

# Churchill: Give Castleton back its Hudson

The Rensselaer County village, cut off from the river in 1994, is the victim of a broken promise

By [Chris Churchill](#) Nov 21, 2023



In Castleton-on-Hudson, a fence blocks access to the river.  
Chris Churchill/Times Union

CASTLETON-ON-HUDSON — We humans are capable of remarkable achievements. We put a man on the moon. We discovered penicillin and put it to good use. We developed supercomputers the size of our hands, miraculous devices for the rapid distribution of cat videos. But what we are unable to accomplish is also often remarkable. For example: We can't manage to get residents of Castleton-on-Hudson to the river.

Doing so wouldn't require a hovercraft, a transporter or any sort of magical invention. For the most part, we're talking old-school technologies here. A railroad crossing would do the trick, as would a tunnel. And yet, the task just doesn't get done. Since 1994, residents have lacked access to the

water that gives the village its name.

The consequences of that are significant. Up and down the Hudson, towns are using the river and its recreational opportunities to boost economic development. Across the water in Coxsackie, for example, there's a new waterfront hotel and restaurants overlooking the river. A redeveloped park on the water has helped [rejuvenate the nearby business district](#).

In Castleton-on-Hudson, such progress has been thwarted.

Yes, some of that is just bad luck. The Amtrak tracks that run along the waterfront are necessary, but make access difficult. But difficult shouldn't mean impossible.

As Mayor Joe Keegan said, the village was victimized by a broken promise. The village agreed to seal off a grade crossing that leads to Riverfront Park with tall fencing and a locked gateway, on the state's assurance that it would be a tunnel under the tracks. The village is still waiting.

"This is about fairness and following the law," Keegan said in a written statement. "It's time for New York to honor its legal commitments, reopen this crossing and help us enjoy our beautiful riverfront."

Indeed, it is. But Keegan isn't the first mayor to make the request. Others have said the same, and residents have pleaded for action. The state Department of Transportation hasn't budged. The water remains so close, but too far.

The argument the DOT makes is about safety. An at-grade crossing to get to the park is not compatible with trains that at times travel through the village at more than 100 mph, the department said.

On the face of it, that's not an irrational argument. But here's the thing: Just 600 feet to the south of the shuttered riverfront park sits the Castleton Boat Club, which is accessible by pedestrians, cars and trailers pulling massive yachts, all of which cross over the tracks when the gates aren't down for an approaching train.

If such a system is too risky at the park, why is it OK at the club? What could be more cumbersome, slow and potentially dangerous than pulling a yacht over the tracks? In all honesty, the discrepancy looks and feels like blatant classism, as a July report from Scenic Hudson on access up and down the river highlights.

"Allowing the private crossing to the boat club while preventing public access to the municipal waterfront park not only prevents local residents, adjacent businesses and the general public from enjoying the benefits of access to the Hudson River but carries with it the perception of privilege and inequity," the report said.

That's exactly what it does. Different standards so close together are blatantly unfair.

And as the Scenic Hudson report also noted, the problem could be fixed with the construction of "state-of-the-art fence/gate equipment" that will provide ample warning of incoming trains while

allowing residents to get to the river. This shouldn't be a mind-blowing proposition; similar gates are common elsewhere.

Scenic Hudson, echoing an oft-heard request from village officials, also recommends reducing train speeds through the village to a 90 mph maximum, which is hardly unreasonable. The step would only add about two minutes to the train trip. But slower trains — and access to the water — would add immeasurably to the quality of life in the village.

The broader issue is familiar in Albany and other places with commuter traffic. People who are merely passing through a community shouldn't be prioritized to the extent of erasing the community's sense of place. Balance is needed.

Castleton-on-Hudson exists because of the river, and the brightest version of its future also depends on water access. Cutting the village off from the Hudson is like denying it sustenance. It's cruel and unreasonable, especially when the solution is within reach.

Putting a man on the moon? That was hard.

Getting Castleton-on-Hudson residents to the river? It's doable — and should have been done already.



By [Chris Churchill](#)

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