

ULSTER COUNTY TRANSPORTATION COUNCIL

Ulster and Delaware Railroad Corridor Trail Feasibility Committee Meeting Summary

October 12, 2005
Olive Free Library, Town of Olive
West Shokan, NY

Present:	Bill Brandt	Trolley Museum of New York
	Jim Bogner	NYC Department of Environmental Protection
	Linda Burkhardt	Town of Olive
	Mircea Catona	UC Department of Public Works
	Linda Cook	Town of Hurley
	Richard Cripe	City of Kingston
	Marianne Davis	UC Planning Board
	Randy Dickinson	Federal Railroad Administration
	Peter Disclafani	Citizen of Shandaken
	Jeff Graf	NYC Department of Environmental Protection
	Laura Lemire	NYSDOT Region 8
	Kathy Nolan	Citizen of Shandaken
	Jeff Olson	Alta Planning and Design
	Jim Rapoli	NYSDOT Region 8
	Russell Robbins	NYSDOT Region 8
	Charles Schaller	UC Traffic Safety Board
	Bill Tobin	UC Transportation Council

The meeting began at 10:15 with Mr. Tobin welcoming those in attendance. Mr. Tobin presented a brief overview of the project.

Mr. Tobin introduced Mr. Olson from Alta Planning and Design.

Mr. Olson gave an overview of the scope of the project. Task 1 of the study was today's meeting. He said background information had been collected and he has begun to build a geographic information system (GIS) database. Mr. Olson presented a map of the project area and invited attendees to comment. A safety analysis needs to be performed for the reservoir area. Mr. Olson said he, Mr. Tobin and NYC DEP representatives will be taking walking tour of the trail after the meeting. There will be a series of public meetings with alignment options. A final report should be completed by spring 2006.

Mr. Olson asked if there were any additions.

Mr. Tobin asked about an interlocking, portable platform concept over the railroad tracks to facilitate the trail system's implementation in areas where right-of-way is limited while preserving the rails and ties underneath.

Mr. Olson indicated a company called Safety Path makes cantilevered bridges that are light enough to be removed if conditions or situations change.

Mr. Tobin stated there may be a need for alternative alignment [referring to the NYC DEP lands].

Mr. Graf said the portion that was directly on the reservoir was a big issue and there is a bridge that needs to be replaced.

Mr. Tobin asked for clarification if they wanted the trail closer to Route 28 or the shore of the reservoir.

Mr. Graf responded “away from the shore.”

Mr. Olson stated that we may not be able to do portions of the trail due to setbacks but he hoped to find out.

Mr. Tobin said it is the desire of the County to maintain a trail system that is seamless.

Mr. Olson said that it may not work in the short-term but might in the future.

Mr. Bogner asked if construction was open ended or were we shooting for minimal cost and disturbance.

Mr. Olson stated the role as a committee was to make sure it was in the draft report. The plan will be flexible given available resources. This is part of looking five to fifteen years into the future.

Ms. Nolan stated that the Town of Shandaken had recently completed GIS and other planning work and suggested we involve hiking and cycling groups to get ideas. They would know where nodal (access) points are and could be helpful as to what they want or need.

Mr. Robbins stated the public involvement section looks general and does not give locations for meetings or who would inform the press.

Mr. Tobin said those would be done by UCTC staff. Ms. Nolan offered her assistance to help with public involvement on the west end of the trail system.

Ms. Burkhardt offered the Town of Olive’s meeting hall would be a good location for a future public meeting.

Mr. Olson stated he had compiled a list of issues and questions for the Committee. The list included the following:

1. Right of Way ownership and NYC DEP ownership of land.
2. How best to illustrate the trail system (in sections)
3. Meeting schedule and public meeting dates

4. Proposed rail improvements (Catskill Mountain Railroad Plans)
5. Change in use process
6. Status Belleayre Resort Development Plans

Mr. Olson asked if the Town of Shandaken was doing an Open Space Plan. Town of Shandaken attendees were unsure of any open space planning efforts. Mr. Tobin replied that Ulster County is currently developing a countywide open space plan.

Mr. Olson stated he had GIS information and documents and asked Mr. Tobin if he would e-mail a previous PowerPoint presentation to him. Mr. Olson stated the electronic version would be helpful to him, he added that he had the deeds but needed the dimensions of the railroad.

Mr. Tobin stated we have Ulster and Delaware Railroad Corridor parcel maps from one end of the County to the next.

Mr. Olson asked if they included the width of the corridor. Mr. Tobin did indicate they had the dimensions he was looking for.

