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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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DOT-Amtrak meeting for Hudson River fencing plan scheduled in Germantown

The New York State Department of Transportation and Amtrak have scheduled a meeting in Germantown for Amtrak to present its plans and reasoning for installing fencing and gates along the Hudson River in Dutchess and Columbia counties.

The meeting is scheduled for Tuesday, Jan. 29, and is tentatively set to go from 5 p.m. to 7 p.m., at the Kellner Community Activities Center, 50 Palatine Park Road, in Germantown. An inclement-weather date has been set for the following Tuesday evening, Feb. 5.

The format of the meeting is unclear, as is the degree to which public comment during the meeting will be sought or considered.

On December 15, the towns of Germantown and Rhinebeck, in coordination with Scenic Hudson, held a forum in Germantown titled “Balancing Passenger Rail Safety with Public River Access,” which drew more than 100 people.

During the forum, elected officials, engineers, Scenic Hudson leaders, co-chairs of Germantown’s Waterfront Advisory Committee and attendees discussed alternatives to Amtrak’s proposed project, currently under review by the state Department of State. The forum explored alternatives designed to address the railroad’s risk concerns as well as the public’s desire for continued open access to the Hudson River. The alternatives discussed included new pedestrian grade-crossings, hosting Operation Lifesaver rail education trainings and exploring the rails-with-trails concept, which has been employed along many other rail lines in the U.S.

Democratic State Assemblymember Didi Barrett, who attended and spoke at the Dec. 15 forum, said after hearing about the scheduled Jan. 29 meeting:

"It is clear that Amtrak’s proposal has serious ramifications for the affected communities along the Hudson River. Whether engaging in recreational activities or enjoying



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stunning viewsheds, residents and visitors alike have long cherished their river. Further, this loss of public access appears to be in conflict with the NYS Coastal Management Plan, as well as the local waterfront revitalization plans of communities in the area. I hope that Amtrak will use these public meetings as an opportunity to seriously consider alternative solutions such as ‘rails-with-trails’ to ensure both river access and safety near the tracks. I look forward to continuing to partner with local leaders and Amtrak to arrive at a win-win solution.”

Republican State Senator-Elect Daphne Jordan, who will take office in January, said:

“Preserving and protecting Columbia County’s scenic beauty and ensuring access to treasured local waterways are important, bi-partisan priorities. The public having continued access to the river for boating and fishing, consideration of Germantown’s waterfront revitalization plans, ensuring public safety and exploring the possibility of state legislation encouraging rail with trail all should be part of this ongoing community conversation. I encourage everyone to attend the State DOT’s public meeting scheduled for January 29 regarding Amtrak’s fences and gates so they can have their voices heard and concerns addressed. As the newly elected state senator representing Columbia County, I look forward to taking part in this community conversation and continuing to hear from Germantown residents and all stakeholders.”

Robert Beury, Germantown’s town supervisor, has requested the meeting’s start time be shifted to 6 p.m. to ensure people working until 5 p.m. can attend. To confirm the start time, people should check [GatesGate.org](http://GatesGate.org) or the Germantown Waterfront pages on Facebook or Instagram leading up to Jan. 29.

“Before an agency can change how we access the waterfront, there must be considerable community involvement,” said Beury, who also spoke at the Dec. 15 forum. “Effective communication is critical to building and maintaining trust. Our stakeholders deserve it as of right. As government officials, whether you are elected or work for an agency, it is our duty to protect the people and their property. That is the central theme of the social contract which ties us together. There is no reasonable one-size-fits-all fences and gates model, and to plan to erect them here and there in a haphazard fashion underscores the need for the most thoughtful consideration regarding a range of questions and issues for each affected community. I look forward to working with all stakeholders and these agencies on January 29th and beyond in order to reach a reasonable, balanced outcome for Germantown.”

Lee Park, a spokesman for the state Department of State, said the scheduled deadline for declaring whether Amtrak’s proposed project is consistent with New York’s coastal management policies—which among other things encourage increased access to public waterways—is February 8. But, he added, the schedule could be amended with a mutual agreement with Amtrak. The review period was extended multiple times in 2018.



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Asked if a representative from the state's department of state will be in attendance to observe at Germantown's January 29th meeting, Park said, "We look forward to the meeting and expect to have representation there."

Earlier this year, Amtrak proposed its project—which would affect northern Dutchess County and much of Columbia County—to install fences and gates to block access to miles of Hudson River shoreline. The known target areas include places where the public has crossed the tracks to use the river at unofficial crossings. Another target area is the shoreline road, a drivable path often referred to as the access road or as the right-of-way. In Germantown, the entire river shoreline has been open and accessible to the public for generations. It is used by anglers, hunters, boaters, bird-watchers and others.

In March and April 2018, the New York State Department of State held a public comment period, during which, according to Park, the state received comments from 302 people, along with a petition with 108 signatures. The Germantown Waterfront Advisory Committee, in its second comment letter to the department, also highlighted two change.org petitions, which, by the end of the spring public comment period, carried a combined 2,059 digital signatures.

In April, the waterfront committee held a riverfront rally in Germantown, which drew about 150 people, as well as several state and local politicians who declared support for maintaining open access to the Hudson River shoreline.

The state's department of state requested that the state's department of transportation hold at least two public informational sessions for the Amtrak proposal. Mr. Park said recently that, "the information presented during Amtrak's informational sessions will determine whether DOS may hold a second public comment period."

For more information and context on Amtrak's proposal and the opposition it has sparked throughout 2018, please visit [GatesGate.org](http://GatesGate.org).

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