

Canalway Trail Gap Segment
Assessment Report
Cayuga and Western Onondaga Counties,
New York

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Report Prepared by

Canalway Trail Partnership Project

New York State Canal Corporation
National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program
New York Parks and Conservation Association

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Introduction

The twenty eight mile trail section discussed in this report extends from the hamlet of Montezuma in Cayuga County to the Town of Camillus in western Onondaga County. This important segment not only connects a string of communities along the path of the Old Erie Canal, but also connects these communities with soon to be completed sections of the Canalway Trail to the east and west. The trail in this segment has been in place for many years, but to a large degree is not improved beyond a cleared, narrow dirt path. The poor condition of the trail limits the types of use and discourages the tourism and recreational activity that the Canalway Trail is intended to encourage. Improvement of this segment of the trail will bring tourists and local cyclists from Syracuse in the east and long range riders coming from the completed trail sections to the west. The completion of this section will provide a continuous bike route from the Wayne County line in the hamlet of Montezuma to the Camillus Erie Canal Park . The trail would provide 28 miles of recreational resource to the villages along its path. With other trail sections expected to be completed in the near future it will also serve as a critical link, connecting Syracuse and Rochester with an almost completely off-road path.

As canal communities complete trails to link the canal both to their centers and to other canal communities, the economic benefits of the Canalway Trail will mushroom.

This document is a product of the Canalway Trail Partnership Project which has been providing technical assistance to further the planning and development of this segment of the Canalway Trail. Under the Canalway Trail Partnership Project, New York Parks and Conservation Association (NYPCA), in partnership with the NYS Canal Corporation and the National Park Service Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program, is organizing and assisting canal communities to plan and develop the Canalway Trail where critical gaps exist. When completed, the Canalway Trail will be a 524 mile continuous multi-use pathway along the New York State Canal System. NYPCA is a statewide non-profit citizens' organization dedicated to protecting New York's parks and helping communities create innovative and popular forms of park lands such as greenways, rail and canal trails and heritage corridors.

Location

The trail segment in this assessment is a 28 mile route through Cayuga and western Onondaga Counties from the Wayne County line in the hamlet of Montezuma to the Town of Camillus Erie Canal Park. The trail follows the route of the Old Erie Canal. In parts, the trail is on the towpath. The current Erie Canal passes to the north, utilizing the Seneca River. The Canalway Trail here will go through the historic canal communities of Montezuma, Port Byron, Weedsport, Jordan, Memphis and Camillus. The trail also passes by numerous historic Old Erie Canal resources such as locks, canal walls, canal stores and aqueducts.

