

# THE EASTERN ONTARIO RAIL TRAIL LOOP ASSESSMENT

Partner Report: Township of Rideau



Presented by:

terminus.

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## Funding and Partnership Acknowledgement for the Eastern Ontario Rail Trail Project

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# Executive Summary

## Trail Description:

When complete, the Eastern Ontario Rail Trail Loop (The Loop) will be a 360 km Loop that will include portions of the Cataraqui Trail, the K & P Trail and the Ottawa Valley Recreational Trail (OVRT) and will travel through the counties of Frontenac, Lanark and Renfrew, as well as the towns of Smiths Falls, Carleton Place and the Township of Rideau Lakes. The trail takes trail users through the portions of the Canadian Shield, Frontenac Biosphere Reserve and lush farmlands and woodlands of Eastern Ontario. The entire trail is developed on abandoned rail corridors, and they all extend beyond the borders of The Loop, thus creating strong connections in all directions, therefore opening up the experience to many communities along the trail and outside of The Loop. The various sections of trail are managed by a number of entities, including the Counties of Frontenac, Lanark and Renfrew, as well as the Cataraqui Conservation Authority and the town of Carleton Place.

## Overall Assessment:

There is strong potential for The Loop to become a Signature Rail Trail product for Eastern Ontario, despite the fact that there are a number of deficiencies that need to be addressed in order to increase its appeal to a wider variety of trail user groups. Currently, the most immediate potential of the loop can be found in the off-road cycling market which consists of users of mountain bikes, fat bikes, gravel bikes and hybrid bikes. The completed portions of the K&P and OVRT are in very good condition and are suitable for use by mountain bikes and hybrid bikes. The Cataraqui Trail will be better suited for people who have gravel bikes and mountain bikes and practice the concept of bikepacking, however, there will be cyclists that will not be deterred by the condition of the trail regardless of the bike they have. Of the noted cycling user groups, a primary focus for the long term would be on hybrid bike users. They represent a larger share of the off-road cycling market, they typically spend more when they are at their destination, and their expectations of the trail experience are complementary to other trail user groups which could widen the appeal of the loop.

## Profile of a cyclist\*

54% women and 46% men

61% are between 45 and 64 years old.

41% stayed 3-4 nights during their visit

55% are university graduates and 34% have a family income of more than \$100,000.

58% have stayed in a hotel or hostel

\* Véloroute des Bleuets 2019

### Market Readiness:

The overall market readiness of The Loop product currently depends on who the market is. For the purpose of this market readiness assessment it will be based on the aspirational goal of developing a product that is marketed to the high-yield hybrid cyclist who typically requires fixed-roof accommodation, access to a diversity of experiences (both on and off the trail), diversity of food options and amenities both on the trail and in the community that cater to cyclists.

Some of the outstanding elements that will need to address include:

- Develop a governance model that supports a long-term collaborative commitment among participating partners. This includes identifying roles and responsibilities of the various partners.
- Develop a consistency standard for the entire trail loop. This standard would apply to:
  - Trail conditions
  - Regulatory and wayfinding signage
  - Interpretive program and signage
  - Branding of the loop

There will be some segments that will be market ready before other sections, however, a fully market ready trail product will take time. A 5-year plan (2025-2030) would be a realistic timeline to elevate the entire product that meets the expectations of the cycle tourist.

### Completion Status:

The following scale provides an assessment of how close the entire loop is from becoming a Signature Rail Trail for the hybrid bike market. It takes into consideration time, funding requirements and the overall level of market readiness\*.



\*Note: This scale has been applied to loop in its entirety and specifically to the hybrid bike market. There are certain segments of trail that would score higher and could be marketed to the appropriate off-road cycling market while the aspirational vision of the loop is achieved.

## Introduction

When complete the Eastern Ontario Rail Trail Loop (The Loop) will be a 360km looped trail through Lanark, Frontenac and Renfrew Counties and will include portions of the Ottawa Valley Recreation Trail (OVRT), The Cataraqui Trail, K&P Frontenac, K&P Renfrew and The Algonquin Trail (also part of the OVRT). The trail takes trail users through historic communities, fertile farmland, the Frontenac Biosphere Reserve and the Canadian Shield, providing a dynamic natural and cultural landscape that provides tremendous opportunity for interpretation. The trail is also made up of abandoned rail corridors that will also provide a rich tapestry of stories that will enrich trail users' experience.

As it currently stands, the 360km Loop would not be considered a signature trail, nor would any of the segments that are complete. Despite the excellent condition of many of the trail sections, the experience needs to be enhanced to meet the expectations of the trail user and there are also sections of trail that will require a considerable amount of work to bring them up to a standard that would be acceptable as a trail tourism product. This document will highlight both the strengths and weaknesses of the Loop and provide recommendations that will lead to the development of a world class signature trail in Eastern Ontario.

The report provides a general overview of the trail conditions, signage, and the readiness of the communities along the trail to cater to the trail tourist. The recommendations outlined will be prioritized and provide trail managers and other key staff with the guidance required to fulfill them.

## Trail Tourism Product: A Definition

Trail tourism products have the highest tourism and recreation value offering a variety of experiences such as walking, hiking, cycling, snowmobiling and ATVing. They are major regional tourism attractions and are considered economic revenue generators.

A trail tourism product draws people for reasons as diverse and individual as those who use it. Generally, it is set in a distinctive landscape that reflects a region's most distinguishing characteristics such as views, natural features, culture or heritage. A destination trail is often "themed," and elicits a "WOW" factor.

Trail tourism product encourages ease of continuous movement through a potential system of linear, looped and linked pathways that are primarily separated from traffic. Some trail tourism products will be accessible to all, while others will attract a focused market niche. A trail tourism product has high quality standards for design, maintenance and amenities. It has trained and knowledgeable staff and/or volunteers dedicated to the management and maintenance of the trail and its amenities, who provide good quality tourism services.



## Value and Benefits of Trails

### Trail Tourism

- People come from outside of the region to use the trail and spend money in the communities
- Trails are enhanced to reflect the cultural, historical and natural significance of the region
- Cyclists tend to spend \$250-\$300/day
- Trails become the “heart” of the community
- Creates more vibrant and aesthetically pleasing communities
- Creates a sense of pride

### Economic Impact

- Creates economic growth
- Grows local businesses and creates jobs
- Compounds the trail’s economic potential: it turns a simple path into a long-term destination
- Improves infrastructure in rural areas and create active transportation options
- Protects the trail and surrounding nature

### Health Benefits

- Active trails and greenways create healthy recreation and transportation opportunities by providing people of all ages with attractive, safe, accessible and low- or no-cost places to cycle, walk, hike, jog or skate
- Trails help people of all ages incorporate exercise into their daily routines by connecting them with places they want or need to go
- Communities that encourage physical activity by making use of the linear corridors can see a significant effect on public health and wellness

### Conservation and Environmental Benefits

- Trails help preserve important natural landscapes, provide needed links between fragmented habitats and offer tremendous opportunities for protecting plant and animal species
- They are useful tools for wetland preservation and the improvement of air and water quality
- They allow humans to experience nature with minimal environmental impact

### Additional Benefits

- Increased:
  - Sales tax revenue
  - Private and public investment
  - Employment
- Increased property assessment

- Improved community aesthetics and atmosphere
- Attract new residents
- Proven method of revitalizing small communities
- Help build a strong sense of community and pride



# The Assessment Process

The field assessment process took place over a two-week period from May 20 to May 29<sup>th</sup>, 2024. The assessment was conducted by vehicle, by bicycle, on foot and ATV. For the majority of the assessment process the assessor was accompanied by the various trail managers, volunteers and tourism/economic development staff. The pre-screening assessment and pre-trip review were conducted in advance of the field assessment. This provided the assessor with a strong understanding of the trail management procedures and allowed a review of any supporting documents that would gain further insight into the work that is currently taking place within the region. It is also important to note that some of these were modified, based on the section of trail being assessed and knowledge gleaned from the trail managers.

