

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.



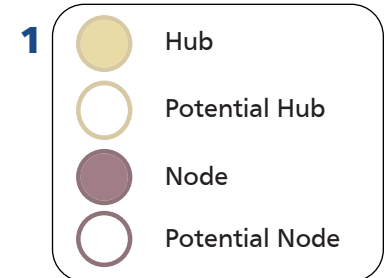
Cyclists on the Erie Canalway Trail in Niskayuna.

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 4: North Tonawanda to Fairport

Overview

Region 4 begins at the western terminus of the trails at Gateway Harbor Park in North Tonawanda and stretches east to the Village of Fairport, just east of the City of Rochester. This is one of the more amenity-rich regions, and was noted by many stakeholders as a place where the historic nature of the Erie Canal is particularly celebrated. Historic structures such as lift bridges are common in this region and the canal is entirely man-made and is therefore narrow, measuring only about 125 feet across in most areas. This

scale creates a comfortable environment for recreational use and creates a strong feeling of connection to the water. In this area, the Erie Canalway Trail tends to run directly alongside the Erie Canal, making it feasible for users of both trails to benefit from shared amenities.



At a Glance

91 miles

ERIE CANAL
NYS CANALWAY WATER TRAIL

94 miles

ERIE CANALWAY TRAIL

4

EXISTING
HUBS

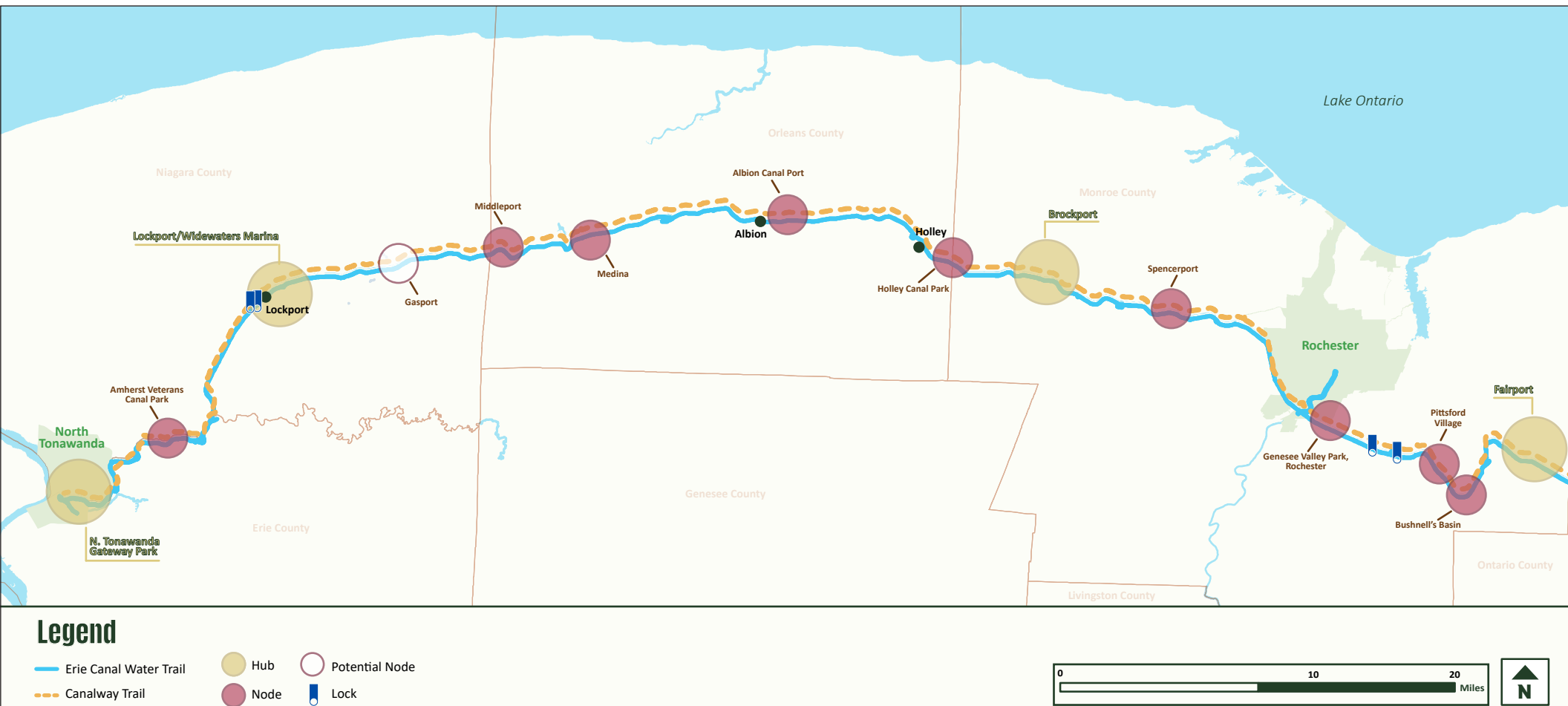
9

EXISTING
NODES

1

PROPOSED
NODE

MAP 4.22. Locations of Hubs and Nodes, Region 4



Note: Region 4 maps include overlap with Region 3.

Region 4 Hubs and Nodes

Map 4.22 illustrates the locations of hubs and nodes identified for Region 4. There are four existing hubs, nine existing nodes, and one proposed node identified in this region.

Overview of Hubs

Map 4.23 illustrates the amenities currently available at hubs in Region 4. Hubs are between 20 and 40 miles apart in this region. Hubs are shown at North Tonawanda Gateway Park, Lockport, Brockport, and Fairport. Hubs in this region have a large variety of amenities geared toward several user types.

North Tonawanda Gateway Park

The western terminus of the Canalway Trail is located at the Tonawandas Gateway Harbor, steps away from Main Street, the primary commercial in the City of Tonawanda. Gateway Harbor and adjacent Canal Street Plaza are lively and activated places with a wide range of amenities for all user types.

Lockport

The Canal passes through the historic downtown of the City of Lockport, where users can see the restored Locks 69 and 70, as well as Locks 34 and 35, which

enable today's canal traffic to climb the Niagara Escarpment. There are a variety of attractions in the area, including several restaurants, coffee and ice cream shops, and a bike repair station, but amenities for paddlers and boaters are limited, as well as key shared amenities like restrooms and drinking fountains. The portion of the Erie Canalway Trail from the city limits to Downtown Lockport is primarily on-road and not well marked. The area is very active, with a community farmers' market and other events.

