

### **Ulster & Delaware Corridor Advisory Committee**

**DATE & TIME:** October 24, 2024 at 4:30PM  
**LOCATION:** Legislative Chambers, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor, County Office Building, Kingston  
**PRESIDING OFFICER:** Chair Collins  
**LEGISLATIVE STAFF:** Michael Tierney, Legislative Support Specialist  
**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Legislators Kovacs, Litts, Nolan, Sperry, Uchitelle  
**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Legislator McCollough  
**QUORUM PRESENT:** Yes  
**OTHER ATTENDEES:** Legislator Manna Jo Greene, Legislator Eric Stewart, Legislator Aaron Levine, Deputy Executive Amanda LaValle, Stuart Auchincloss, Kevin Smith, Ernie Hunt

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Chair Collins called the meeting to order at 4:34 PM.

Chair Collins gave the floor to Ernest Hunt, President of the Catskill Mountain Railroad, to give a presentation on the report authored at their direction from Stone Consulting.

President Hunt emphasized that CMRR is a state-designated Railroad, not a rail-ride, which allows them to access grants from New York State Department of Transportation.

President Hunt highlighted their growth and shift from a volunteer organization to an organization with employees, with payroll expenses amount to approximately \$500,000 in operating costs.

President Hunt stated rider demographics, including 81% of ridership originating outside Ulster County, which he compared with the local rail trail network utilized mostly by County residents. Those staying overnight, primarily in for their winter train rides, are an increased benefit to Ulster County through their overnight stay and increased number of meals. He stated this benefit would be compounded if the railroad was allowed to travel to the Basin Road, making the ride more attractive as a connector to the Ashokan Reservoir and Rail Trail.

President Hunt pointed to their Stone Consulting report on the feasibility of certain portions of the corridor, stating there are points in which the rock cut could be expanded, but cleared overgrowth and resolved drainage issues would allow for minimum rock cutting. President Hunt spoke to the possibility of an elevated walkway lower on the infill portion known as Stony Hollow, with an estimated cost of \$850,000. Their consulting study estimates the total cost of Trail Only would cost \$14,740,536 and \$18,457,727 for Rail With Trail. President Hunt indicated that Rail With Trail would be significantly less than either of these options, but believe Rail With Trail is the best option. President Hunt cautioned that Trail only for this portion would not be in compliance with the DOT grant for the structure at the terminus of the rail line at Basin Road, and would remove the possibility of a “destination” for CMRR, hampering their ability to grow as an organization and receive licenses to expand their themed train operations.

Legislator McCollough inquired on the percentage of overnight stays. Mr. Hunt said approximately one third of ridership stays overnight, with half of Polar Express passengers staying overnight.

Legislator Nolan referred to the economic projections compiled by Open Space Institute's economic consultants and inquired how CMRR arrived at its economic projections. Mr. Hunt stated it was accomplished in-house based on the added attraction of rail with trail. Legislator Nolan pointed out that Stone Consulting was originally hired in 2015 by Ulster County and the new report brought by CMRR was not paid for by the County. Mr. Hunt confirmed this and stated that CMRR reached out to contract for an update on the report. Mr. Hunt stated that he wanted to an additional opinion following OSI's estimation provided to the Committee previously.

Legislator Stewart referenced difficulty for a trail crossing on Route 209 highlighted in OSI's presentation and inquired what CMRR saw as a possible connection and how the ART and O&W rail trail could better connect. Mr. Hunt stated that the county could move the rail to accommodate a trail on the bridge.

Legislator Nolan inquired what the County's role would be in the construction of the building and if the County would be expected to pay. Mr. Hunt said the County's only role would be in the planning and approval process and the organization would cover the cost of capital improvements.

Legislator Nolan inquired about potential remediation regarding fill and referenced creosote ties requiring expensive removal during the construction of ART. Mr. Hunt said this fill would be rock created through the widening of the corridor required for rail with trail. Legislator Levine asked about the logistics of removal. Mr. Hunt said they have the equipment to remove the fill. Chair Collins stated the stoney hollow area is a federally designated wetland, and asked how that would be addressed. Mr. Hunt stated that the plan is for the wooden walkway to be anchored to the fill and elevated above the wetland.

Following the close of questions the Committee stated they would like to have the Departments of Tourism and Economic Development come to provide information on the economic impacts to Ulster County CMRR and the trail network have.

### **Adjournment**

**Motion By:** Legislator Kovacs  
**Seconded By:** Legislator Litts  
**TIME:** 5:43 PM  
**Respectfully Submitted By:** Michael Tierney, Legislative Support Specialist  
**Minutes Approved:** January 23, 2025