- **Pre-screening assessment:** management plan, risk management protocols, liability insurance, trail manager
- **Pre-trip:** This is an assessment of the elements available for the tourist when they are planning their trip such as: website and how to get there (i.e. accurate information to the designated entry points, signage to locate designated entry points, etc.)
- **Sense of Arrival:** this includes ensuring that the tourists have a clear and defined access point for parking and accessing the trail
- **On the Trail:** This includes trail signage and trail conditions and maintenance
- **Trail Design:** This includes assessing the trail route and alignment, conservation, safety and interpretation
- **Trail Experience:** This assesses the overall brand/theme of the trail and how it connects with the tourist and the region as well as the natural features of the trail
- **Trail Town Assessment:** Review of basic tourism services, access to communities, package/itinerary development, transportation, washrooms, garbage/waste disposal
  - **Investment Analysis:** This provides all overall understanding what elements within the trail towns require investment and the priority of the investment, as it relates to ensuring that the “towns” are equipped with the essentials of a creating a memorable experience for the trail user.

# General Observations

## Strengths

- Buy-in from the respective counties and key communities along the trail
- A significant portion of the Loop is completed
- Well positioned near Ottawa (airport/train) and Kingston (train)
- Supportive ATV Community
- Enthusiastic business community in some communities
- The diversity of the trail provides interest (lean into it!)
- Unlike traditional rail trail experience, where trail users travel in one direction to the end of the trail and then return back to their starting point on the same trail, looped experience provides trail users with the opportunity to experience a completely unique landscape the entirety of The Loop.

## Weaknesses

- The condition of the Cataraqui Trail is poor and could not realistically be promoted as a tourism product, particularly for hybrid or road cyclists.
- The Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority's portion of the K&P is in very poor condition.
- Some long stretches of trail lack the WOW factor necessary to capture the interest and imagination of the trail tourist
- Bringing together 3 (4 if the Algonquin Trail is differentiated from the OVRT) different trails with different management plans, signage and approach to working with communities is a challenge
- Roadway connections – particularly the connection from the OVRT to Smiths Falls and the Renfrew K&P into Calabogie is a challenge
- ATV use may dissuade non-motorized users coming from away (observations from the Trail Journey)
- The Trail between Sharbot Lake to Calabogie is 72km long and there is limited cell service and no services
- The trail within the Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority jurisdiction will require significant upgrades
- Some sections of land that will be used to the Frontenac K&P have still not been acquired
- Lack of accommodation and poor cell reception on the northern portion of the Frontenac K&P needs to be addressed
- Land-use challenges in Calabogie (recently made aware of this)

# Recommendations

## Overall Recommendations for the Eastern Ontario Rail Trail Loop

To keep in mind throughout the project: Celebrate SUCCESS -as each new trail is upgraded or developed the story needs to continue to be celebrated publicly.

It is recommended that cyclists should be the target market for this project, based on the assessment of the various trails that will make up The Loop product. Other than a road bike, the trail conditions should be to a standard that a hybrid or cruiser bike can comfortably cycle.

There were a number of factors that contributed to this decision, they include:

- The Cataraqui Trail does not allow ATV use on their trail, therefore, there isn't an ATV loop to promote
- Cyclists tend to spend between \$250-\$300/day on multi-day trips
- Developing the trail to a surface appropriate for hybrid cyclists will ensure that the surface is also better able to support people with mobility issues, parents with baby carriages, etc, therefore making it far more accessible for all residents within The Loop region.

### Ride Habits & Preferences of Ontario Cyclists

- Road cycling, followed closely by riding off-road trails (paved and unpaved) are preferred types of cycling (same as 2021), followed by gravel cycling, than mountain biking, with a number mentioning fat biking as other preference.
- 52% prefer a daily ride distance of 46km to 99km, 32% who prefer distances between 21km to 45km, on multi-day trips that include cycling.
- Ontario cyclists frequently ride solo, followed by riding with a group (45%), significant other (38%), and one to two friends (37%).
- 49% ride with a cycling club or regularly organized group.

It is important to note, however, that the cost to maintain a trail to this standard requires an annual commitment of maintenance funds. Funding programs for maintenance costs are not readily available, therefore the trail managers must have reliable access for trail maintenance funds. This cannot be an afterthought. Developing a capital funding campaign or business development programs can assist in alleviating the burden on the counties, conservation authorities or towns. The recommendations are listed by priority within each area of topic. Consider breaking the partnership into teams in order to address the various topics (IE. Governance: CAO, Director, Trail Infrastructure: Trail Managers & Product Development: Economic Development, Tourism)

## Recommendation A: Governance

### The Loop

1. Establish a **formal partnership agreement** and identify any other key partners that will need to be at the table (i.e. Carleton Place- they are actively promoting cycling, and they are the trail managers for their section).
2. Determine **roles and responsibilities** related to signage, business engagement programs, etc.
3. A well-defined **strategy** and a clearly articulated **action plan** will be necessary in order to ensure that there is a clear understanding of the work that is required in order to achieve the aspirational goal of a market ready product.



### Cataraqui Trail

Although these recommendations are specific to the Cataraqui Trail, they have a considerable impact on the overall product, therefore they are included in the general recommendations, as well as being reinforced within the individual trail recommendations and action plan. This will be a significant undertaking and will take time, however, in order to bring the entire product to market and a bicycle tourism product (as defined earlier in the document), upgrades to the trail will be necessary by 2030.

1. **Trail management** for the Cataraqui Trail must be addressed and new model developed. The **current model is not sustainable** over the long term, and the current budget does very little in terms of upgrading the trail. There are a number of models that could be considered; this could include transferring responsibility to an entirely different entity or

management agreements could be developed between the municipalities and the Conservation Authority for maintenance and the Conservation Authority would be responsible outside of municipal jurisdictions.

