

# CONNECTIONS

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THE NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION ENHANCEMENTS CLEARINGHOUSE NEWSLETTER

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## The Erie Canal: Transportation Enhancements' Trek through New York State

A group of cyclists breeze by the reflective waters of the Erie Canal in Fairport, New York. Their tires spin over the very route that mules once tread in the 1800s as they pulled passenger boats, called “packet boats,” full of settlers from the East Coast. Continuing along the Erie Canalway Trail, the cyclists encounter the locks, once used to raise and lower specially designed canal boats called “line boats” hauling wheat, flour, whiskey and lumber to the cities of the coast. Boats continue to navigate the waters of the canal today.

Originally opened in 1825, the Erie Canal created a waterway between the Great Lakes and the Atlantic Ocean. Although many considered the Erie Canal to be a preposterous notion before its construction — Thomas Jefferson once fretted that it was “little short of madness”— the waterway was an overwhelming success. It changed the course of settlement in the United States and a distinctive culture developed along its path. Gambling, revelry, and bellows of “low bridge!” accompanied travelers and goods as they cruised into cities like Buffalo, Lockport, Rochester and Utica. These towns exploded into urban centers as use of the canal intensified. Although culture, trade, and settlement were fostered along its waters, use of the canal diminished in the late 1800s with the rise of the railroad.

Fortunately, the canal’s history and life still thrives today due in part to the Transportation Enhancement (TE) funds that the New York State Department of Transportation dedicates to the Erie Canal. The funds have gone toward the devel-

*Continue on page 2*



**T**HIS PAST JUNE, A NINE-MILE STRETCH OF TRAIL THAT WAS FUNDED WITH A \$2.2 MILLION TRANSPORTATION ENHANCEMENTS AWARD WAS OPENED NEAR HERKIMER. IN ADDITION, TE HAS HELPED RESTORE THE HISTORIC LOCKS THAT ALLOW BOATS PASSAGE FROM THE HUDSON RIVER TO THE INTERIOR OF THE COUNTRY.

### TABLE OF CONTENTS

TE IN THE NEWS .....	3
THE HISTORIC BAY SAINT LOUIS DEPOT: A HUB FOR RECOVERY .....	4
RESOURCES .....	5
SAVE THE DATE .....	6



## FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THE ERIE CANAL

New York State Canal Corporation:  
[www.canals.state.ny.us](http://www.canals.state.ny.us)

Parks & Trails New York:  
[www.ptny.org](http://www.ptny.org)

Erie Canalway National Heritage Corridor:  
[www.eriecanalway.org](http://www.eriecanalway.org)

opment of hundreds of miles of bicycle/pedestrian paths, known collectively as the Erie Canalway Trail. This past June, a nine-mile stretch of trail that was funded with a \$2.2 million Transportation Enhancements award was opened near Herkimer. In addition, TE has helped restore the historic locks that allow boats passage from the Hudson River to the interior of the country.

### TE Funds on the Canal Benefit Many

Since the benefits are so widespread, the Erie Canal offers a unique and maximized use of TE funds. The canal meanders through over 200 communities, offering historical allure and aesthetic recreational facilities to all those who reside in its vicinity. Almost 80 percent of upstate New York's population lives within 25 miles of the Erie Canal, a direct result of the development the canal spurred in the 1800s. Because of this, many people benefit from trail facilities along the canal's route. These urban and rural trails offer not only a place for recreation and exercise, but also a pleasant route to get to downtown.

The benefits of the canal extend beyond the people who live nearby it. From families to cyclists to history buffs, this magnificent channel entices curiosity-seekers from all over the globe. Visitors appreciate the historical significance and accessibility of the pathway and the locks, avidly reading the historical signage along the way. Those who visit on two wheels can use the trails that TE funds helped to develop to bicycle the 400 miles between Buffalo and Albany. The cyclist attraction to the canal is immense. This is especially evidenced each July, when the statewide nonprofit Parks & Trails New York hosts "Cycling the Erie Canal." A stream of 500 bicyclists voyage from Buffalo to Albany, stopping at canal-side towns along the way. Community involvement abounds as towns host rest stops for the cyclists and present their local history and culture, eateries and shops.

While this great bicycle ride attracts many visitors during the event, the canal is a marvel all year. From Chittenango's yellow brick sidewalks, the boyhood home of *Wizard of Oz*



author L. Frank Baum, to the spectacular views of the powerful Cohoes Falls, there is no shortage of treasures along the Erie Canalway Trail and surrounding area. Visitors are drawn to the numerous cities that the canal touches to take advantage of festivals, boat rides, historic train trips, and concerts. Merchants and businesses thrive, hosting visitors in their cafes, shops, museums, and tour boats, offering their local delights for a unique experience in each town.

