

MEETING SUMMARY

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| Project Title | Watertown-Jefferson County Bike-Pedestrian Connectivity & Black River Trail Extension Study |
| Meeting Date | May 18, 2021, from 6:00 – 7:30 p.m. |
| Location | Video Conference |
| Topic | Public Meeting #1 |
| MPO Members | Scott Docteur, MPO Director (NYSDOT) Al Ricalton, MPO Highway Technical Committee (NYSDOT) Geoff Urda, MPO Bike/Ped Coordinator (City of Watertown) Jim Lawrence, MPO Highway Technical Committee (Jefferson County) Kris Reff, MPO Highway Technical Committee (NYSDOT) |
| Project Team Members | Keith Ewald, AICP, PLA (Barton & Loguidice) Katie Darcy, AICP (Barton & Loguidice) Christopher Dunne (Highland Planning) Charvi Gupta (Highland Planning) |

OVERVIEW

Introduction

On Tuesday, May 18, 2021, the first public meeting of the Bicycle-Pedestrian Connectivity & Black River Trail Extension project for the Watertown-Jefferson County Transportation Council (WJCTC) was held from 6:00 to 7:30 p.m. The meeting was held using Zoom Webinar videoconferencing software and included presentation and discussion of MPO-wide bike-pedestrian issues and opportunities as well as proposed alternatives for the Black River Trail Extension. The meeting was also livestreamed to Facebook and shared on the JeffersonCoBiking Facebook Page. The meeting had an estimated 40 attendees who are listed in the Appendices.

Meeting Promotion

The meeting was promoted through e-blasts to the project stakeholder list comprised of 183 contacts, posting of a Facebook event to the Facebook pages of the City of Watertown Planning and Community Development, ReCre's Bike Studio and JeffersonCoBiking, and a press release that was submitted to local media outlets and emailed to officials in the towns and villages within the

Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) boundaries. Flyers were also posted at the existing trailheads prior to New York State's I Love My Park Trail Day volunteer clean-up event for the Black River Trail on May 1, 2021. Copies of promotional materials are available in the Appendices. The project team also presented on the study and promoted the meeting at the virtual Black River Watershed Conference webinar hosted by the Tug Hill Commission on May 12, 2021.

AGENDA

1. Team Introduction & Project Overview
2. MPO-Wide Analysis
 - Vision & Goals
 - Existing Conditions Overview
 - Key Takeaway and Preliminary Needs
 - Public Input: Issues & Opportunities
3. Black River Trail Extension
 - Project Objectives
 - Overview of Preliminary Alternatives
 - Design Components
 - Public Input on Alternatives
4. Next Steps

WELCOME & INTRODUCTION

Geoff Urda, WJCTC, welcomed attendees and presented an overview of the role and jurisdiction of the MPO. Christopher Dunne, Highland Planning then spoke to the meeting agenda, introduced the project team, provided instructions for giving input using Zoom Webinar controls during the meeting and summarized initial public outreach efforts.

PRESENTATION & DISCUSSION

The meeting's presentation and ensuing discussion are summarized below.

MPO-Wide Analysis

Katie Darcy, Barton & Loguidice, presented an overview of the project including the objectives of identifying gaps in the bicycle and pedestrian networks, providing context-sensitive solutions for future active transportation investments and enhancing connectivity and accessibility for active transportation users of all types. She spoke to a draft vision statement for the project and goals before reviewing existing conditions of the roadways and surrounding infrastructure, commuting modes, and bicycle and pedestrian facilities. After presenting findings from the preliminary needs assessment, the floor was opened up for questions and comments in response to the prompt "what are the key issues & opportunities in the region regarding

bicycle & pedestrian connectivity?” Comments, questions and responses from the project team are summarized below.

