

Castleton-on-Hudson



Main Street Association

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***ROUTE TO THE RIVER – PARTNERSHIP’S GOAL IS TO “RECLAIM OUR WATERFRONT”
Dozens pack the local firehouse to learn about modern ways to safely cross the tracks***

On Friday evening, residents of Castleton and neighboring communities along the Hudson gathered to learn about safe rail crossings and community connections to the river. The Village of Castleton-on-Hudson lost access to the river in the mid-90s when they signed an agreement with NYS Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) to close the Scott Avenue rail crossing to vehicular traffic in exchange for pedestrian access to their soon-to-be public land, Riverfront Park. The impediment to access was a CSX/Amtrak line that saw about two dozen trains a day.

At the time of the municipal agreement, New York State was anticipating an upgrade to trains with speeds over 125 miles per hour. This factored into the decision to close the crossing, which was to be one of multiple at-grade crossing closings on this section of the Empire Corridor. However, that train speed didn't pan out...and it won't. Peter Melewski, PE, F.ASCE said, "At the Scott Avenue crossing, the tracks can currently handle speeds up to 110mph. According to the 2014 High Speed Rail Tier 1 Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS), the maximum future speed in the village will remain 110mph*."

And trains that fast are not even what most people want. "The current 'need for speed' for trains should be re-evaluated. For example, with northbound trains needing to slow for the Rensselaer station just 8+/- miles to the north, there is nominal time savings if the train passes Scott Avenue at 110mph or 80mph. Studies have found that passengers tend to be more focused on reliability – 'My train will depart and arrive on-time' - rather than train speed," continued Mr. Melewski. Mr. Melewski is the owner of Peter Melewski LLC and was the consultant Principal-in-Charge/RR Retainer Project Manager under which the Tier 1 DEIS was developed for the Federal Rail Administration and NYSDOT.

Castleton and other Hudson riverfront towns and villages have a strong advocate in their courts: Scenic Hudson. "Everyone deserves and benefits from safe and easy access to the Hudson River," said Jeffrey Anzevino, Scenic Hudson's Director of Land Use Advocacy. "For far too long, the Village's undeveloped municipal riverfront park has awaited behind an imposing fence denying residents their public riverfront access, an inalienable right guaranteed under the Public

Trust Doctrine. Around the corner, struggling Main Street businesses would benefit from the activity generated by a riverfront park.”

NYSDOT has offered to build a multi-million-dollar bridge in the Village that would severely impact the footprint of the park, the land on the east side of the tracks, and the skyline in the Village. The Village would be responsible for maintenance and upkeep of the bridge as well as the elevators. Experts and many in the Village feel this is not the best solution to the problem. Enter state-of-the-art technology.

Mr. Anzevino added, “Public agencies and communities in other States have found common sense solutions that reduce risk along passenger rail lines by using modern gates and warning devices. Scenic Hudson is committed to working with the Village of Castleton-on-Hudson to explore these options in order to provide residents safe and equitable public river access at their park.”

At the meeting, residents watched videos and learned more about state-of-the-art technology – gates that use the trains’ own signals to open and close. These types of gates are being used in California, Illinois, Washington and Pennsylvania, yet they’re not even being considered in New York.

“In other states, Amtrak has found ways to peacefully co-exist with bordering communities. Yet, the Village of Castleton-on-Hudson is cut off from the river and is used as a speed track for Amtrak to make up time, despite the fact that some residences are within 15’ of the rail. It’s time that Amtrak and NYSDOT stopped treating the Village of Castleton as collateral damage,” said Lissa D’Aquanni, Trustee with the Village of Castleton-on-Hudson.

Suzanne Donnelly said, “The Castleton-on-Hudson Main Street Association supports safe at-grade access to the inaccessible Village-owned riverfront parkland. This scenic peninsula of property is a conduit for community accessibility to our majestic Hudson River and the economic stability of our Main Street. We are excited that with state-of-the-art technology, the Castleton crossing can be the prototype for the safest at-grade rail crossing in New York State.” Ms. Donnelly is president of the Main Street Association.

At the meeting, some things just seemed obvious to those in attendance. When faced with the prospect of an expensive 30’ high bridge with a large footprint that would be difficult to maneuver with gear in tow, Theresa Scandurra, a 30-year resident of Castleton said, “In an age where we have cars that drive themselves and I can adjust the temperature in my house with my phone, why are we using a 20th century solution to address how to safely cross the tracks?”

Route to the River is a coalition of organizations, including the Castleton-on-Hudson Main Street Association and Scenic Hudson, Inc., and individuals that have joined together to advocate for safe and equitable at-grade access to the Hudson River in Castleton.

** Source: Exhibit ES-2 / Corridor Map of Build Alternatives / Tier 1 DEIS / Page ES-9*

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