Widewaters Marina, two miles northeast of Downtown Lockport, provides excellent amenities for paddlers and boaters but is not well connected to the Erie Canalway Trail. Enhanced wayfinding signage could make this amenity center more accessible to bicyclists, pedestrians, and runners.

Brockport

At Harvester Park, south of the Canal, there are a wide range of amenities available to trail users, and many are accessible, including the hand launch, restrooms, and showers. The Welcome Center is an aspirational example of the type of experience users would like to have throughout the system. Staff greet and orient visitors seven days per week from May to October. Boaters can register

for access to power and water and users can register to camp overnight.

Village of Fairport

Fairport has capitalized on its connection to the Canal and created an epicenter of activity along the water. Users can easily access the local shops, restaurants, and lodging options. As noted previously, this hub is an exemplary model of investment in enhancing accessibility.

Overview of Nodes

Map 4.23 shows the amenities currently available at nodes in Region 4. In this region, nodes are primarily shown in town, village, and hamlet centers, however several parks are also shown as nodes. In this region, nodes have a particularly strong concentration of amenities for multiple user types, especially the Village of Middleport, Amherst Veterans Canal Park, and the Village of Pittsford.

Amherst Veterans Canal Park

Amherst Veterans Canal Park is located in a rural section of the Town of Amherst. The main feature of the park is the boat ramp, which allows access to Ellicott Creek for larger boats, as well as a hand launch for canoes and kayaks. The park

also offers restrooms, a drinking fountain, picnic tables, and a bike repair station. There is ample parking, including boat trailer parking. Overall, the facilities are in good condition and the Erie Canalway Trail is well-marked in this area.

Gasport

Gasport has a marina and provides a logical stopping point between Lockport and Middleport, but it does not offer many amenities. With investment in public amenities such as restrooms, potable water, and electricity, both the community and the Canal could capitalize on an enhanced nexus of activity.

Middleport

The trail is well connected to the restaurants and other businesses on Main Street. This is one of the few locations with a primitive campsite served by public restrooms within a downtown.