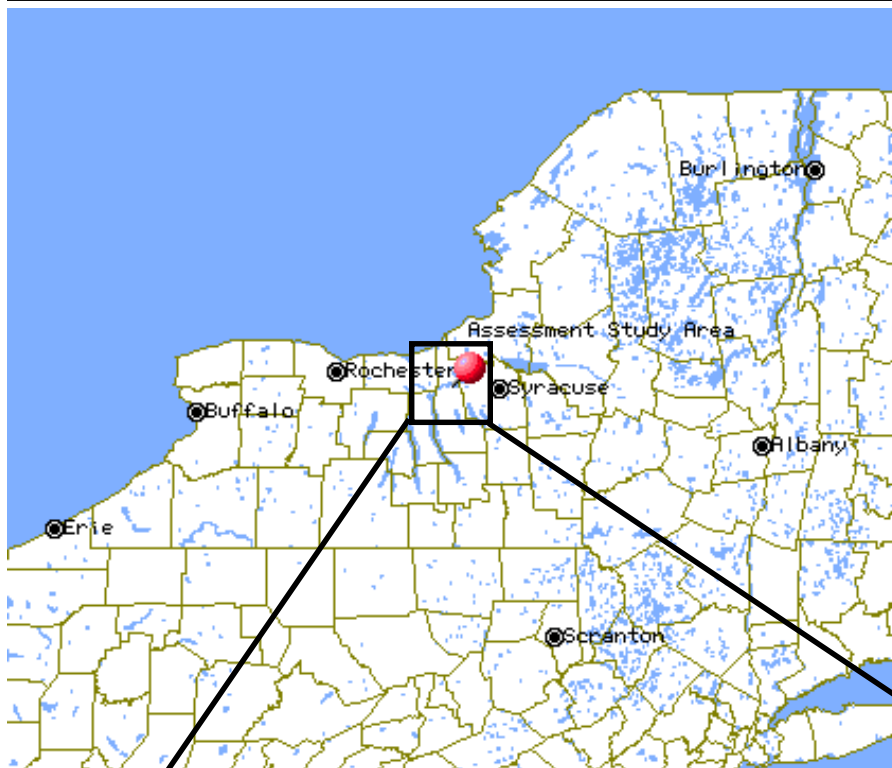


Fig. 1 Location of Assessment Area in New York State

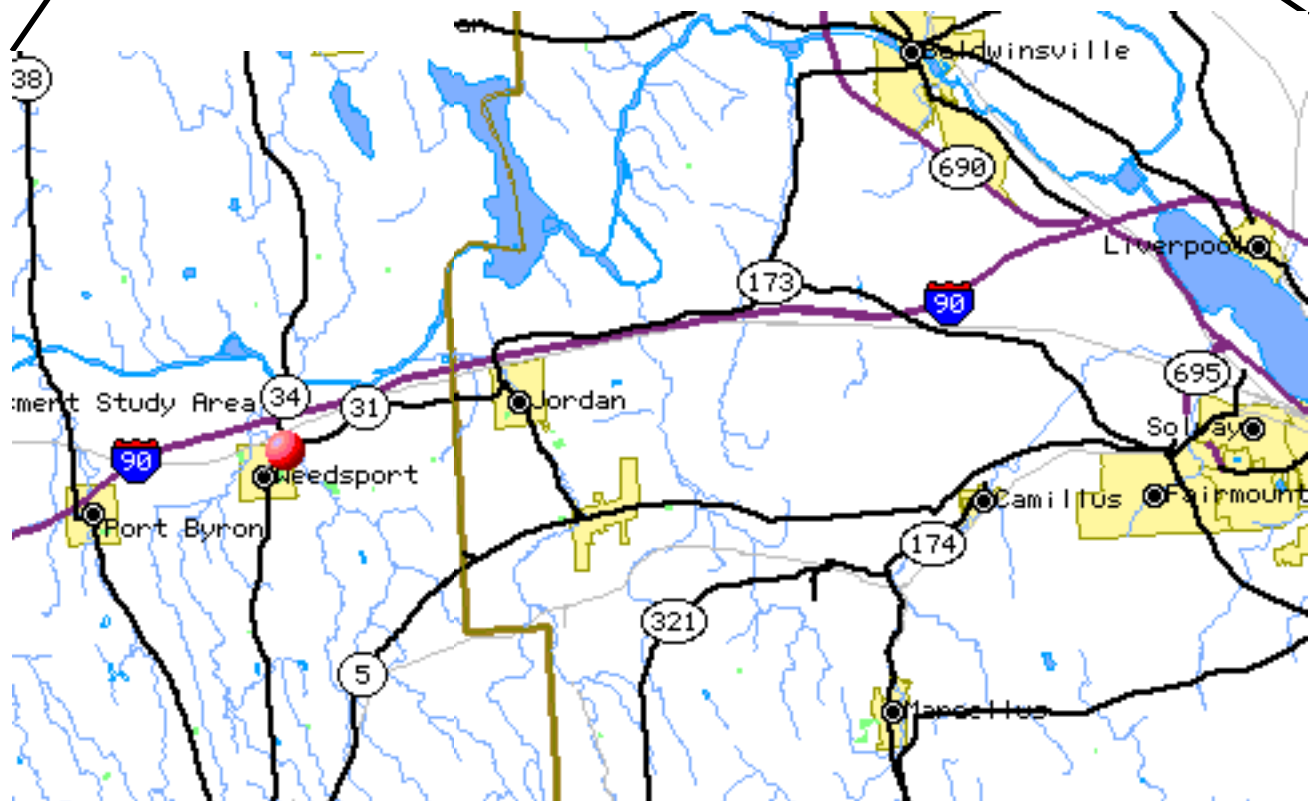


Fig 2. Assessment Region Detail

Landscape Character

The character of landscape that this trail segment passes through varies from village and small town urban to rural. The trail passes through wooded areas and second growth open fields. Because the current Erie Canal passes north of this area, the historic Erie Canal has long been unused. The original canal prism, which is visible from most of the trail, is, in places, filled with vegetation and not well defined. There are, however, lengths of this trail segment where the old canal has been restored or preserved, and the historic resources are visible. This is especially true at Camillus Erie Canal Park, the eastern end of the segment.

The towns and villages that this segment of the trail passes through greatly enhance the tourism experience. These quaint villages offer glimpses into historic Erie Canal life and provide the traveller with services such as restaurants and lodging.

From Canal Recreationway Plan

The Canal Recreationway Plan of 1995 identifies this section as composed of the following segments in exhibit 7-7 *Canal Trail Route Segments*:

1. ET-13 (part). Lock 25 to Port Byron. 9.5 miles. Ownership - NiMo and unknown. R.O.W. status 3¹. Trail follows the Old Erie Canal alignment.
2. ET-14. Port Byron to Warners. 14.5 miles. Ownership - Cayuga County and unknown. R.O.W. status 2¹. Old Erie Canal alignment. Earth-surface trail currently being used by hikers and snowmobiles.
3. ET-15. Warners to Reid Webster Park. 7 miles. Ownership - Town of Camillus. R.O.W. status 1¹. Camillus Erie Canal Town Park.

These characterizations correctly describe the state of the Canalway Trail planning in this area in 1995 and up to the present. This document updates this information.

Trail Partners

In Cayuga County the primary entity involved in the routing and planning of the Canalway Trail in this section is the Cayuga County Planning Department. Cayuga County has developed a plan for a county-wide hiking and bicycling trail system. This plan defines a network of multi-use trails of varying recreation and transportation uses, including the section of the Canalway Trail that passes through Cayuga County.

In western Onondaga County the trail ROW is owned by the county but county involvement is minimal. The towns that the trail passes through have taken on the development and maintenance of the trail. The Town of Elbridge, Village of Jordan, Town of Van Wyck and Town of Camillus all have sections of the trail in their jurisdiction which they are currently operating. Elbridge, Jordan and Camillus have established volunteer groups which depend on citizen participation in maintaining the trail.

