

Ulster & Delaware Railroad Corridor

"U & D Rail + Trail"

Trail Feasibility Study

Final Report - Executive Summary

July, 2006



This report was prepared for the Ulster County Transportation Council by Alta Planning + Design (www.altaplanning.com), in cooperation with the Ulster County Rail Trail Committee. Funding and in-kind support were provided by the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA), Ulster County, and the State of New York. This document is based on information presented in prior task reports developed during the course of this study, including:

Existing Conditions Summary
Needs Identification and Safety Assessment
Trail Alignment and Feasibility Assessment
Preferred Alignment and Recommendations

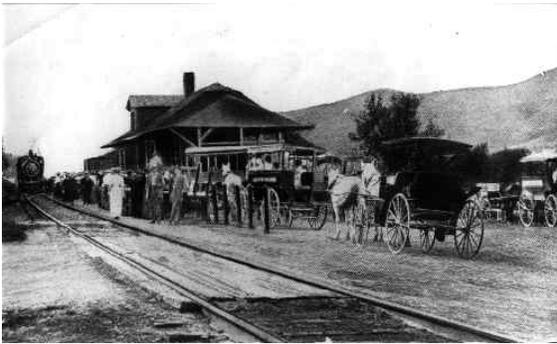
Ulster County Transportation Council
244 Fair Street
PO Box 1800
Kingston, NY 12402-1800
P: (845) 340-3340
F: (845) 340-3429
www.ulstercountyny/planning/tran.html

Ulster and Delaware Railroad Corridor Rail Trail Feasibility Study Acknowledgements

Le Roi Armstead, NYSDOT Region 8
Karl Beard, National Park Service
Jim Bogner, NYCDEP
Bill Brandt, Trolley Museum of New York
Fred Burkhardt, Town of Olive
Linda Burkhardt, Town of Olive
Mircea Catona, UC Department of Public Works
Helen Chase, Town of Olive
Michael Comerford, NYS Police - Kingston
Linda Cook, Town of Hurley
Wally Cook, Town of Hurley
Richard Cripe, City of Kingston
Peter DiSclafani, Town of Shandaken
Randy Dickinson, Federal Railroad Administration
Dennis Doyle, UC Planning Board
Richard Edling, Trolley Museum of New York
Gladys Gilbert, Catskill Mountain Railroad
Jeff Graf, NYCDEP
Evan Jennings, Trolley Museum of New York
Harry Jameson, Catskill Mountain Railroad
Peter Kraft, UC Legislator
Laura Lemire, NYSDOT Region 8
Bruce La Monda, Town of Olive
Tom Mank, UC Transportation Council
Karen Miller, Town of Shandaken
Joe Munster, Town of Shandaken
Kathy Nolan, Town of Shandaken
Earl Pardini, Catskill Mountain Railroad
Mimi Pardini, Catskill Mountain Railroad
Sheldon Quimby, Ulster County Office of Administration
Jim Rapoli, NYSDOT Region 8
Russ Robbins, NYSDOT Region 8
Charlie Schaller, UC Traffic Safety Board
Robert Stanley, Town of Shandaken
Bill Tobin, UC Transportation Council
Greg Vaughn, Catskill Mountain Railroad

Executive Summary

The Ulster and Delaware (U&D) Railroad corridor has the potential to become a unique “Rail + Trail” system providing transportation, economic development, tourism, and recreation benefits for Ulster County and the communities along the route. The existing corridor is approximately 40 miles long, 30-66 feet wide, and includes more than 300 acres of land. The U&D line runs from the historic Rondout section of Kingston, New York to the Belleayre Ski Center at the top of the Catskill Mountains. The majority of the railroad property (38.5 miles) is owned by Ulster County and is leased to the Catskill Mountain Railroad (CMRR) by the Ulster County IDA. The City of Kingston owns approximately 1.5 miles of the railroad property that is leased to the Trolley Museum of New York, which operates the Kingston Trolley on part of the line. The other major landowner along the Corridor is the New York City Department of Environmental Protection (NYCDEP). It owns approximately 12 miles of the railroad bed along the north side of the Ashokan Reservoir, which is leased to the Catskill Mountain Railroad. Several sections of the railroad are technically ‘out of service,’ but the tracks are still in place.



Historic photo of the Phoenicia train station, which has been restored by the CMRR.

The planning process included research on the history of the railroad corridor, an analysis of existing conditions, and detailed review of opportunities and constraints. The project team took several tours of the corridor, including along the Ashokan Reservoir, through downtown Kingston, and a ride on the CMRR; and developed a photo inventory of key locations. Meetings were held with the County’s Rail Trail Committee (RTC), key stakeholders, and the public.