Ms. Nolan stated that the width of ROW varies along the corridor.

Mr. Tobin added that certain segments had been deeded over to property owners. Some properties also have easements.

Ms. Nolan said that the right-of-way has been abandoned in some circumstances and people have lawns spilling over into the right of way.

Mr. Graf said the NYC DEP could provide maps for their portion of the railroad corridor. The NYC DEP owns the land and the railroad has easements to use for rail purposes.

Mr. Olson stated the railroad and the reservoir have an interesting history.

Mr. Graf said that the railroad had to be relocated when the land became the City's property and an easement was granted.

Ms. Burkhardt added that the railroad ran from Kingston to Brown's Station which is now underwater.

Mr. Olson stated that any changes to the right-of-way would require legal work.

Mr. Graf said it would require a lower Environmental Impact for a footpath than for a rail with trail which would be a major impact.

Mr. Dickinson added that this was a major consideration that it would not be using foresight to plan on just a footpath, the project should be designed with a rail in mind or it may have to be revisited in the future.

Mr. Tobin stated the Catskill Mountain Railroad has plans for establishing passenger rail service from the Belleayre Mountain Ski area to the City of Kingston.

Mr. Graf said it was his opinion that people would benefit more from a walking/biking trail than a pay-per-ride tourist train ride service.

Mr. Tobin stated that all rights and responsibilities for utilizing the Ulster and Delaware Railroad Corridor were conveyed to the Catskill Mountain Railroad Corridor by the County of Ulster in 1991 for the term of the lease agreement (2016).

There was some discussion as to whether the Catskill Mountain Railroad was in default of their lease.

Ms. Burkhardt stated that historically, the railroad was an important part of this area. She said that biking and hiking were important, too, but would like to preserve the heritage of the Railroad Corridor as well.

Mr. Tobin stated the Committee could consider assigning a theme to the trail such as "Heritage Trail" whereby the Corridor could provide for multiple modes (passenger rail, walking, bicycling) and offer historical and cultural information kiosks along the way for visitors and users.

Ms. Nolan asked about what the consult was planning to do about areas of the Corridor that didn't offer sufficient right-of-way to facilitate a hiking or biking trail.

Mr. Olson said that they would be going out after the meeting to visit areas that weren't wide enough or too close to the reservoir. Mr. Olson asked if further from the water was better.

Mr. Graf stated there could be security concerns.

Mr. Robbins stated that there was a trail near the Croton Reservoir halfway to Brewster continuing up the Maybrook Line.

Mr. Graf asked if it was a complete conversion from rail to trail.

Mr. Robbins said yes and that it was very expensive as previous pavement was used.

Mr. Graf stated that the study could make recommendation flexible enough to consider using less expensive improvements.

Mr. Rapoli stated that the City of Kingston has been looking at areas northwest of Kingston as potential Trolley line extensions. The City of Kingston is clearly interested in safeguarding its portions of the Ulster and Delaware Railroad Corridor for passenger rail utilization.

Mr. Tobin asked if this is in connection to the Trolley Museum.

Mr. Rapoli stated this refers to the Washington Avenue corridor by the Dutch Village. Mr. Olson said that we would like to have the corridor reasonably intact and asked if the trail would be an advantage to the NYC DEP for maintenance or inspection purposes.

Mr. Graf stated that it would be of minimal benefit. The NYC DEP has their own access points.

Mr. Olson said that a service road would be needed to maintain the rail.

Mr. Tobin stated that cuts and trestles in the Catskill Mountains prevent the building of a maintenance road.

Mr. Graf said that on parts of the trail there is no chance for a side-by-side trail whether it is due to a berme or proximity to water.

Mr. Olson said this may divert the trail a significant distance from the existing railroad corridor.

Ms. Burkhardt stated that a problem in the Boiceville area is that a bridge is in extremely poor condition and not owned by the town.

Mr. Brandt stated that there is a railroad bridge up from that bridge that will cost up to a million dollars to fix.

Mr. Robbins stated that having a plan doesn't mean funding will be available. Until 2016, the tracks are tied up with a lease. The Committee should look for different uses for the next 10 years and be realistic with funding limitations.

Mr. Graf suggested asking the railroad for a copy of their plan.

Mr. Tobin agreed to try and obtain a copy of the Catskill Mountain Railroad plan [two different plans have been acquired since this meeting].

Mr. Dickinson was surprised the railroad was not being represented at the meeting.

Mr. Tobin stated the railroad was invited but indicated it was difficult for them to attend because of day time employment responsibilities.