### A Display of Transportation Triumphs

During a jaunt along the Erie Canalway Trail, it is easy to appreciate not only the history and culture that sprang up because of the canal's construction, but also the fascinating transportation and engineering works that have been preserved along the route. Several miles east of Pittsford, for example, engineers carried the Erie Canal over the Irondequoit Creek Valley by constructing the "Great Embankment." This mile long Canal Skyway brings trail users level with the tree tops. Passing above a lock gate at Lock 21 gives trail users a unique view of a lock chamber. Near the town of Medina is the only place that a road is tunneled beneath the great waterway. In Lockport, the original 1825 5-step locks are a stunning sight, and run right next to the

*Continue on page 5*

## BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

Baltimore's first black maritime history museum and park was officially opened in June. The museum honors civil rights activist Frederick Douglass, as well as Isaac Myers, who was the first African American owner of a maritime railway. The Frederick Douglass-Isaac Myers Maritime Park features a museum in the restored Sugar House in Fells Point. Historic displays in the park and museum include a 170 year old canoe, a marine railway, artwork, quilts made by the African American Quilters Group of Baltimore, as well as a mural by Baltimore middle school students. This new historic asset in Baltimore's harbor, which is a campus of the Living Classroom Foundation, introduces an interactive learning experience to the community, as well as employment training to the public. A \$1 million Transportation Enhancement award helped to fund the \$14 million museum. [*Baltimore Examiner*, June 28, 2006]

## HERKIMER, NEW YORK

A nine-mile segment of New York's Erie Canalway Trail was officially opened on National Trails Day. The segment connects Herkimer and Montgomery counties, and connects trail users to the region's historical assets, including the Herkimer Home State Historic Site. Tourism, recreation and economic development all benefit from this new 9 mile stretch, which helps to create a nearly continuous 40 mile section of trail. The 10 foot wide trail is comprised of crushed limestone or asphalt in certain areas. It was funded in part by a \$2.2 million Transportation Enhancement award. [*NYS Canal Corporation press release*, June 1, 2006]

## LAPER COUNTY, MICHIGAN

Residents of Lapeer County celebrated the opening of their newly restored 106-year-old Amtrak depot. The depot was recently renovated with historic reparations to the roof, windows, benches, light, and paint. The cost of the historic depot's rehabilitation was \$217,000. A \$144,000 Transportation Enhancements award helped to fund it. The building is now available for community use, meetings, and social events. [*The Flint Journal*, July 4, 2006]



## BELTON, TEXAS

Belton has used Transportation Enhancement funding to realize a dream of a city-wide greenway that had been brewing in the city since the 1920s. In July, the city opened its first hike and bike trail. The 1.5-mile trail meanders along Nolan Creek and ambles through downtown Belton. The trail starts at a city park and ends at the local community center. The trail was described as the "centerpiece" to the community by TxDOT's TE coordinator Jim Reed. Surrounding communities are following suit, and plans are in the works to create a 30 mile trail system between the various cities. TE funds helped to pay for 80 percent of the \$2 million trail. [*News 8 Austin*, July 1, 2006]

## EMERALD ISLE, NORTH CAROLINA

An additional two miles on Emerald Isle's bicycle pathway was recently opened. The new section of the path, which runs along state route 58, brings cyclists and pedestrians through the central business district to town hall. The completion of this phase of the path brings the town one step closer to realizing a dedicated pathway for nonmotorized transportation all the way through town. Residents are happy to see the new miles of trail, as children, morning joggers, and bicycle clubs make frequent use of it. A \$140,000 Transportation Enhancement award helped to fund the pathway, along with \$31,000 from the town of Emerald Isle and \$4,000 provided by the Emerald Isle Business Association. [*The Daily News*, July 29, 2006]



## ALBANY, WYOMING

Wyoming cyclists are getting ready to celebrate the completion of a 20 mile TE-funded rail-trail in the Medicine Bow mountain range this September. A 10-foot wide bicycle and pedestrian pathway has been built along the Snowy Range Railway, once used to haul lumber and coal across the mountains. The trail covers a variety of landscapes, including deep forests, lakeside views and wet open meadows. A section along Lake Owen includes a boardwalk over a riparian area. Six trailheads were constructed along the path with bathroom facilities, information kiosks and picnic benches. The trail received an initial Transportation Enhancement award of \$326,000. Later, an additional \$200,000 in TE funds were also awarded. [*Associated Press*, September 6, 2006]

## KENT ISLAND, MARYLAND

A two and a half mile section of the Kent Island South Trail is opening up for public use in Queen Anne County in Maryland. Community residents are welcoming the trail with open arms, after the Recreation Department held four public hearings to address their concerns. The 10-foot-wide trail is designed to safely connect residents with neighboring communities. Trail users are now able to access the Blue Heron golf course, Romancoke Pier, and the Matapeake School and Park Complex. Safety signs and crosswalks were installed along the trail for enhanced safety. Transportation Enhancements funded about half of the \$900,000 project. [*The Capital*, July 12, 2006]

