

Chapter 2 - Purpose and Goals of the Canal Recreationway Plan

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2.1 GOALS AND POLICIES

" . . . the commission shall develop a conceptual framework for fostering the development of the canal system into a canal recreationway system . . ."

New York State Legislature
Chapter 766 of the Laws of 1992,
as amended

Thruway 2000 legislation set broad guidelines for the preparation of a plan for the development of the Canal System. The following summarizes the legislative goals and elements to be included in the Canal Recreationway Plan:

1. Criteria for uses of the Canal System which will effectuate the goal and objective of developing the Canal into a recreationway system.
2. Provisions for fostering a Canal System characterized by clusters of development connected by stretches of undeveloped open space in areas between cities, villages and hamlets which will be conducive to the preservation of waterfowl, fish and wildlife habitats.
3. Provisions for the consideration of environmental resources, including significant fresh-water wetlands and lands which possess significance for purposes of wildlife management, recreation or natural resource protection.
4. Provisions which protect the public interest in such lands and waters for purposes of commerce, navigation, fishing, hunting, bathing, recreation and access to the lands and waters of the state, and otherwise encourage increased public access to the Canal through the establishment of parks, scenic byways and recreational trails on the Canal System. Such provisions shall ensure public safety.
5. Provisions to protect agricultural uses of canal land and waters.
6. Provisions for development of businesses in appropriate locations which will support outdoor recreation activities.
7. Provisions which give guidance to the Authority with respect to managing water levels in reservoirs to provide water to the Canal System and retain water for recreational purposes.
8. Provisions to protect the interests of commercial shipping on the Canal System.
9. Provisions for the preservation and enhancement of historic buildings, sites and districts as well as encouraging the use of historic buildings, sites and districts listed on or eligible for the State or National Registers of Historic Places.

To implement these goals, the Canal Recreationway Commission has developed the following overall vision for the Canal:

- Transform the Canal System into a recreationway which will bring the waterfront heritage of an earlier era into the 21st century.
- Interpret and conserve the natural resources of the Canal.
- Magnify the presence of the Canal System through appropriate development.

Of particular importance in the Commission's vision is that the Canal be viewed as a total system. This will ensure that a vivid public image can be created, similar in magnitude to other national treasures such as Niagara Falls or the Grand Canyon. Inherent in this approach is the development of systemwide concepts and standards that guarantee users a consistent and high-quality environment along the entire length of the Canal. While providing for the unification of the system, standards must also encourage local diversity and creativity within canalside communities.

The redevelopment of the Canal must highlight and maintain the character and authenticity of the many diverse parts of the system, including its

cities, towns and villages, open spaces and greenways. It must also provide protection from over-development and/or design that is not consistent with the character of the Canal.

Embodied in the Commission's vision are three fundamental goals for the Canal Recreationway Plan: (i) preserve the best of the past: (ii) enhance recreational opportunities: and (iii) foster appropriate and sustainable economic development.

The Best of the Past

The Canal is seminal to the history of New York State, and fortunately many of its historic resources are still intact. These resources are the essential ingredients that have traditionally attracted land- and waterside-users. Preservation of the basic infrastructure and the ecological, historical and cultural resources of the Canal System will provide a solid foundation upon which the Canal can be re-invented, and will facilitate the promotion of the system as living history.

The following goals have been formulated to protect and enhance the historic and environmental aspects of the Canal:

- Identify an appropriate historic designation which will amplify the national and international significance of the Canal and attract federal aid and program assistance.
- Develop a comprehensive interpretive and educational program encompassing the Canal's historic, cultural, economic and social features.
- Determine the balance between development and preservation by identifying the true capacity of the Canal: its waterways, trails, environmentally sensitive areas, access roads and canal-owned land.
- Develop a program for conserving viewsheds, agriculture, woodlands, wetlands, and open space between urban centers.
- Provide a canalwide conservation policy that preserves, protects and augments the ecology,

fish and wildlife resources and natural habitats.

- Prepare a water management and quality plan that can accommodate the expanded use of the Canal, while remaining sensitive to issues of water-level management, erosion and pollution control, farm management, natural resource management, wastewater management, clean-up of contaminants and needs for dredging the system.
- Continue to maintain, rehabilitate and improve existing canal infrastructure.

