

# Along the Trail

THE NEWSLETTER FOR THE FRIENDS OF THE MOHAWK-HUDSON BIKE-HIKE TRAIL

## On the lookout at trail crossings



On a frigid night in January, months before most people were thinking of pulling out a bicycle, a crowd gathered at Iroquois Middle School in Niskayuna to look over the New York state Department of Transportation's plans to rebuild the Ferry Road bridge that currently spans the Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail.

A month later, a firehouse in Rotterdam Junction drew a similar crowd as plans for a redesign of Route 5S were discussed. Although the plans relate to several miles of the road and surrounding land, much of the discussion centered on the spot where the bike-hike trail crosses the two-lane highway. A local cyclist, Al Fairbanks, was struck by a car while crossing the road there in the fall of 2006 and later died of his injuries.

The two sections of trail are very different: The Ferry Road bridge provides access to about a dozen homes and businesses on Niska Isle and is only lightly traveled. Route 5S gets thousands of cars a day, many traveling at or above the posted speed limit of 40 mph. However, the redesign of



The Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail crosses Route 5S just outside Rotterdam Junction.

PHOTO BY GILLIAN SCOTT

both provides an opportunity to discuss and improve the safety of trail users. Representatives from the Friends of the Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail were at both meetings to make sure the concerns of trail users were heard.

Under the preferred plan offered in Niskayuna, a new, lower bridge would be built with an at-grade crossing with the trail. Planners discussed a variety of ways the safety of such a crossing could be improved, such as installing stop signs on the trail and/or on the

road, or adding a an angle or small hill in the trail before the road crossing to force trail users to slow down.

After the meeting in Niskayuna, Department of Transportation planners decided to go back to the drawing board. Their decision had little to do with the bridge's proximity to the bike path; instead, they were concerned that lowering its height wouldn't provide enough clearance for any emergency boats that might need to access the inlet. Repairs are now underway on the bridge.

In Rotterdam, proposals to improve the

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### Get in touch

Write to Friends of the Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail, 141 Willowcreek Ave., Schenectady, NY 12304 or e-mail [mhbway@yahoo.com](mailto:mhbway@yahoo.com) We're online at <http://www.geocities.com/mhbway>.

## Trails Day clean-up a sunny success

Members of the Friends of the Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail, the Schenectady chapter of the Adirondack Mountain Club and Niskayuna EMS gathered in Schenectady on Trails Day, June 7, to clean up the city's section of the bike-hike trail. Nineteen volunteers worked in the bright sun, cutting back brush and picking up trash not only on the trail, but also on the short underpass trail that runs under the nearby Freeman's Bridge.

As always, thanks to the volunteers who turned out and to EMS for their continuing support.



## Lock 23 earns historical status

Old Lock 23 in Rotterdam, once part of the Erie Canal, has been added to both the State and National Historic Registers.

According to Union College Professor Andrew Morris, the register listings “underscore the significance of the site and its importance in regional, state and national history.”

The recognition could also help spur efforts to revitalize the site, making it eligible for more grants and funding. Possible projects include removing an old, unused water main running through the lock and repairing some of the lock walls.

Morris has led restoration efforts at the site for several years, clearing brush and helping make the site more accessible and visible from the Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail, which passes nearby.

Last year, Morris told the Friends, “If we’re able to do some restoration, interpretation and establish a maintenance plan for the site, it will be a real resource for local educators and students, for tourists coming through on bike or boat, and for those of us for whom part of the attraction of living in this area are the many layers of history that surround us.

## Hey, volunteers!

Parks & Trails NY and the Friends of the Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail are developing a trail ambassador program. We need individuals who are knowledgeable about the bike-hike trail and who are willing to answer questions, provide basic assistance to trail users, and report trail maintenance issues. E-mail Gillian Scott at [gvsco07@verizon.net](mailto:gvsco07@verizon.net) for more information or call 372-8478.

## Safe Routes Committee is making connections

The Safe Routes Committee in Niskayuna formed in 2005 to study ways to create connections for pedestrians and cyclists throughout the town, including use of the Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail.

