

# ARTA, Put Up or Shut Up

Since my recent satire essay, I noticed that ARTA recently did an opinion stating that us “train advocates” should stop the “attacks”. I don’t see these as attacks, and I’m sorry that ARTA’s board see’s it as such. But these are all legitimate questions in regards to the numbers ARTA is putting out in regards to the rail line. First, their numbers. By ARTA’s admission, they estimate that their trail will cost \$1500 per mile, per year to maintain. Ok... But the trail isn’t paved, doesn’t see any sort of major infrastructure upgrades that would improve drainage, lighting on remote parts of the trail, or emergency beacons should someone require medical or police assistance.

There is also the lack of numbers associated with maintaining a patrol of the trail in its entirety to ensure it is safe for the public. They further decry the Adirondack Scenic Railroad’s business plan, saying it would deny access to the region. Well... What’s the problem with the business plan? I see nowhere in any terms saying that a train is the only option. The Adirondack Scenic has stated many times that they would be happy to work towards a rail-with-trail, so both ARTA and the Adirondack Scenic can have their respective cakes and eat them as well. But, through their own admission, ARTA said there is no rail-with-trail plan in place. Maybe that’s because they’re willing to sue the Adirondack Scenic in an attempt to make them look foolish (although they don’t want to push the point, as stated in the same conversation by a board member of ARTA), as reported by an unnamed member of the ALCO Historical and Technical Society. While it is uncertain which board member this was, another individual pointed out the recent vandalism of one of the locomotives used by the Adirondack Scenic, as there is some suspicion amongst many of us in the preservation community that while this may not have been “officially” sanctioned by ARTA, their comments and attacks at said individual through their facebook page have shown that they are most pleased with the turn of events in regards to that engine. People could have died if that engine was started, and they’re happy that it was sabotaged. Those attacks proved so vicious, and caused such a fear that this individual would be sued by ARTA over his comments, that he withdrew his original point. These people are being downright belligerent.

With that point in place, I get back to the rail-with-trail plan that ARTA says doesn’t exist. While that is most certainly true, the problem here is that ARTA’s actions against the Adirondack Scenic have made it nearly impossible to reach an agreement from both sides. That doesn’t go to say that the Adirondack Scenic is opposed to the idea, but they are a bit more wary (and this is from an outsider looking in, mind you) of attempting to work with ARTA due to these transgressions.

Further, that \$1500-mile-per-year maintenance estimate. Over the last decade, Adirondack Scenic has spent roughly \$1350 per mile, per year on track maintenance of the existing and operating track. That is the only place you’ll see ARTA complain about an operational subsidy. That same business plan that ARTA quotes shows that the Adirondack Scenic is a profitable enterprise, and the money the State of New York pays goes to reimburse the railroad for maintenance. The State would be an irresponsible landlord if they didn’t help to maintain their property. While they further say that the whole corridor will prove more expensive than their trail (by Adirondack Scenic’s numbers, about \$1900 per mile for the whole corridor once fully returned to service), but mind you this includes proper drainage, signaling and safety devices, improvements to the roadbed to increase speeds between stops, and infrastructure in the communities that they’ll be serving. Now, if ARTA’s trail included all of the improvements that were mentioned at the beginning of this response, then most certainly would their numbers seem like a bargain.

But, those numbers don't reflect those amenities.

To those concerned, I point this out; ARTA has called the Adirondack Scenic and its supporters snakes. Well, I would advise them to look in the mirror if they intimidate those who bring up entirely valid points in regards to the trail proposal and how workable will it be as it stands. Has anyone seen the Adirondack Scenic or it's supporters threaten and intimidate those opposed to their operations? I didn't think so...

So to those on the Board of Directors for ARTA, I encourage you to respond to these points. Explain why you make these accusations and assertions, and why do your numbers show such a disparity for such a simple trail? If its just a matter of removing the tracks, then why would it cost \$1500 per mile, per year to maintain? Is paid labor being used in the maintenance program that would be required, or will it be a volunteer effort? Better yet, with no direct revenue stream, who will be providing the funding to maintain the trail so it can be maintained to the still ambiguous standards that ARTA has set forth. I have yet to see a full and detailed business plan from ARTA that explains how all of this will be funded, where the revenue will come from, etc. As a final note, I would encourage ARTA to release that full business plan so they can support their own statements. But I doubt they will do such, and I further expect them to state that it is of no concern of the public on how this trail would operate. If they want all of the information from the Adirondack Scenic Railroad in regards to their operations, why haven't they contributed to this debate by putting forth at the very least the executive summary of their business plan? Because as shown in the attached link, the Adirondack Scenic has done just that. So, to those in charge of the Adirondack Recreational Trail Association, I say its far past time to put up or shut up.

Respectfully, Dylan M. Lambert

<http://www.adirondackrr.com/ExecutiveSummary.pdf>