

WHERE OUR FUNDING COMES FROM:

In 2018, the Village received an Estuary Grant from the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC).

The grant of \$50,000 was to be used for two purposes: gaining access to Riverfront Park and design of the park.

What has the grant money been spent on?

The Village has paid two attorneys to explore the situation and make recommendations. We are currently under contract with an engineer with a strong background in rail safety who will advise the Village and represent us in upcoming negotiations. We have also hired a landscape design firm to do artistic renderings of our future park.

Spotlight: River Access

Despite owning a 3/4 acre piece of land known as Riverfront Park, which is located west of the train tracks at the end of Scott Avenue, the Village of Castleton-on-Hudson has no public riverfront access.

In 1994, the Village signed an agreement with NYS Department of Transportation (NYS DOT) to close the Scott Avenue at-grade crossing to vehicular traffic; the state agreed to provide pedestrian access to the park. After the agreement was signed, fencing, locked gates and “No Trespassing” signs were installed. A 3’ gap was left between the pillars and, for many years, people used it to access the area, primarily for fishing. In 2021, Amtrak filled in the gap with concrete blocks.

After almost three decades of trying to secure access to Riverfront Park, several public meetings and extensive discussions with NYS DOT about potential options, the Village Board of Trustees decided to petition the Commissioner of NYS DOT directly. **In January of this year, the Board convened a strategic workgroup composed of residents and advocates to focus specifically on securing safe, at-grade access to Riverfront Park using state-of-the-art technology safety features.**

Our goal is that this is the year we put ‘on Hudson’ back in Castleton’s name.



Frequently Asked Questions

Why do you think this type of crossing would be safe?

State-of-the-art safety gates would be operated by a process called “positive train control”. They would remain open until they get a signal that a train is approaching, and then they would close with plenty of time for anyone on the tracks to exit. (They can be pushed open from the track side.) They would extend low enough to keep children and pets from passing beneath. In case of equipment malfunction, they would be in a closed position. Similar safety gates are being used for commuter train crossings in Illinois, with slower-speed variations in California, Florida and Pennsylvania. To date there have been no instances of death or severe injury from trains at these types of crossings.

Why don't we just accept the bridge DOT has offered?

A bridge would need to be ADA-compliant which requires elevators or ramps. We have been offered various bridge designs from the Department of Transportation where construction would be no cost to the Village. The Board funded a project with grant money to have a bridge using only ramps designed, but felt that it took up too much space on both sides of the tracks. Maintenance and upkeep costs of a bridge would be the responsibility of the Village. There is a possibility of an increase in state funding for roads and bridges, called CHIPS funding, that could help offset these costs.

When faced with a 3-story bridge, stairs, ramps or elevators, at-grade access using safety gates is the 21st century solution to offer a safe, cost-effective, and environmentally-friendly option to improve recreation and enjoyment of our waterfront in the Village of Castleton-on-Hudson.

Can't people just go down to the State Park to enjoy the riverfront?

Schodack Island State Park is a beautiful resource that we are lucky to be near. But it costs money on the weekends. For people without cars, it's not easy to get to. It's not very walkable and biking on 9J isn't safe (although we are hopeful that a path is in our future!) The Village owns a magnificent piece of riverfront property right on Main Street that should be free and available to all people in the community. River access should not be limited to people with transportation and the means to pay for entry.

Why does the Boat Club have an open crossing but Scott Ave doesn't?

There are open at-grade crossings at the Castleton Boat Club and at Hudson River Foods/water treatment facility. These crossings are allowed because of the existing businesses and Village utilities. We agree that it doesn't make sense from a safety standpoint. Vehicles of all types, including some towing boats, and pedestrians cross the tracks to get to the Boat Club. We would like to see state-of-the-art safety gates at the Scott Avenue crossing synchronized with updated safety features at the Boat Club crossing.

Will river access change the economic scene on Main Street?

Yes! Imagine people coming to the Park to enjoy a beautiful day on the river. They might want to get some lunch and have a picnic. They can do a little shopping. Stroll along Main Street looking at an art gallery or antique shop. Coffee and pastries. Bagels. Brew pub. Kayak rental. Fishing tackle. Having river access makes Main Street much more attractive to potential entrepreneurs and investors.

