

Bicyclists Bring Business Roundtable



Final Report 2012

Prepared by Parks & Trails New York

for the

New York State Canal Corporation

Background

According to the U.S. Travel Association, bicycling is now the third most common vacation activity, and more than 27 million Americans have taken a bicycling vacation in the past five years. A recent study by the Adventure Travel Trade Association found that bicycle travel for pleasure generates \$89 billion in revenue annually in the U.S. With the Erie Canalway Trail's widespread name recognition and abundance of almost everything bicycle tourists seek: safe, mostly off-road cycling between historic communities; scenic landscapes, historic sites, parks and other attractions; detailed maps and route descriptions; and cycling options ranging from daytrips to week-long adventures, it has the potential to annually attract large numbers of tourists.

Program Goal

The goal of the program is to help local business people, elected and tourism officials, and citizens discover what services and amenities make a difference to bicyclists when choosing a touring destination so that they can better attract and profit from the growing bicycle tourism market. Since 2006, PTNY has conducted 10 "Bicyclists Bring Business" community roundtables in Canalway Trail communities across the state. In 2008, PTNY also produced *Bicyclists Bring Business: A Guide for Attracting Bicyclists to New York's Canal Communities* to bring the message to an even wider audience.

In 2012, PTNY added a field component, a bike visit around the village of Albion the morning following the roundtable. The goal of this activity was to enable elected officials and business and tourism leaders to get out and experience their community's services and infrastructure from the perspective of a cyclist visiting the downtown business district.

Program Location

Parks & Trails New York (PTNY), the New York State Canal Corporation, Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor (ECNHC) and Western Erie Canal Alliance (WECA) presented a free roundtable entitled "Bicyclists Bring Business" on October 10, 2012 at the Hoag Library in the Village of Albion in Orleans County. Albion was chosen because it is located within the western section of more than 90 continuous miles of trail, there is considerable interest in the trail among business owners in the region, WECA is already working with the communities to promote tourism, and, as a National Trust Main Street community and recipient of a NYS Main Street grant, Albion is in the process of deciding on streetscape improvements.

Evening Roundtable

The roundtable was held from 6-8 p.m. so business owners could attend on their way home from work. More than 50 persons participated in the event.

After light refreshments and introductions, NYS Canal Corporation Trails Director John Dimura began the roundtable with a power point presentation designed to review accomplishments and ongoing work along the Erie Canalway Trail. Subsequently, Parks & Trails New York Executive Director Robin Dropkin presented multiple images of other bicycle-friendly communities and cited statistics that substantiated the impact of bicycle tourism on local economies. Photos from her visits to the Le P'tit Train du Nord in Quebec and the Katy Trail in Missouri illustrated how trail-side communities have created programs and developed

infrastructure to cater to the bicycling tourist. Ellen Martin of Sweet Sixteen Café and Sweet Rides Bike Rentals in Lockport; Jeri Becker of Erie Canal Schoolhouse B&B in Albion; and Bob DeRoos of Peddlars Bike Shop in Rochester – then shared what they have learned from serving the cycling tourist.

In the discussion following the presentations, roundtable participants pointed out the need to establish loop trails to encourage visitors to explore more of the area and the importance of erecting additional informational signage at community gateways to alert trail users to the many services and attractions. In anticipation of the completion of more than 120 miles of continuous off-road trail between Buffalo and Lyons, the creation of multi-day tour packages and establishment of bicycle and luggage transport services were also discussed.

Everyone present received a copy of Parks & Trails New York's *Bicyclists Bring Business: A Guide for Attracting Bicyclists to New York's Canal Communities*.

Morning Bike-a-round

The morning after the roundtable, PTNY and ECNHC staff joined a group of business owners and local government representatives to visit the Village of Albion by bike. Seeing the trail and the community from the perspective of a first-time tourist was an eye opener for everyone. As they made their way around the village, the cyclists referenced the checklists found in PTNY's *Bicyclists Bring Business: A Guide for Attracting Bicyclists to New York's Canal Communities* which generated suggestions for improvements to the trail, signage, street infrastructure, and businesses and attractions that could increase the likelihood that someone would stop and visit and even stay overnight.