Medina

The Village of Medina offers a plethora of businesses, including restaurants, pharmacies, and a movie theater. There is ample parking at Medina Harbor. This location would benefit from public amenities like restrooms and drinking water.

Albion Canal Port

Downtown Albion offers a number of restaurants and other conveniences within a 5-minute walk from the Erie Canalway Trail. Amenities for boaters, paddlers, and bicyclists are available in this area.

Holley Canal Park

Holley Canal Park offers a number of amenities to trail users. The park includes pavilions, drinking fountains, an accessible port-a-potty, ample parking, a playground, and scenic views of the Holley Canal Falls. A 10-minute walk or 2-minute bike ride brings users to the downtown of the Village of Holley, which has several restaurants and other conveniences.

Genesee Valley Park, Rochester

This city park is an Empire State Trail designated trailhead and has amenities clustered together within a short walk from the Erie Canalway Trail. In this area, the Erie Canalway Trail also connects to the Genesee Waterways Trail into downtown Rochester and other points north. The Genesee Waterways Center is located nearby on the Genesee River, and it's easy for paddlers to connect to the NYS Canalway Water Trail from this location. However, the restrooms and other amenities in the park are not directly accessible to boaters and paddlers via a launch or marina.

Village of Pittsford

The Village of Pittsford has a strong connection to the Canal and the Erie Canalway Trail, with shops and restaurants lining the water. This area is home to several regattas throughout the year, and rowing stakeholders noted how unique these events are because spectators can be so close to the water. Although there are many opportunities to find restrooms at nearby private establishments, there are no dedicated public restrooms for trail users.

Bushnell's Basin, Perinton

This historic hamlet is a beloved stopping point for boaters who visit the restaurants along the water. Showers and restrooms are located here, which is helpful for overnight stays. Although there is low-profile docking here, it is difficult for paddlers to launch or land. The Erie Canalway Trail is on the opposite side of the water, but a nearby bridge connects the two sides. Dedicated kayak launches and wayfinding signage would help bicyclists and paddlers utilize this node.

Region 4 Amenity Needs and Opportunities

Maps 4.24-4.28 illustrate the gaps between amenities and present needs and opportunities identified for future investment to enhance the recreational user experience. Overall, this region has ample amenities for paddlers, boaters, and bicyclists. Because the Erie Canal/ NYS Canalway Water Trail and the Erie Canalway Trail are directly adjacent to each other and the scale is small, it is easy for users of both trails to take advantage of shared amenities.



Restroom and Drinking Water Gap



There is a noticeable gap between Lockport and Brockport, where key amenities like restrooms and drinking fountains are sparse or nonexistent. This segment should be a focus of further evaluation for future investment at nodes.

Lockport's Potential

Lockport is a key destination for trail users and tourists alike but lacks publicly available amenities (Map 4.23). Given the popularity of this location as a tourist destination, where attractions like the Flight of Five Locks bring visitors from near and far, there is opportunity to capitalize on it as a recreational destination through amenity investment.



Enhancing Paddler Access

Although paddler amenities are generally well positioned in this region, two locations were identified where they would benefit from investment.

- Widewaters Marina near downtown Lockport provides ample amenities for paddlers and boaters alike but is located about two miles from downtown Lockport, which would be a long walk for visitors who want to access off-trail services. To the extent that a launch could be installed closer to downtown, paddlers would have better access to the active downtown.
- Bushnell's Basin is a popular local destination for boating, with restaurants, a Canal Walk, and ice cream located along the water. Paddlers have a difficult time accessing this location because the low profile docks are too high out of the water to land. A purpose-built launch would open this location to paddlers.



