

Daily Gazette (July 20, 2002) State will build tunnel under blocked trail

Bike-hike route interrupted by barricades on rail track

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ROTTERDAM JUNCTION - A tunnel is scheduled to be built under the portion of the Mohawk Hudson Bike-Hike Trail that has been blocked by cement barricades on either side of a railroad track - but not until 2004.

The state Canal Corp., which operates under the Thruway Authority, plans to build the tunnel under the railroad tracks on Scrafford Lane as part of a \$5 million plan initiated by Gov. George Pataki.

The "Canal Revitalization Program" is a five-year plan that projects rehabilitating the entire state bike path, which runs from Buffalo to Albany. As a part of that plan, the obstruction on Scrafford Lane will be remedied, a Canal Corp. spokeswoman said Friday.

"Canal Corp. is meeting with Schenectady County and discussing the alternatives for that portion - the 10-mile stretch from Rotterdam Junction to Amsterdam," said Canal Corp. spokeswoman Casey Cannistraci.

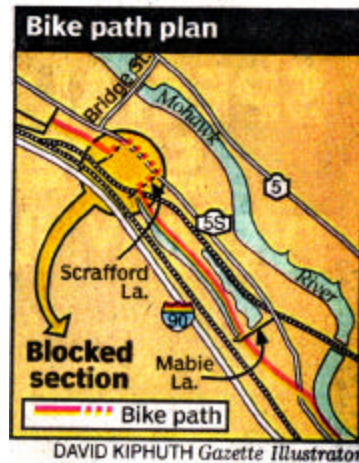
"The options are a tunnel or a walkway . . . the tunnel right now is the most likely option right now," Cannistraci said.

There is no cost projection on the project because it is part of the larger revitalization program. But whatever the cost, it will likely be split with the county, Cannistraci said.

The Rotterdam Junction section has been obstructed for about a year by cement barricades on Scrafford Lane. The obstacles were placed there by Guilford Rail System, the company that owns the tracks.

The company claims that there was an easement across the tracks for several years for the sole purpose of allowing the owner of a house on the other side access.

Once that home burned down a few years ago, the easement ceased to exist, Guilford claims.



So to discourage cyclists and walkers from crossing the tracks to get to the remainder of the path, the company placed large cement barriers on either side of the tracks last year.

Guilford claims the trains that idle on the tracks pose a threat of injury to anyone crossing the tracks, and the company would like to avoid the liability.

An official from Guilford said he hasn't had any correspondence from any county officials for about a year. "The last I got was a nasty letter from some lawyer in Schenectady County," Guilford Executive Vice President David Fink said. "I have heard nothing back in a year."

Meanwhile, Rotterdam town officials are hoping to clear the roadblock sooner than 2004 and are also trying to find some way to give emergency vehicles access across Scrafford Lane, which is also blocked by the barricade.

"If we need to access that because of a potential life-threatening injury or fire, we can't right now," town Supervisor John Paolino said.

As it stands now, firefighters must take the same circuitous route to get to the other side of the tracks that cyclists must take:

From Fire District No. 1, they must travel east on Route 5S for about a mile to Mabie Lane and enter a fire road there, then travel west, back to the other side of the barricade.

It is the opposite route for bikers, who must double back down the path, exit at Mabie Lane, then travel west on 5S - which has a 55-mph speed limit in places - and resume the bike path on the other side of the tracks.

Although Fink said he has not communicated with anyone for about a year, he did say he was amenable to building a tunnel.

"We wanted to work out there in partnership. If they're going to do a tunnel, that's great," Fink said. "At least it's something . . . there's a plan I guess, that's the best thing I can say about it."