2. The Cataraqui Conservation Authority needs to identify a **sustainable funding source(s)**. A couple of options could include leveraging the Friends of the Cataraqui Trail to access funds from foundations (Trans Canada Trail), various levels of government and private donors or a capital campaign could be organized to refurbish the bridges, and naming rights could even be given for the bridges. As part of a new management model there could also be contribution agreements developed between the Conservation Authority and the communities to provide funding for portions within the management of the Authority, as a recognition of the value of the trail to the communities in its entirety and not simply their portion of the trail.



## Recommendation B: Trail Infrastructure

- A **signage and amenities plan** will need to be developed for The Loop project, consistency will be critical to creating a seamless experience.
- The **K & P Trail** being acquired from the **Mississippi Valley Conservation Authority** must be a **priority** for the 3 counties and ideally be developed in coordination. Not only will this ensure a consistent experience but also could result in cost savings through the use of the same contractors.
- Establish a **trail maintenance fund** to ensure that there is annual source of funds to ensure that the trail is maintained to a cycling standard.
- **Cataraqui Trail must be upgraded** overtime to a standard similar to the OVRT and the K&P. This can happen overtime; however, it will be very important that trail users are

made aware of the trail condition and what kind of bike is best suited for this type of experience.

- Consider establishing **partnerships** that can assist in developing the **amenities** along the trail. For example, the long stretches where there are limited or no accommodations, a partnership could be developed with Algonquin College, and through the Heritage Carpentry class, they could build bunkies or similar structures that are placed along the trail on private property (to be managed by the landowner). These would need to be reserved in advance through an online registration system similar to one used by [Parks Canada](#).



## Recommendation C: Product

Please note that the recommendations are listed based on priority. An infographic with specific timelines will be added to the final report.

- An **inventory of “experiences”** within a 5km radius should be conducted and cross referenced in relation to access to the trail. It will be important to create experiences that will get trail users off the trail- particularly along sections of the OVRT where there are vast open spaces where you can see down the trails for miles.
- **Branding and trail hierarchy** will need to be sorted out **before a signage plan** is developed NOTE: trail users can be very attached the identity of their preferred trail -it will be important to socialize the concept of the Loop in a respectful manner and ensure residents that the trails will not lose their original identity.

- Look for **partnership** opportunities in **communities** between Sharbot Lake and Calabogie that would be willing to work with the trail manager to potentially create space in community centres for overnight stays or working with a local community association to prepare bagged lunch opportunities (they would need to be pre-ordered).  
\* County of Frontenac is currently looking at amending by-laws to allow private landowners to erect infrastructure on their properties to support trail users in these remote areas.
- In areas where there is a need to use **road** (particularly Calabogie), there may be an opportunity to **create a shuttle service** that could be pre-booked by cyclists.
- **ATV** use on the trail may pose a challenge as trail use by cyclists increases – **communication** will be critical.
- Build stronger **relationships** with the **cycling community**- this will primarily be a cycling product.
- As part of the relationship building with the cycling community consider starting to socialize the concept of The Loop with **small cycling events**, particularly in areas where there are two trail segments that are connected (for example: a 3-day cycling event from Carleton Place (OVRT) to Chaffeys Lock (Cataragui) once the Cataragui is upgraded. An example that could incorporate the rougher sections of the trail could be like the [Paris to Ancaster Race](#), where rougher routes are sought out.
- Given that the railway unites the entire Loop, it is recommended that from a Loop perspective the partnership should lean into the **railway theme**, however, individual trails can continue to develop their own interpretive programs, based on the unique aspects of their respective trails. See Appendix C for examples of a branding opportunity for a railway theme. This is an [example](#) of railway themed interpretive signage created for the Confederation Trail. This can not only focus on the railway and trains, but how the communities along the trail prospered.
- It would be advisable to set up a **search and rescue plan** for the trail. This would entail working with local search and rescue teams, the OPP and other first responder organizations.
- An **inventory of trails and cycling initiatives** should be undertaken to better understand the landscape of trail and cycling opportunities in Eastern Ontario. In particular, a clear understanding of the cycling initiatives such as the Log Drivers Waltz, Cycle MORE, Voyageur Cycling Route, etc. This will help to better understand how to differentiate The Loop from them. It is important to note that these initiatives are also important economic drivers to the region and are not competition for The Loop product.



# Individual Trail Condition Assessment

## Trail: Cataraqui Trail

### Jurisdictional Breakdown:

Frontenac County: 43.5km from Chaffey's Locks to East and Yarker to the West

Township of Rideau Lakes: Approx. 35.5km to Smiths Falls

Smiths Falls: 1 km

The Cataraqui Trail follows the former Canadian National Railway line from Smiths Falls to Strathcona near Napanee. Therefore, the trail has no steep grades of over 5%. The only exceptions to this are at the Opinicon Road (km 59.1) and Colebrook Road (km 87.8) where the railway overpasses were removed and at km 69 where the trail was detoured up the hill around some cottages.

The trail surface is usually the gravel surface of the old railbed. In many places, an additional layer of crushed stone (granular A-5/8 inch minus) has been added. In 2008 and 2009, stone dust surfacing was placed from Hogan Road (km 66.8) to Boyce Island (km 68.2) and from Yarker (km 88.8) to East Street in Newburg (km 98.4). Approximately 30% of the trail has this stone dust surface so a hybrid or mountain bike is the best choice for cycling on the trail. The trail is managed by the Cataraqui Conservation Authority (the 1 km inside of Smiths Falls is managed by the Town) and the Friends of the Cataraqui Trail managed a bench program along the trail.

### Entry Points

There are a number of well-marked entry points along the trail, with the addition of the aforementioned parking area, there is adequate parking along this section of the Cataraqui Trail. There was a considerable amount of discussion regarding the addition of other parking areas along the trail, however, for the purposes of the Loop project, more parking is not required. New signage was fabricated recently, including trailhead signage.





## On the Trail

### Navigation

Built on an abandoned rail-line, the Cataraqui Trail is a relatively easy trail to navigate, although it does have a bit more interest with some winding turns, but these are very slight, and trail users can still see down the trail for long distances. There are signs located at road crossings to indicate that trail users are on the trail.



## **Trail Conditions**

The 2000 Cataraqui Trail Plan outlines the spatial configuration of the trail:

Clearing width: 4.3m

Clearing Height: 3.5 m

Tread Width: 3.2 km

Tread Surface: various materials: compacted stone fines, gravel and natural terrain.

The assessment of the Cataraqui Trail was not based on whether it followed the original design standards but rather based on the condition and maintenance of the trail. It is, however, worth noting that outside of the sections of the Cataraqui Trail that are built outside of the ROW, they do follow these specifications. The trail is managed by the Cataraqui Conservation Authority and there is also a Friends of the Cataraqui Trail. They have assisted in maintenance activities (particularly vegetation control), and they have contributed financially to signage, trail surfacing, amenities, among other things. They have just started a bench program to increase amenities and they also support and host events on the trail.