Roundtable Summaries

After the roundtable, participants were emailed a summary (see Appendix A) of the comments from the discussion session and the bike visit. Persons who registered for the roundtable or bike visit but did not attend also received a copy of the summaries. A summary of the 2012 roundtable comments was also posted on the Parks & Trails New York website.

Publicity

WECA, the Albion Main Street Alliance; Medina Business Association; ECNHC; Main Street managers in Lockport, Albion and Lyons; and other local groups assisted PTNY in publicizing the event by emailing an invitation letter and flyer to a comprehensive list of clubs, shopkeepers, associations and local governments in the region area. PTNY also sent the invitation to area state and national legislators and to bike shops, B&Bs and inns.

A press release was sent to media outlets across the state, including the Buffalo, Medina, Batavia, and Rochester newspapers and Buffalo and Rochester television and radio stations. Articles announcing the roundtables were also included in electronic newsletters produced by PTNY, WECA, and ECNHC.

Prior to the event an article appeared in the *NY Outdoors Blog* and a blog from Holley. In response to receiving the press release about the event, the Schenectady *Daily Gazette* published an editorial, "Bicycle tourism can be a boon to local economies" focusing on the importance of

communities working together to promote Canalway Trail tourism and noting the Albion roundtable as an example of what is being done elsewhere in the state. The editorial also states that the Montgomery County planner hopes to set up a similar roundtable.

Two local papers ran stories after the event.

Krencik, Jim, "Forum, cycling tour show local officials how towpath travelers experience Albion, Medina, Medina *Journal-Register*, October 12, 2012. <http://journal-register.com/local/x674145264/OUTSIDERS-VIEW>

Rivers, Tom, "Communities urged to cater to bicyclists," Batavia *Daily News*, October 12, 2012. http://thedailynewsonline.com/news/article_12c65e20-1424-11e2-b64b-001a4bcf887a.html

Participant Survey

The 46 persons who provided an email address and who attended or planned to intend the roundtable and/or the bike-a-round were emailed a summary of the comments from the roundtable and bike-a-round. Included in the email was a link to a survey of both events. Nine persons (20%) responded to the survey, 44% of whom were business owners.

All the survey respondents who attended either the roundtable or the bike-a-round stated that the event was worthwhile and indicated that they were willing to work with other members of their community or neighboring communities to encourage more Canalway Trail tourists to stop. However, only half of the respondents indicated they would be willing to participate in a bike-a-round in their community. It is unclear whether they did not feel the activity would be valuable or whether they were not interested in bicycling.

When asked what their community needs most to benefit from Canalway Trail tourism, 78% of respondents chose wayfinding signs and cooperative advertisements in cycling magazines. Second in popularity, with 67% of responses, were bike/ped infrastructure, community maps in central locations, and bicycle friendly business designation. See Appendix B for complete survey results.

APPENDIX A



BICYCLISTS BRING BUSINESS ROUNDTABLE OCTOBER 10, 2012 ALBION, NEW YORK

GENERAL COMMENTS

1. Develop locally focused loop trails marketed to cyclists.
 - a. Trail users need to know where the trails are located
 - b. The route needs to be friendly to cyclists
2. Orleans County has mapped loops. They need to be condensed to a usable format – could use smart phone app or collaborative approach to e-mapping.
3. Municipalities can place signs along the trail but they must be cleared first with the Canal Corporation.
4. Tour packages are a strong draw - but tourism infrastructure, such as a central point of contact, is needed to make them work.
5. Need mile markers.

ALBION BIKE VISIT OCTOBER 11, 2012

SUMMARY

General Comments:

- *Don't go overboard on signs*
- *Wayfinding signs needed to direct trail users to named and specific community parks and attractions and amenities and services*
- *Re-establish information kiosk at Courthouse Square*

- *Install bike racks in front of businesses*
- *Install benches*
- *Install planters, banners or other enhancements to draw people to the community and create an visually appealing entrance*
- *Establish process for responsibility for updates to bulletin boards and other community information*
- *More education for drivers, cyclists, and pedestrians to acknowledge responsibility of motorists to stop for pedestrians and dismounted cyclists in crosswalks*

Retailers

- *Carry bicycling supplies in the local hardware store*
- *Have information on where to find and phone numbers for bike shops and/or repair equipment or supplies in communities without bike shops*
- *Collect zip codes of customers*
- *Internet presence important for small businesses and google analytics for the website*
- *Provide general orientation materials (community/county/regional maps on the wall*

