

SECTION 4.

Needs Assessment

This section presents both systemwide and regional needs for the Erie Canal, NYS Canalway Water Trail, and the Erie Canalway Trail. Hubs and nodes for amenities are identified in each region, along with the amenity needs in each. A detailed gap analysis of key amenities is also presented.

Systemwide Needs and Opportunities

Through evaluation of amenities and activity centers, several systemwide needs and opportunities were identified to enhance the recreational user experience. These include:

1. investing in standardized wayfinding
2. enhancing placemaking at campsites
3. leveraging opportunities to encourage shared use of amenities by multiple user types
4. strengthening maintenance agreement processes

These targeted investments will support the goal of elevating the Erie Canal, NYS Canalway Water Trail, and the Erie Canalway Trail to a world class recreational destination.

1 Invest in Wayfinding

Wayfinding was one of the most commonly cited challenges expressed by stakeholder groups. They noted several sign types in need of enhancement, some of which are identified to the right. Canal Corporation is in the process of developing a comprehensive wayfinding system that will be implemented on land they own, but this would not apply to segments owned by other entities. The following sections identify specific wayfinding needs.



On-Road Trail Markers

Some portions of the Erie Canalway Trail are located on roads, which can pose a challenge for navigation. Users noted that increased signage for on-road portions, especially at turns or other decision points, would help with navigation. It should be noted that placement of these markers is regulated by the Federal Highway Administration's *Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices (MUTCD)* and NYS Department of Transportation's *TSMI-17-08, Guidance for the Empire State Trail*.



Mile Markers

Mile markers help users track their progress and convey their location in the event of an emergency. Though mile markers were well spaced in places where they have been installed, they are not consistently present and there are a variety of mile marker types. Two examples are provided above. A standard mile marker system is recommended. It should be noted that if on-road portions of the Erie Canalway Trail are converted to off-road, distances will change and a mile marker system would need to be updated, which would be a considerable capital expense.



NYS Canalway Water Trail Markers

Water Trail markers were recently installed at public access points on the NYS Canalway Water Trail. They are intended for users on the water to identify public take-outs by differentiating from private docks, as well as for landside users to identify public launch points. There are instances where these signs might be visible from the water but not from the road or nearby parking lot, which would be the first point of arrival for those launching. There may be an opportunity to add supplemental markers closer to landside access points.



Trail Destination Signs

Trail destination signs indicate the distance to the next milestone or destination along the Erie Canal, NYS Canalway Water Trail, and Erie Canalway Trail. Users rely on signs like these to track progress and make decisions about whether to stop and rest or continue to the next destination. There are a variety of sign types like these with varying designs and levels of detail. Users prefer signs that note both the distance to the next stopping point and what amenities they will be able to access when they arrive.



Off-Trail Destination Signs

Off-trail wayfinding signs are those that direct users to destinations and services located near the trail. There are a wide variety of these types of signs, including maps, arrows, and distances. Users prefer signs that provide direction to general centers of activity, such as downtowns and Central Business Districts. This is consistent with the wayfinding system that Canal Corporation is developing.

2 Enhance Placemaking at Campsites

Campsites were highlighted among users as a key resource for those who want to complete an affordable long-distance trip by bicycle, boat, or paddlecraft. In particular, users rely on primitive campsites, such as those located at locks and through community partnerships, for camping, but these locations often lack any sense of arrival, such as clear signage. Investment in these locations to create clear and consistent signage that indicates to users that they have arrived at a designated campsite and that they are permitted to stay overnight would create a more consistent and predictable experience, increasing confidence among users.



A typical primitive campsite at a lock has few defining characteristics to indicate that a user is permitted to camp there. (Lock 23, Clay)

3 Maximize Impact through Shared Amenities

The Erie Canal/NYS Canalway Water Trail and the Erie Canalway Trail are unique in that they are two parallel trails geared towards different types of users, however many amenities can benefit multiple user types. For example, a restroom located at a marina on the Erie Canal might have been intended for boater use, but bicyclists on the nearby Erie Canalway Trail would benefit from knowing it exists and having easy access to it. Finding opportunities to share amenities among user types maximizes the benefit from capital investment, supports maintenance efficiency, and creates a stronger nexus of activity. The following opportunities were identified to make amenities more widely available to multiple user types.

- **Expand use of long-distance trip amenities such as showers and laundry facilities**, which currently tend to be located at marinas and geared towards Erie Canal users. As the Erie Canalway Trail gains popularity for long-distance bicycling, enhanced wayfinding to direct Erie Canalway Trail users to these amenities would enhance access.

