

The Auburn Trail

Like many abandoned railroad rights-of way, the old New York Central & Hudson Railroad, Auburn Branch, has become a trail through the municipalities it used to serve.

The New York State Legislature incorporated the Auburn & Syracuse Railroad on 13 May 1836 and two years later it ran its first trains. The Auburn and Rochester Railroad was completed in 1841. Henry O'Reilly, in his *Sketches of Rochester*, published in 1838, rhapsodized about travel from Rochester to New York City, saying "...we may anticipate that, in the course of three years, the journey between Rochester and New-York will be made by railroad and steamboat within twenty-four hours, or between sunrise on one day and the same period on the following day!" O'Reilly's calculations included the Albany to New York, Hudson River segment, by boat.

In 1842, the Auburn line purchased for \$1,700 each, six elegant 50-passenger coaches with separate lavatories for men and women, providing travelers and state lawmakers a comfortable ride to the state capital.

In 1850 the Auburn & Rochester and the Auburn & Syracuse railroads were consolidated into the Rochester & Syracuse Railroad Company that became a part of the New York Central system in 1853.

The Auburn Road carried passengers and freight for more than 100 years, discontinuing its passenger service on 18 May 1958 but continuing its freight service to the former Brighton village until 1981. The tracks were taken up in 1982.

A remnant of the railroad is still intact, the "**S 97**" milepost just north of Allens Creek Road, photographed in 2021. Probably installed around the turn of the last century, the letter **S** stands for Syracuse and **97** is the number of miles from the milepost to that city.

Rochester Gas & Electric used the old railroad bed as a right-of-way for its power lines but the pathway itself was largely neglected until it became a point of negotiation when developers sought to open the Whole Foods Market on Monroe Avenue. In describing the "significant community amenities" to be provided by the developer, Brighton Town Supervisor, William Moehle, in the Messenger-Post on 27 March 2019 said, "The developer will acquire right of way and construct the Auburn Trail from the Pittsford Town Line to Highland Ave." In March 2021, Brighton town officials broke ground on the Brighton section of the trail.

The stone dust-covered surface provides a firm but comfortable surface for walkers and bicyclers for about 2.7 miles from Highland Avenue to Allens Creek Road. From Allens Creek Road, one can cross Clover Street and continue along the Trail behind Whole Foods Plaza to the village of Pittsford where one can connect with the Erie Canal Trail at Grove Street.

Mary Jo Lanphear
Town of Brighton Historian