## CROOKSTON, MINNESOTA

A bicycle-pedestrian path recently opened that connects the University of Minnesota, Crookston campus to a commercial area on the north side of the city. The new trail connects to an existing bike path in the downtown area. The new facility is meant to promote the safety and well-being of students and residents. Many parties were involved in the creation of the TE-funded pathway, including the University of Minnesota, the Minnesota Department of Transportation, Polk County, and the City of Crookston. [*Crookston Daily Times*, July 17, 2006]

# The Historic Bay Saint Louis Depot: A Hub for Recovery

The historic Bay Saint Louis depot in Mississippi was restored with Transportation Enhancement funds to become a thriving cultural arts center for the city. No one expected that the building would be called upon to serve as a vital support for the community's health and well-being in 2005. After Hurricane Katrina ravaged the area, the depot was the only prominent structure within the city to survive the hurricane's far reaching damage. It stood as a place of meeting, aid and comfort. It became a beacon of hope for recovery.

This mission-style structure was originally built in 1928. In 1992, the Mississippi Department of Transportation programmed \$709,840 in Transportation Enhancement dollars toward the renovation of the depot. The building was completely rehabilitated by 1996. Once it was restored, the depot provided a dynamic and educational cultural arts center to Bay Saint Louis. The purpose of the depot restoration was to primarily benefit the city's residents by operating as a place of community and gathering. The depot also provided the city with a historic tourist attraction. The depot is in fact listed on the National Register of Historic Places and

was designated as an official Mississippi Landmark. The renovation of this remarkable building led to an im-

petus for further redevelopment in business district. The city was soon experiencing revitalization in community, arts, and commerce.

Tragically, the eye of Hurricane Katrina made landfall not far from Bay Saint Louis. The storm dragged away almost every structure within one half mile of the beach, leaving driveways and walkways that led to nowhere. The community mourned the dead and feared for those missing. As the only remaining prominent structure, the historic depot became a symbol of survival.

Immediately after the hurricane, the depot became a repository and distribution point for donations of clothing, food, and other supplies. The Army Corps of Engineers set up their initial headquarters in the depot. Since Hurricane Katrina damaged City Hall, the historic depot became the provisional headquarters for the mayor and city officials as well. A year after the storm, the depot still plays the role of City Hall for Bay Saint Louis.

On September 15, two weeks after Hurricane Katrina left its massive footprint on the area, the Loudoun Medical Group of Leesburg, Virginia, set up emergency medical facilities on the first floor of the depot. The group stayed at the depot for a full nine months to serve the community. This free medical clinic cared for patients in need, coming to the aid of those without medical insurance and those out of work. Over 18,000 patients received treatment at the depot,



Those seeking medical care after Hurricane Katrina found first aid and medical facilities at the historic Bay St. Louis depot.



which served as a medical center for all of Hancock County.

As the autumn months passed by, many Bay Saint Louis residents were still without homes or jobs. Prospects of providing a warm and filling meal to their families for the Thanksgiving holiday were bleak. CityTeam Ministries, a nonprofit dedicated to the poor and homeless, partnered with Calvary Chapel and Rotary Clubs of Jonesboro and Bay Saint Louis to make a community-wide Thanksgiving feast. About 700 people gathered at the historic Bay Saint Louis depot and were served a warm Thanksgiving meal under the live oaks that shade the depot's property.

From medical care to meals to city headquarters, this impressive historic depot has acted as a stronghold for Bay Saint Louis during a very dire time. Residents gravitated toward it, taking comfort in it as a center of community and support. At their very core, Transportation Enhancement projects are intended to strengthen and improve communities. The renovation of the historic Bay Saint Louis depot is a striking example of what a Transportation Enhancement award means to a community.

# The Erie Canal...

*Continued from page 2*

modern locks used today — a marvel in their own right. Throughout the trek between Buffalo to Albany, the historical transportation feats create an intriguing trail experience.

## The Erie Canal and Beyond

Besides offering the state a treasure trove of sights and experiences, the Erie Canalway Trail has become a fundamental part of nonmotorized transportation in New York. In 2005, Governor Pataki announced a plan to create the Empire State Greenway, which would create trails connecting the entire New York State canal system. TE funds are currently being used to create new segments of the Erie Canalway Trail in Onondaga, Cayuga, and Wayne counties. Trail construction in these areas is being enhanced with benches, kiosks, informational exhibit panels, and a pedestrian bridge.

