

LET'S RESTORE RESERVOIR RAILROADING! CATSKILL MOUNTAINS, NEW YORK

"LET'S RESTORE RESERVOIR RAILROADING!" Music and pictures portray a capsule history of the Catskill region. Imagine the charming country railway around the Ashokan Reservoir running again. This tourist-generating engine just might pull the area's economy back into life. (15 mins.)



The Catskills already have an underutilized railway system, which could be a real draw for families and railroad buffs. It turns out that shoring up the tracks in just two very bad spots can revive the whole route around the Ashokan Reservoir. One part along Route 28 does now offer recreational training. Though Hurricane Irene damaged its railbed, it is still in use on a reduced scale.

The complete railway circuit returned to service might once more make the Catskills a national and international travel destination. The spectacular views over the water are only visible from the train.



When Kingston connects along the reservoir to Phoenicia, folks could take their car, a bus, a train, or a boat to Kingston and transfer to a colorful scenic railroad for transport through the Catskill Park. The rail system can later re-establish itself past Belleayre, a large all season ski center.

Hikers and bikers may trip on the train to various locations. On all day sightseeing excursions, visitors can trek from trailheads or cycle along 28A and ride the railroad back.



Such a tasteful evolution forward to the past will mark out a regional identity. Returning to yesteryear and projecting into the future, let us envision this ghost railroad around the reservoir running again.

UNITING RAIL AND TRAIL ADVOCATES

Rather than competing for access to the right of way, rail and trail supporters need to work out a full proposed route for both. The overall trailway can offer trail alongside rail, trail on 28A, and trail crisscrossing rail stop points like a rapid transit.



At hub locations, hikers and bikers can easily rejoin or disembark from the train all day. Passengers might choose to ride back and forth using open tickets. Electric jitneys or vans can enable groups of tourists to shuttle around to local attractions or trailheads once they step off the train.



Though the rails remain intact from Kingston all the way around the Ashokan Reservoir, at places the underpinning needs shoring up, at least a \$16 million investment. The federal government could be ready to provide this amount, but they require a clear non-profit conduit to receive and disburse the funds. The longstanding community institution, **Empire State Railway Museum**, located in Phoenicia, is now offering to perform this function, in order to complete the restoration of the railbed.

ALIGNING THE KEY PLAYERS

Progress in restoring this charming country railway system depends on collaboration between the key government and community actors.

The **United States** can readily afford the modest costs of repairing the railbed.

New York State has regulatory authority.

New York City owns the reservoir.

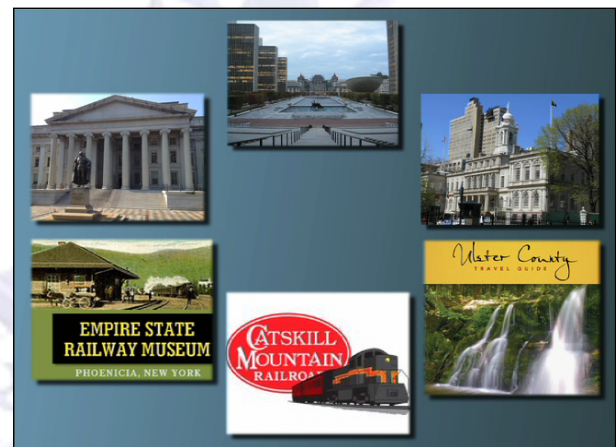
Ulster County bought the tracks and right of way in the late 1970s.

The **Catskill Mountain Railroad** holds the operating lease until 2016.

The **Empire State Railway Museum** in Phoenicia has the non-profit status necessary to apply for and disburse funds.

These entities pulling together can bring this locomotive for local prosperity back on line.

All through the boom years, the railroad served as a central nervous system for the region. Now the train runs from Phoenicia to the Coldbrook station with a few thousand passengers annually, instead of the many more who would flock to see the spectacular reservoir views only accessible by rail.



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