Enhancing the Bicycling Experience



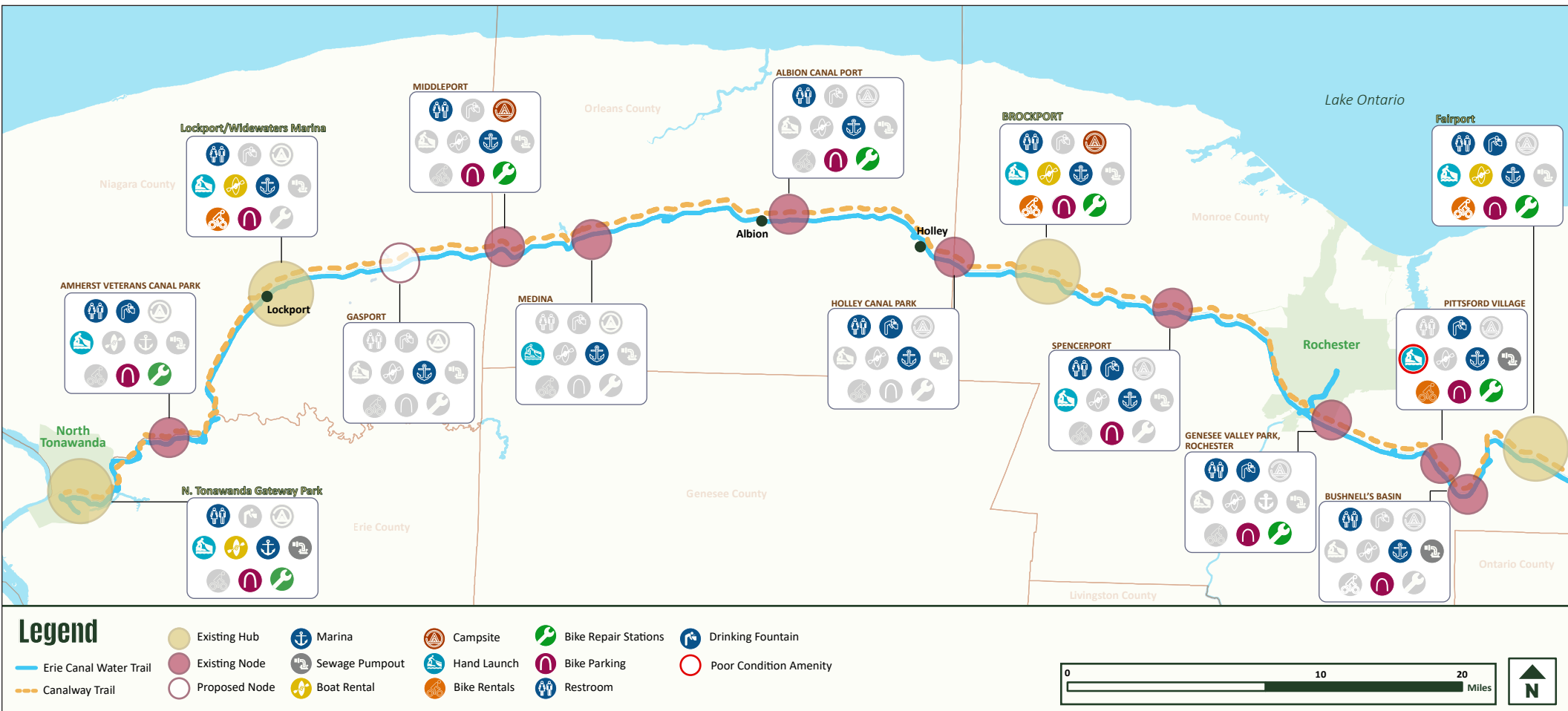
Similar to paddlers, amenities geared towards bicyclists are generally plentiful.