¹ The Recreationway Plan divides the status of trail R.O.W.s into four groups as follows:

- 1 Improved Trail in use
- 2 R.O.W. assembled-Trail needs improvement
- 3 Trail sited, R.O.W. or easement to be acquired
- 4 Trail not sited.

A grass roots organization, Partners Along the Canalway Trail (PACT), combines the resources of volunteers in several municipalities in this area for promotion of tourism along the canal. PACT members meet four times per year to share information and plan promotional activities. PACT also operates an information table each year at the New York State Fair.

As one of the owners, the Onondaga County Parks Department should be encouraged to play an active role in the development of the Onondaga County portion of the trail.

Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation will also need to be asked to help since a portion of the trail in Cayuga County will require an easement to cross their property.

Resources

Many important and fascinating historic canal resources exist along this segment of the Canalway Trail. Starting in the west, outside the hamlet of Montezuma, the trail passes the stunning site of the remaining section of the Richmond Aqueduct, which brought the Old Erie Canal across the Seneca River.

Further east in the Village of Port Byron is the Erie House, a soon to be restored, historic canal store. The Erie House and an Old Erie Canal lock will become the center pieces of a new historic park operated by the New York State Canal Society.

The Village of Weedsport features an historic aqueduct which is now on the federal register, as well as dining and camping facilities.

Approximately 3.5 miles east of Weedsport, on the Cayuga/Onondaga County Line is an Old Erie Canal Lock which is cared for by the local volunteers and acts as a western gateway to the trail as it enters the Village of Jordan.

The canal in Jordan is well maintained and the trail runs along the bottom of the old prism with views of the old canal walls. In the center of the village, the Jordan Canal Park contains gardens and benches. The aqueduct in the Jordan Canal Park, which originally brought the canal over Skaneateles Creek, is in need of repair. The village recently was awarded a Clean Water Clear Air Act grant to do these repairs. When this is done, this park will offer a wonderful view into the workings of these aqueducts because access will be both on the canal towpath and at the bottom of the prism, allowing visitors to view these historic resources very closely. The Village of Jordan offers several opportunities for stopping, eating and enjoying its history. 1.5 miles east of Jordan, and just outside the hamlet of Memphis, is a restored weir lock.

The eastern end of this segment is the six mile long Camillus Erie Canal Park. The trail in this park is constructed on the towpath of the Old Erie Canal. The park also includes a water filled section of the canal, a restored canal store, which is now a canal museum, boat tours, and several historic renovations and reproductions of canal related paraphernalia. The most impressive park volunteers are restoring an historic aqueduct that carried the canal over Nine Mile Creek. They have received an ISTE grant for this project.

Economic Opportunities

The Canalway Trail in this section can play a significant role in bringing tourism development to the area. The section is located at the center of the Canalway Trail between Albany and Buffalo, and is the gateway to the Cayuga-Seneca Canal and the Finger Lakes Region. Its central location will enable this section to take full advantage of the cross-state network of bike trails which will bring cycling tourists from the Hudson Valley, Finger Lakes, Rochester and Buffalo. Additionally, persons on extended and cross-state trips will not be the only ones to use the trail. It is anticipated that residents of the area will use the trail as an alternative to driving to and from work in Solvay and Syracuse and as an important regional recreational resource, improving their health and quality of life.

When this section of the trail is completed it will link the broadly spread communities of western Onondaga and Cayuga Counties. It will also link to the City of Syracuse through the Camillus Erie Canal Park. Area business leaders should be aware that the completion of this segment will result in many bicyclists traveling through who are visiting the areas to the east, west and southwest to Seneca Falls and Montezuma Wildlife Refuge. Hiking and bicycling tourists [from the east and west] will find the historic resources in this area fascinating and stops will generate revenue through meals, shopping, repairs, or overnight stays. The facilities that exist will enjoy increased usage and new opportunities will appear. The potential for bicycle and hiking based tourism, including rentals and equipment repair and sales will increase. Development of canal-side restaurants and overnight boarding establishments would enhance the trail experience and further encourage visitors and residents to take advantage of the recreational potential of the canal.

The completion of this segment of the Canalway Trail will provide an important recreational, health and transportation facility for area residents and showcase the significant historic resources of the canal. This will measurably add to the quality of life and the view that this is a great place to live and work. The economic implications are significant. The perceived quality of life in a community is a major factor in many businesses'

decisions either to stay in a community or to relocate there.

Trail Route Description/Ownership/Condition of Trail

This description of the trail route proceeds from west to east. The off-road route is presented as well as an on-road option through Cayuga County and where the trail is not suitable for all the uses intended for the Canalway Trail. Additionally, the trail route is on-road in some places along this route where the towpath of the Old Erie Canal has been lost due to intervening construction or changes in ownership.

The descriptions given below are preliminary. Detailed routing will be done considering site-specific conditions and may differ somewhat from these descriptions. The final trail route may also change to some degree when the trail is improved.

Ownership

The majority of the land used for the trail in this section is owned by the two counties involved. The Village of Jordan owns the trail within its borders and the Town of Camillus owns the six miles of trail within the Camillus Erie Canal Park at the eastern end of the segment.