Mr. Dickinson added that the future of rail is in passenger transportation as fuel costs will make individual transportation expensive. In 10 to 30 years, the emphasis will be on mass transit projects. He stated requests for funding to support mass transit, such as passenger rail, will be looked upon more favorably. He strongly suggested planning on passenger rail now.

Mr. Olson stated that we need to look at the Belleayre Mountain Resort area and the impacts of passenger rail.

A discussion regarding the current status of the proposed Belleayre Resort followed.

Ms. Nolan stated that even without the resort, Shandaken is growing.

Mr. Graf added that Belleayre has year-round activities, such as the concert series.

Mr. Olson had a question about not seeing the Catskill Mountain Railroad Corridor in the County's long range transportation plan.

Mr. Tobin stated that the County's transportation plan had recently been updated, from a 2003 version where there was little said about the corridor. The recently updated long range transportation plan also provides little information about the corridor. This is mostly due to the fact that a private operator [Catskill Mountain Railroad] has ownership over the corridor.

Ms. Nolan suggested contacting Peter Carofano who serves as a contact person for the Ulster County Railroad Advisory Group.

Ms. Cook stated that Sheldon Quimby would also be a good resource for regional trails planning.

Mr. Olson displayed a map of the corridor area and illustrated how it could be divided into sections for a more specific analysis of corridor segments.

Mr. Robbins suggested breaking down the projects by municipality. NYSDOT seeks a municipal agreement when approving the plan. The Ulster County Transportation Council will move to prioritize corridor segments for improvement.

Ms. Burkhardt asked how corridor improvements are to be funded.

Mr. Tobin stated that, while money is needed, a plan is needed also. This Committee needs to develop a plan and formulate recommendations with costs. The Plan is expected to be completed in about one year. Timing is ideal since the next UCTC Transportation Improvement Program (TIP) application process begins about the same time this feasibility study nears completion.

Ms. Burkhardt asked in what areas the railroad corridor was not in use.

Mr. Tobin stated from about the reservoir to Kingston and from about Phoenicia to Belleayre Mountain.

Mr. Tobin stated that from Kingston to Boiceville was a high priority segment for initial improvements.

Mr. Rapoli said the map made sense and stated we should look at constructability, to see which is easiest to construct. The railroad is receptive to the trail concept but maybe there is a section currently in use by the railroad that could be used as a pilot.

Mr. Tobin suggested the Mount Tremper area behind the Emerson Place as a demonstration segment that may be easy to implement.

Mr. Graf stated that there are already rail trails on Route 209 and recommended, as a high priority, the Ulster and Delaware trail system link up with the Route 209 trail system.

Ms. Cook stated this effort was already in progress.

Mr. Schaller stated that there have been disputes over property in the area and the boundary lines need to be identified.

Mr. Olson stated that we have the deeds and parcel maps. Some of the sections may need to be reacquired or surveyed.

Mr. Brandt stated that there has been encroachment by private property owners on some segments of the railroad corridor.

Mr. Olson stated that we should schedule the remaining meetings. Two (2) committee meetings followed by two public meetings. The purpose of the last meeting would be to distribute the documents.

Mr. Tobin asked for suggestions for a location that could accommodate western Ulster County.

Ms. Burkhardt offered to check on the Town Meeting Hall on Bostock Road in Shokan.

Ms. Nolan stated the Kingston portion could be held in Kingston.

Mr. Olson said we could have one meeting in Kingston and one in the Town of Olive Olive.

After some discussion on which months would be suitable it was decided to hold the next meeting at the **Olive Town Meeting Hall on Thursday February 9th – the committee will meet at 5:00 p.m. with the public meeting following at 7:00 p.m.**

In Summary:

NYSDOT has signed Route 28 as a bike route, and is improving shoulders along the roadway as part of capital and maintenance projects.

Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) is particularly concerned with railroad safety, especially at grade crossings.

Ulster County Traffic Safety Board is concerned with roadway crossings (both RR and trail), and sees the trail as a safe way to 'get bicyclists off the road.' Mr. Shaller will send Alta Planning and Design bike/ped crash data for Routes 28 / 28a.

Kingston Trolley Museum attended to protect their interest and support the project. They own the right-of-way between in the City of Kingston to the Hudson River waterfront.

City of Kingston supports connections to the regional trail system, and the planning process. They hope to see train service materialize from the Rondout area to Belleayre Mountain.