- Carthage would be a good connection to include on a trail. From there, the trail could potentially connect to Lowville. Also, you have a site near the dam in Herrings which the Town of Wilna has studied as a potential park location.
 - Yes, the ultimate goal is to have the Black River Trail extend all the way to Carthage.
- Has there been any thoughts to making it an “arts trail” and including installations from local sculptors and artists?
 - The project is not at the recommendations stage just yet but that is a great idea, and we can certainly consider opportunities for public art in any public right-of-way improvements when we reach that stage.
- One reason that there is low uptake in bicycle commute is because it is very difficult for people to get to retail areas.
 - Yes, particularly if retail locations are situated along high traffic corridors that are less bike-friendly
- The existing conditions analysis showed zero bike commuters in the area. However, I bike to work daily. I’m sure I’m in the minority. One challenge was having my bicycle vandalized/stolen when working in downtown Watertown.
 - The Census data did show roughly 0.2% of residents biking to work but we rounded it to zero for the purposes of this presentation. Bike security and storage will be an important consideration as well.
- Hope there will be offshoots from the Black River Trail to other towns.
 - Yes, that is the hope with the larger MPO-wide analysis of bicycle and pedestrian connections. It would be great to hear thoughts on which communities trail offshoots could connect to in the area.
- Would it be possible to build a trail around the exterior of Fort Drum to Carthage from the Black River?
 - Yes, we will discuss this possibility in the second half of the meeting.
- Is there a plan for extending the trail to Remington bike trail to Felts Mills to Great Bend?
 - Yes, some of the alternatives being considered for the Black River Trail Extension use this existing path.
- Is there any chance that all or part of the trail can be groomed during the winter?
 - Operations and maintenance of any trail extension will be considered as part of the study.
- I live in Carthage and work on Fort Drum. I commute to work via bicycle. Riding on Rt. 3 is dangerous with limited space on the side of the road closest to the River. Are there any plans in the future to improve shared roads for bicycles?

- Yes, the study is considering improvements to bicycle and pedestrian facilities throughout the region, including on-road facilities.
- Have you considered in the long term what will and will not be considered motorized traffic on these trails? E-bikes, e-scooters, one-wheels, etc. are not a big issue yet but I suspect this will get complicated. I currently see all of these devices on the current trail.
 - Yes, a lot of communities are having these conversations and the types of vehicles allowed on the trails will have to be considered in the study.
- Who currently owns and maintains the current paved Black River Trail?
 - New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation maintains the trail segment from the Village of Black River to the dismount point at the Eastern Boulevard Bridge. The City of Watertown maintains the segment in front of the wastewater treatment plant to Waterworks Park.
- How are you planning to use the streets in the Village of Black River? They are not wide enough.
 - There are a few alternatives being considered for the trail extension that will be reviewed in the second half of the meeting.
- Are there any challenges at the entry points, crosswalks, and intersections? There are many challenges when bicyclists and pedestrians are simply trying to access the trail and have conflicts with automobile traffic.
 - Part of the design criteria we'll be reviewing in the second half of the meeting. However, we are still very early in the process. Once funding has been secured for the Black River Trail Extension, then we will be able to get to the level of individual intersections.
- Will the width of recumbent trikes and handcycles be considered in the design of the trail extension and, in particular at, trail entrances? They barely fit on the current trail.
 - When we get down to the level of specific routes and properties, we will have a better sense of this. Ultimately, we want to make the trail accessible to as many different users as possible.

Black River Trail Extension

Keith Ewald, Barton & Loguidice presented on the proposed extension of the Black River Trail. Objectives for this project include evaluation of alternatives from the current terminus at the Village of Black River to Fort Drum, engagement of public and private property owners, assessment of environmental impacts and constructability as well as a development of cost estimates and identification of a funding source.

Christopher Dunne then reviewed efforts to reach property owners as well as findings from initial outreach to key stakeholders and property owners. Opportunities included that a longer Black River Trail could be a regional destination linking to a relocated Fort Drum Museum, that the Trail extension could benefit the Village's downtown, and that partnerships between agencies could be used. Issues identified included

funding and resources, the presence of multiple privately-owned properties along identified trail extension alternatives and associated liability issues, the high traffic volumes and speeds along Route 3, the presence of motorized vehicles along existing paths and concerns around safety.

