



**Testimony of Parks & Trails New York (PTNY)
& New Yorkers for Active Transportation (NY4AT)
to the Joint Legislative Public Hearing on the
2015-16 Executive Budget Proposal
Transportation**

*Respectfully submitted by
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Thank you for the opportunity to speak on behalf of New York's bicyclists and walkers, and in support of the infrastructure that supports their active transportation choices – *thousands of miles of greenways, multi-use trails, bike lanes and sidewalks in communities across the state.*

I am James Meerdink, Project Coordinator at Parks & Trails New York. For 30 years, Parks & Trails New York has been the leading advocate for parks and trails throughout the state. We have worked with hundreds of communities to create, promote, and protect a system of parks, greenways, bike paths, and trails that benefit all New Yorkers.

In 2013, Parks & Trails New York joined the New York Bicycling Coalition (NYBC), Tri-State Transportation Campaign (TSTC) and other bicycle-pedestrian advocates to form New Yorkers for Active Transportation (NY4AT), a coalition dedicated to securing equitable funding for non-

motorized transportation, such as trails, bike lanes, and sidewalks. Today, I will be speaking on behalf of this coalition, whose partners have reviewed these remarks.

We are fortunate that for more than two decades federal transportation bills have provided New York communities with the funds to build bicycle and pedestrian paths, sidewalks, bike lanes, and other infrastructure that encourages persons of all ages and abilities to engage in bicycling and walking. We are especially pleased with the Governor's announcement of federal funding for 131 bicycle, pedestrian and trail projects in January and October of 2014. These investments will support community revitalization, attract knowledge workers, improve quality of life, and contribute to improved health in communities across the state.

However, the future of federal funding for bicycle and pedestrian projects is uncertain as Congress considers reauthorization of the current federal transportation bill, MAP-21, this spring. MAP-21 represented a 30% reduction in funding for bicycle and pedestrian programs compared to the previous federal transportation bill. There is no guarantee that the new federal transportation legislation will remedy this situation. In fact, we may not see any dedicated funding for these projects in the next federal transportation bill. All of this comes at a time when we hear from local officials across the state that they are eager to build infrastructure that supports bicycling and walking in their communities. Community-level bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure can offer unparalleled recreational opportunities, generate tourist revenue, improve community health and make downtown business districts more vibrant and appealing.

In light of the uncertainty surrounding federal funding, the Legislature should act to set aside dedicated funding to support the development of bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure in our cities, villages, and towns. Presently, bicycle, pedestrian, and trail projects represent less than two percent of New York's transportation funding. With demand higher than ever, New York should be increasing the level of funding for these projects. ***We ask that pedestrian and bicycle infrastructure projects receive a continuous, dedicated funding of \$20 million annually, in FY 2015-2016 and beyond. This amount will return funding levels to those enjoyed in New York before the federal government's 30% decrease.***

Why should the State fund active transportation infrastructure?

Because we must:

- ***Ensure that all communities have “Complete Streets” – with bike lanes, sidewalks, traffic calming measures, crosswalks and nearby multi-use trails – that promote safety and accessibility.***

Everyone, regardless of age or ability, should have the opportunity to safely walk and bike every day. However, currently, 29% of all fatalities on New York’s roads involve bicyclists and pedestrians, the highest rate in the nation and 12% higher than the national average. Bicycle and pedestrian investments are essential to the long-term health and safety of our citizens.

- ***Close the remaining gaps in the 360-mile Erie Canalway Trail.***

Stretching from Buffalo to Albany, the Erie Canalway Trail is the backbone of the state’s trail system. With 280 miles now open to the public, the Erie Canalway Trail is more than 78% complete and on its way to becoming a premier tourist destination for cyclists and other outdoor enthusiasts as well as the longest trail of its kind in the nation. It is PTNY’s goal to have the remaining 80 miles of trail under construction or in design by the bicentennial of the start of construction of the Erie Canal in 2017.

PTNY’s recent study of the economic impact of the Erie Canalway Trail found that the trail contributes \$253 million to the state’s economy and supports 3,440 jobs. However, the Erie Canalway Trail can neither realize its full potential as a world-class tourism destination nor offer maximum economic benefit to the more than 200 communities along its length until it is completed as an off-road trail.

Here are some statistics.