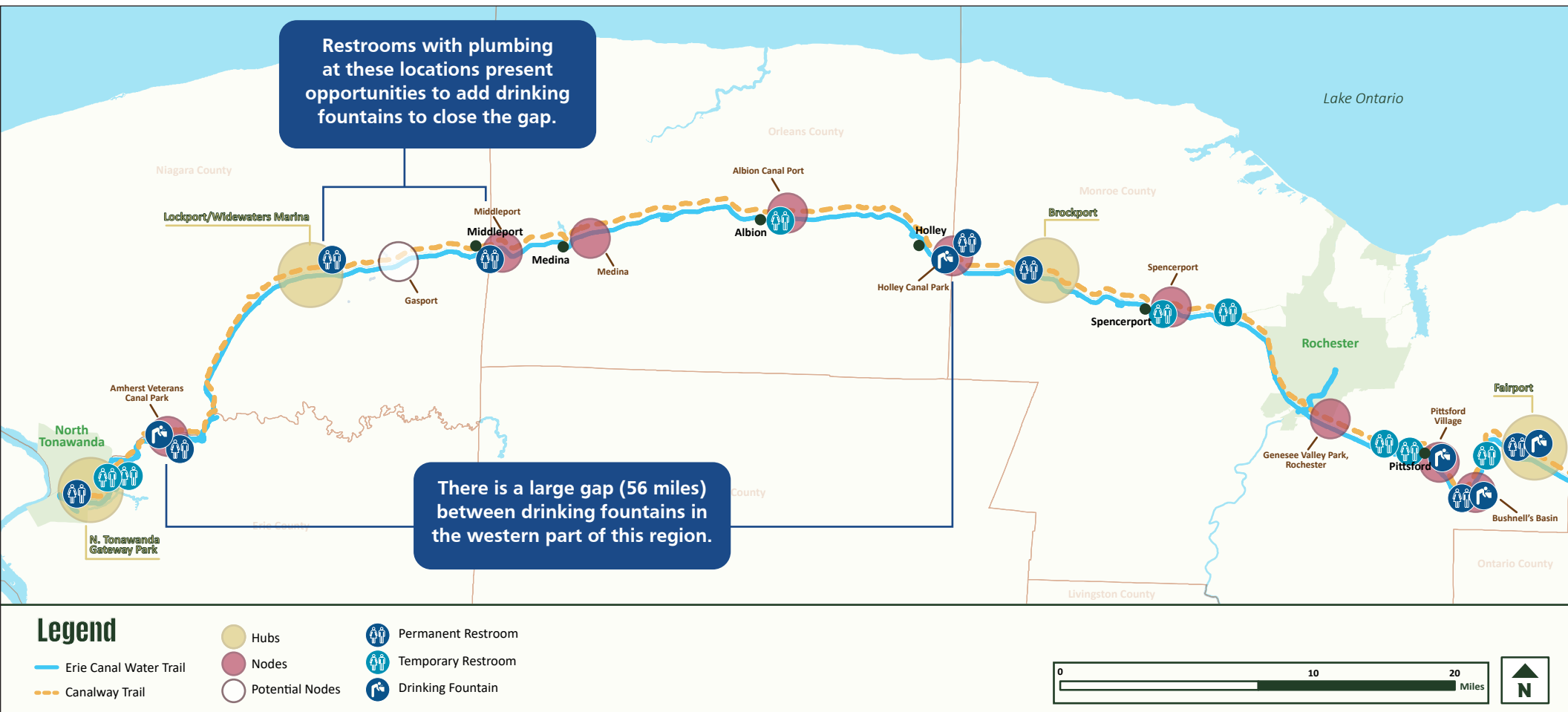
Two needs were identified for this user group.

- Hubs have strong amenities for bicyclists such as bike repair stations and bike rentals, but these are less plentiful at nodes. Additional bike repair stations should be added to node locations.
- Though the Erie Canalway Trail runs alongside the Canal throughout this region, it crosses back and forth and at times is on the opposite side of amenity centers. For example, near Bushnell's Basin, bicyclists can see shops, restaurants, and restrooms on the opposite side of the canal but it isn't obvious how to get to them. Enhanced wayfinding in this region could increase awareness of shared amenities like restrooms and drinking fountains for Erie Canalway Trail users.