- **Enhance the paddler experience at locks and marinas.** Locks and marinas are designed for use by boaters and therefore feel out of scale for paddlers. Paddling stakeholders noted frustration when they arrive by water at a hub of activity but cannot access it due to high vertical walls or inadequate launches. Identifying key locations where hand launches such as low docks with rollers or adaptive launches can be installed would enhance the experience for paddlers. Similarly, as paddlers are not always comfortable locking through alongside larger boats, well-defined portage trails and highly visible signage would encourage paddlers to land and portage around the locks.
- **Cluster amenities at community gateways.** It was noted that although the trails pass directly through many communities, there is not always a clear connection to those communities, which is a missed opportunity. Placemaking, the process of designing and building public places that are inviting and uplifting to the community, can be used at points of connection to the community to strengthen ties to the trails, encourage trail users to visit the community, and create a nexus of activity among users.

4 Strengthen Maintenance Agreement Processes

It is imperative that recommended investments are implemented in compliance with state and local regulations and that they are maintained in the long term. With roughly 100 jurisdictions owning portions of the trail system, and countless private and non-profit entities operating on the trails, this can present a unique challenge. Maintenance agreements define responsibilities between entities, such as a community installing amenities on Canal Corporation land or non-profits installing amenities on municipal land. Strong maintenance agreements ensure the safety, functionality, and attractiveness of trail amenities long after they are installed.

Maintenance agreements currently exist in some cases but are not consistently used. Model agreements, combined with strong community engagement around the importance of maintenance agreements, could make this practice more commonplace to ensure amenity investments reach their maximum potential.



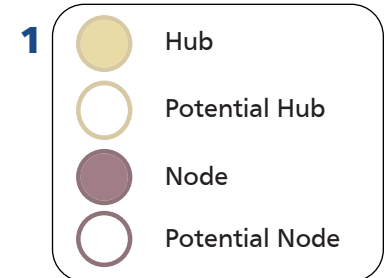
Cyclists on the Erie Canalway Trail in Niskayuna.

Regional Needs

For the purpose of this study, analysis and recommendations were divided into four regions, shown in Map 4.1. The following pages detail location-based recommendations specific to each region. In each region, there is a narrative description of needs and opportunities followed by a series of maps. Specifically, the following six elements will be included for each region.

1 Locations of Hubs and Nodes

A map of the general locations of hubs and nodes is shown for each region based on the criteria outlined in Section 3. Existing hubs and nodes are places where the hub and node criteria outlined in Section 2 are currently met. Proposed hubs and nodes are places where there is potential based on proximity to an activity center or strategic location along the trail, but would require significant amenity investment.



2 Existing Amenities at Hubs and Nodes

A summary map of the key amenities currently available at each hub and node is provided for each region. Amenities that do not currently exist are greyed out. Amenities in poor condition are outlined in red.



3 Gap Analysis by Amenity Type and User Group

A series of five maps shows the locations of key amenities along the trails, with specific needs and opportunities called out. These maps are not specific to hub and node locations. Poor condition amenities are outlined in red.



4 Needs and Opportunities at Hubs and Nodes

A narrative description of the location context of each hub and node is provided to highlight key needs and opportunities at each location. These are based on field observations as well as stakeholder input.

5 Additional Needs and Opportunities

A narrative description of needs and opportunities not specific to a hub or node is also provided. These are based on field observations as well as stakeholder input. They may note needs identified for the region overall or for a specific user group, such as bicyclists.

6 Summary Table

Each region concludes with a summary table of the recommended amenity investments at each hub and node, including the municipality and county where the hub or node is located along with the jurisdiction of the trail and whether trailside land is owned by Canal Corporation, DEC, OPRHP, or another entity.

MAP 4.1 Study Area Regions





Region 2: Baldwinsville/Camillus to Rome

Overview

The Erie Canalway Trail diverges from the Erie Canal and NYS Canalway Water Trail for the majority of Region 2. The Erie Canal follows the Seneca River in this region, stretching from Baldwinsville in the west to Bellamy Harbor Park in Rome to the east. The Erie Canalway Trail in this region begins in Camillus and travels through the City of Syracuse and surrounding suburbs before reconnecting with the Erie Canal in Rome.

