

Feasibility report released on multi-use trail proposal

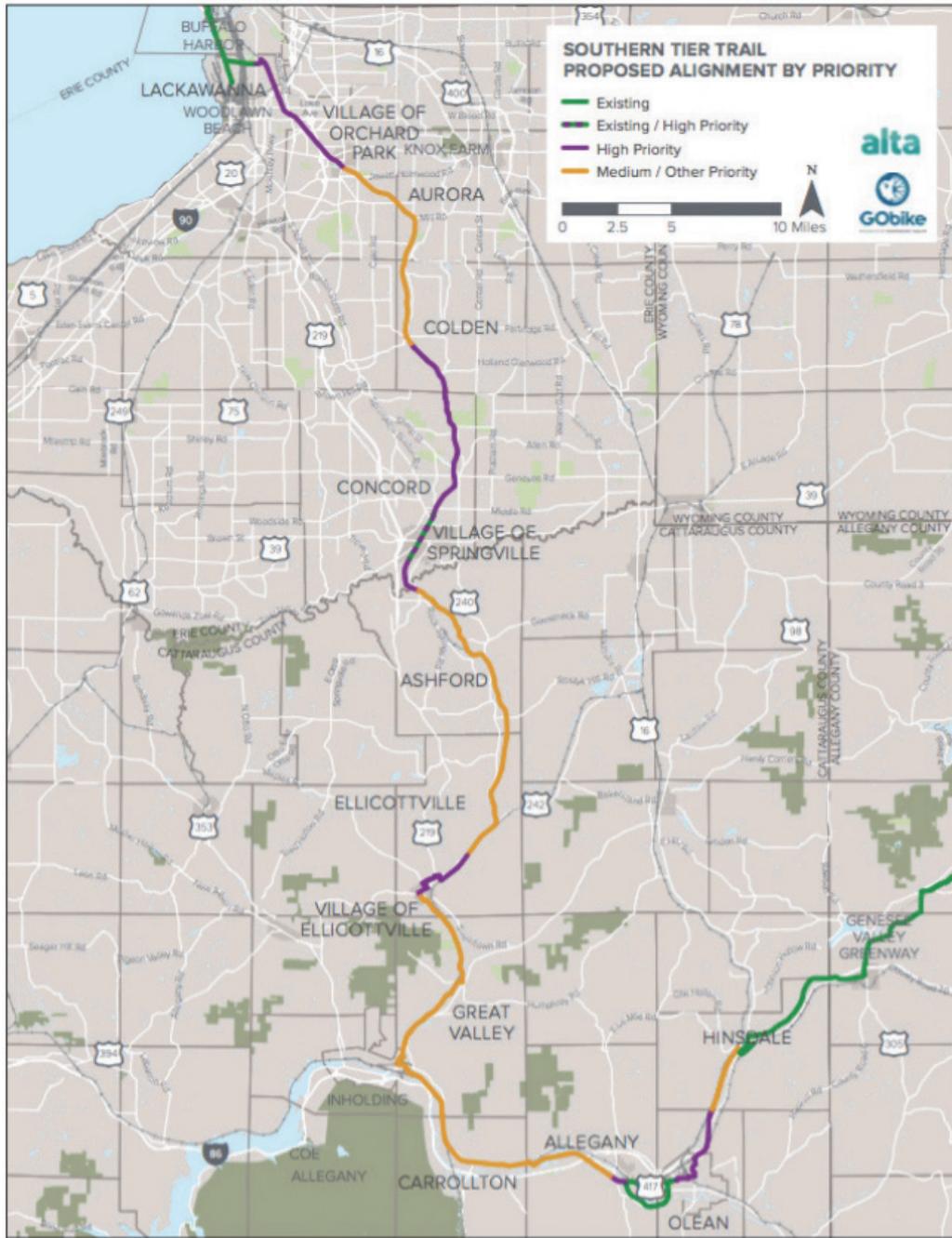


Photo provided

The proposed route for the 80.1 mile Southern Tier Trail.

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The groups behind an 80-mile multi-use trail to connect Buffalo to Hinsdale have released a feasibility study detailing the proposal. The feasibility study, released by Gobike Buffalo, looks at preferred routes for the Southern Tier Trail – divided into 23 sections – and cost estimates for the work. It also notes alternative routes for cases where there could be public opposition or problems.

Much of the Southern Tier Trail would utilize a former railway trail to allow people to walk and bicycle between communities, along with snowmobile and travel by horse on certain sections of the trail. The proposed 80.1 mile trail would connect Erie and Cattaraugus counties and primarily follow the alignment of the Buffalo-Pittsburg rail corridor.

