

ULSTER COUNTY
Ulster and Delaware Railroad Corridor Rail Trail Committee

Meeting Summary

June 28, 2005
Olive Free Library, Town of Olive
West Shokan, NY

Present:	Le Roi Armstead	NYS DOT Region 8
	Alex Averin	O & W Rail Trail
	Linda Burkhardt	Town of Olive
	Mircea Catona	UC Department of Public Works
	Linda Cook	Town of Hurley
	Richard Cripe	City of Kingston
	Gladys Gilbert	Catskill Mountain Railroad (CMRR)
	Jeff Graf	NYS Department of Environmental Protection
	Tom Mank	UC Transportation Council
	Karen Miller	Sustainable Trails of Mt. Tremper
	Kathy Nolan	Town of Shandaken Citizen
	Earl Pardini	Catskill Mountain Railroad (CMRR)
	Mimi Pardini	Catskill Mountain Railroad (CMRR)
	Sheldon Quimby	D & H Canal Rail Trail
	Russell Robbins	NYS DOT Region 8
	Charles Schaller	UC Traffic Safety Board
	Peter D. Sclafani	Catskill Rose of Shandaken
	Bill Tobin	UC Transportation Council
	Greg Vaughn	Catskill Mountain Railroad (CMRR)

The meeting began at 2:00 p.m. with Mr. Tobin welcoming those in attendance.

Mr. Tobin gave a brief overview of the Rail-with-Trail (RWT) project. He reiterated that this is a feasibility study only. We are proposing the study to determine if a rail trail project along this corridor is possible, and if so, how and where, and how much will it cost?

Mr. Pardini gave an overview of the history of the Catskill Mountain Railroad (CMRR):

- Ulster County purchased the Railroad corridor in 1979.
- In 1991, the CMRR signed a twenty-five (25) year lease with Ulster County.
- The CMRR is a volunteer organization utilizing 30-40 volunteers per year for track work, restoration projects, and as engineers.
- A Federal grant will add 3 miles of track and a new railroad crossing in Mt. Pleasant.
- The CMRR meets the stringent Federal guidelines required to receive funding.

Mr. Pardini noted that he has concerns with the rail-with-trail philosophy which encourages walking next to the railroad tracks. To meet the Federal guidelines, he noted that he can not allow any activity within 15 feet of the track's railroad ties (i.e. a rail-with-trail would only

be possible in stretches of the trail that have wide rights-of-way). The restrictions of steep topography would make rail-with-trail impossible in many stretches of the corridor. Also, regarding the portion of the corridor past the reservoir (mile posts 10-22) – it might be difficult to obtain permission from NYCDEP for pedestrians (currently for rail purposes only).

On the plus side, Mr. Pardini noted the opportunities that rails-*to*-trails would offer – that is the CMRR providing rail service to otherwise inaccessible trails in the bordering State forests (for example, taking the train from Phoenicia south to Cold Brook / Wilson State Forest).

Mr. Armstead reiterated that the FRA's position would be to not encourage children walking near trains.

Ms. Nolan stated that, though safety is an important issue, the literature that she has read suggests that a rail-with-trail is safer than having rail-only corridors. Having a trail adjacent to a railroad track will help discourage people from walking on the tracks.

Mr. Tobin noted that the consultant hired for this feasibility study might need to consider alternative trail alignments off the right of way for certain segments of the trail especially in areas that are inaccessible because of topography or off limits due to security concerns.

Mr. Graf stated that the NYCDEP would be unlikely to support rail-with-trail concept along the reservoir. It would be more likely to support a trail-only project. He noted that he would be providing a letter to UCTC stating their opposition to having rail-with-trail along the reservoir portion of the corridor.

Ms. Miller stated that she is attending this meeting to speak in support of more hiking and biking trail accessibility in and along the corridor.

Mr. Graf noted that the corridor west of Phoenicia was seriously damaged in the last flood (the tracks are submerged in the Esopus Creek). This might be a potential opportunity for a rail-to-trail portion of the corridor.

Mr. Vaughn noted that rails-to-trails projects usually link to abandoned properties. That area of the corridor is out-of-service, not abandoned, and there is a difference.

Mr. Pardini noted that, in addition to serving as a tourist train, the CMRR preserves the corridor for future use as a passenger rail line linking the CSX corridor. Ulster County should prepare itself to accommodate passenger rail in the future.

Mr. Armstead supported Mr. Pardini's comment adding that light rail passenger service frequently functions in the same way a collector road might, moving passengers to primary rail service lines. Especially as our population ages and no additional roads are built, we may be looking at alternatives to the automobile in Ulster County.

Ms. Miller reminded the group that walking and biking is a low cost investment in our health. Converting or linking the corridor to facilitate more hiking and biking access would benefit

all of Ulster County. For example, driving to view the fall foliage should not be our only option – we also need a walking and biking option for tourists and residents to view the foliage.

Mr. Robbins stated that, despite the concerns noted at this table, there have been many successful rail-with-trail projects built in the US – we must recognize this (ex. Beacon-Brewster rail-with-trail).

Mr. Vaughn noted that biggest challenge would be keeping the trail 15' from the tracks.

Ms. Nolan asked that if the studies [found in the rail-with-trail report and elsewhere] show potential safety improvements why not encourage this design?

Mr. Armstead questioned the validity of the studies Ms. Nolan mentioned. He also noted that mountain railroads are, in general, hard to financially maintain.

Mr. Tobin stated that in his discussions with Evan Jennings [New York Trolley Museum] they would like to connect trolley operations in the Roundout with the Ulster and Delaware Railroad Corridor behind the NYCDEP and Kingston Main Post Office.

Mr. Pardini stated that the trolley tracks through Kingston would be a challenging project. He voiced his support for the idea of a trail that deviates on and off the rail corridor right-of-way as one possible option.

Mr. Tobin asked Mr. Pardini if the CMRR would support the Committee going ahead with the rail trail feasibility study?

Mr. Pardini said we should go out and look at the trail first and offered to take us through on the train.

Ms. Nolan asked whether or not the 15 foot buffer is absolutely necessary?

Mr. Armstead responded that New Jersey Transit allows less but Amtrak and Metro North Railroad are not as flexible.

Mr. Robbins wondered why we don't add a 4th option – hiking trail only [this alternative was added for consideration to the scope of work].

Ms. Nolan summarized that we have four options: rail-to-trail (i.e. no rail), rail only (as is), rail-with-trail, and trail-on-rail (on abandoned section west of Phoenicia).

Mr. Robbins noted that at the Putnam Trailway in North County, the DEP gave approval to pave over the railroad tracks and it may be an option for this project effort.

Mr. Graf reiterated that the DEP would need to review any future proposal options.

Mr. Pardini stated that he is not in favor of paving over any track (the base will rot over time). There may be some way to do this while preserving the tracks that he doesn't know

about. He also noted his concern with hikers and bikers having to climb four mile grade. Mr. Pardini stated that the CMRR will consider the trail concept as long as the railroad tracks remain in place.

Mr. Tobin stated that we need to assemble a consultant selection sub-committee by mid-July, 2005. The consultant would need to be selected by September, 2005. The municipalities will be contacted to appoint a representative to this committee. In September this Rail Trail Committee should meet with the retained consultant for a project meeting. It was suggested that we change the name of the study effort to something other than "Rail-With-Trail" since this implies a decision has been made on which alternative has been selected. A name for the study effort was recommended as follows: "Ulster and Delaware Railroad Corridor Trail Feasibility Study."

The meeting concluded at 4:40 p.m.