- ***Trails and community infrastructure that promote bicycling and walking contribute to healthy communities and lower healthcare costs for individuals and local governments.*** Annual obesity-related costs in New York State are estimated at more than \$11.8 billion per year, \$4.3 billion of which is funded by Medicaid. That’s an important number

because New Yorkers' state and local taxes pay half of that Medicaid cost – money which could be used for other governmental services.¹

- ***Bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure projects create jobs - more jobs per federal dollar than road-only highway construction.***

A University of Massachusetts study demonstrated that “road-only” projects created 7.8 jobs per \$1 million spent, while “bicycling only” and “pedestrian-only” projects provided 11.4 and 10 jobs, respectively, per million dollars of spending.²

- ***Trails, bike paths and walkable, bike-able communities are key assets in helping the state and localities attract tax-paying businesses and a high-quality workforce.***

In “the new New York”, trails and walkable, bike-able communities are what companies and young professionals are seeking when deciding to relocate. Of those “Millennials” that we want to attract and retain:

- two-thirds seek walkable places and town centers, even if they prefer to live in a suburb,
 - 26 percent do not have a driver’s license, and
 - 45 percent report making a conscious effort to replace driving with alternative forms of transportation.³
- ***Sidewalks and other places to walk such as trails rank as one of the top priorities with home buyers.***

The 2013 Community Preference Survey, conducted on behalf of the National Association of Realtors, found 80% of those polled considered having sidewalks and places to take a walk one of their top priorities when deciding where they would like to

¹ Office of the State Comptroller, Thomas P. DiNapoli, Soaring Health Care Costs Highlight Need To Address Childhood Obesity, October 2012.

²Garrett-Peltier, Heidi, *Pedestrian and Bicycle Infrastructure: A National Study of Employment Impacts*, Political Economy Research Institute, University of Massachusetts Amherst, June 2011, https://d3n8a8pro7vnmx.cloudfront.net/americanbikes/pages/199/attachments/original/1343930066/PERI_Natl_Study_June2011.pdf?1343930066

³ Benfield, Kaid, “Why smarter land use can help cities attract and retain young adults,” NRDC Switchboard, February 1, 2013, http://switchboard.nrdc.org/blogs/kbenfield/why_smarter_land_use_can_help.html

live. This was an increase from the 2011 Community Preference Survey. Also, places to walk ranked higher than “high quality public schools,” which was selected by 74% of survey respondents.⁴

While the future of federal funding for active transportation is in doubt, the State’s ability to act has not been curtailed. MAP-21 gave states the flexibility to set their own priorities and to shift funding to address safety and accessibility goals. In addition to dedicated funding, New York State can do that through the Department of Transportation’s 5-year Capital Plan, which is currently being developed. This Plan is an essential tool for advancing goals such as increased bicycle and pedestrian infrastructure. However, NYSDOT’s 5-year Capital Plan is not currently submitted through the normal budget process. ***We call on the Legislature to establish a more open budgeting process for NYSDOT’s operating and capital budgets. The Metropolitan Transportation Authority has a statutory date on which they must release their 5-year Capital Plan; NYSDOT should have a similar requirement in order to ensure ample time for the public and legislators to give the document their full consideration.***

Finally, to support New York’s expanding role as a leader in bicycle-related tourism, we urge the Legislature to support roll-on bicycle service on all Amtrak passenger trains. Because Amtrak serves all the major cities along the Erie and Champlain Canalway Trails and in the Hudson Valley, many cyclists wish to cycle one way and take the train back to their starting location. Unfortunately, despite the fact that bicycles are allowed on trains in other parts of the country, Amtrak prohibits bikes from being rolled onto the Maple Leaf, Empire Service, Adirondack and Vermonter trains. We urge the Legislature to take a strong position in support of roll-on bike service, as presently it is a lost revenue opportunity for Amtrak and the many communities that Amtrak serves.

Closing

Active transportation is an essential element of the state’s historic commitment to a transportation system that prioritizes safety of users, economic development, and accessibility

⁴ National Association of Realtors, *2013 Community Preference Survey*, designed and administered by American Strategies and Myers Research | Strategic Services, LLC in September 2013.

for all New Yorkers. This commitment must be matched by funding that enables local communities to build and maintain road, sidewalk and trail networks that support quality of life for residents – regardless of the ebb and flow of federal transportation dollars. Demand for this infrastructure has never been greater.

Today we look to you for an investment in active transportation in the form \$20 million in dedicated funding in the FY 2015-16 state budget for bicycle-pedestrian projects. We also urge you to *Close the Gaps* in the Erie Canalway Trail, with funding that will allow design and construction on the remaining 80 miles in time for the 2017 bicentennial of the start of the Erie Canal’s construction. These investments will promote a healthier and safer population, more local travel choices, an attractive climate for business, and increased tourism.

Parks & Trails New York, and our partners in the New Yorkers for Active Transportation coalition, the New York Bicycling Coalition and Tri State Transportation Campaign, look forward to working with the Legislature and the state’s transportation agencies to improve the effectiveness and safety of our shared transportation system.

Thank you!

For more information, please contact:

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