BIKE-A-ROUND OBSERVATIONS

General

- People are already doing things on their own
- Albion Main Street Alliance has momentum and some resources
- Great enthusiasm but need follow up
- Opportunities to involve youth and help them attain the necessary hours of community service
- Need to share information among Canalway Trail communities, e.g. Champlain Canalway Trail working group
- Travelers want to know where the bike shop is located and where to eat
- Cyclists like to talk to locals
- Decisions to stop in a community may be preplanned based on web information
- Ensure community website has information and is welcoming to cyclists

On the Trail

1. As cyclists approach your community, do they know where they are?
Yes. There are signs on the trail from the east and west.
2. Is there a “Welcome to” sign? *Yes.*

3. Is there an “information ahead” sign?

No. There is a kiosk west of Main St. but it only gives standard historical information. There is no information on the types of services available or a map.



A NYS Canal Corporation kiosk provides trailside interpretation outside of Albion. In addition to local Canal history, information about what the village and town offers could entice cyclists to make a stop.

4. Are street names given at crossings, bridges?

Yes. However, the Main St. bridge says Albion but does not say Main St.

5. Do “trail ambassadors” patrol the trail near your town to assist bicyclists as needed?

No but there is an opportunity to work with the Canal Corporation and PTNY to establish an Ambassador program if there is interest. Ambassadors have begun patrolling in the area of Spencerport and Brockport. More information on the Ambassador program can be found at <http://www.ptny.org/canalway/ambassador/>.

Comments:

- *Mileage markers are important for the trail.*
- *Note on welcome signs that Albion is a National Trust Main Street community.*
- *Mural is great but consider including some information on what it depicts.*
- *If the owner is willing, the side of the building close to the trail west of Main Street would also provide a great surface for another mural.*

At the Gateway

1. Is it obvious to trail users that this is the entrance to your community? *Yes.*

2. Is there something that grabs attention and encourages cyclists to learn more?

Variety of opinions

Yes. Appears to be historic buildings and historic Main Street

No. Not sure what is across the canal. Detour sign is confusing to trail users – not clear if it applies to them and if so why it does.

Suggestions: banners, planters, more green space along the trail in the area of the gateway to Main Street.

3. Is the gateway area clean and well maintained?

Yes, but the trail area on either side of Main Street is uninviting and can feel unsafe because of the wide expanse of asphalt – is the person riding through a parking lot on the east and sharing a road on the west?

4. Are the following available at the gateway?

Bike parking (bike rack)	<i>No</i>
Benches/picnic table	<i>No</i>
Information on the community (history, attractions, etc.)	<i>No</i>
A “you are here” map of the town	<i>No</i>
Water & restrooms (or directions to them)	<i>No</i>
Locations of key services (lodging, restaurants, showers, bike shops, etc.)	<i>No</i>
A bulletin board for events and other announcements	<i>No</i>
Emergency contact information	<i>No</i>

Is there a welcome center nearby and directions to it?

The Chamber of Commerce on Main Street has information on attractions, etc. but it is not open on weekends. Also, the trail user has no information on the location and hours of the Chamber.



Without street side bike racks, cyclists will resort to whatever they can find to secure their bikes. Street side bike racks not only make cyclists feel welcome, they also impart a sense of security often encouraging cyclists to spend more time and money in Albion.

5. If appropriate, is there signage showing how to get to the downtown?

The location of downtown is obvious but the trail user does not have information on what is located there without crossing the bridge first.



Providing up-to-date information to cyclists is critically important. While Albion has a bulletin board, the information needed to be updated.

Comments:

- *Some information, albeit outdated, was included in the bulletin board (above) as part of the small pocket park on the east side of Main Street, but the trail user does not know that the park exists.*
- *Public restrooms are available with entrance at the rear of building on Main Street, but the trail user has no way of knowing that.*
- *Information needs to be kept up to date*
- *The story of Albion's sandstone and cobblestone architecture needs to be told*
- *Tie in the historic markers*
- *Consider a sign-in or log book at kiosks to capture names and locations of travelers and comments*
- *Use QR codes on signs*

Entering the Community

1. Is the connection from the gateway into community clearly marked?

It is visually obvious.