It will come as no surprise that the condition of the Cataraqui Trail is not currently at a standard that it could be promoted as a 3-season product (spring/summer/fall). The condition of the trail varies considerably from Smiths Falls to Harrowsmith. A significant factor impacting the trail condition, is the fact that the Conservation Authority owns and maintains the trail, and they have a number of priorities (including the trail), but have financial constraints. The Conservation Authority is currently looking at different management models where they can work with other partners/municipalities. There will be a recommendation included, based on models in other jurisdictions.

### Gates

The Cataraqui Trail prohibits the use of ATV/Side-by-sides on the trail, therefore they have a barrier at access points, to prohibit access. These need to be opened in the winter in order to allow snowmobiling. Most of these are gates and they appear to be effective, however, they are unsightly (common on many trails) and could possibly be painted to embrace the theme of the trail to make them look aesthetically pleasing and to tie into the branding.



### Surface

The most significant deficiency of the trail is the inconsistency of the trail surface. To bring this up to a similar standard as the K&P and OVRT it will require a significant investment, and the Cataraqui Conservation Authority does not have the financial capacity to heavily invest in the project, at the moment, as they rely significantly on other funding sources. To get a better understanding of the cost to bring it up to a standard appropriate for cycling (it is recommended that on multi-use trails, the surface should be at the standard that is required for the use that requires a higher standard to ensure a quality experience) a complete technical assessment of the trail is required. The Gravel surface is difficult for cyclists and the vegetation on the trail also creates some challenges.





Additional comments regarding the trail design:

- It is also worth noting (however, I do not have a photo) that the trail coming into Sydenham is built on private property (leased) and runs very closely to the houses and cottages in the area. The trail is much narrower in this area and there is a point along the route where a road intersects with the trail, and it is difficult to determine where the user must go. Better signage is required in this area.
- The Opinicon Road section is quite steep, the likelihood of finding an alternate route is low, therefore it is advisable to ensure that users are aware of this.

## Bridges

The bridges appear to be in good condition, however there is some damage by snowmobiles. A recent study noted that in order to bring them all up to a better standard, there is an estimated cost of over \$3 million, however many of these structures are not on the Loop. A solution could be to add runners on the bridge to reduce the damage from the tracks on the snowmobile and groomers. A review of the structures is conducted every two years.



## **Amenities**

Trail users must travel long distances between amenities, as there is very little on the trail. Having adequate amenities, particularly in areas where there is considerable distances between communities will be important for trail tourists. This does not need to be addressed immediately; however, trail users must be made aware of the lack of amenities in order to plan properly.

## Benches

Friends of the Cataraqui Trail are exploring a bench that allows them to place benches along the trail. They should be strategic in their placement and be consistent in design. The trail is currently littered with a wide range of styles and the condition of some of them is very poor and are possibly hazards (note the two wooden structures in the photos). The benches on the concrete slab meet AODA standards and something similar should be the standard moving forward.





### Washroom Facilities

There are a few outhouses placed along the trail by the Snowmobile Club and are accessible for all trail users. There will need to be more placed in areas where there are long distances between communities, however, this does not need to be a priority. It is also important to note that servicing and cleaning these pose a modest cost and potential logistical challenges.



**NOTE:** The Conservation Authority recently passed an asset management plan which includes all major infrastructure assets (bridges). They are developing individual asset schedules for their properties as well which will include a detailed inventory of the assets (trail surfaces, signage, amenities) and their condition and the needs to maintain upgrade them depending on the service level that they wish to achieve.

## **Strengths and Weaknesses**

### Strengths

- There is an established “Friends of” group.
- Newly developed signage has been installed along the trail.
- The town of Smiths Falls will be developing a new access point along the 1km stretch of trail that they manage.

### Weaknesses

- Trail conditions on the vast majority of the trail is rough and difficult for road or hybrid bicycles
- Some sections of trail near Sydenham are on private land and if that land exchanged hands in the future they could be reverted back to private land.
- There is a very haphazard array of benches along the trail and some are in very poor condition.

# Trail Town Assessments

## Trail Towns: A Definition

*A trail town is a community through which a trail passes that **supports** trail users with public services, **promotes** the trail to its residents and visitors and **embraces the trail as a resource to be protected and celebrated**. Trail towns are built on a relationship between a town, the trail and its volunteers.*

*--Adapted from North Country Trail Association's definition*

A Trail Town is...

- Destination along a trail
- Users can enjoy the scenery, services and heritage
- It has character and charm
- It is a safe place
- It can be easily accessed
- It is a friendly place with warm hospitality
- Linked by a long-distance trail
- Users may be passing through town on a day trip, long distance trek or driving to the community

### Benefits of the Trail Town Program to the Region

- Increased sales tax revenue
- Increased private and public investment in the towns and adjacent areas
- Improved aesthetics and atmosphere in the towns
- Increased employment
- Opportunity to leverage the economic potential of the Eastern Ontario Rail Trail Loop
- Trail Towns working together multiplies the value and spreads opportunity throughout Eastern Ontario
- Increased awareness by locals of what the region has to offer in activities, eating experiences, sightseeing and accommodations
- Increased property assessments
- Stability for existing businesses
- Growth opportunities for existing businesses
- Opportunity to attract new residents

- Proven method of revitalizing small communities
- Increased entrepreneurial opportunities
- Helps build a strong sense of community and pride