For both the Erie Canal/NYS Canalway Water Trail and the Erie Canalway Trail, amenities are relatively sparse, especially at proposed hub and node locations (Map 4.9). Stakeholders who have embarked on long-distance trips noted that this area is one of the most difficult for camping because there are so few locks, which are a key camping location. This region should be a focus of investment to enhance the recreational experience in Central New York.



At a Glance

57 miles

ERIE CANAL
NYS CANALWAY WATER TRAIL

57 miles

ERIE CANALWAY TRAIL

3

EXISTING
HUBS

1

PROPOSED
HUB

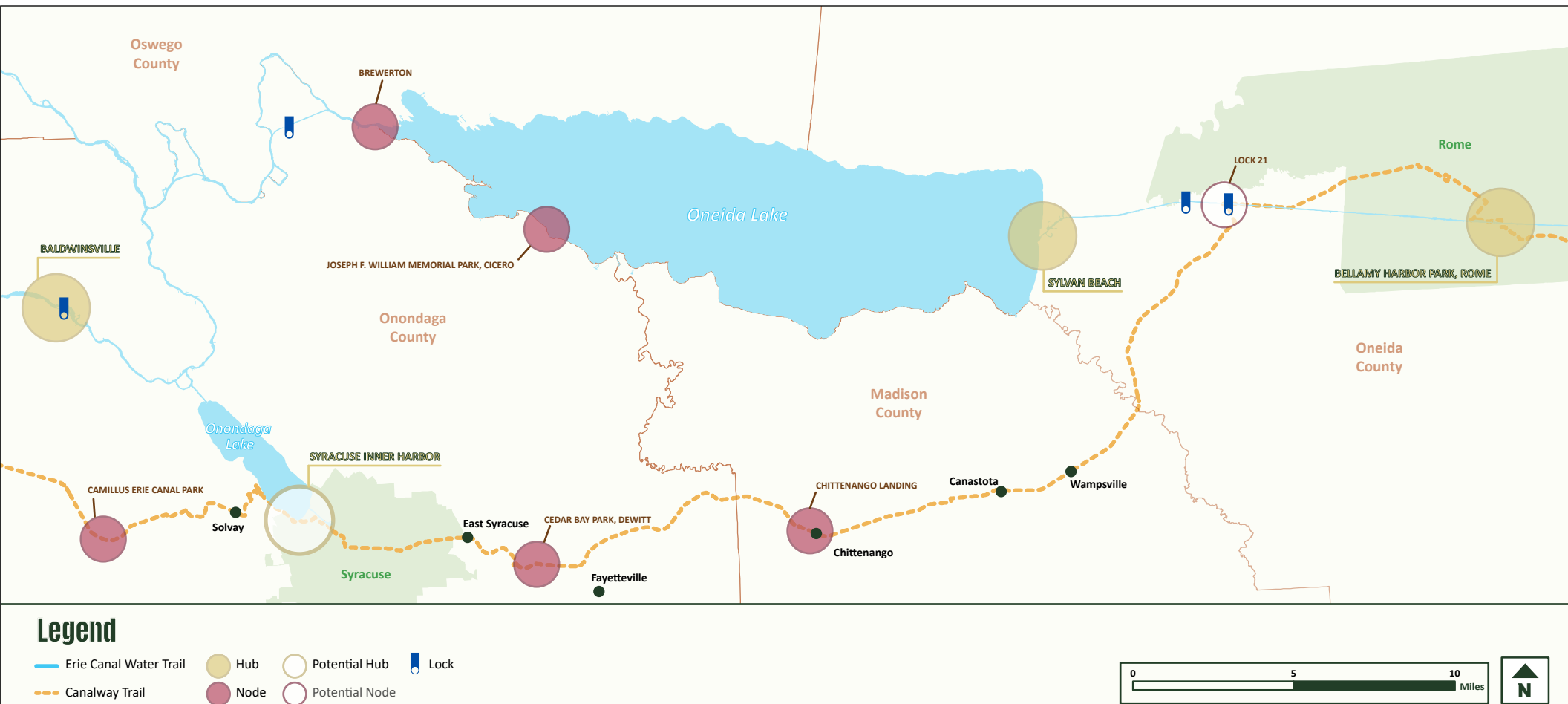
5

EXISTING
NODES

1

PROPOSED
NODE

MAP 4.9 Locations of Hubs and Nodes, Region 2



Region 2 Hubs and Nodes

Map 4.9 illustrates the locations of hubs and nodes identified for Region 2. There are three existing hubs, one proposed hub, five existing nodes, and one proposed node.

