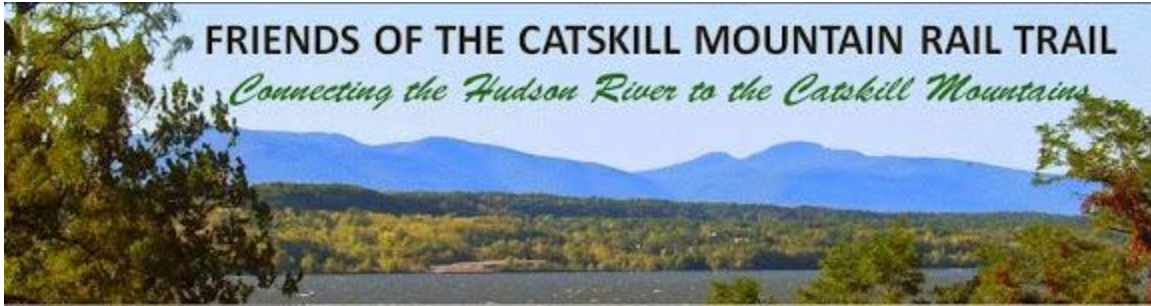




Statement Regarding Ulster County Resolution 451 and the Basin Road Trestle

The Friends of the Catskill Mountain Rail Trail is surprised and disappointed by the Ulster County Legislature's decision to withdraw Resolution 451. Despite recent media coverage, and notwithstanding the Catskill Mountain Railroad's (CMRR) pressure campaign against it, the issue of removing and replacing the Basin Road trestle should not be controversial.

"Everyone agrees we need a bridge over Basin Road, yet the current bridge represents a liability to Ulster County," coalition member and retired National Park Service professional Karl Beard said. "This resolution would have solved the problem at no cost to the county or to the CMRR company."

Resolution 451 would have authorized the replacement of the deteriorating Basin Road railroad trestle with a new, active transportation bridge that met both national safety standards and Americans with Disability Act requirements. This project guaranteed a connection between the east side of Basin Road and the Ashokan Rail Trail (ART), and it addressed a critical vehicular safety hazard **at no cost to Ulster County taxpayers**.

A Choice Between Public Safety and Unfunded Risk

The current bridge has a vertical clearance of only 11.5 feet, well below the 14-foot safety standard for public roads. It has been struck by vehicles multiple times, placing the county on notice of unsafe conditions. Replacing the bridge is also an immediate logistical necessity for the NYC Department of Environmental Protection's (DEP) Ashokan Century Program. Without this replacement, construction traffic must detour, adding approximately 750,000 truck miles to local roads and generating substantial amounts of carbon and other emissions.

"Resolution 451 represented a win-win for Ulster County," said Kevin Smith, coalition chair. "It solved a liability issue, kept heavy trucks off our neighborhood streets and

ensured future trail connectivity — all fully funded by the NYC DEP. Rejecting this is a gamble with taxpayer money."

Correcting the Record on Funding

Before the resolution was withdrawn, CMRR had proposed amendments to keep the existing trestle and raise it for future train use. The proposal relied on the claim that the NYCDEP has agreed to fund this modification. **This is false.**

DEP only committed to funding the active transportation bridge. DEP will not fund, construct or permit dual rail and active transportation bridges. Adopting the CMRR's amendment would force the county to reject a guaranteed, fully funded project and could leave Ulster County taxpayers liable for the significant costs of raising an obsolete structure.

Protecting the "Trail Only" Policy

The CMRR's push to maintain rail infrastructure at Basin Road masks a larger intent that contradicts established policy. The bridge connects directly to DEP property on the west side of Basin Road, which has been designated "Trail Only" since 2015. The railroad's operating permit ends nearly 1.7 miles east of this location, and it has no legal authority to operate on the bridge.

Resolution 451 was entirely consistent with a decade of thoroughly-reviewed county policy as well as several agreements between Ulster County and NYCDEP, all approved by the legislature. Key among these is Resolution #488 of 2015, which established a policy for segmented "rail with trail" along the U&D Corridor. Resolution 488 was exhaustively studied, discussed and agreed-to by all parties including CMRR, and it was passed unanimously by the county legislature. Furthermore, it has been a resounding success, allowing for the creation of the Ashokan Rail Trail that now attracts more than 140,000 visits per year and supports \$5.3 million in annual visitor spending at surrounding area businesses. Allowing CMRR to operate west of Basin Road would upend that success.

In recent correspondence, the CMRR revealed a desire to run "longer trains" past Basin Road and establish "rail-with-trail" on the western side. This violates the 2015 policy and multiple legally binding UC-DEP agreements approved by the legislature for the Ashokan Rail Trail, which specifically preclude rail operations anywhere on reservoir property.

"If the railroad succeeds in overturning the 'Trail Only' policy to expand westward, it could force the county to rip up sections of the Ashokan Rail Trail and potentially require

repayment of millions in grant funding," said Nick Mercurio, a coalition member and a retired NYSDOT project manager. "CMRR had exclusive control of this corridor for 30 years, and it languished and deteriorated during that time. We must not allow CMRR to turn back a decade of progress."

Making Connectivity Controversial

Resolution 451 was also completely independent of the engineering study currently underway on the undesignated section. Regardless of the outcome of the ongoing study, that section ends at Basin Road, as is well accepted. The resolution's sole focus was the crossing of Basin Road, and since the area immediately west of Basin Road is already occupied by the Ashokan Rail Trail, the only uses a bridge must accommodate are bicycle and pedestrian uses.

What Will We Do?

Although we had not previously thought this resolution neither controversial nor a "trail" issue per se, it's now clear CMRR manufactured outrage and its disinformation machine has turned it into one. We will do our best to:

- bring factual information and rational discourse to the attention of the legislature, executive branch, the media and the public.
- encourage members of the public who love the ART and the vision of extending and connecting it to the Empire State Trail to be aware of the stakes and raise their voices with their elected and appointed officials.

We strongly encourage the Ulster County Legislature to bring this resolution to the floor for a vote as soon as possible. The safety and liability issues of the current bridge must be addressed, the impacts of DEP's Ashokan Century Project must be minimized, and Ulster County residents deserve to know where the members stand on protecting the future of the Ashokan Rail Trail and the 2015 policy that enabled it.

About Friends of the Catskill Mountain Rail Trail

Friends of the Catskill Mountain Rail Trail is a volunteer coalition organized by the Woodstock Land Conservancy to advocate for a trail connection from the Ashokan Rail Trail to Kingston. It is composed of nonprofit organizations and concerned citizens from multiple communities along the Ulster & Delaware Corridor in Ulster County.

###