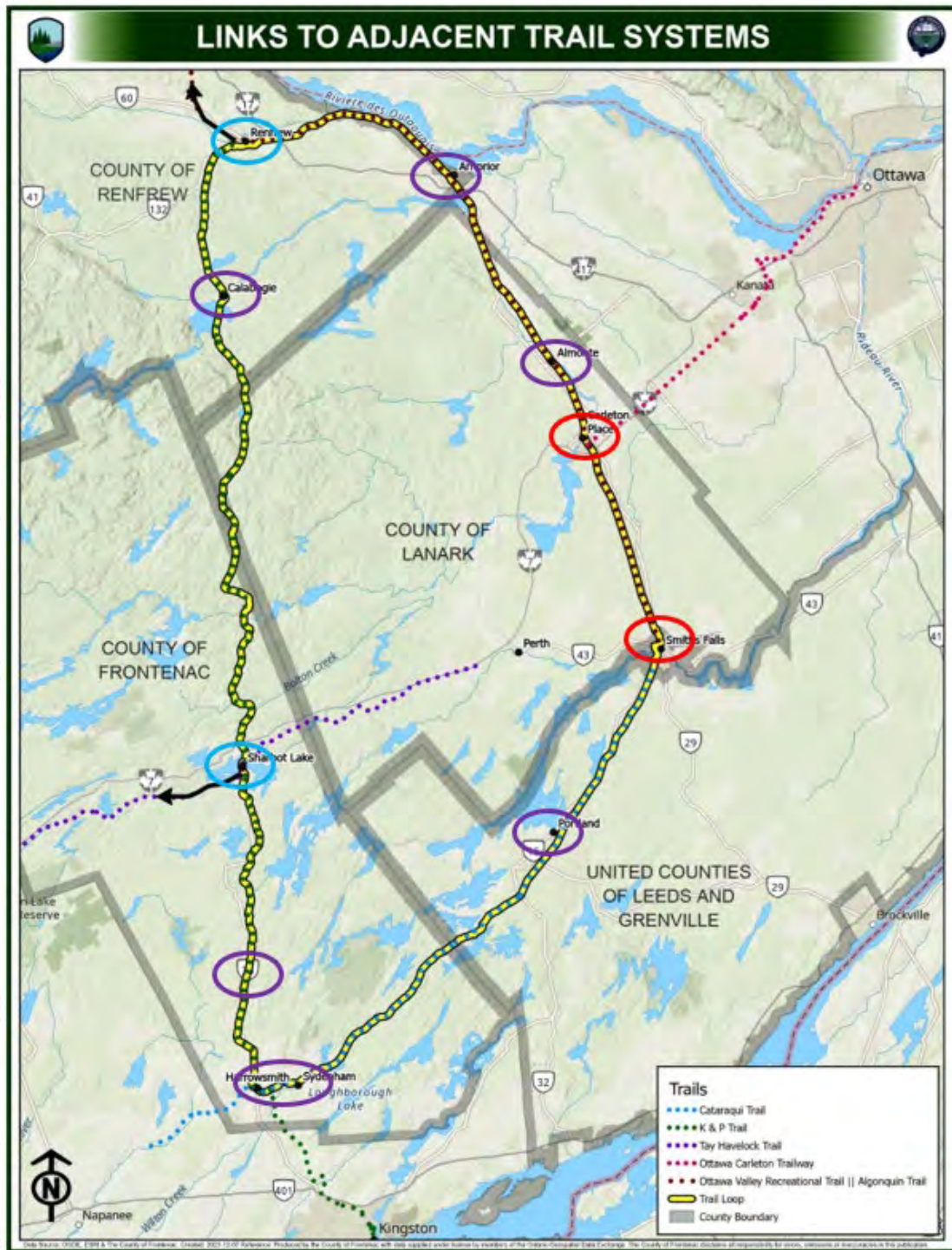
### **Trail Town Breakdown**

*Primary Hubs:* These are the communities along the trail that provide access to the greatest number of amenities and are connected by trail to transportation hubs.

*Secondary Hubs:* These are communities that have trail access (Tay Havelock and The Algonquin Trail) have a decent number of amenities.

*Overnight/Day Trail Towns:* These communities don't offer a lot of amenities but are worth visiting and spending time in them.





### Legend

Primary  Secondary  Trail Town (day or overnight) 

## Trail Town #1: Portland

Portland is a small village located in Rideau Lakes. The trail does not run through the centre of the village; however, it is easily accessible and provides trail users with a place to stop, rest and grab some food to eat. It has traditionally been a boating community and remains so today, as a result there are amenities available for trail users. There is limited accommodation in the region to be a true trail town, however it is an excellent stopping point and has the potential to develop more B&B or Inns to cater to trail users.

### Connection to the Village

Trail users can directly access the trail at Station Rd and easily make their way into town. There is a bench and trail sign, but it isn't very clear that this is the access into town. A sign with a list of the services could be placed here as well so that users know what they can get in Portland.



### Bicycle-Friendly Businesses

There are currently no certified Bicycle-Friendly businesses in Portland.

### Amenities and Service

As noted, the village of Portland does not have a lot of amenities and services, but it does provide adequate services for trail users and trail users can also enjoy spending time along Big Rideau Lake.



## Accommodation

There is a bed & breakfast located on Station Street that caters to trail users, there are, however, only two rooms. The Harlem Stonegate B&B is not located directly in the village centre, but could be access, and they are a bicycle friendly business. There is also Len's Cove Marina, and it appears that there are 15 cottages, however, they do require a 1 week stay during peak summer season. Portland is approximately 25km from Smiths Falls, for people only interested in travelling a short distance, this would be a good place for additional accommodation. There is a campground and cabins at Otter Lake, however, these are on the Smiths Falls side of the trail.



## Bicycle Shops

There are no bicycle shops in Portland, however, a relationship could be struck with the marina to have some tools and parts available if a trail user requires assistance.



## Food & Beverage

There are a few restaurants in the village that would be sufficient for someone travelling through. These include a few pub-style restaurants, pizza place and chip truck in the core village area and there is a café outside of town (with a pharmacy located next door) that would require the trail user to access it by road on Highway 15, or a trail connection could be made from the trail to the restaurant (depending on landownership).



## Complimentary Experiences

Portland has some opportunities to extend the stay of the trail tourist in the village. The Portland Hanna Memorial Park or Portland Conservation area are beautiful spots to stop and take a rest or enjoy a picnic lunch. There is a local art gallery, heritage centre and boats can be rented at the Marina for as little as 8 hours. A little further along on the trail is the Forfar Dairy, which is definitely worth a stop.



### Bicycle Storage

There is currently no bicycle storage available in town. Racks could be installed in front of the restaurants and a storage locker could be placed at the Station Road access point.

### Washrooms

There is a public library located in the village. An agreement could be established where trail users are able to use the washroom.

### **Strengths & Weaknesses**

#### Strengths

- Portland has a small “business area” and will be easily navigable once signage is erected
- Located on Big Rideau Lake
- Storefront opportunities in the village

#### Weaknesses

- Access point to the village needs better signage, directing trail users to Station Street
- Navigation through town needs to be improved
- Lack of public washrooms and accommodations

## Trail Town #2: Chaffey's Lock

Chaffey's Lock is a cottage and tourist located on an isthmus of land between Indian Lake and Opinicon Lake. The Cataraqui Trail runs just above the village and the historic Iron Bridge can be seen from the village centre. The Rideau Canal National Historic Site, seasonal Lockmaster's House Museum, historic fishing lodges and waterfront resorts harkens of years past and will be a favourite of the trail users.

### Access to Town

With the trail located above the village, access needs to be developed in order for trail users to safely access the village. There is a "trailhead" located just past the Iron Bridge (on the south end of the trail), however, there is not a clearly delineated trail to get people into the village, there is only a "goat path" that needs to be fully developed.



### Bicycle-Friendly Businesses

The Ontario by Bike database does not indicate that there are any certified businesses in the area, however, in searching for accommodation it appears that there may be at least two: Canalview Cottage and Tree Top Glamping Bunkie.



## Services and Amenities

The village of Chaffey's Lock does not have a lot of amenities and services, but they are adequate, and it is a must stop along the trail. The aesthetic of the community, the history and, of course, the Lock makes it a perfect stop for trail users.



## Accommodation

There are not a lot of places for tourists to stay, but there are cabins as well as some AirBnB rentals. This would be sufficient as a start; however, it would be worth discussing opportunities with the owners of the Opinicon to understand if there are any future plans to open it up as a full-service resort. In a review of camping opportunities on Parks Canada land, it does indicate that the Rideau Canal National Historic Site permits camping at [lockstations](#).