Overview of Hubs

In Region 2, the three hubs are located at Baldwinsville, Sylvan Beach, and Bellamy Harbor Park in Rome. Hubs are between 15 and 40 miles apart in this region. Map 4.10 indicates the amenities currently available at hubs. Though paddlers and boaters have strong access to amenities in this region, the Erie Canalway Trail is in need of investment to enhance the experience for bicyclists and pedestrians. A potential hub is identified at Syracuse Inner Harbor because it would be a strategic location for Erie Canalway Trail users, but would require significant investment.

Baldwinsville

Baldwinsville contains several amenity clusters for boaters and paddlers within a dense, walkable downtown. The marina is a popular social destination for boaters and is quite activated on weekends. Paddlers have access to excellent amenities such as an adaptive launch, picnic area, and restrooms at nearby Mercer Park, but may not be aware of the showers located at the marina. Enhanced wayfinding could

connect these two locations to maximize the potential for recreational use.

Syracuse Inner Harbor

On the Erie Canalway Trail, there are no obvious hubs. Given the amount of planning and investment taking place at the Syracuse Inner Harbor, this location is a logical place for a hub, but there are currently very few amenities geared towards trail use. This would need to be a focus of investment in order to capitalize on the location as a hub for recreation.

Sylvan Beach

Sylvan Beach is a well-established destination for boaters, paddlers, and tourists, with private marinas, a beach, and waterside attractions such as an amusement park and restaurants. Near the public beach is the Cove Road boat launch, which is a popular kayak launch site. Verona Beach State Park also has many amenities for paddlers. There is an opportunity to capitalize on the popularity of the State Park by promoting it to long-distance paddlers.

Bellamy Harbor Park, Rome

Bellamy Harbor Park is the point of confluence between the Erie Canal and the Mohawk River. The location has ample amenities, chief among them the recently completed Rome Navigation Center, an ADA-compliant facility with comfort

amenities such as restrooms, showers, and laundry. The location is easily visible to trail users. Because the park lacks a clear connection to downtown Rome, destination wayfinding would reduce the psychological barrier for users to venture out and access off-trail services.

Overview of Nodes

Map 4.10 indicates the amenities currently available at nodes. There are five existing nodes and one potential node located in Region 2. Most nodes are between 5 and 15 miles apart, although there is a 20-mile gap between the Baldwinsville hub and the next node in Brewerton. Lock 20 is identified as a potential node, but would require enhanced paddler access.

Brewerton

Brewerton is shown as a node and is a key location for boaters looking to refuel, seek repairs, or store their boats. In fact, many Great Loopers will store their boats at a marina in Brewerton for the winter so they can return the following spring and continue their journey, thereby extending the trip over two boating seasons.

Joseph F. William Memorial Park

Joseph F. William Memorial Park in the Town of Cicero provides simple amenities and a picnic area for paddlers.

Lock 21, Rome

Lock 21 is another useful stopping point for bicyclists and boaters and has a large flat area ideal for camping. Additional placemaking would enhance the camping experience here. Paddlers have difficulty accessing amenities here due to high vertical walls. A launch would open these amenities to paddlers.

Camillus Erie Canal Park, Cedar Bay Park, and Chittenango Landing

Nodes for the Erie Canalway Trail are shown in Camillus, DeWitt, and Chittenango, primarily because they have restrooms, but each of these nodes would benefit from additional investment such as bike repair stations and enhanced wayfinding to nearby downtowns to enhance the trail experience for bicyclists and pedestrians.

Region 2 Amenity Needs and Opportunities

Maps 4.11-4.14 show key amenities by user type in Region 2 and identify gaps that detract from the user experience. The narrative below describes specific needs and opportunities for this region.



Restrooms and Drinking Fountains



The Erie Canal is well equipped with these key resources in Region 2, in part thanks to the many waterfront parks and developments along Oneida Lake. There is a permanent restroom at Sylvan Beach that could present an opportunity to add a drinking fountain. It has been noted by stakeholders that paddlers cannot access the restroom located at Lock 21 because there are steep vertical walls and no kayak launches.



Boat Rentals and Adaptive Launches



Based on stakeholder input, boat rentals and adaptive launches should be co-located within centers of activity. There are adaptive launches located at either end of this region, but overall they are lacking and should be prioritized at hubs and nodes. The Town of Cicero is in the planning stages for a new kayak launch on the south side of the Canal in Brewerton, which could be an opportunity to add an adaptive launch. Baldwinsville has an adaptive launch but it is located at Mercer Park, several blocks away

from the heart of activity within downtown. Enhanced wayfinding from the park to the rest of downtown Baldwinsville could help to connect recreational users in this area. Boat rentals should be prioritized at hubs in this region.