Keith Ewald then reviewed the four alternatives for the Trail extension. Alternatives #1, #2 and #3 all connected an existing path owned by a utility north of the Black River at the intersection of 971V and First Street. Alternative #4 would be an on-road facility from the Village of Black River to Great Bend on Route 3. After presenting on trail facility design, safety and potential trailhead facilities, the floor was opened up for questions and comments in response to the prompt “what are your thoughts on the alternatives presented?” Comments, questions, and responses from the project team are summarized below.

- Can the Black River Trail Extension stay on the old railroad bed? It only has a couple of property owners and the Black River can be accessed via National Grid property [sic].
 - Two of the alternatives utilize portions of this railroad bed. It is no longer one single property.
- Regarding Alternative 3A along Maple Street: what are the benefits of the improved sidewalks and where would the funding for that infrastructure improvement come from?
 - The planning process is funded through the MPO and will have recommendations for the MPO-wide trail network as well as specific elements of the Black River Trail Extension. Ultimately, we hope to leverage those recommendations to seek state and federal funding such as TAP (Transportation Alternatives Program). Regarding sidewalks: if the existing sidewalks are in a condition that can be used, that is the preferable option. However, we need to assess them, understand their accessibility from an ADA standpoint, and add crossings where warranted.
- Would a state or federal entity than maintain the sidewalk rather than the Village of Black River since it would be part of the Trail?
 - The study will look at operations and maintenance for the Trail. The Trail could have potential economic development benefits for the Village but also mean additional wear-and-tear on sidewalks so that is something to consider.
- Alternative 3A also provides access to destinations in Kamargo Trail (Poor’s Island) recreation area, the Sally Ploof Hunter Memorial Library, and several ballfields (Maple Street Park)
 - Agreed and this is the kind of information we are looking for not just for the Black River Trail Extension but the wider bike-ped connectivity study
- Today, I encountered some trespassers on my land who were trying to access the Black River for fishing. This highlights a concern for property owners and the need to avoid these kinds of incidents as well as littering that may be associated with it should not just be viewed as a sticking point for a particular plan.

- Point well taken. Once we have identified a recommended alternative and secured funding, we can then work with individual property owners to include elements in the design that encourage users to stay on the trail and off private property.
- Could you speak to the proposed alternatives through the Village of Black River (specifically along South Main Street, Maple Street and East Remington)?
 - South Main Street will be part of the plan one way or another but first we have to look at what is there today. We want to use the existing street and sidewalk facilities to the extent we can so long as they are safe and accessible. Where we identify needs for improvements, we will include that in the design.
- What is the timeline for the project?
 - The planning process will conclude by the end of 2021. Once we have a draft plan available, we hope to be able to share that and hold an in-person meeting on-site at some point this summer or in the early fall.
- Could the project team meet with representatives of the Village of Black River?
 - Yes, we certainly want to meet with Village officials given the importance of the Village as a stakeholder and destination for the Trail Extension. We will need to determine the best time to do that.

Next Steps and Adjournment

Keith Ewald outlined next steps for the project including continuing the gap analysis for the MPO-wide bike and pedestrian network, continuing to evaluate ROW and construction constraints and conversations with property owners. Ultimately, a draft plan would be presented in summer / early fall ideally at an in-person trail walk meeting.

John Peck, Representative for Jefferson County Legislative District 7, provided some closing remarks. He thanked attendees and the presenters and highlighted the opportunity the study presents to further the concept of Walkable Communities, connect towns from Watertown to Carthage and perhaps even to Lewis County. Christopher Dunne and Geoff Urda thanked attendees and the meeting was adjourned.