### Bicycle Shops

There is no bicycle shop located in Chaffey's Lock, however, Brown's Marina may be able to carry some parts for trail users and a bicycle repair station could also be located in the village.



### Food & Beverage

The only restaurant in Chaffey's Lock is the Opinicon, which opens for the season on Mother's Day and closes after Thanksgiving. The Opinicon has a number of restaurants to choose from and there are many people who make the trip from Sydenham to Chaffey's Lock to enjoy their ice cream. It may be possible to work with Brown's Marina General Store to have sandwiches and other items for picnic lunches available for trail users who can then have lunch along the canal.





### Complimentary Experiences

Despite the size of Chaffey's Lock, there are many things that trail users can take advantage of and extend their stay. There is a beach for swimming and those that enjoy more active water activities can rent kayak or paddle boards or go fishing. Tourists can take a historic walking tour of Chaffey's Lock, visit the Lockmasters Museum, tour a historic cemetery or simply take the day to enjoy the area.



### Bicycle Storage

There is currently no bicycle storage in the village, however there is bicycle rack at the key access point into the village. Installation of bicycle racks strategically placed throughout town would be beneficial, and there is ample space to install bicycle racks or a secure bicycle storage system at the Opinicon.

### Washrooms

There is a public washroom located at the Lockmaster's House Museum. There may be washrooms available at the community centre- this could be a partnership developed between the Heritage Society (who manages the centre) and the Cataraqui Trail. This could be a fundraising opportunity for both organizations.

## **Strengths & Weaknesses**

### Strengths

- The Locks and the Lockmaster's House Museum
- Beautiful setting where Indian Lake meets Opinicon Lake
- Great location for outdoor enthusiasts
- Nicely developed trail entry point with a bicycle rack (but does need work on access trail)

### Weaknesses

- Does not have the capacity to accommodate a lot of people. With the Opinicon no longer offering overnight accommodation, there is very little to offer. That said Chaffey's Lock would be a highly desirable destination for trail users
- The access trail to Chaffey's Lock has not been developed, however, it should be clearly delineated for the ease of access for the users.
- Limited services and amenities are available; however, this is a location for people to explore the outdoors and learn about the history of the area
- Wayfinding signage within the village



## Investment Analysis

This investment analysis is not only the investment required to upgrade services and amenities, but also investments of time for staff or businesses in these communities to create exceptional experiences for the trail users and build support within the business sector.

[Ontario By Bike/Transportation Options](#) has been collecting data over the past number of years to compile an annual study that documents cyclists' riding habits and trip preferences, as well as illustrating that cycle tourism is growing in Ontario and is having a large impact on the tourism economy in the province.

Recreation cycling continues to be the most popular type of cycling; however, it is closely followed by cycle touring and events. The two types of cycling styles preferred by cyclists is road cycling and off-road cycling and there is a growing trend towards increased riding distances ranging from 46km to 99km.

- 58% of cyclists in Ontario did one overnight trip
- 68% did a three or more day trip
- There are over 1689 businesses certified as bicycle friendly by Ontario by Bike
- 47% of cyclists visited one or more of these businesses with accommodation and food and beverage are where cyclists spend the most.
- The age of cyclists is decreasing with more riders under the age of 44
- When trip planning, most stated that when trip planning, they get recommendations from trusted sources including family and friends, followed by websites and resources published by Ontario By Bike

### Impact on Businesses

- Food & Beverage: 55% of cyclists spent over \$26 and 23% spent over \$50 in 2021
- Attractions, Entertainment and Other Activities: 30% spent over \$26 in 2021
- Retail Shopping: 27% of cyclists spent over \$26 in 2021
- Accommodations: 32% of cyclists spent over \$150/night in 2023



Cyclists have increased their spending in all areas since 2018.



In order to ensure that The Loop meets the expectations of these cyclists, not only will there be the need to make investments on the trail, but they will also need to make investments within their communities.

The following investment analysis provides recommendations specific to the entire loop product, two primary Trail Town Hub communities and two secondary Trail Town Hub communities. The smaller trail towns along the route are addressed in this section as well.

## **Investment Opportunities for the Entire Loop**

### **1) Luggage Transportation**

There are a number of ways that this could be developed.

- New Business Opportunity

An individual could create a business shuttling the luggage of the trail users from accommodation to accommodation.

- Accommodation to Accommodation Transport

This was a concept that was used on the Bruce Trail, where accommodations along the route created a partnership where they would work together to shuttle luggage from accommodation to accommodation and each year 1 accommodation takes responsibility to book the transport and they each accommodation would be responsible for transporting the luggage.

### **2) Business Engagement Program**

Although each trail/county/town will likely be developing their own business engagement signage program, a similar approach to facilitating relationship building can be developed. Consistent messaging about The Loop and the opportunities for businesses should be consistent throughout the network. A tool kit for business engagement

### **3) Beautification Program**

Developing a beautification program for the entire loop will not only create an aesthetically pleasing community but also create a more cohesive experience throughout The Loop. Some potential ideas:

- Themed light post banners
- Consistent colour theme for planters at businesses that support The Loop.
- Themed public art (i.e. railway theme)

### **4) Accommodation Investment Attraction Program**

Major Gap - Smiths Falls to Clarendon Station (Cataraqui Trail and Frontenac K&P)

There is a severe shortage of accommodations between Clarendon Station and Smiths Falls that needs to be addressed in order to truly make this product “market ready”. As it currently stands, the number of trail users will be limited due to the lack of fixed roof accommodation, however, should trail users be willing to camp or stay in alternative accommodation options there would not be as much of an issue. According to the Transportation Options 2023 Ontario Cycle Tourism & Cycling Activity Report only 18% of cyclists prefer camping while 45% of cyclists prefer staying at hotels/motels/luxury accommodations either often or very often.

There will be the need for significant investment of both time and finances.

- Engaging potential investors
- Changes to by-laws
- Meet with community centres, churches, etc. to discuss the possibility of using their facilities in order for groups of trail users to book and stay overnight (this may require the town/counties to purchase cots, etc. for use by the trail users).

## **5) Trail Town Program**

There are smaller communities along the trail that stand to benefit from the trail economy, however, there are some general investments that will need to be made in order to create a strong sense of place within them.

### **1) Conduct an inventory of empty storefronts**

These could be potential opportunities for new businesses. Understanding what potential there is for further businesses investment.

### **2) Wayfinding Signage**

Some of the communities along the trail could potentially be missed if the trail user is not made aware of them. Installing wayfinding signage directing people into town will be critical.

### **3) Bicycle Racks**

While secure storage is not critically important, however, bicycle racks in visible locations throughout the downtown core and key access points will be important.

### **4) Business Diversification**

In order to fill in any gaps in services and amenities partnership members should hold discussions with existing businesses to potentially diversify their offerings in order to better meet the needs of the trail users. This could include accommodations setting up a bicycle repair

shed on their property, or restaurants offering packed meals that trail users can easily take with them on the trail.