According to co-chairman Jared Wells, the committee’s accomplishments relating to the bike-hike trail include:

- Signs have been installed at Jeff Blatnick Park to warn trail users that the trail makes a sharp turn as it enters the park from the west along River Road. Some trail users were continuing straight along the trail parallel to River Road and getting lost in the nearby neighborhoods.

- Vehicle gates along River Road have been improved — the wire across the path has been replaced with a knock-down center bollard.

Also in the works:

- The town is working with General Electric to extend a mowed path that currently connects soccer fields near Craig Elementary School to the bike-hike trail. The extension would terminate on Zenner Road.

Wells said the committee is also doing long-term planning with the school district for a path on the Craig school side of Zenner Road. The school is located on Balltown Road, near River Road.

- The town will request an easement to create a short paved connector to the trail opposite Edison Drive. Currently, anyone trying to access the bike-hike trail from Edison must either bike along River Road to a paved entrance or ride across a grassy median in front of KAPL.

- The committee is also hoping to incorporate connections into the reconstruction of the Ferry Road bridge off Rosendale Road. A paved path alongside Ferry Road would provide access to Rosendale; this path would then be continued east along Rosendale Road to connect to an existing town right-of-way (the future Flower Drive). This long-term project would provide access to the bike path for the Birchwood School area, Wells said, including Merlin and Lori drives off Route 7.

## CROSSINGS: Safety at stake

*(Continued from page 1)*

trail’s crossing of Route 5S (shown in photo, page 1) were developed by a study team formed in November 2007 to review traffic along Route 5S from Thruway Exit 26 to the rail crossing at Schenectady International. The study group, which was funded by a grant, included Friends representative Fred Thompson, who signed on to act as a conduit of information to and from concerned trail users.

After two public hearings, including the one in February, the study team developed the following recommendations regarding the crossing, which were presented to the Rotterdam Town Board May 14:

- Insure that NYSDOT keeps brush cut back from 5S in both the east and west crossing approaches.
- Use weave patterns of bollards just outside the right-of-way of 5S.
- Relocate stop signs closer to the bollards.
- Retain the bicycle crossing signs and pavement paint if two warnings are warranted.
- Place high visibility bicycle crossing signs further from the crossing. Consider providing trail user activated flashing crossing lights on these signs.
- Ensure significant enforcement of speed limits within the lower speed limits. Work with NYSDOT to determine if extending the lower speed limit zone to start further from the crossing.

Associated with the study is an implementation matrix that lists all the considered improvements with estimated dates of implementation, estimated cost, funding entity and implementation entity.

Just days before the Rotterdam meeting on May 14, a “ghost bike” appeared at the Route 5S bike-hike trail crossing memorializing 72-year-old Fairbanks’ accident on October 29, 2006 and his death due to paralyzing injuries on November 28, 2006.

## News roundup: Trail work near community college completed

A project long in the planning stages finally came to fruition this year: A section of trail has been constructed along State Street from Washington Avenue and around the Western Gateway Bridge underpass that provides access to Schenectady County Community College (see photo at right).

The cost of the \$800,000 project was shared by the state and federal governments, the county and the college.

Eventually, the city hopes to reroute the Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail from its current route through city streets to a new bike path along the river in the Stockade district.

The current path takes to city streets near Union College, rejoining the trail a mile or so later at Schenectady County Community College. According to newspaper reports, the city plans to acquire the old Alco plant on Erie Boulevard, redeveloping the land and routing the trail between the buildings on the site and the river.

### Other local news:

- The New York State Canal Corporation announced July 11 that the \$6 million set aside in 2005 to complete a missing section of trail between Rotterdam Junction and Amsterdam will be used instead to make repairs to dams and locks along the canal. The six-mile gap includes a crossing over tracks owned by Guildford Rail in Rotterdam Junction — the proposal called for building a tunnel under the tracks, but the state is still negotiating with the railroad. Canal Corp. Director Carmella Mantello said the state has asked the federal government for funds for the project and is working with Parks & Trails NY. (Daily Gazette, July 11, 2008)

- In June 2007, the city of Schenectady removed the old railroad bridge that took the Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail over Peek Street, building an at-grade crossing. The bike-hike trail in that area borders industrial land that is being redeveloped.