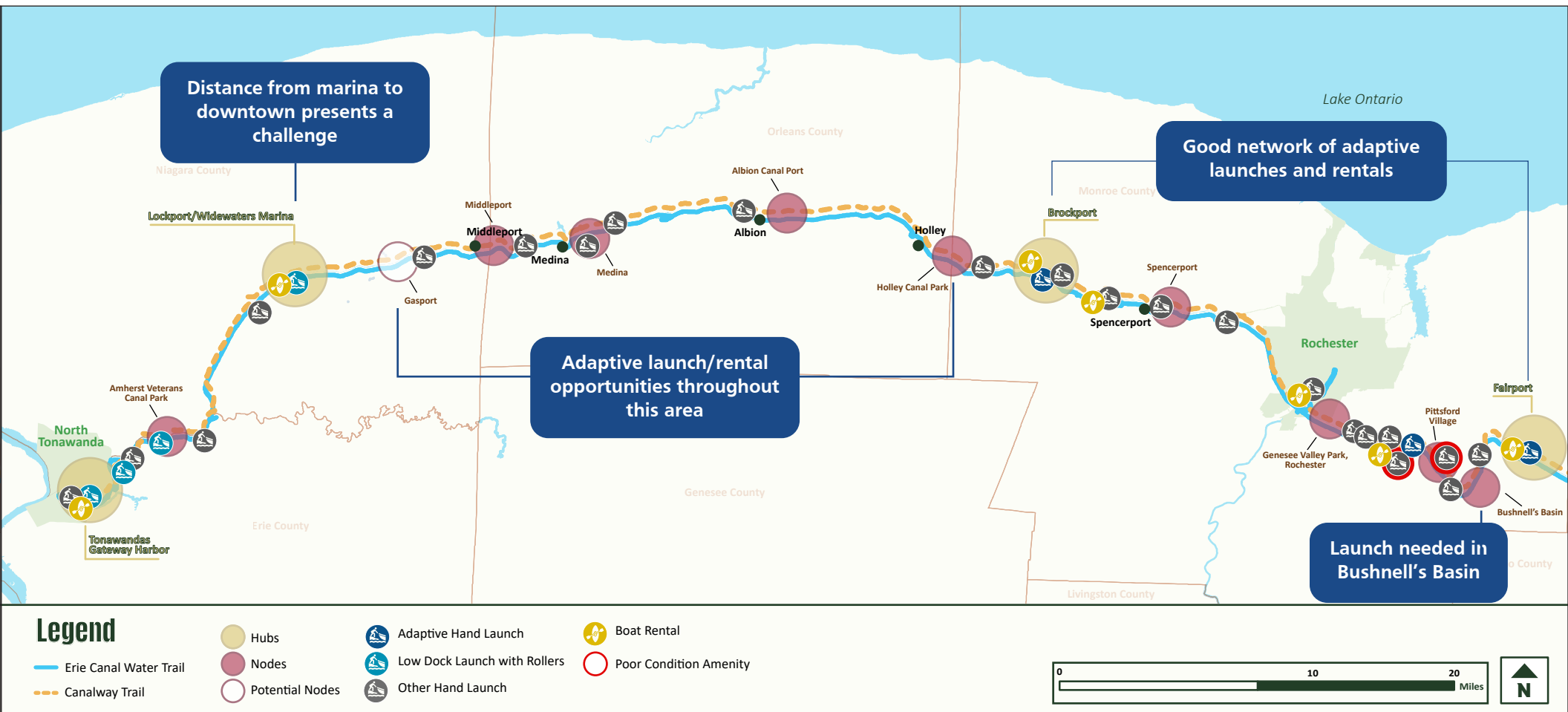
MAP 4.23. Existing Hub and Node Amenities, Region 4



MAP 4.24. Existing Shared Amenities, Erie Canal and NYS Canalway Water Trail, Region 4