Key Issues:

1. R.O.W. Ownership / Dimensions. Original RR alignment was moved when the Ashokan Reservoir was built. NYC DEP owns the land under the railroad, the County owns this section of the railroad as a right-of-way across city land. The R.O.W. is for railroad purposes only, and a new agreement would be required for other uses. Original valuation maps will be copied by Ulster County and provided to Alta. Note: some parcels may have reverted to private adjoining landowners, there are several encroachments in the vicinity of Big Indian. NYC DEP would anticipate less adverse impact from the trail than the railroad along the reservoir; the trail would have minimal benefit for DEP in terms of improved access for their operations and management.

2. Project Segments / Sections. review draft map by Alta, sections were defined as 1) City of Kingston, Kingston City Line to Ashokan Reservoir, Ashokan Reservoir, Existing CMRR line, Phonecia-Bellyare. Notes were made on the draft plan to initiate process for documenting existing conditions. Recommended projects could be sorted by municipal jurisdiction.

3. Review of Scope. Project scope acceptable to the Committee. Clarification was provided that Ulster County will maintain contact lists and set up RTC and public meetings, and will provide meeting notes to participants. NYC DEP stated that the scope doesn't address that there are possibly mutually exclusive alternatives, and asked that Alta be objective about the constraints of the project. The Town of Shandaken stated that their new comprehensive plan includes trail data in GIS format, and will provide this information to Alta. The town suggested involving local hiking / bike clubs, and that it is possible that rail could be used to 'bridge' constrained sections of trail. A discussion included potential rail 'push carts' or 'bio rail' alternatives. The Remsen-Lake Placid Railroad was mentioned as an example. It was noted that the initial CMRR process could have used more public involvement.

4. Meeting Schedule and Dates. RTC Meetings and Public Workshops will be combined with RTC in the afternoon and Public in the evening. Two public workshops are proposed. The next session will be on Thursday, February 9th, 5: 00 pm RTC meeting with a 7:00 pm public workshop with location TBA.

5. Location of proposed rail corridor improvements. Approximately \$1.2 million was spent on 3 miles of improvements for the CMRR on either side of the Mt. Pleasant / Route 28 crossing, including a new at-grade signal. A new 5 year plan was approved by FTA – a copy will be provided by Ulster County to Alta.

6. NYSDEP Public Use Process. Use permits are required for access on NYC DEP lands, including hiking, hunting and fishing. Bicycling and other trail uses are not currently permitted. There are more than 1,000 rowboats permitted for fishing along the Ashokan Reservoir. The weir between the two reservoir basins was closed to motor

vehicles after 9/11, and is now a popular walkway and birding site. Hundreds of people gather on the weir to watch bald eagles during the winter nesting season.

7. Belleayre Resort Development. The NYS managed ski area is increasing its operations, and is open for year-round trail use including skiing and mountain biking. There is a private development proposed on adjacent lands. The new resort concept is called the Resort at Belleayre, and features golf course, hotels and residential development. Information is available online at <http://www.belleayreresort.com/> and at www.castkillheritage.org.

8. Inclusion of the U&D Line in Existing Documents. The Ulster County long range transportation plan recommended more emphasis on trail planning; the RTC may serve as the nucleus for developing a county-wide trails plan. The U&D R.O.W. may not show up in existing transportation plans because the CMRR is private, and because there is not enough analysis of potential rail use in the corridor. Additional information may be available from Peter Carafanno, Chair of the County Rail Advisory group, or the CMRR.

NOTES:

County: CMRR lease is until 2016; lease has specific performance measures for maintaining the line in a state of good repair.

Citizen: RR is historically significant, it's how people got here, must preserve the corridor's heritage.

NYSDOT: trail across Croton Reservoir (N.County Trail) was negotiated with DEP. (will provide Alta with photos / descriptions). Also noted that previous pavements don't last as long, especially in freeze-thaw conditions. Mentioned that new roadway designs in Kingston include the RR right of way and maintain the option for future use [reference to Washington Avenue at the Holiday Inn]. MPO planning and construction funds may be available to connect the U&D and O&W / Route 209 trails (old double track section) into Kingston.

NYC DEP: Rock cuts in Hurley and below Mt. Pleasant prohibit RWT alternative due to constrained ROW (right-of-way). ROW is also on raised berms through the Reservoir lands; other alternatives may be possible.

NYSDOT: is it possible to exempt RR grade crossings on weekdays when the train isn't running?

FRA: re: future plans / funding: "the future of transportation in America is in mass transit." There will be more emphasis on projects like this. Use the railroad as a point of departure.

NYSDOT: a 'test section' [reference to a trail co-existing with an active portion of the railroad corridor] should be built to demonstrate long term feasibility; a possibility would be from Phoenicia to Mt. Pleasant.