- In May, the town of Colonie dedicated two new signs that interpret the natural and cultural history along the Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail. The



A new section of trail on State Street near Schenectady County Community College will one day link to trails along the river in the Stockade.

Photo by Howard Halstead.

two-sided signs, designed by Don and Lois Porter, replace the maps in the kiosks at the western gateway of the bike-hike trail. The cost of making the signs was covered by a grant from the New York State Canal Corporation.

### Regional trails news:

- On Trails Day last year, the town of Halfmoon broke ground on a 1 1/2 mile section of stone dust trail along the old Champlain Canal. The trail was funded by a \$112,500 grant from the Canal Corporation. The town hopes to eventually extend the trail to five miles in length. The trail can be accessed from the parking lot of Brookwood Road, adjacent to the town's water treatment plant. (Daily Gazette, May 31, 2007).

- The town of Stillwater purchased a 3.5 acre parcel of land to serve as a trailhead for a future bicycle and pedestrian trail that will one day run through the village of Stillwater along the Old Champlain Canal towpath. In the more distant future, the trail is planned to extend south to Waterford and north to Saratoga National Historic Park. The town paid \$90,000 (money it received through grants) for the property, which is located west of routes 4 and 32. Building the trail (Daily Gazette, May 30, 2007). Construction of the blacktop trail got under way in September. The town received about \$550,000 in state grants to pay for the project. (Daily

Gazette, Aug. 9, 2007).

- A new 3.3 miles section of Saratoga County's Zim Smith Trail opened in November 2007. The new stone-dust section of trail runs from Round Lake to Coons Crossing in Halfmoon. It cost \$440,000 to construct, money that was provided via a federal transportation grant. There are also three miles of trail that run from Round Lake to Malta; this section is closed this year because of construction of the Round Lake Bypass. The Zim Smith Trail will eventually extend for 9 miles through Ballston Spa to the southern boundary of Saratoga Spa State Park. (Daily Gazette, Nov. 5, 2007).

- A pedestrian bridge over Watervliet-Shaker Road in Colonie opened to the public in October 2007. The bridge, which cost \$600,000 to build, links the paved trail in the office park off British-American Boulevard (off Route 7) to Ann Lee Pond. The trail passes Shaker Ridge Country Club and the Hilton Garden Hotel near the airport before reaching the bridge. The town hopes to one day extend the trail to The Crossings town park and Wolf Road. British-American Boulevard is only two blocks up Route 7 from Rosendale Road and therefore within walking distance of Lions Park in Niskayuna. Eighty percent of the bridge's cost was paid for by the federal government, 15 percent by the state, and five percent by Albany County. (Daily Gazette, Oct. 18, 2007).

Friends of the Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail  
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*Find us online at*  
[http://www.geocities.com/  
mhbway](http://www.geocities.com/mhbway)

## Friends of the Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail

Our mission: To develop through public education and stewardship the historical, recreational and economic opportunities of the Mohawk-Hudson trail.

The Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail is a multi-use trail located along the Mohawk and Hudson rivers in Albany and Schenectady counties. The trail is part of the NYS Canalway Trail System and the Hudson River Valley Greenway Trail System.

The Friends of the Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail works to ensure the long-term success of the trail and related trails. This includes integrating the Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail as a keystone, forging a link among three major state trail corridors: the Erie Canalway Trail, the Hudson River Valley Greenway Trail System, and the Champlain Canalway Trail. When completed, the Canalway Trail will span over 500 miles, making it one of the longest multi-use recreational trails in the country.

### WE ARE ACTIVELY SEEKING VOLUNTEERS!

We are looking for local people interested in participating in planning for the future of the Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail and/or in improvement projects along the trail. To become a member of the Friends of the Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail, complete and return this form to:

**Friends of the Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail**  
**141 Willowcreek Ave.**  
**Schenectady, NY 12304**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail address: \_\_\_\_\_

**To make a contribution to the Friends of the Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail, write a check payable to Parks and Trails New York (PTNY).** PTNY is the fiscal agent for the Friends of the Mohawk-Hudson Bike-Hike Trail, and a non-profit, tax-exempt organization under IRS code 501(c)(3). Gifts may be tax deductible.