At various points along its course, there are significant paths which link to the Erie Canalway Trail, connecting trail users to destinations that are otherwise inaccessible without negotiating traffic and roads. The urban Genesee Riverway Trail is a mostly off-road route that brings users to downtown Rochester and to Lake Ontario. The Genesee Valley Greenway provides 52 miles of rural trail south from the Erie Canal, and will one day develop into a 90 mile trek. This TE-funded greenway passes through Letchworth State Park, dubbed the Grand Canyon of the East Coast. Work is underway to complete the Cayuga-Seneca Canal Trail, with a \$420,000 Transportation Enhancements award to help its development. This path will eventually span from Seneca Lake to the Montezuma National Wildlife Refuge, where it will connect with the Erie Canalway Trail.

The Erie Canal and the Erie Canalway Trail are noteworthy assets to the state of New York and to the country as a whole. It is richly fascinating in history, culture, transportation, and engineering — elements that inspire and captivate.

## RESOURCES

The Institute of Transportation Engineers recently released **Context Sensitive Solutions in Designing Major Urban Thoroughfares for Walkable Communities**, to provide guidance in the planning, development, and maintenance of roadway improvement projects in major urban thoroughfares that support walkable and bikeable communities. The report emphasizes context sensitive design, and provides guidance to help balance interests of adjoining land uses, the environment, the community, and various users of transportation facilities. Read the guide at [www.ite.org/bookstore/RP036.pdf](http://www.ite.org/bookstore/RP036.pdf).

The Thunderhead Alliance has recently completed the second edition of their **Guide to Complete Streets Campaigns**. This guide is aimed at leaders of Thunderhead organizations or those who are seeking to create change in their communities by working with bicycle and pedestrian policies. The report is a roadmap to creating a Complete Streets Program. Complete streets are thoroughfares that serve all users, moving by car, truck, transit, bicycle, wheelchair, or foot. Complete streets allow all their users to travel in a safe and welcoming way. Find the guide at all on-line booksellers; ISBN: 0-595-39318-7. Useful excerpts of the guide are available at [www.thunderheadalliance.org/pdf/Guide%20Excerpts.pdf](http://www.thunderheadalliance.org/pdf/Guide%20Excerpts.pdf).

With the enactment of ISTEA in 1991, the crucial role of bicycle and pedestrian facilities in transportation systems was high-

lighted. As a result, large cities faced the challenge of incorporating these facilities safely, despite difficulties such as limited funding, space and data. Fifteen years later, the response to this challenge is examined in the report **Pedestrian and Bicyclist Standards and Innovations in Large Central Cities**, funded by the Federal Highway Administration and performed in conjunction with National Association of City Transportation Officials, Inc. The report combines two endeavors. One is a literature review and analysis of the challenges facing large central cities when trying to support pedestrians and bicyclists, as well as a review of several promising approaches being taken in various cities. The report also includes the results of a September 2005 session with representatives from ten cities, and several agencies and advocacy groups. Read the report at [www.contextsensitivesolutions.org/content/reading/rubin\\_bike-ped/resources/Rudin\\_Bike-Ped/](http://www.contextsensitivesolutions.org/content/reading/rubin_bike-ped/resources/Rudin_Bike-Ped/).

The Pedestrian and Bicycle Information Center recently launched the **Bicycle Countermeasure Selection System (BIKESAFE)**. This interactive site offers tools and information for practitioners to apply toward bicycle safety and mobility. This resource follows the launch of Pedestrian Countermeasure Selection System (PEDSAFE), a similar site geared toward pedestrian safety. The site offers information, data, analysis, case studies and detailed explanations of countermeasures. Find the tool at [www.bicyclinginfo.org/bikesafe/](http://www.bicyclinginfo.org/bikesafe/)

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## **SAVE THE DATE!**

### **CONFERENCE CALENDAR**

#### **OCTOBER**

##### **NATIONAL TRAILS SYMPOSIUM**

October 18–22, 2006 • Davenport, Iowa  
[www.americantrails.org](http://www.americantrails.org)

##### **CONFERENCE ON THE SMALL CITY**

October 15–17, 2006 • Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania  
[www.urbanstudies.org/CSC](http://www.urbanstudies.org/CSC)

##### **ASSOCIATION OF METROPOLITAN PLANNING ORGANIZATIONS ANNUAL CONFERENCE**

October 30, 2006 • Fort Lauderdale, Florida  
[www.ampo.org/events](http://www.ampo.org/events)

#### **NOVEMBER**

##### **NATIONAL PRESERVATION CONFERENCE**

October 31–November 5, 2006 • Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania  
[www.nthpconference.org](http://www.nthpconference.org)

##### **AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST NATIONAL CONFERENCE**

November 13–15, 2006 • Newark, Delaware  
[www.farmland.org/conference2006](http://www.farmland.org/conference2006)

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*Editor:* Meghan Taylor, Graham Stroh

*Contributing Writers:* Meghan Taylor, Graham Stroh

*Graphic Designer:* Barbara Richey

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