Acquisition needs

- Easements or licenses will be needed where the trail follows NIMO R.O.W. east of the hamlet of Montezuma
- Permission to develop the trail will also be needed where the trail is routed on DOT or NYS Thruway ROW

Proposed Route Description	Present Condition of Trail	Ownership
Cayuga County		
<p>Montezuma to Port Byron 5 miles</p> <p>The trail starts on the east side of the Seneca River where Rt 31 crosses into Cayuga County. The existing trail proceeds south through woods along the east bank of the Seneca River to the site of the former Richmond Aqueduct. At the aqueduct site the trail turns east to the hamlet of Montezuma. The trail then turns north on State Route 90 and rejoins Route 31. At this point an off-road trail route is proposed parallel and south of Route 31 using Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation ROW to just west of the NYS Thruway overpass. Here it crosses to the north side of Route 31 and follows the Thruway berm down to Craine Brook. The trail would continue over the brook on a bridge and proceed east parallel to Towpath Road and Heel Path Road to Maiden Lane. The trail will then cross over the Thruway on Rt. 38 and east on Rt. 31 through Port Byron.</p> <p>Alternate</p> <p>An alternate on road route can be used by cyclists until the off-road route is improved. This route stays on Rt. 31 from the intersection of Rt. 90 all the way into the Village of Port Byron.</p>	<p>The trail route south from Rt. 31 to the Richmond Aqueduct is unimproved and will need extensive clearing, grading and surfacing. The trail from the aqueduct site to the hamlet of Montezuma is a narrow, packed dirt trail that will need grading and surfacing for bicycle traffic. The trail route through Montezuma, and on Rt. 90 will need little other than signage indicating the trail route and "Share the Road" signs.</p> <p>The proposed route on NiMo ROW and down the Thruway berm is unimproved but flat and will need some grading and [will need] surfacing. A new bridge is needed to cross Craine Brook and bring the trail to the east side of the brook and join with Towpath Road.</p> <p>All on-road sections of the path in the Village of Port Byron should have striping for bicycle lanes and "Share the Road" signs.</p> <p>As a temporary alternate, Rt. 31 is already designated as state bike route 5 and is signed for that. After improvement, the off-road route should be the designated Canalway Trail.</p>	<p>The trail from Rt. 31, past the Richmond Aqueduct and into the hamlet of Montezuma is either already owned by or will soon be purchased by Cayuga County. Approximately 1/2 mile of the route along Route 31 between Montezuma and the thruway berm is leased ROW of Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation. The Thruway berm and land on the east side of Craine Brook is owned by the NYS Thruway Authority.</p> <p>All on-road routes would be on publicly owned roads.</p>

Proposed Route Description	Present Condition of Trail	Ownership
Cayuga County (cont'd)		
<p>Port Byron to Weedsport 5 miles</p> <p>The existing trail continues on Rt. 31 to 1/4 mile east of Port Byron where the towpath joins the south side of the road at the town park. The trail is on towpath of the Old Erie Canal through Centerport to the Aqueduct Park west of Weedsport. In Weedsport the trail is on village streets to the intersection with Rts. 34 and 31. At this point the existing trail route goes behind the Arby's and continues east.</p>	<p>The off road trail between Port Byron and Weedsport is limited for use by traffic other than hikers, mountain bikes and snowmobiles. To accommodate cross-state multiple use it will need widening, grading and surfacing. Streets in the Village of Weedsport will need signage to indicate the route of the trail.</p> <p>A temporary alternate, Rt. 31, can be used until the off-road route is designated as Canalway Trail.</p>	<p>The off-road trail route is owned by Cayuga County. Rt. 31 and village streets in Weedsport are in public ownership.</p>
<p>Weedsport to County Line 4 miles</p> <p>The existing trail continues behind Arby's and crosses Putnam Creek and onto Towpath Road behind Weedsport Raceway. The trail then goes off road but crosses Rt. 31 back to the Old Erie Canal heel path on the south side of Route 31. After a short distance the trail crosses back again to the towpath on the north side of Route 31 and proceeds to the lock park at historic Lock 51 at the county line.</p> <p>The temporary alternate to the off-road route is Rt. 31 which connects Weedsport and Jordan, travelling past the Lock 51 Park.</p>	<p>The condition of the off road trail between Weedsport and the county line also limits its use by traffic other than hikers, mountain bikes and snowmobiles. Like the section between Port Byron and Weedsport it will need grading and surfacing to accommodate cross state multiple-use traffic.</p> <p>The temporary alternate, Rt. 31, can be used until this section is improved and can be designated as Canalway Trail.</p>	<p>The off-road trail route is owned by Cayuga County. Rt. 31 and Village Streets in Weedsport are in public ownership.</p>

Proposed Route Description	Present Condition of Trail	Ownership
Onondaga County		
<p>County Line to Camillus 14 miles</p> <p>From the Lock 51 Park the trail crosses Rt. 31 and proceeds off-road through the Village of Jordan. The trail is at the bottom of the old canal prism until it crosses Main Street where it transfers to the towpath on the north side of the canal, crossing Skaneateles Creek at the Aqueduct Park. After the park, the trail is on road for about 1/4 mile behind the elementary school and re-joins the towpath. At this point, except for small road crossings in Peru, Memphis and Warners the trail is on towpath to and through the Camillus Erie Canal Park.</p>	<p>The section through Jordan at the bottom of the canal prism will need grading and surfacing, the towpath trail in the Jordan Aqueduct Park runs along the top of the aqueduct wall which is unsound and needs repairs.</p> <p>The off-road trail in this section between the Village of Jordan and Camillus Erie Canal Park is unimproved packed dirt trail. Often the trail is narrow and consists only of a dirt path.</p> <p>The trail in Camillus Erie Canal Park is well suited for walking and off-road bicycling. From the beginning of the Park in Warners to the Sims store in Camillus the trail is semi-improved and can use re-surfacing. The mile between the Sims Store and the Nine Mile Aqueduct is improved and very functional. The trail from the aqueduct west to Warners Road needs clearing, grading and surfacing.</p>	<p>The Village of Jordan owns the trail within its borders and the Town of Camillus owns the six miles of trail in the Camillus Erie Canal Park. The remainder of the trail is owned by Onondaga County but is maintained by the Towns.</p>

