



The Situation:

Despite owning a ¾ 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 several decades, people used it to access the area, primarily for fishing. In 2021, Amtrak filled in the gap with concrete blocks.

There are two existing at-grade crossings in the Village. Both crossings lead to private businesses: one is used by vehicles (often towing boats) and pedestrians; the other is predominantly used by vehicles.

In the 1990s, New York State was exploring high speed rail that would put train speeds at 125 mph or more. This was one of the reasons that the Village agreed to the closure of the Scott Avenue crossing to vehicular traffic. Since then, the High Speed Rail Tier 1 Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) determined that train speeds over 110 mph (the current maximum) are not feasible between Rensselaer to Poughkeepsie. At-grade crossings with train speeds of 110 mph are permitted by the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA).

The Problem:

In 2009, NYS DOT offered to build a pedestrian overpass for the Village to access Riverfront Park. The bridge would have been approximately 35’ tall and span 100’ across the tracks. Each tower would have contained three flights of stairs and an elevator to transport people and equipment to the bridge. At that time, the Village of Castleton declined the bridge because the cost of maintenance and operations would be cost-prohibitive for taxpayers.

In 2021, NYS DOT offered the same bridge design as the sole option for accessing the municipal waterfront park. Because of the large footprint of the bridge towers on both sides of the tracks, the negative impact on the skyline, the lack of utility for transporting kayaks, and the prohibitive cost of maintenance and operations, Village residents expressed opposition to the bridge. Most recently, at two separate public meetings, residents expressed a strong desire for an at-grade crossing using state-of-the-art technology, and questioned the equity of at-grade crossings being allowed in two private locations in the Village.

In addition to the access issue, residents expressed longstanding concerns regarding train speed and noise. Buildings in the Village’s Main Street business district are within 15 feet of the Amtrak line, over which trains operate at speeds in excess of 80 mph sounding horns at 100 decibels, which creates a substantial vibrational effect and negatively impacts the quality of life for residents of and visitors to the Village’s Main Street.

The Solution:

There should be a balance between Amtrak’s and NYSDOT’s goal to transport travelers safely and efficiently with the quality of life for those who live in and visit the historic communities along the rail lines. The Village of Castleton-on-Hudson recommends the following changes:

- Replace the fencing and locked gate at the Scott Avenue entrance to Riverfront Park with a safe at-grade crossing using state-of-the-art technology, such as what is being used in other states.
- Reduce the train speeds traveling through the Village of Castleton-on-Hudson. The DEIS concluded that reliability (trains arriving and departing at scheduled times) was more important to passengers than increased speeds. Reducing the speed through the Village will minimize the risk of injury to residents playing in their backyards (just feet from passing trains), as well as the vibrational damage to the buildings.
- Install bells or other audible warnings at the gates and create quiet zones to reduce the negative impact of horn blasts from passing trains.
- Increase the advance warning system (currently only 15 seconds) and synchronize infrastructure at the Castleton Boat Club (Justus Way) and Scott Ave.
- Install signage alerting people to passing trains.