Lock 21 should be evaluated for potential installation of a launch. Without paddler access here, paddlers have to travel 15 miles between Sylvan Beach and Rome without a break, which is on the upper limit for paddlers.



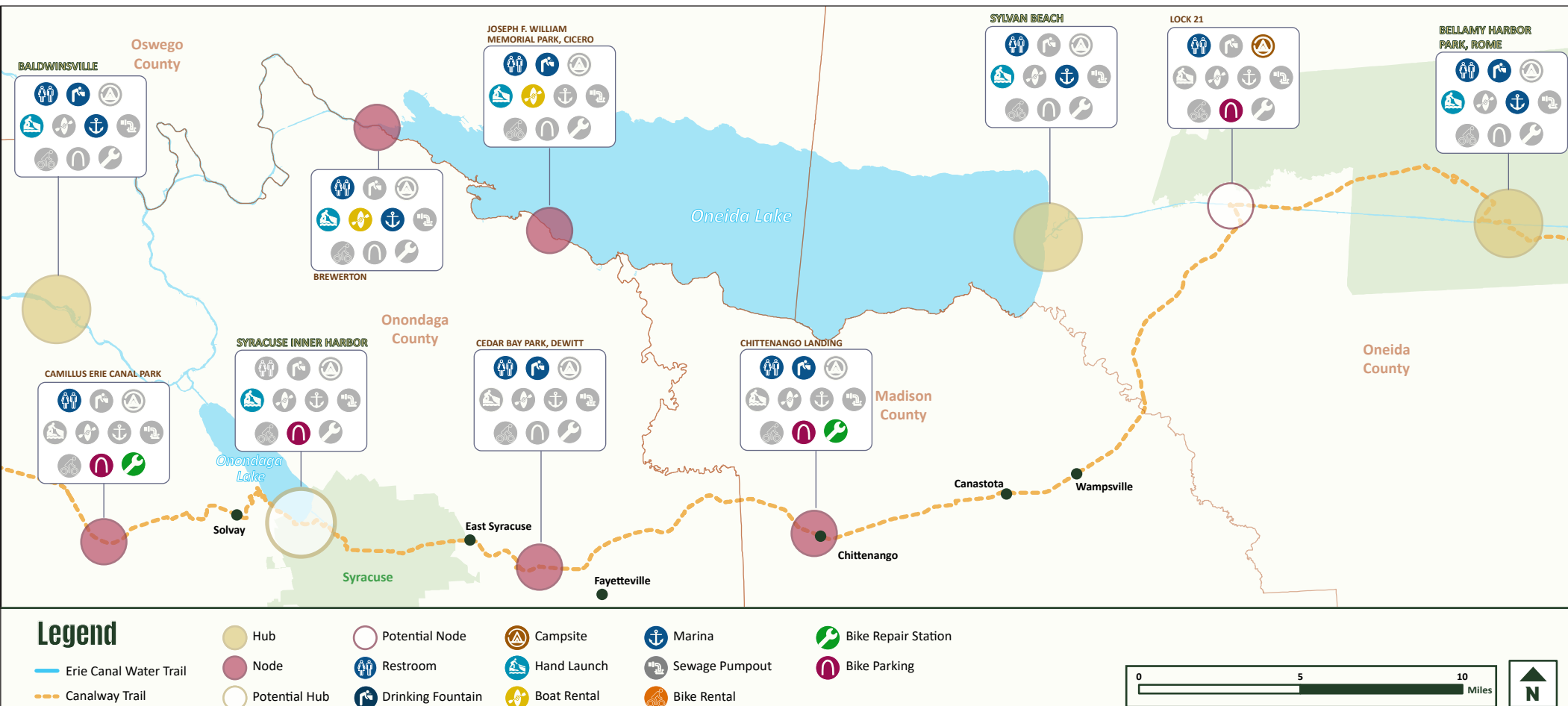
Bicycling Amenities



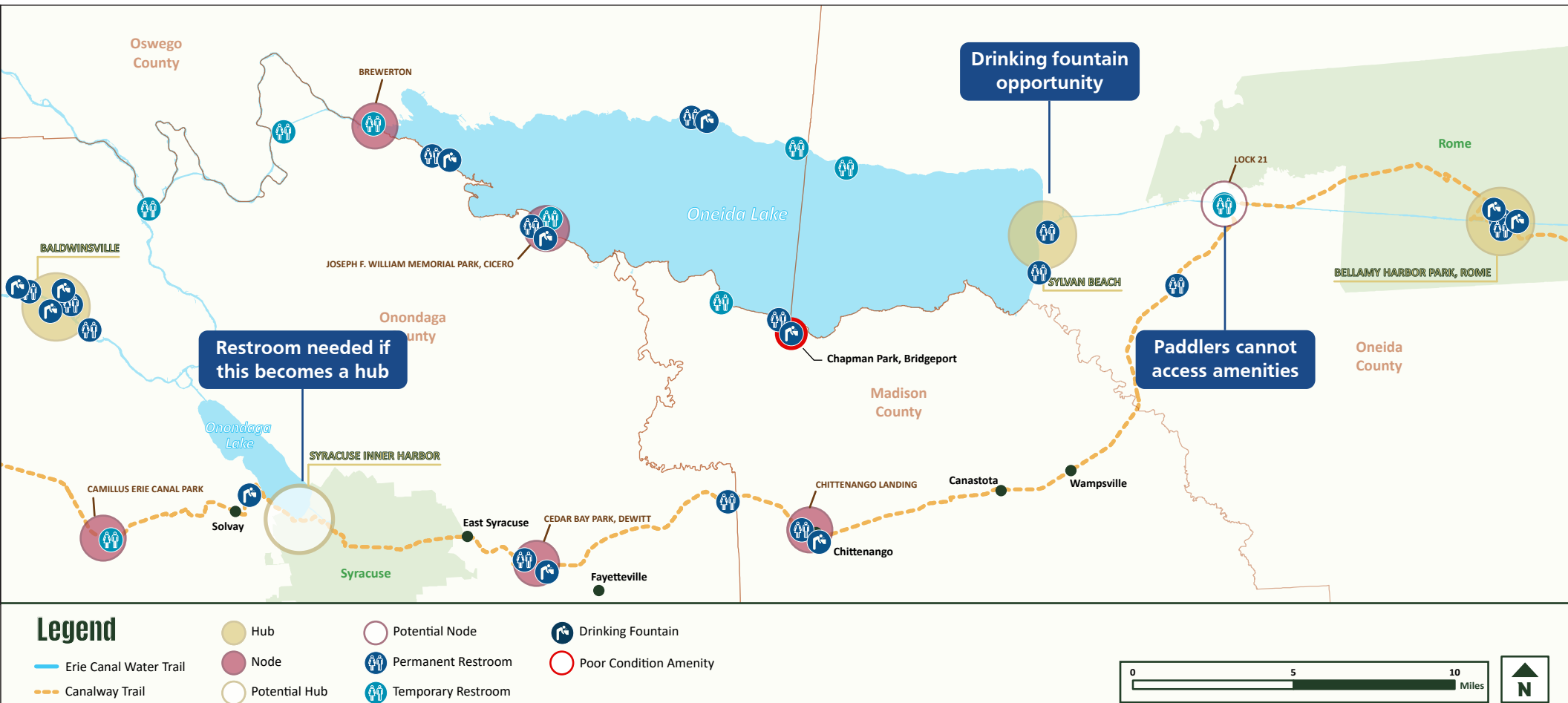
Bicycle amenities are generally lacking in this region. They are more plentiful on the western end between Camillus and the City of Syracuse. The Syracuse bike share program provides one option for the community to try biking on the Erie Canalway Trail, but similar to Capital Bikeshare in Albany, this service is designed to act more like transit for users to travel from point A to point B rather than experiencing a recreational trip at a leisurely pace with stops along the way. This region would benefit from the addition of true bike rental offerings.

Consistent bicycling amenities such as repair stations and bike racks at all hubs and nodes would contribute to the sense of place in this region. Cedar Bay Park in DeWitt in particular is in need of bicycling amenities (Map 4.14).