#### 5) Business Networking Events

In order to create the opportunities above, it would be beneficial to create Trail Town business networking events where businesses can network and explore various partnership opportunities.

#### **Conclusion**

Throughout the life-cycle of The Loop project, there may be other investment opportunities, however, focusing on the opportunities noted above is key to meeting the goal of being fully market-ready by 2030.

# Recommended Action Plan

## Cataraqui Conservation Authority/Township of Rideau Lakes – The Cataraqui Trail

The focus of the **Cataraqui Conservation Authority** should be on the development of a new management model and having a full trail inspection with costing in order to better understand the long-term needs and costs of the trail. This will allow the Conservation Authority to prioritize the work that is necessary to ensure a safe and secure plan. Based on the discussion at the November 13<sup>th</sup> workshop, it appears that there is an understanding of the cost for the refurbishment of the bridges and culverts, therefore this may not require an outside consultant if these costs are already known. Until a full costing is completed (including annual maintenance costs) engagement with potential trail managers should not happen. However, exploring different management models could happen in parallel with the development of a trail enhancement plan.

### Trail Inspection →

- Trail Enhancement Plan
- Maintenance Plan

### Trail Management Model

An exploration of other long-distance management models is recommended. Some examples include:

- Iron Horse Trail
- P'tit Train Du Nord
- Veloroute de la Peninsule Acadienne
- Veloroute des Bleuets

### Business Engagement Program

The **Township of Rideau Lakes** should focus on the development of a business engagement program. As with Renfrew and Lanark counties, using the example of the Frontenac K&P as a jumping off point will be helpful. Elements to consider:

- Trail signage
- On-line listing
- Collateral (i.e. hard copy maps)

Determine how the Township of Rideau Lakes will work with Ontario By Bike – Will a Business Engagement Program be a standalone program managed by the Township or will they assist in promoting the Ontario By Bike Program and focus on enhancing wayfinding signage within the communities?

# Appendices

## Appendix A - Sharbot Lake Trailhead Recommendation

### **Trailhead Location in Sharbot Lake**

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A destination trail assessment was recently completed by Terminus Consulting, to determine whether the concept of the Eastern Ontario Rail Trail Loop (EORTL) had merit as a tourism product for the region. The 360km Loop will consist of portions of the Frontenac K&P, Renfrew K&P, The Algonquin Trail, Ottawa Valley Recreational Trail and The Cataraqui Trail.

As part of the assessment process, existing and potential trailhead sites were assessed. This included assessing the options available in Sharbot Lake. Elements taken into consideration were the following:

- Parking area is conveniently located for easy access to the trail
- Parking area is adequately sized for peak visitation and unloading of ATVs and snowmobiles
- Parking area is attractive, well maintained, graded and kept clean with no litter
- Trailhead sign is located at the entrance of the trail or section of the trail
- Trail map is on display
- Essential information is provided at trailhead

The following assessments of the Sharbot Lake Beach site and the Boat Launch (old railway station) site were taken from the overall destination trail assessment for the EORTL.

### **Boat Launch**

Factors impacting the placement of the Trailhead at the Boat Launch/Old Railway Station location:

- Provides a clear delineation between the K&P Frontenac and the Tay Havelock trails, and the trailhead can ensure that trail users know which trail to take.
- Provides adequate space for snowmobiles and ATVs to be offloaded.
- Provides adequate space for trailers and trucks to be parked while users are out on the trail.
- Does not have direct access to washroom facilities, however, signage can be placed to direct them to the public washrooms located at the beach.

### **Sharbot Lake Beach**

Factors impacting the placement of the Trailhead at the Beach location:

- Provides access to washrooms, picnic tables and shelters.
- The primary function of this site is a beach and playground, those coming to use it will not be pleased if they are unable to park in the area if there are trucks and trailers parked there.
- There is inadequate parking space available in the area for trailers and trucks, this will likely result in these vehicles parking in the Health Clinic parking lot, the Belong restaurant and along the road.



- Off-loading ATVs and snowmobiles near the beach and businesses could be disruptive and potentially dangerous with children running around.

### **Recommendation**

Based on the factors noted above from the assessment, in particular the need for adequate space for snowmobiles and ATVs to be unloaded and the vehicles parked, it is recommended that the optimal location for the placement of the new trailhead for the Frontenac K&P in Sharbot Lake is at the boat launch (former railway station) where the K&P and the Tay-Havelock intersect.

The bicycle repair stand, located by the Belong restaurant can be relocated to the trailhead, and it can also have picnic tables and shelters and benches added on the site of the former railway station. Boaters, those using the railway park along with the trail users can benefit from these amenities. Dedicated bike stands and secure bike lockers should also be added, this will encourage cyclists to get off the trail and go into town. Directional signage can be placed on site to direct trail users to businesses in town, and direct people to the washroom and the tourist information centre located at the beach.

A primary focus in the development of the Eastern Ontario Rail Trail Loop will be the railway history of the region. A trailhead located at the original site of the railway station and next to the railway park creates a tremendous opportunity for placemaking and can become a feature for the town and the overall trail experience. This makes use of an otherwise underutilized property and can help to enhance the overall aesthetic of the town.



Ideal location for the trailhead

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads 'Jane McCulloch'.

Jane McCulloch, Principal  
Terminus Consulting

## Appendix B - Partnerships and Business Diversification Opportunities

### Partnership Opportunities

Partnerships are important to develop, particularly in smaller regions. Oftentimes communities will look at what they DON'T have rather than what they DO have. This means that communities will often sell themselves short before they ever get started because they may not have a full compliment of services and amenities to offer. This does not need to be a deficiency, rather think about how the different businesses and services within the region could partner together to fill in the gaps in the offerings. This may require some thinking outside of the box, but once you start considering your assets you may be surprised to find out what unique experiences you can create. Keep these things in mind when you are thinking about potential opportunities:

- *Theming and Experiences*: Identify themes that can be carried throughout the entire trail experience and region
- *Think beyond the Trail*: NOT everything has to be “trail based”
- *Community Partnerships to engage residents*: Residents are your best ambassadors
- *Connecting Attractions, Cultivating Assets (non-traditional)*: Farm tours, gastro-tours, local festivals
- *Casual/Experience-based*: Lobster dinners, kitchen parties, etc

*You may be wondering where to start when it comes to creating unique partnerships- here are some ideas to get started!*

Think of these as “recipes” to assist you in developing your partnership opportunities. There really is no wrong way to develop your partnership scenarios however have a good mix of experiences to make it well balanced.