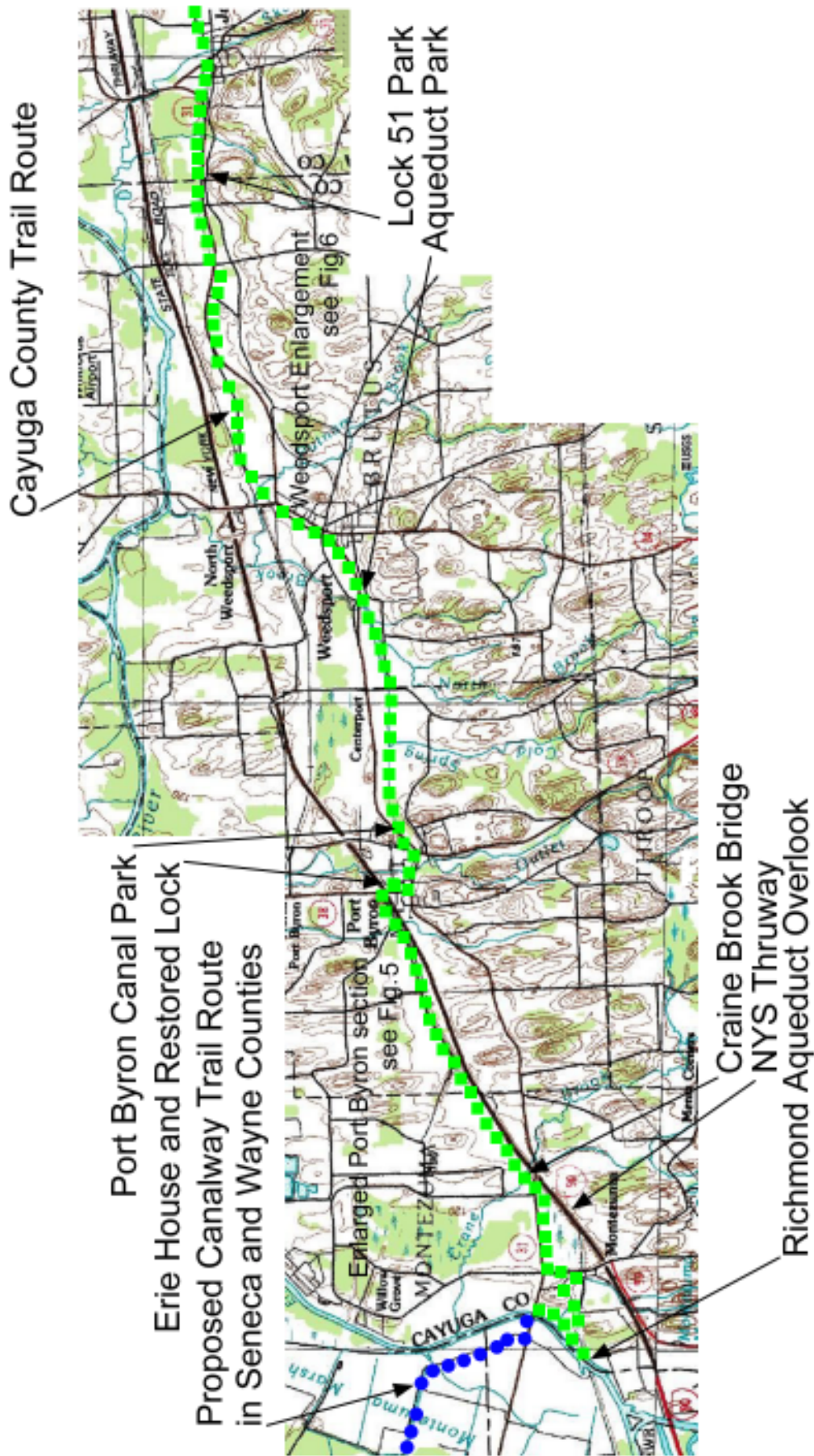


Fig. 3 Cayuga County Canalway Trail Route

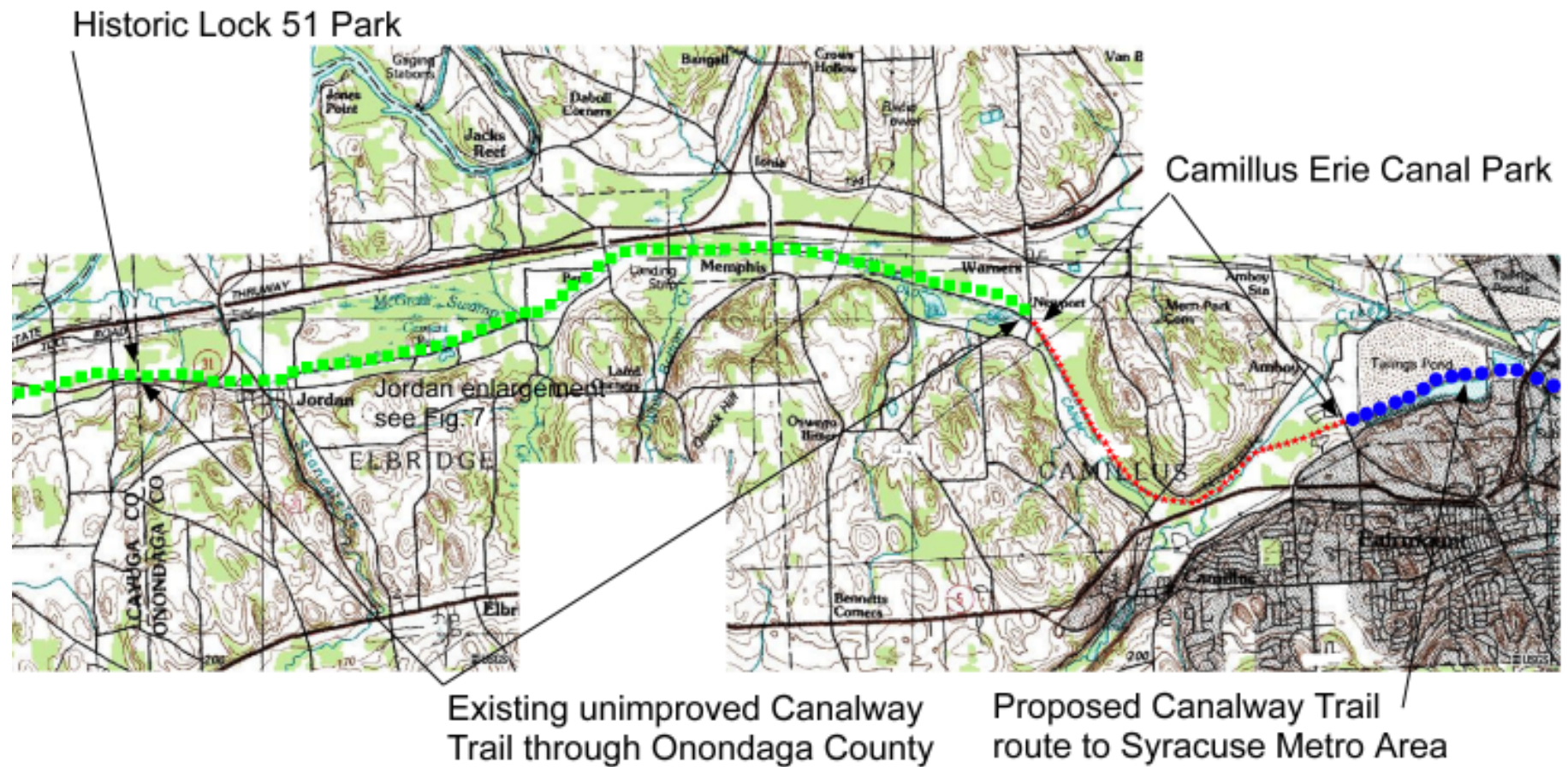


Fig. 4 Western Onondaga County Canalway Trail Route

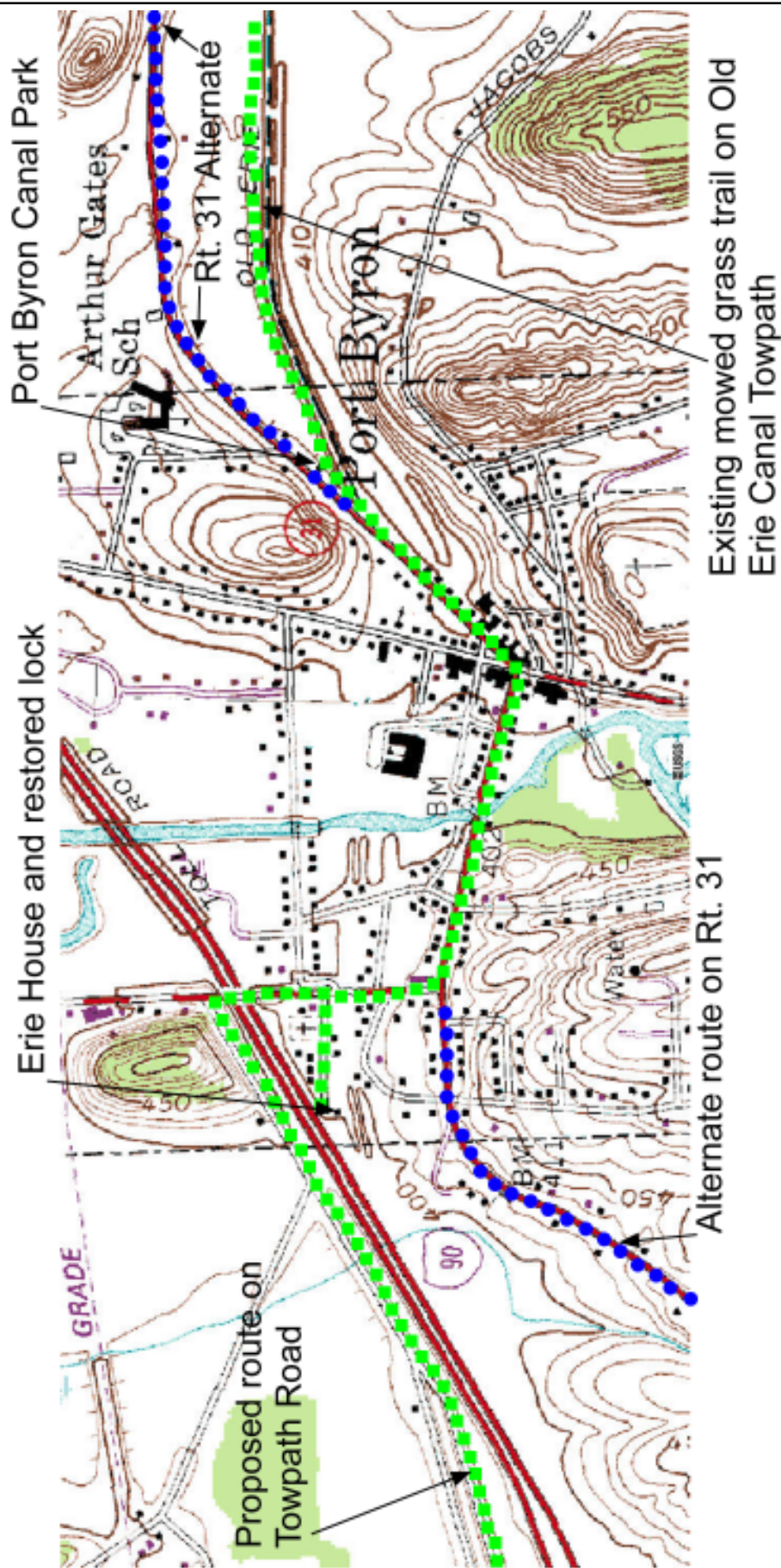


Fig. 5 Canalway Trail Route through Port Byron