2. If the connection is on-road:

Are there clearly delineated and marked (on pavement or with signs) bike lanes or paved shoulders?

No. If you come across the bridge using the sidewalk, there is then a drop off the curb to get back into the street and parking spots all along the curb.

Are bike lanes/shoulders well maintained and free of gravel and debris?

There are no bike lanes. Shoulders are okay but parked cars present possibility of being "doored."

Are drainage grates bicycle-friendly? *Yes.*

Is there cautionary signage for motorists along the route?

There are no bike route or share the road signs.

3. If the connection is off-road (bike path):

Is the surface paved or firm, well maintained and free of debris?

Yes - applies to sidewalk on bridges.

Is there cautionary signage for cyclists and motorists when it connects with roads? *No.*

Comments

- Village and NYSDOT need to help with infrastructure
- Cyclists are unsure whether to ride on the sidewalk or the road when crossing the bridge to Main Street.

In the Community

1. Are the streets most likely to be used by cyclists bicycle-friendly, including:

Clearly delineated and marked bike lanes or shoulders, if appropriate? *No*

Bike-friendly drainage grates (mesh or curb-face rather than slotted)? *Yes*

Bicycle stop lines that are closer to intersections than auto stop lines for improved visibility? *N*



Not only would delineated bike-lanes or pavement markings such as “sharrows” improve safety in Albion, it would also be a visible way of conveying the community is bike-friendly.

2. Is secure (ideally, covered) bicycle parking available at convenient locations (parks/town squares, welcome center, shopping areas, etc.)? *No, bike racks on Main Street. A bike rack is located behind the Chamber of Commerce.*
3. Are public restrooms available? If not, do businesses make theirs available? *Public restrooms are available at the rear entrance of a building on Main Street, but there is no information that lets trail users know they exist.*
4. Are there shuttle services or taxis/buses equipped to handle bikes? *NA*

5. Have local businesses been encouraged to welcome bicyclists, and are those that do readily identifiable? *Local businesses are welcoming to bicyclists. However, there is no sign or other form of bicycle friendly designation so trail users know this.*
6. Is information about opportunities to explore the community and nearby attractions (walking tours, museums, historic sites, themed bike loops, other bike paths, natural areas, etc.) readily available?
The Golden Gourd Bistro and Chamber of Commerce have a good selection of materials but a trail user would not know that until they visited the establishment.
7. Are the downtown, parks and other public areas clean and well maintained? *Yes, but one kiosk is no longer in place at the Court House Square and the information board in the pocket park on Main Street is out of date.*



While this sign refers to the sidewalks around the court house, it can make visiting cyclists feel unwelcome. A curb-side bike rack can accomplish the same thing.

8. Have you developed/identified a community “theme” or asset and reinforced it with signs, banners and promotional materials? No
9. Is overnight parking available for cyclists who have chosen your town as a starting/ending point for a multi-day trip? *Yes, at the Schoolhouse B&B. Service is listed on their website, but this information is not available in the village.*
10. Do police patrol parks and public facilities used by bicyclists? Yes

BICYCLISTS BRING BUSINESS PARTICIPANT SURVEY

1. Please enter your zip code:

14433 - Clyde
 14201 - Buffalo
 14559 (2) - Spencerport
 14411 (2) - Albion
 14094 - Lockport
 14623 - Rochester
 14105 - Middleport

**2. Which of the following best describes why you are interested in bicycle tourism?
 (Select all that may apply).**

	Response Percent	Response Count
Business owner	44.4%	4
Member/Employee of a recreation based organization	0.0%	0
Member/Employee of a community organization	11.1%	1
Village/Town Employee	33.3%	3
County Employee	0.0%	0
Municipal Official	11.1%	1
Outdoor Enthusiast	22.2%	2
Other (please specify)	33.3%	3

I was one of the first persons in Clyde to do little things to make the Bikers welcome. It has evolved into providing bottle water by the Chamber, the Grange Provides music, Many bake cookies that are free. The Meth. Church provides a free soup and sandwich. Museum opens free.