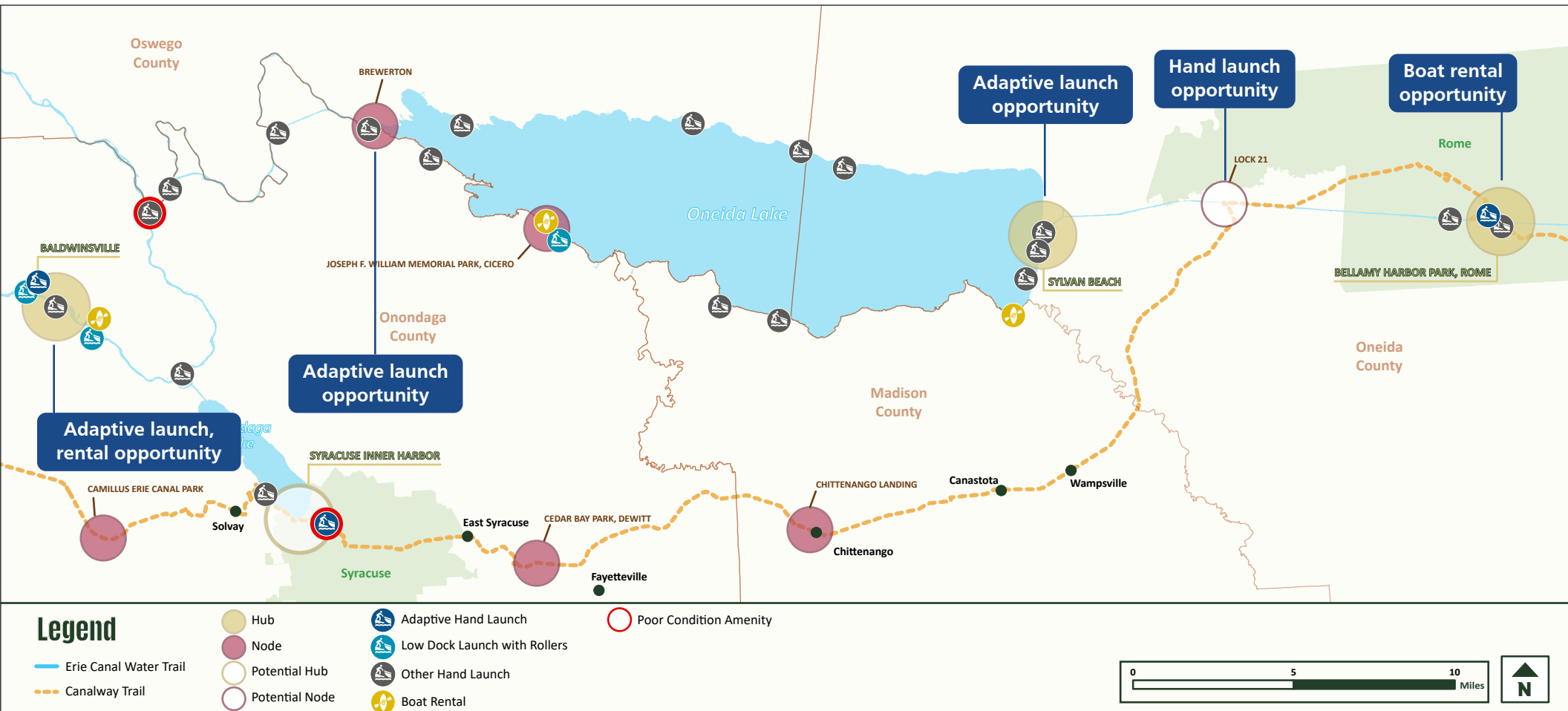
MAP 4.10. Existing Hub and Node Amenities, Region 2