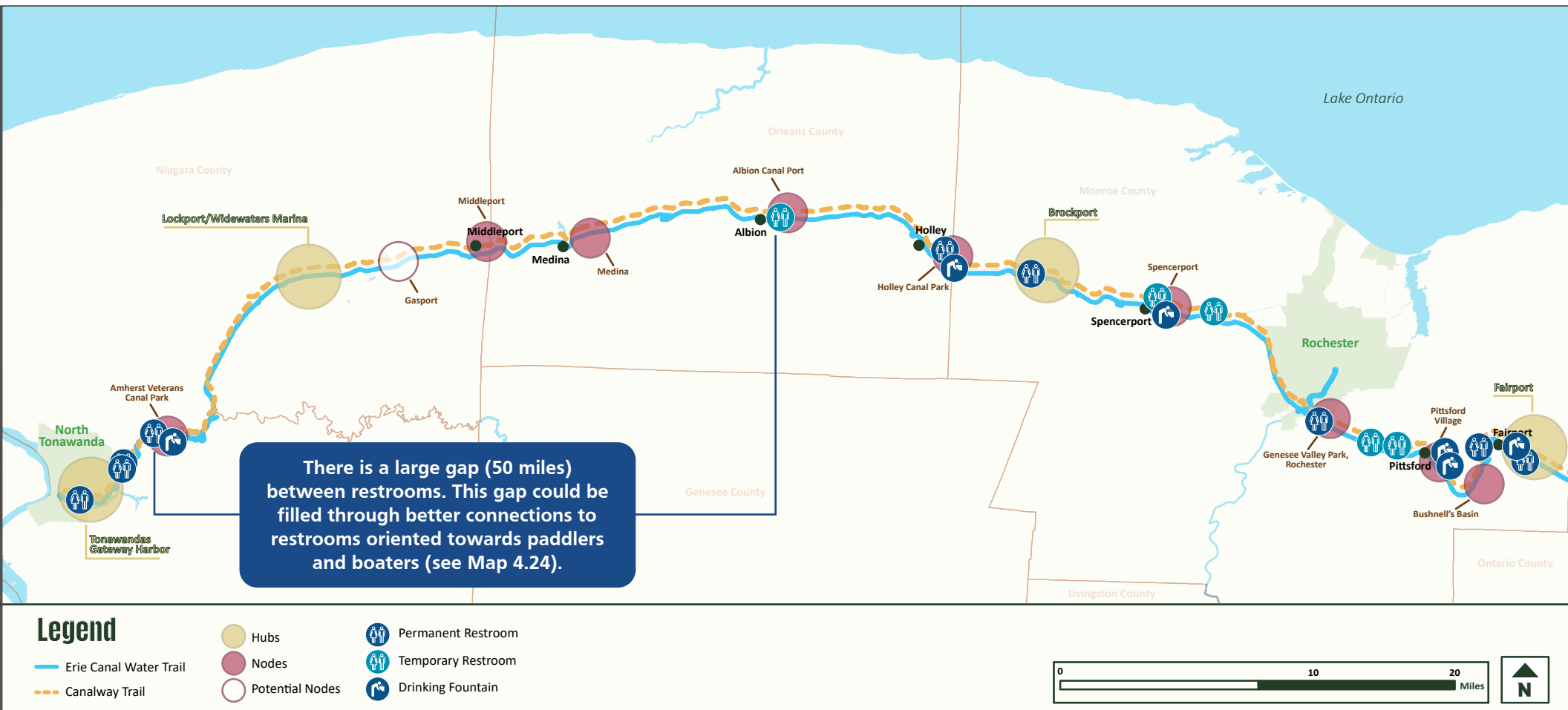
MAP 4.25. Existing Paddler Amenities, Region 4