APPENDIX A: ATTENDEES

Jennifer Austin
Alicia Bach
Pamela Beyor-Murtha
Jennifer Bossuot
Michael Bourcy
Linda Burns
Abigail Buttacavoli
Matt Carpenter
Matt Cervini
Terance Cooley
Diane Covell
Mickey Dietrich
Mike Gaines
Maria Garcia
Adam Hanson
Charles Hatch
Sèan Hennessey
Patrick Hickey
Paula Hurlbut
Todd Kennedy
Paul Kilgore
David Larrabee
Taryn Leonard
Derrick Leonard
Bob Morgia
Steven Murphy
Charles Myers
Joanne Nugent-Ward
Joseph Paige
Rich Ross
Adam Ruppe
Marc Rusch
Paul Shepard
Andrew Short
Justin Wood
Jason Wagner
Mark Wonderly

APPENDIX B: PRESENTATION

A copy of the meeting presentation is attached under separate cover.

APPENDIX C: MEETING RECORDING

A recording of the meeting is available on YouTube at this [link](#).

APPENDIX D: MEETING PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS

Media Coverage

News source: ABC50 Now

Title: [Jefferson County council seeking public input on Black River Trail extension](#)

Date: April 22, 2021

News source: NNY360

Title: [Council seeks community input on trail extension](#)

Date: May 8, 2021

News source: NNY360

Title: [A step forward: Online meeting to discuss plans to extend Black River Trail](#)

Date: May 13, 2021

News source: 7 News, WWNY-TV

Title: [Feedback welcomed on vision to expand trail network](#)

Date: May 14, 2021

News source: 7 News, WWNY-TV

Title: [Public gets first look at Black River Trail expansion plans](#)

Date: May 19, 2021

Flyers and Social Media Images

Figure 1 Meeting Flyer

**City of Watertown
Jefferson County
Bike-Pedestrian
Connectivity & Black River
Trail Extension Study**



**Virtual Public
Meeting**
Tuesday, May 18
6:00 PM

The Watertown-Jefferson County Transportation Council (WJCTC) is studying the possibility of extending the Black River Trail to connect with the Village of Black River, Fort Drum and other communities. Additionally, WJCTC is exploring other options for enhancing bicycle and pedestrian connectivity throughout the city of Watertown and Jefferson County.

WE WANT YOUR INPUT AND IDEAS!
SCAN THE QR CODE OR
USE LINK BELOW TO
REGISTER
<https://TinyURL.com/vteOu6F4>

1. Aim phone camera or code reader at code
2. Open link in browser to register for meeting



Need help? Contact Christopher Dunne: christopher@highland-planning.com or (585) 752-5806

Figure 2 Facebook Event

The image shows a Facebook event page for a meeting held on Tuesday, May 18, 2021, from 6 PM EDT to 7:30 PM EDT. The event is titled "Black River Trail Extension & Bike-Ped Connectivity Meeting" and is a free online event. The cover image features silhouettes of a person walking a dog and a person riding a bicycle on a paved trail. The event details include a duration of 1 hour and 30 minutes, 36 people who responded, and it is organized by Highland Planning LLC. The insights section shows that 1,573 people were reached and 36 responses were received in the last 7 days (May 19 - May 26).

| Category | Value | Change (Last 7 Days) |
|----------------|-------|----------------------|
| People Reached | 1,573 | +3 |
| Responses | 36 | +0 |

Figure 3 MailChimp E-Blast



[View this email in your browser](#)

Join us for a virtual public meeting

The Watertown-Jefferson County Transportation Council (WJCTC) is studying the possibility of extending the Black River Trail to connect with the Village of Black River, Fort Drum and other communities.

Additionally, WJCTC is exploring other options for enhancing bicycle and pedestrian connectivity throughout the city of Watertown and Jefferson County.

Join us for a presentation and Q&A regarding proposed Trail Extension alternatives and bike-ped connectivity projects in the area.



Virtual Public Meeting
Tuesday, May 18
6:00 P.M.

[REGISTER FOR MEETING](#)

Send us a comment or sign-up for project updates by clicking the button below.

[SEND A COMMENT OR GET UPDATES](#)

Can't make this meeting? We'll also be presenting on the project and taking comments at the Black River Watershed Conference Webinar tomorrow, May 12 at 3:00 P.M.

[REGISTER FOR WATERSHED CONFERENCE WEBINAR](#)