

Editorial

Rail trail progress is inspiring

They are going up, they are being extended, and they are being connected.

The progress on creating a network of rail trails in the mid-Hudson Valley has been positively stirring the past few years, after decades of what were merely the dreams of hikers and bikers and those who realized there were considerable gains to be made from “eco-tourism.”

In the past two weeks alone, significant strides have come the valley’s way.

Consider:

» Construction has begun on what will be a 21-story elevator from the City of Poughkeepsie waterfront to the Walkway Over the Hudson state park. This project will provide a critical link for the ever-popular Walkway — the centerpiece of the trail system — to city businesses below and the surrounding communities. That will be especially true when the Dutchess Rail Trail, which runs to East Fishkill, gets connected to the Walkway later this year as well. The elevator will make it easier for disabled people to access and enjoy

the Walkway, in addition to those coming via train at the nearby Poughkeepsie station.

» Meanwhile, in Ulster County, a celebration took place this weekend, and with good reason. The gem of the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail — the Rosendale railroad bridge — was re-opened, giving visitors a bird’s-eye view of the Rondout Creek gorge and the hamlet of Rosendale and connecting that trail north to Kingston. The 116-year-old trestle was in great need of repair and had been closed since 2010.

This \$1.5 million extension project has been handled with great care by the Open Space Institute and the Wallkill Valley Land Trust, with the help of many volunteers.

Of course, officials on both sides of the river have plenty of work ahead of them.

Dutchess County is in the process of building an overpass across Route 55 in the Town of LaGrange to connect two parts of the existing rail trail, and then will connect that to the Walk-

way.

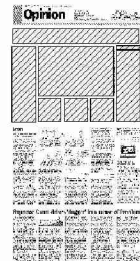
In Ulster County, segments of the Wallkill trail aren’t finished but soon will run from the Kingston area south to Rosendale, through the Village of New Paltz and into Gardiner.

Since the Walkway Over the Hudson already connects to Ulster County and the Hudson Rail Trail in the Town of Lloyd, continuing the path to neighboring New Paltz and the Wallkill trail will — and should — get intense focus in the near future.

As is, the Walkway Over the Hudson attracts about 500,000 visitors a year and pumps about \$24 million into the local economy. The expanding rail trail network has a great chance to aid businesses throughout these corridors, in addition to improving recreational opportunities for local residents.

Success hasn’t come all at once but, rather, one segment at a time.

The area must continue to capitalize on the growing strength of its trail system.





Route 213 and the Rondout Creek are seen from the Rosendale trestle bridge, which recently reopened as part of an expanded Wallkill Valley Rail Trail. KARL RABE/POUGHKEEPSIE JOURNAL