MAP 4.26. Existing Boater Amenities, Region 4



MAP 4.27. Existing Shared Amenities, Erie Canalway Trail, Region 4



MAP 4.28. Existing Bicyclist Amenities, Region 4

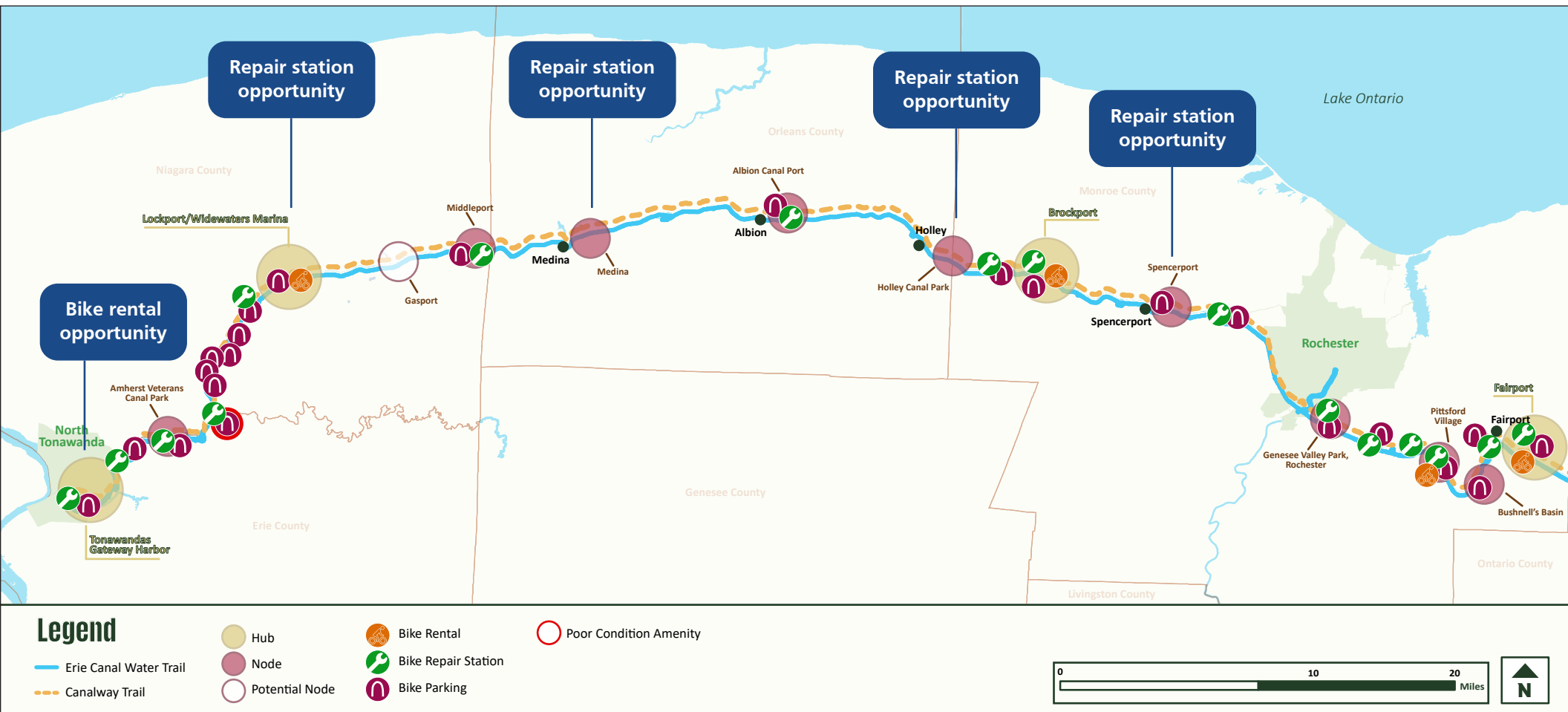


TABLE 4.4 Summary of Amenity Needs, Region 4

Hub/Node Name	Type	Amenities Needed	Municipality	County	Erie Canalway Trail Jurisdiction(s)	Land Jurisdiction(s)
Tonawanda Gateway Park	Hub	Drinking Fountain Bike Rental Adaptive Hand Launch	Tonawanda	Erie	Canal Corporation	Other
Amherst Veterans Canal Park	Node		Amherst	Erie	Canal Corporation	Canal Corporation
Lockport/Widewaters Marina	Hub	Drinking Fountain (potential) Bike Repair Station Adaptive Hand Launch	Lockport	Niagara	Clty of Lockport Canal Corporation	Canal Corporation Other
Gasport	Potential Node	Restroom Hand Launch Bike Rack Bike Repair Station	Royalton	Niagara	Canal Corporation	Canal Corporation Other
Middleport	Node	Hand Launch Drinking Fountain (potential)	Middleport	Niagara	Niagara County Canal Corporation	Canal Corporation Other
Medina	Node	Bike Rack Bike Repair Station	Medina	Orleans	Canal Corporation	Canal Corporation Other
Albion Canal Port	Node	Hand Launch	Albion	Orleans	Village of Albion Canal Corporation	Canal Corporation Other
Holley Canal Park	Node	Hand Launch Bike Rack Bike Repair Station	Holley	Orleans	Village of Holley Canal Corporation	Canal Corporation Other
Brockport	Hub	Drinking Fountain	Brockport	Monroe	Village of Brockport NYSDOT Canal Corporation	Canal Corporation Other
Spencerport	Node	Bike Repair Station	Spencerport	Monroe	NYSDOT Canal Corporation	Canal Corporation Other
Genesee Valley Park, Rochester	Node		Rochester	Monroe	Monroe County Canal Corporation	Canal Corporation Other
Pittsford Village	Node	Hand Launch Restroom	Pittsford Village	Monroe	Village of Pittsford Canal Corporation	Canal Corporation Other
Bushnell's Basin	Node	Hand Launch Bike Repair Station	Perinton	Monroe	Canal Corporation	Other
Fairport Village	Hub		Fairport	Monroe	Village of Fairport 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.