Within a municipality:

- Local Restaurant
- Local Accommodation
- Local Artisan

= Unique partnership that could keep people in the region for an extra day

Within the region:

- Local Restaurant
- Experiential business outside of the town
- Local shuttle driver

= Unique partnership that allows businesses not directly on the trail to benefit from the trail

Here are some other potential partnership opportunities to consider:

- Food and beverage are a motivating factor for many tourists. Partnering with food producers and local restaurateurs, a seasonal offering can be provided for residents and tourists alike that feature local products and can be eaten at the restaurant or taken as a picnic lunch. One restaurant in each community could be engaged to do this and work together to create unique menu options- this would be a great community building opportunity and unique to the region.
- The Breweries in the region could develop a “themed beer” for the Trail. This has been done in various regions: Saltbox Brewing Company in Mahone Bay (NS) has a beer named “Dynamite Trail Ale” (Dynamite Trail is part of the larger Rum Runner Destination Trail), Port Rexton Brewing in the Bonavista Peninsula (NL) has a beer called the “Skerwink Haze” (the Skerwink Trail is a hiking trail in the Bonavista Peninsula) and Brasseux D’La Cote in Tracadie (NB) has created the “Velorousse” based on the Veloroute de la Peninsule acadienne.
- Accommodations along the bicycle route can partner to shuttle luggage from accommodation to accommodation so that the bicycle tourists do not need to make arrangements to have their luggage transported along the routes. This allows users to enjoy the linear trail experience and will provide greater opportunities for people to see more of the region.  
Accommodations will work together to coordinate the transportation of the luggage amongst themselves. Ideally one accommodation would take the lead in coordinating (i.e. central contact number) for one year and then another would take on the role.
- Accommodations could provide bagged lunches to their guests for them to take on their journey or they can partner with a local eating establishment to provide bag lunches for their guest to take on their bicycle trip. These would be available upon check-out in the morning at the front desk.
- Accommodations could partner with bicycle rental locations to arrange to have bicycles dropped off (and picked up) if their guests are renting their bikes for their trip.
- Bicycle rental locations along a trail route could partner with each other and allow bikes rented at another location to be dropped off for a tune-up or repair at a discounted rate should something happen along the route.

## Business Diversification

Often there are small things that existing businesses can do in order to make their businesses more appealing for the trail tourist. It doesn't take much for a person to feel special and welcome. Think about those hotels that leave a chocolate on the pillow or the restaurant that provides free refills. Going that extra mile means a lot and makes the trip that much more memorable. It is however important to understand the consumer- reviewing the profiles of the bicycle and eco-tourist and doing a bit more research on your own will be a good way to ensure that your changes will have an impact. There are also larger diversifications that can be made, but they will likely cost additional funds. These funds may well be worth it if the business can see a return on its investment, but it may be a project that happens once the trail is further established.

Here are some potential business diversification ideas:

- An existing Inn or B & B could make their establishment more desirable for the cyclist by adding a bicycle storage locker with a cleaning & repair station. They could also provide a high carb bagged lunch that guests could order the day before & it would be ready at breakfast for them to take for the day.
- Restaurants could offer special meals on the menus for people who are travelling long-distances. Perhaps some high carb options or "gourmet picnic lunches" to take on their hike or bike ride.
- Walking sticks and trail mix could be available in hotels rooms for people who may not be cycling but might be interested in going out for a walk on the trail.
- Tie into local festivals- there could be a unique opportunity to connect community trails to the festivals and create an "on-trail" component.

\*\* It is worth noting that K & P Brewing located in Sharbot Lake has already jumped on the opportunity and named the brewery after the railway.

## Appendix C - Leaning into the Railway theme

### THEME

The trail has incorporated their rail history into their theme



The Pinellas Trail in Dunedin, Florida has embraced their railway heritage and have incorporated the theme into their bike racks and roadway crossing in trail towns.



## Appendix D - Trail Corridor Options for the Cataraqui Trail

When complete The Shore-Line Trail will be a 150 km greenway that hugs the coast of New Brunswick from Alma to Cap-Acadie. When the railway was abandoned, portions of the trail were reclaimed and there are now significant gaps along the route. Rather than building these new sections to the same standard as a rail-trail, they are building a single-track trail that will be accessible for cyclists and walkers/hikers. This could be an option for the Cataraqui Trail, in so much as some of the sections that require significant work can be narrowed and developed as a single track (allowing clearance for groomers) and focus on developing the rail trail standards in more populated areas or where the current trail is in relatively decent condition.

### Trail Corridor Types

**Former rail lines 2.5 to 3 meters**



**Machine built, Single Track 1.5-2 meters**



## Appendix E - Frontenac Business Trail Sign Program



with the Business Trail Sign Program.



Business signs on the K&P Trail and the Cataraqui Trail in Frontenac County. Frontenac County is adding wayfinding signs to the trail to help trail users connect with local businesses and villages.

The program is a pay-to-play on a cost recovery basis to ensure the expenses for materials and installation are paid through the program.

Signs are for a 3-year placement.

Directional arrows are \$150 and wayfinding signs are \$50 for each location.

To add your business to one or more sign, email Economic Development, [ecdev@frontenaccountry.ca](mailto:ecdev@frontenaccountry.ca) before April 19, 2024.



## Appendix F - Hybrid Cyclists: Needs & Wants for a Trail Experience

Hybrid cyclists blend **comfort and versatility**, often seeking **multi-day recreational experiences** with moderate challenge and ample support. They represent a **high-yield demographic** and are ideal for trail tourism development.

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### Surface & Condition – NEED

- **Smooth, consistent surface** (stone dust or pavement preferred)
- **Well-maintained trails** with no large potholes, ruts, or soft sand
- Limited steep gradients; moderate elevation changes are acceptable

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### Wayfinding & Signage – NEED

- **Clear, consistent signage** at trailheads and junctions
- Directional signage at trail splits and transitions between trail segments
- Information about **distances, destinations, hazards, and rules**

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### Amenities & Services – NEED

- **Frequent rest stops** (benches, shelters, water stations)
- **Accessible washrooms**
- **Bike repair stations** and/or nearby repair shops
- **Shaded areas** and scenic lookouts
- Availability of **accommodations** (hotels, B&Bs, campgrounds) at reasonable intervals (every ~40–60 km)

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### Safety & Security – NEED

- **Cell phone coverage** or signage noting no-service areas
  - Safe and **secure parking or bike storage**
  - **Trail patrols** or contact information for assistance
  - Trail access points with **visible maps** and emergency plans
-

## Food & Refreshment – WANT

- Access to **cafes, pubs, and grocery stores** along or near the trail
  - **Picnic areas** and food kiosks during peak season
  - Opportunities to **sample local food** or beverages
- 

## Cultural & Recreational Experiences – WANT

- **Off-trail detours** to local attractions (museums, heritage sites, artisan markets)
  - **Interpretive signage** about history, culture, and nature (railway, biosphere, local lore)
  - Thematic elements (e.g., **railway heritage** installations, public art)
- 

## Trail Community & Identity – WANT

- Feeling of being part of a **welcoming trail community**
  - Social or group ride options
  - Opportunities to **engage with locals** or fellow riders
- 

## Trip Planning & Digital Tools – NEED/WANT

- A dedicated **website or app** with:
  - Trail conditions
  - Route planning tools
  - Accommodation and amenity listings
  - Offline map access for areas without cell service
- Option for **GPS routing** or downloadable trail maps