Enhancing Recreational Opportunities

Opportunities for expanded water and landside recreation will be an important driving force for development of the Canal System. Identifying these opportunities for passive and active recreation is fundamental to transforming the Canal into a world-class recreationway.

The following goals were developed to foster expanded recreational use along the Canal:

- In cooperation with local government, private owners and interested constituencies, create a continuous public trail system along the Canal, with linkages to other trails and open spaces.
- Formulate an integrated recreational boating system with charter routes, cruise ships, dinner boats, increased boater services, mixed-use terminal locations, tourist accommodations, and support facilities.
- Consider provisions of minimum boater and trail services to be of paramount importance to the Plan. These services must be integrated into the Canal Corporation's capital program.
- Identify a range of winter facilities and activities to minimize the impact of seasonal use of the Canal.
- Provide increased public access to the Canal for recreation wherever possible.

- Create new opportunities for canal recreation, landside attractions and expansion of existing commercial attractions.
- Identify opportunities to enhance access and encourage hunting, fishing, and trapping activities, where appropriate.

Economic Development

The Canal played a major role in the development of New York State as we know it today. It was initiated as a business venture, it paid for itself, and created unparalleled economic opportunities for the region, the state and the nation. Appropriate and sustainable canal development can again serve as a catalyst for economic growth, community revitalization and job creation. In addition, revenue generated from canal development is constitutionally required to be reinvested in the system and will be an important contributing source toward financial stability and future canal enhancements.

The following goals were developed in support of these objectives:

- Promote economic development and tourism in the necklace of towns, hamlets, villages and cities along the Canal through selected development and restoration projects.
- Establish a comprehensive system of services and facilities located at regular intervals along the Canal to serve the needs of canal users, including residents, tourists, boaters, hikers, and cyclists.
- Wherever possible, strive to reuse existing buildings in urban centers and elsewhere.
- Encourage local business participation in the development of canal-related services such as lodging facilities, retail stores, restaurants, and marinas. Canal investments should not jeopardize existing local businesses.
- Work cooperatively with local government in the formulation of land-use and development programs to implement the Canal Recreationway Plan.

- Consider canal development to be a partnership between the Canal Corporation and private business, nonprofit groups, local government, and state and federal agencies.
- Maximize direct revenues for reinvestment in the Canal System.
- Revitalize and protect the commercial use of the Canal.
- Develop an intermodal transportation system to provide easy access to canal boating facilities, recreation centers, tourist destinations and communities.
- Develop a comprehensive marketing plan to attract local, regional, national and international tourists to the Canal.

2.2 A STATEWIDE PLAN

An estimated 73 percent of the state's population now lives within two miles of the NYS Canal System and its connecting waterways (Lake Erie, Lake Ontario, Lake Champlain, Long Island Sound and the Hudson River). This in large measure is the result of construction of the first Erie Canal in 1825 and its several subsequent enlargements. Over the years, the Canal generated extraordinary and far-reaching impacts on the state and nation:

- It opened the West to the greatest movement of immigrants the world had ever seen.
- It made New York City the greatest port in the world.
- It created the greatest inland waterway system in the world by joining the Great Lakes and the Atlantic Ocean.
- It stimulated a ribbon of urban growth along its banks from Buffalo to Albany.
- It earned for New York the title of "The Empire State."

Commercial traffic peaked on the Canal in the 1880s, with annual shipments of six and a half million tons of grain, oil, coal and other commodities. The precipitous decline to 154,000

tons shipped in 1993 is attributed to many causes: the railroad boom in the late 1800s, the St. Lawrence Seaway opening in the 1950s, and the availability of truck transport on interstate highways after the Second World War, and wintertime closure of the canals.

Thruway 2000 provides the legal and financial framework to reinvent the Canal based upon today's realities of tourism, recreation, historic preservation and environmental conservation. These late-20th-century forces, when combined with the established cultural, commercial, industrial and agricultural facilities along the Canal, have the potential to develop a Canal Recreationway which will affect all New Yorkers far into the future.

Although the Thruway Authority and the Canal Recreationway Commission are the sponsors of the Plan, providing statewide leadership, canal operations and funding, successful development of the canals will involve broad participation from many levels of government, the private sector, and not-for-profit organizations.