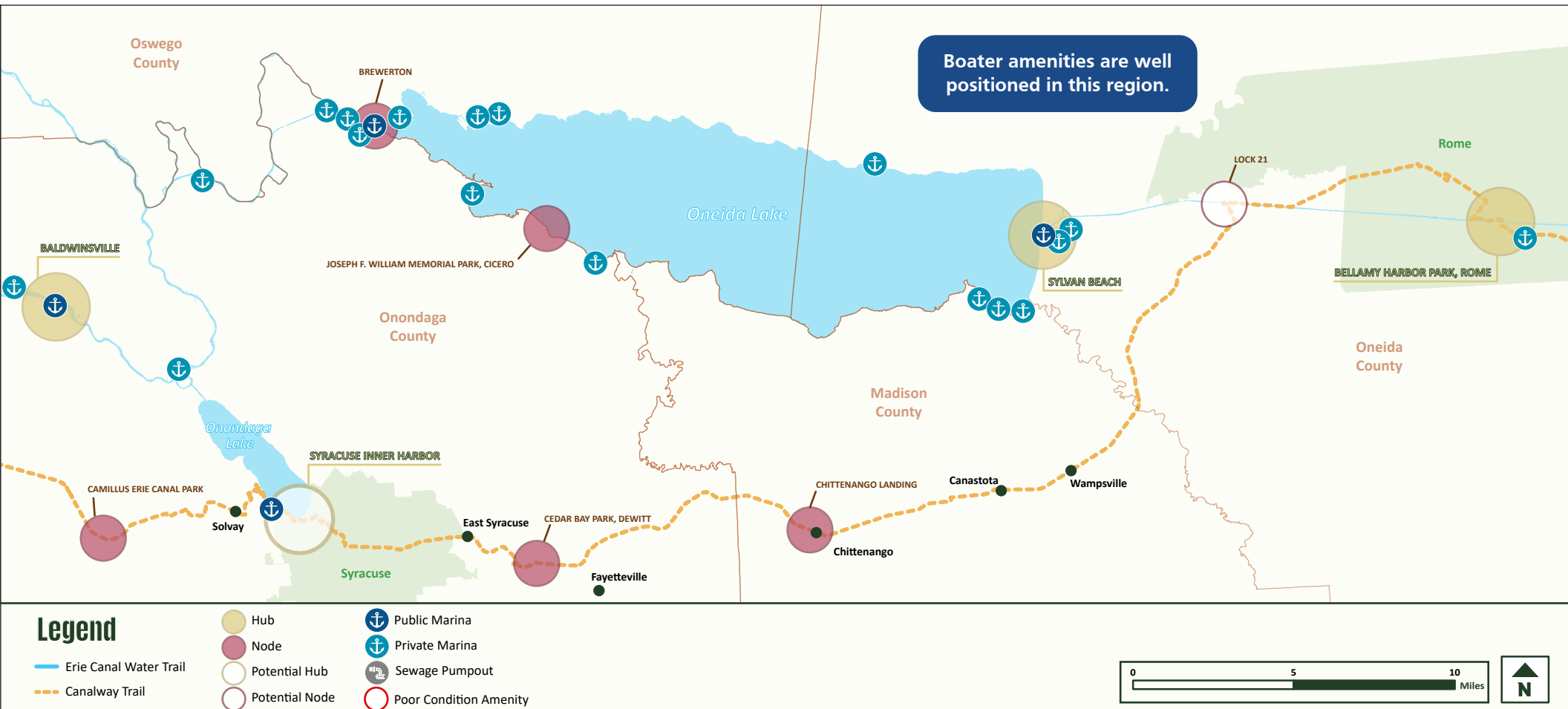
MAP 4.11. Existing Shared Amenities, Region 2



MAP 4.12. Existing Paddler Amenities, Region 2



MAP 4.13. Existing Boater Amenities, Region 2



MAP 4.14. Existing Bicyclist Amenities, Region 2



TABLE 4.2 Summary of Amenity Needs, Region 2

Hub/Node Name	Type	Amenities Needed	Municipality	County	Erie Canalway Trail Jurisdiction(s)	Land Jurisdiction(s)
Baldwinsville	Hub	Boat Rental Adaptive Hand Launch	Baldwinsville	Onondaga	n/a	Canal Corporation Other
Camillus Erie Canal Park	Node		Camillus	Onondaga	Town of Camillus Onondaga County	Other
Syracuse Inner Harbor	Potential Hub	Restroom Boat Rental Bike Rental Bike Repair Station	Syracuse	Onondaga	Onondaga County	Canal Corporation Other
Brewerton	Node		Cicero Hastings	Onondaga Oswego	n/a	Canal Corporation Other
Joseph F. William Memorial Park, Cicero	Node		Cicero	Onondaga	n/a	Other
Cedar Bay Park, DeWitt	Node	Bike Rack Bike Repair Station	DeWitt	Onondaga	OPRHP	OPRHP
Chittenango Landing	Node		Sullivan	Madison	OPRHP Madison County	OPRHP Other
Sylvan Beach	Hub	Boat Rental Drinking Fountain	Verona	Oneida	n/a	Canal Corporation Other
Lock 21, Rome	Potential Node	Hand Launch Bike Repair Station	Verona	Oneida	n/a	Canal Corporation
Bellamy Harbor Park, Rome	Hub	Boat Rental Bike Rental Bike Repair Station	Rome	Oneida	NYSDOT	Canal Corporation Other

“Erie Canalway Trail Jurisdiction” refers to the entity or entities that own this segment of the Erie Canalway Trail. “Land Jurisdiction” refers to the entity or entities that own either the land surrounding the Erie Canalway Trail, such as a park with amenities that the trail passes through, or land used for Erie Canal/NYS Canalway Water Trail access points.