

# What is the real pedal bike story?

As sent to the Adirondack Daily Enterprise, October 19, 2015

To the editor:

I simply do not understand the "buzz" that the pro-train folks are trying to generate over pedal bikes. They seem to think that their currently popular operation on the unused tracks between Saranac Lake and Lake Clear will somehow change the government's plans to convert those otherwise unused tracks to a recreation trail, when the truth is the pedal bikes are demonstrating a public thirst for access to wilderness areas currently available only to vehicles with train-like wheels.

The premise behind the buzz seems to be (i) these pedal bikes are more valuable to our community than the proposed recreation trail would be, (ii) somehow this will keep the tracks in place for restored rail service, and (iii) taking up the rails would destroy the pedal bike business.

All three suppositions are patently absurd. First, the data from multiple studies, including the joint DEC/DOT estimates, point to between seven and 50 times as many recreation trail users (including the old, infirm, young and those just not interested in a slow, for-fee group ride) would use a recreation trail, versus pedal bikes, and those visitors will spend an average of \$108 per visitor per day across our communities. The second supposition, that train service could coexist with the pedal bikes, is flat-out wrong. No operations other than train service can coexist on working tracks. And leaving tracks for those pedal bikes also curtails the winter use of the trail for snowmobiles.

Which leads to the third mistaken premise, i.e., that taking up the tracks would destroy this successful entrepreneurial effort. The purveyors of the pedal bike rides have two clear options to continue their business when the recreation trail is built. First, they could switch to renting recumbent trikes on the rail trail for people unsure of riding a "two-wheeler." They are commonly used on many rail trails. Or they could simply move to Tupper Lake or Big Moose and operate there, as they have been operating in Saranac Lake, until the train service hoped for by some is restored there.

I applaud the operators of the pedal bikes for their entrepreneurial success. They are a valuable addition to the Adirondack experience and a positive influence on our economy. I hope they can continue as I outlined. But the positive impacts on the quality of our lives and on the economies of the Tri-Lakes are negligible compared to what the planned Adirondack Rail Trail will bring.

Cheers,

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