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Jan. 1, 2021

To:
Ulster County Legislators and County Executive
c/o Clear of the Ulster County Legislature
244 Fair St., 6th Floor
Kingston, NY 12401

Dear Legislators and County Executive,

I live in Boulder, Colorado and am writing to advocate that the Catskill Mountain Railroad (CMRR) is a valuable asset for the county and to ask that you grant them permission to extend the line and build a station at Milepost 10.

I rode the train when I visited over the holidays. It drew me to Kingston, as I was visiting Saugerties and learned about this opportunity to enjoy the railroad. Afterward, I shopped at Adams grocery and bought gas at a Valero. The train was full when I rode it before Christmas.

In general, I find the Catskills region a pleasure to visit. I plan to return in warmer weather and hike some backcountry trails, bicycle a rail-trail, and hopefully also ride the Delaware and Ulster tourist train and visit your Trolley Museum of New York in Kingston. Not far away are the Cooperstown and Charlotte Valley Railroad in Milford and Steamtown National Historic Site in Scranton. There are plenty of people like me who will travel from far away to enjoy this concentration of historic railroading. Plus, you have frequent Amtrak service right across the river, which offers great mobility to the region and plenty of train watching opportunities. The west side freight line also contributes as an attraction to people like me. So don't discount the importance of railroading to your tourist economy.

I am highly involved in bicycling and trails. I enjoy finding and riding rail-trails. I'm a member of Rails To Trails Conservancy and strongly support more trail development.

I have served as President of the High Country Citizens' Alliance and Senior National Policy Advisor for the International Mountain Bicycling Association, where I worked to expand trail systems. Yet I support the railroad over the trail interests who would dismantle CMRR to lengthen the Ashokan rail-trail. The trail and the railroad could complement each other if you allow the railroad to extend to MP10, which is where the rail-trail starts. I, for one, would like to put my bicycle on the CMRR train and ride west from the western station. Take a look at the wonderful Cuyahoga Valley Scenic Railroad, south of Cleveland, OH, where many people enjoy combinations of bicycling and train riding. (<https://www.cvsr.org>)

I was saddened to learn that the county government had earlier sold off 11 miles of tracks to make the Ashokan trail. You lost the opportunity to have a train running the full length of the old Ulster and Delaware RR. That could have been one of the most attractive tourist railroads in the country. At least you still do have the two railroads on that route. The Catskill Mountain Railroad is a vibrant enterprise and it brings a lot of people who would not be riding or walking the rail-trail.

A federal law facilitated a lot of America's rail-trails through a provision called "railbanking". Congress wanted to preserve these corridors for a future return of railroads. That makes a lot of sense. We have spent so much money on roads and automobiles, yet we still have a lot of traffic congestion and safety problems in our automobile and trucks system – plus a big contribution to global warming. Ulster County once had a fantastic railroad system with frequent, fast trains into New York City and Albany as well as branches bringing hordes of tourists into the Catskills. That disappeared because we subsidized their competition and spent huge public money on building roads. Railroads are far more energy and land efficient than highways, and potentially much faster. We need to support rail transportation at every opportunity.

You have such an opportunity, even it is just a short tourism train. Please help the Catskill Mountain Railroad to prosper and expand.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary Sprung". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gary Sprung