

August 4, 2020

Nonprofit announces deal to buy unused rail line, paving way for Hudson-Essex Greenway



Train tracks on the old Boonton Line owned by Norfolk Southern, as seen from Laurel Hill Park in Secaucus, which connect to the DB Draw railroad swing bridge over the Hackensack River. Norfolk Southern is seeking to sell the nearly 9 miles of abandoned rail line to the Open Space Institute (OSI) which plans to turn it into a walk and bike pathway called the Essex-Hudson Greenway between Jersey City and Montclair.

By Peter D'Auria

An open space nonprofit announced a deal to buy an abandoned rail line, bringing a proposed rails-to-trails pathway in Essex and Hudson counties one step closer to fruition.

Last month, the Open Space Institute announced that it was “actively realizing” the acquisition of the unused Boonton Line, an 8.6-mile stretch between Jersey City and Montclair.

Now, that acquisition has been finalized. On July 30, the Institute announced that it had

reached a deal with Atlanta-based Norfolk Southern Railway to buy the former railroad.

Kim Elliman, president and CEO of the nonprofit organization, said in a press release that the deal was a “once in a generation opportunity to acquire property that can become a working green space for the people of these communities.”

The Essex-Hudson Greenway, as the organization calls it, would pass through Jersey City, Secaucus, Kearny, Newark,

Belleville, Bloomfield, Glen Ridge, and Montclair. No trains have run on the line since 2009.

The Institute did not release any details of the agreement, but noted in the press release that the New York City-based Thomas L. Kempner Jr. Foundation “generously supported” the project.

Norfolk Southern still needs permission from the federal government to sell the line, and it’s likely that construction is still months, if not years, away.

“Many steps lie ahead, including securing federal approval, environmental and engineering reviews, and financing,” the New York-based organization said.

But biking and open space advocates hailed the deal. In the press release, Thomas Baxter, president of the September 11th National Memorial Trail Alliance, called the trail “an important environmental and economic asset” and “a true treasure.”

And Debra Kagan, executive director of the New Jersey Bike & Walk Coalition, said the deal was only a preliminary step, but that her organization is “excited to continue working with the Open Space Institute, our supporters, and the communities to ensure that this project becomes a fully functional greenway for those along its route.”