Fig. 6 Canalway Trail Route through Weedsport

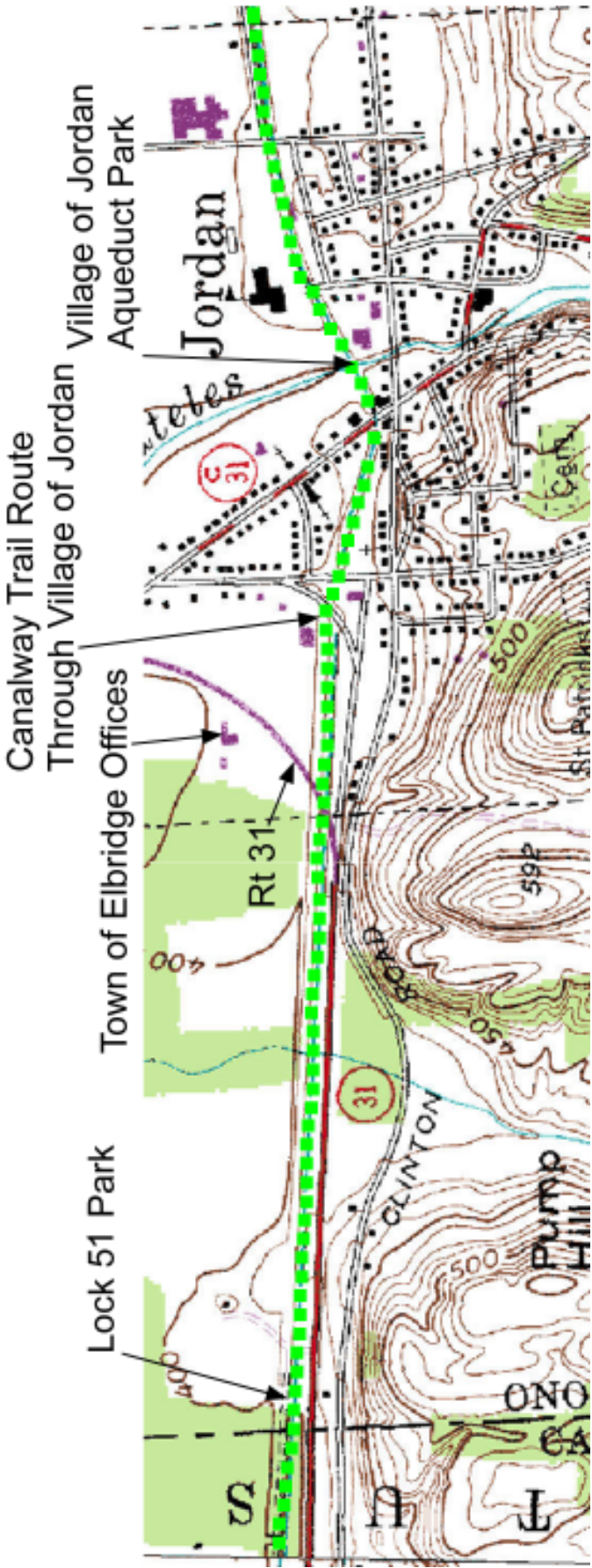


Fig. 7 Canalway Trail Route through Jordan

Constraints

Craine Brook Bridge

Just east of the hamlet of Montezuma the proposed trail route crosses Craine Brook just north of the NYS Thruway. Presently there is no bridge crossing Craine Brook at this point and the trail alternative is to go, on road, to the Village of Port Byron. The off road route is the desired route and a bridge across Craine Brook should be constructed.