The route is broken up into 23 preferred projects and nine secondary projects, which would be implemented if any preferred routes are not constructed. The Southern Tier Trail would go through local towns and villages including Colden, Concord, Springville and Ashford. If the preferred routes are implemented, 94 percent of the Southern Tier Trail would be offroad. The trail would have 24 trailheads and access points and would also connect to two other major pedestrian trail systems in New York state.

In order to help prioritize implementation of the 23 preferred projects, sections of the trail were evaluated, scored and ranked. Criteria included connection to existing trails, population density, right-of-way availability, public support, municipal support, access to amenities/destinations and maintenance support. Of the 23 preferred projects, nine were identified as high priority including the 2.8-mile Concord Rail Corridor, 6.1-mile Colden Rail Corridor, upgrading the existing 2.3-mile Pop Warner Trail in Springville and the 1.9-mile Concord/Ashford Rail Corridor. The 4-mile West Falls to Colden Railroad Corridor and the 6.1-mile Ellicottville/Ashford Railroad Corridor were ranked as medium priority, while the 3.8-mile Ashford Railroad Corridor (north) and 4.8-mile Ashford Railroad Corridor (south) were ranked as low priority.

Trails like this often go through many communities and feature places to stop and visit local businesses. It also offers a chance for new facilities to be created and become an economic driver for a region. Other benefits for the trail outlined in the feasibility report include providing a safe and commutable opportunity for all users; providing environmental benefits including habitat protection, improved water and air quality, conservation of natural and historic resources and opportunities for people to access nature; and increasing mobility and accessibility by providing alternatives to people without cars, public transit or those concerned with their environmental impacts.

The study recognized opposition in some sections as it passes by the backyards to some homes. Within the study are thoughts for creating privacy with fences or potentially moving the trail to the roadway. Another local section that may have obstacles is the Concord/Ashford Railroad Corridor due to the right-of-way constraints in the vicinity of the **West Valley Nuclear Site**. The **West Valley Demonstration Project** nuclear and waste storage site has also identified the Buffalo Pittsburg tracks heading south from the site to Ellicottville and beyond as potential for future waste transport. The total cost of the entire 80-mile trail has been estimated at around \$104 million. It is divided into 23 main sections

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and the majority of the costs relate to creating the trail, either through laying down a type of stone or some asphalt in more heavily trafficked regions.

Proposed costs for local sections include the West Falls to Colden Railroad Corridor at \$5,320,000; Colden Railroad Corridor at \$3,280,000; Concord Railroad Corridor at \$7,740,000; upgrades to the Pop Warner Rail Trail at \$1,210,000; Concord/Ashford Railroad Corridor at \$8,170,000; Ashford Railroad Corridor (north) at \$3,970,000; Ashford Railroad Corridor (south) at \$5,050,000 and Ellicottville/Ashford Railroad Corridor at \$6,990,000.

Raising funding and identifying a management structure are some of the future steps for Gobike. For the study, the group was able to utilize private funding through the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Foundation and the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. Legacy Funds. Gaining additional grants in the future is part of the long-term goal.

“This Study envisions a long-term improvement strategy for the Southern Tier Trail corridor,” the study reads. “Although most of the proposed improvement projects will take time to implement, there are some near term steps that can be taken to move the vision for the Southern Tier Trail forward:

- Seek capital improvement funds for high priority projects.
- Develop a governance structure to adequately manage the enhanced corridor.”

Many municipalities along the proposed Southern Tier Trail have expressed their support for the project and the benefits it can bring to communities along the trail.

“The Village of Springville enthusiastically supports the Southern Tier Trail Feasibility Study because it will enhance and extend the Village’s rail trail which we opened in 2016. This study is a vital blueprint on how to increase tourism in our Village and region because our experience shows that the rail trail both serves our residents and attracts visitors,” Mayor William Krebs of the Village of Springville said in a press release. “We are especially interested in the improvement to the Cattaraugus Creek high level bridge to the south and the connection to the ski resort and county park to the north.”

“The Town of Ashford enthusiastically supports the creation of a future rails-to-trails opportunity in Ashford. Rehabilitation of the Cascade Bridge as the Gateway to Ashford and Cattaraugus County is a major step forward in attracting tourism and other adventure seeking people to all that we have to offer,” Town of Ashford Supervisor John Pfeffer said in a press release. “The Town of Ashford is the gateway to the Enchanted Mountains of Cattaraugus County.”

A copy of the full study can be found at <https://gobikebuffalo.org/gobike-finalizes-plan-for-80-mile-southerntier-trail/>.

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A photo-simulation of what the Cascade Bridge may look like along the Southern Tier Trail.