding is as we start filling in the gaps in our trail network and making logical extensions, an extension like the Hojack Trail would create a more robust system that allows people to use, say a bicycle as a viable alternative to a car."

Trail system benefits

The National Partnership for Active Transportation, a collaboration of transportation, public health and community vitality organizations, notes significant public benefit from investment in trail systems. Those benefits include helping to address America's obesity crisis by making it safer and more convenient to bike or walk and take advantage of free outdoor recreation activities, reduce pollution by encouraging people to forego taking a car when there's an accessible trail nearby and boosting local economies by making more connections between communities; fostering small businesses and encouraging corporate investment that attracts a more talented, highly-educated workforce.

According to the Ur-

ban Land Institute, there's also clear evidence that being located in close proximity to bicycling paths and walking trails can significantly increase real estate values. For example, a 2014 study in Indianapolis showed properties within a block of an eight-mile high-quality biking and hiking trail more than doubled in value within six years after that trail opened. In Minneapolis, the University of Minnesota found that in the Minneapolis/St. Paul area, for every thousand feet or so closer a median-priced home was to an off-street bicycle facility, its value increased by \$500. And, a 2009 study by CEOs for Cities, a group devoted to developing ideas to make U.S. cities more economically successful, found that homes in areas deemed to have above-average walkability or bikability were worth as much as \$34,000 more than similar homes in areas with average walkability levels.

Richard Tyson, a licensed real estate broker with RealtyUSA, said he's seeing more potential home-buyers interested in nearby active transportation. Indeed, he said a recent buyer in Brighton had hoped to locate near a trail system, and was overjoyed to find a home that backed right up to a trail. Now, he said, she's



BILL WOLCOTT/ @BILLWOLCOTT /STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER
A trail for hikers in Letchworth State Park. This part of the Genesee Valley Greenway is joined by the Finger Lakes Trail.

planning to bicycle to work.

Closing the gaps

In September, U.S. Sens. Charles Schumer and Kirsten Gillibrand announced more than \$3.4 million in federal funding to "close a gap" in the trail systems in Greece and Rochester by making links between the Canalway Trail and the Route 390 Trail, as well as a start on the first segment of what will be the Eastman Trail west from 390 to the Genesee River.

"Making these critical improvements to the Canalway and Eastman Trails would help strengthen Rochester's local economy and long-term sustainability," said

Gillibrand in a written statement.

Scott Copey, planner with the town of Greece, said the feasibility study recently completed by the three west-side municipalities will help get the Hojack Trail in line for similar infusions of funding. Although the study is done, that doesn't mean there's money available right now to build it. But, the study, which looks at potential environmental effects, potential trail amenities, road crossings, land characteristics, routing and more ensures when grant opportunities are available, the communities can apply.

If built, the Greece/Parma/Hilton trail would be the second in Monroe County to run along the

old Hojack Line. The Webster Hojack Trail is a 3.5 mile stretch that runs from Phillips Road near Route 104 to Lake Road. That is one of two Hojack Line trails in the state; the other is the Cayuga Hojack Trail in Cayuga County. They run along the route of the former Rome, Watertown and Ogdensburg Railroad (apparently once nicknamed "Rotten Wood & Old Rusty Rails" before it went bankrupt in the late 1800s). The former rail corridor is now owned by Rochester Gas and Electric, which has allowed trail construction in its right-of-way.

NY eyes largest trail

Meanwhile, as localities here look to expand their trail offerings, Gov. Andrew Cuomo earlier this year also announced his plans for the nation's largest state-run multi-use trail. That plan calls for 750 miles of trail running from New York City to the North Country and from Albany to Buffalo. Adding 350 miles to the existing Hudson River Valley Greenway and the Erie Canalway, the project would cost \$200 million and be funded over three years. If approved by the legislature, the first leg of construction would kick off this year through the Hudson Valley.

MCDERMOTT@
Gannett.com