Easements

Also just east of the hamlet of Montezuma, between the intersection of Route 90 and Route 31, a section of the proposed route (approximately 3/4 mile) is on land currently owned or leased by Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation. This would allow the trail to be off of Route 31. The alternative is the shoulder of route 31 which is less desirable. An easement for use of the power ROW should be negotiated with Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation and the land owner if owned by others.

Abutting Property Use

An automotive junk yard exists on property abutting the towpath between the Village of Port Byron and the hamlet of Centerport in Cayuga County in the Town of Mentz. The owner has bulldozed right up to the towpath and this land use has a significant negative impact on the trail experience in this section. The town should be encouraged to enforce the building of a fence as a visual barrier between the towpath and the junkyard. The fence should be of such material and design that it also does not become an eyesore. Additionally, the county should survey the boundaries of the trail where it is next to the junk yard to make sure that the trail property is not being encroached upon.

Cost Estimates

The standard cost estimates for trail surfacing being used by NYS Canal Corporation for the Canalway Trail at this date are \$85,000 per mile for stone dust surfacing and \$125,000 for asphalt surfacing. This estimate does not include trail amenities such as benches, kiosks, parking areas, bridges, camping or picnic areas or signage. In this trail section a stone dust surface is recommended, the costs for asphalt surfacing are given for comparison purposes.

The following tables incorporate the above estimates and add in costs of surveys, engineering, signage, Craine Brook bridge and contingencies. The totals have been rounded up to reflect these additions.

Item	Cost	Amount	Unit	Sub Total
Asphalt Surfaced Trail	\$ 125,000.00	28	mile	\$3,500,000.00
Stone Dust Surfaced Trail	\$ 85,000.00	28	mile	\$2,380,000.00
Signage	\$ 7,000.00	28	mile	\$196,000.00
Striping Streets for Bike Lane	\$ 5,000.00	5	mile	\$25,000.00
Craine Brook Bridge	\$ 750,000.00	1	LS	\$750,000.00
Total for Asphalt Trail Option	Corrected to include contingencies and rounded up to the nearest ten thousand dollars.			\$4,920,000.00
Total for Stonedust Trail Option				\$3,690,000.00

Key Needs and Opportunities

Role of Trail Partners

Onondaga County Parks Department. Onondaga County is the owner of most of the trail route between the Cayuga County Line and the Town of Camillus. It is important that the county begin to take an active role in the planning, developing and maintaining of the trail through this area. Partnering with the towns and villages along the trail route would be the most effective method of encouraging local municipal and volunteer participation.

Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation. A portion of the proposed trail route is on land currently owned or leased by Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation (NiMo). Partnering with NiMo to arrange use of this ROW is important to maintain the longest possible off-road trail route.

Trail Improvement

The Canal Recreationway Commission has recently approved the formation of a Canalway Trail Management Organization (CTMO). One of the tasks of this organization is to develop standards for trail design, development and maintenance across the state. The purpose of this is to assure consistent, standards and an enjoyable and safe visitor experience on the trail. It is understood that providing a high class multi-use trail is essential in order to promote tourism. It is expected that the trail and the historic re-

sources along its length will attract tourists from all over the country and the world, and that, in order to promote the trail to these audiences, it needs to consistently meet certain performance standards along each mile of its 524 mile length. When the CTMO finishes these standards (expected in Spring of 2001) they will constitute a benchmark to be used for designating sections of the trail as Canalway Trail. Only sections with this designation will be signed as part of the Canalway Trail system and included in promotional material for the trail.

It is important that county and local governments in Cayuga and Onondaga Counties plan to improve the trail to obtain Canalway Trail designation. Many miles of the existing trail are narrow and dirt surfaced which will not support the type of traffic that is expected. There is an on road alternative but this is not satisfactory in that the purpose of Canalway Trail development is to provide off-road routes as much as possible because it enhances the experience, especially where it can be on the towpath of the historic canal, and is safer.

Volunteer Organization

One of the first needs in this area would be to expand on the existing grassroots trail committees by forming a regional canalway trail group that will help support trail development and maintenance in this area. This group would focus on the entire trail section rather than in any one municipal division. It is important to maintain each county's control over its own property and at the same time construct a vision for the section as a whole. This group would be made of a mix of representatives from the businesses, municipal and county officials, PACT, the Friends of the Camillus Erie Canal Park, trail users and community residents. Participants for this group should be actively recruited and meetings should start as soon as possible.

During trail development the committee could organize volunteers to help in trail clearing and construction activities. The committee could recruit volunteers and businesses willing to donate time, money and materials to the maintenance and development of the trail. The committee could also be active in encouraging trail development and helping to write grants, do surveys, trail inventories and event programming.

This group should become part of the statewide Canalway Trail Management Organization. This state-wide organization is in the process of being formed and its structure will include regional canalway trail groups of this type. This involvement would mean helping to develop and locally implement statewide trail development and maintenance standards as part of a statewide organization as well as organizing and administering local trail events and initiatives, which would enhance the economic benefits of the trail.