Volunteer Coordinator of Buff. Support Team EC Bike Tour

County Tourism Director

3. Did you attend the evening Bicyclists Bring Business roundtable discussion in Albion on October 10?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	88.9%	8
No	11.1%	1

4. Do you feel that it was worthwhile?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	100.0%	8
No	0.0%	0

I would like to see someone in our community to (probably a retiree) open a Bicycle repair shop. This is important not only for the tour but all travelers. Statics about how bicyclist help our economy was interesting. Is there anyone who can give a talk about all that was covered? Sending someone out in the communities might make many aware? Sharon Rice

Contacts, faces to names, and it's great to meet so many others who love the Erie Canal and the historic communities along the way. I'm anxious to return to Albion by bike to visit new venues.

Until Albion becomes a vibrant economic community bikers will not chose to stop here. They will stop in Medina, Spencerport and other more attractive, less drug infested area. Bikers have choices.

loved hearing ideas on making the towpath more user friendly.

i got a chance to directly converse with all the players in the operation and planning of the canal trail and its use. Its important to realize that an unpaved trail is for recreation a PAVED trail is for tourists and recreation. What do you want to attract?

I got great advice on using technology to develop online bicycle tour maps.

The discussion made us aware that there is a very real need to increase services to bicyclists along the Erie Canal pathway.

5. Did you attend the Albion bike around-on the morning of October 11?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	22.2%	2
No	77.8%	7

6. Do you feel that it was worthwhile?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	100.0%	4
No	0.0%	0

I was unable to attend on Oct. 11th however I suspect there was a lot to be learned.

Sorry I missed it. With more advance planning I could have arranged it and perhaps stayed at the School House B&B to boot.

Two Members of our Village staff did attend and felt it was worthwhile.

The checklist was a useful tool in evaluating the village as we rode.

7. **Would you be willing to work with other members of your community or neighboring communities to encourage more Canalway Trail tourists to stop in your community? If so, please input your email address.**

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	100.0%	9
No	0.0%	0

jsullivan@vil.spencerport.ny.us
 I already do. srice@rochester.rr.com
suzanne550@juno.com
 jlobene@aol.com
 office@wattfarms.com
 ellen@sweetsixteencafe.com
 sales @ pedallers.com
 whale@orleansny.com
 MiddleportNY@villageofmiddleport.org

8. **Would you be interested in participating in a bike-around in your community?**

	Response Percent	Response Count
Yes	55.6%	5
No	44.4%	4

No but there are some people in our community that might.
 We already have several cue sheets.
 Spencerport
 Lockport

9. In your opinion, what does your community need most to benefit from Canalway Trail tourism?

	Response Percent	Response Count
Bike/pedestrian infrastructure (sidewalks, bike lanes, etc)	66.7%	6
Bike racks	55.6%	5
Benches	11.1%	1
Kiosks	11.1%	1
Community maps in central locations	66.7%	6
Visitor-friendly business hours	22.2%	2
Bicycle friendly business designation	66.7%	6
Welcome center	44.4%	4
Wayfinding signs	77.8%	7
Cooperative advertisements in cycling magazines	77.8%	7
3 day bicycle tour packages	44.4%	4
Luggage/bike transportation service	22.2%	2

Better signage. There is an area that the bicyclist pass on the area between Lyons and Clyde that they totally miss do to no signage. If per chance someone "stumbles" across it the signage describing the Clinton Ditch etc. is barely readable due to fading. Our Supervisor has brought this to the attention of the county to no avail.

Based on cyclist feedback (as manager of the B&B in Lockport)- finding way out of Buffalo, to Canalway Trail after visiting Buffalo Canalside has been difficult and frustrating. Unable to find any person who could help. Riverwalk entrance near Erie Basin Marina and bike Path to Hertle Ave entrance is not safe. Isolated, hemmed in by fence on both sides of path, not maintained (glass and debris, as well as grafitti.) I am not sure which gov agency is responsible for which part of Riverwalk and Canalway trail. Ambassador program would be most helpful. I have discussed these challenges with a few friends who have helped with the Buffalo Support Team - EC Bike Tour. We have ideas and suggestions but unsure about how best to proceed and with whom.

We have excellent Visitors Center

An economy not dependent on government.

signage and advertising very important

Pave it and then Maintain it!

Restrooms, canalside camping (only village of Holley has it as far as I know)