Key issues identified for the U&D Rail + Trail corridor during the planning process include:

- The CMRR lease is for 25 years and began in 1991. The Trolley Museum lease with the City of Kingston is for 99 years. Both rail operations were considered as existing conditions, and therefore the rail tracks will remain in any of this study’s proposed alternatives.
- Sections of the corridor are currently in need of substantial repairs and upgrades, including washouts along the Esopus Creek in Phoenicia, deterioration of the Butternut Basin culvert, and repairs to the Boiceville Bridge.
- Connect the region’s history: The unique heritage and culture should be integrated into the Rail + Trail concept.
- Shared-use trail activity is not currently permitted by NYCDEP on lands around the Ashokan Reservoir. Any uses, other than the railroad, within reservoir lands would require NYCDEP approval.

- Walking and bicycling account for more than 5% of all commuter transportation in Ulster County, but use of these modes declined by 11% from 1990-2000. With rising fuel costs, the need for increased non-motorized transportation will continue to be an important issue for the region.
- Cardiovascular disease accounts for more than 30% of all fatalities in Ulster County. This is consistent with the widely documented national obesity epidemic. There is a need for increased physical activity in Ulster County, especially for children.
- There are more than 100 rail-with-trail projects in the U.S., and both rail and trail use can be part of a corridor preservation strategy.

Based on the available information and input, the consultant presented a series of alternative scenarios, ranging from a paved shared-use path for walking, bicycling, running, and other uses parallel to the railroad for the length of the corridor to a more rustic single track trail for hiking and mountain biking, to a ‘hybrid’ concept with a mix of rail and trail uses. The ‘hybrid’ concept is presented as the preferred alternative, connecting 40 miles of rail and trail facilities from the Hudson River in Kingston to the Belleayre Ski Center. Key connections would be made to the Long Path and NYSDEC hiking trails in the Catskill Forest Preserve.

The project will require a public-private partnership between Ulster County, the City of Kingston, New York City DEP, the Catskill Mountain Railroad, the Trolley Museum of New York, NYSDEC, and other organizations. Due to right-of-way, environmental, financial, and other constraints, a continuous railroad service with a parallel shared-use path is not currently feasible along the entire corridor. However, a continuous facility can be developed that utilizes a combination of railroad, trail, and rail-with-trail sections to create an innovative, 40-mile “rail + trail” system. The project is illustrated in the map on the following page. Detailed section maps are provided in the full report, as follows:

Section 1: Rondout Trolley Trail

Section 2: Downtown Kingston Trail

Section 3: O&W Trail Connector

Section 4: I-87 to West Hurley Station

Section 5: West Hurley to Boiceville

Section 6: Boiceville to Phoenicia

Section 7: Phoenicia to Highmount

Creating the 40-mile U&D Rail Trail project will take a sustained effort with many partners. Both the CMRR and the Kingston Trolley have relied primarily on volunteers and grants for their support. In order to advance the project, the following ‘next steps’ have been identified:

- **Preserve the Right-of-Way:** Regardless of the outcome of this report, it was the consensus of all participants involved in the project that the top priority is to ensure that the U&D right-of-way remains intact and in public ownership.
- **Conduct an Engineering Assessment:** The current railroad lease includes a provision for routine engineering evaluations of the railroad line. An annual review should be conducted for all sections of track and related structures.
- **“Early Win” Projects:** Support and action at the local level will be a key to success for the rail trail project. Local municipalities and agencies will need to be involved in creating sections of the trail that can be linked over time into the overall concept.
- **Initiate Fundraising and Grant Writing:** There are a variety of funding sources available for projects like the U&D Rail Trail, and all available opportunities should be pursued, including SAFETEA-LU federal transportation funds.
- **Set Up a Maintenance Endowment:** Many successful trails establish a fund for ongoing operation and maintenance. Starting this effort at the beginning of a trail project will help sustain effort in the future.
- **Public-Private Non-Profit Partnership:** Establish a “Friends of the U&D Rail Trail” non-profit organization to advocate for the project, and reconfigure the County RTC and/or Rail Advisory committee to include the involved agencies and organizations required to advance the project.



Participants at a U&D Rail Trail public meeting, in the Town of Olive.

The future vision of the Ulster & Delaware Rail + Trail is a significant opportunity for local communities, Ulster County, and the region. The combination of two historic tourist railroads, the trolley and railroad museums, restored historic sites, and a trail for multiple uses will compliment the tourism and recreation economy of the Catskill Mountain Region. The project can become a model of sustainable transportation and cooperation between a wide range of public, private, and non-profit partners.



A possible vision of the future for Ulster County: clockwise from bottom left: Tourists of all ages enjoy the CMRR in Phoenicia; The existing right of way at Washington Street in Kingston; A multi-modal train service in California; An artist's rendering of a new trail along the CMRR line at Washington Street in Kingston. (Photos: J.Olson)