PUBLIC MEETING

We are having a public meeting sometime during the Summer. Please attend! We will post time and location on the Village's website and Facebook page.

DID YOU KNOW...

“The Village of Castleton-on-Hudson is the only Hudson River community to have its municipal waterfront gated off from public use.”

-Jeff Anzevino
Director of Land Use
Advocacy, *Scenic Hudson*



“In Castleton-on-Hudson, shouldn't it be easier to get from Castleton to the Hudson? The river that made the village could remake its future.”

-Chris Churchill,
Times Union, 2014

FAQ continued

"From cutting off our river access to train speeds as they rattle our historic buildings, Amtrak has been treating Castleton as collateral damage for years."

-Lissa D'Aquanni,
Village Trustee



The River Access Workgroup meets bi-weekly and is comprised of 11 members: Jeff Anzevino, Suzanne Cecala, Sue Donnelly, Jeff Knaack, Patricia Pillsworth, Eric Samarija, Theresa Scandurra, Leslie Sharkey, Les Waite and two Trustee Members, Lissa D'Aquanni and Rebekah Timerman.

How can I get involved?

Please email Lissa or Rebekah on the Village website (www.castleton-on-hudson.org/government/board-of-trustees).

How much would building a bridge cost us?

The NYS Department of Transportation has previously offered to build a bridge with elevators, as part of the deal agreed upon in the 1990s. (Elevators or ramps are required so that it is compliant with the Federal Americans with Disabilities Act.) And in 2022, board members met with DOT and discussed a bridge idea that did not include elevators. If a bridge were to be built it would be at no cost to Village taxpayers. Upkeep, however, would be the responsibility of Village taxpayers. Safety gates operated by positive train control would not impose any upkeep cost to Village residents because they would be maintained by Amtrak.

Can the trains slow down?

That's a great question. We would like them to slow down and establish quiet zones with audible alarms at the crossings, so the trains don't have to blow 100 decibel horns, disturbing residents in buildings less than 15 feet away. We also know that slowing from 108 mph to 80 mph through Castleton would add a mere 90 seconds to the arrival time in Rensselaer. And studies show that passengers are more concerned about arrival time than train speed. However, even if the speed is reduced, a train at any speed is dangerous to people without proper safety measures. Safety gates are the logical answer and the 21st Century solution.

What happens when high speed rail comes in?

Contrary to what was assumed in the late 20th century, it has been determined that anything over 110 mph (the current maximum) on the rail line between Albany and New York City is not feasible because of track alignments and geography. This is documented in the Federal Rail Administration's High Speed Rail Final Environmental Impact Statement and confirmed by studies under several governors. It's safe to say this is the fastest trains will go through the Village.

This struggle has been going on for a long time. Could it ever actually happen?

We think so! Different Village administrations have tackled this problem over the years. Some headway has been made, but we feel we are now in a never-before-seen period of momentum. Our position is not based solely on the fact that the agreed-upon conditions were not met. Things and times have changed. High speed rail isn't coming. Technology exists that didn't previously exist. Preserving the natural environment has become a priority. The rights of individuals are being recognized. Determined people have joined with the Village and we are supported by statewide advocacy groups, elected officials, and experienced professionals.

If we get access, when would the park be open to the community?

It's hard to know the answer to that question. We don't know how long it would take to have safety gates installed. It would likely be a coordinated effort between NYS Department of Transportation, Amtrak, CSX, the Village, the Federal Rail Administration, and other state agencies such as the Departments of State and Environmental Conservation. At the same time, we will be seeking grants to repair the sea wall and create the park. Development of the park will include input from residents and environmental factors such as the projected rise of sea level. Our Local Waterfront Revitalization Program will ensure the process is in alignment with coastal zone management policies. We expect the park will be open to the community, subject to periods of construction.

A CLOSER LOOK AT SMART GATES:

Safety gates along the Schuylkill Rail Trail in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania! (left: open, right: closed)



Color the park!