



NYSDOT Administrative Hearing (Case #72026, Scott Ave, Castleton)
Hudson River Sloop Clearwater Oral Testimony
Delivered by: Jen Benson, Hudson River Sloop Clearwater
January, 30, 2024

Good morning/afternoon Judge Howard,

My name is Jen Benson, and I am the Director of Environmental Action at Hudson River Sloop Clearwater, and am here to provide testimony on Case #7026 RR at Scott Avenue in Castleton-on-Hudson, in support of the restoration of the crossing and the community's access to their Hudson River park.

First, I would like to thank the New York State Department of Transportation for convening this long-sought hearing, and the opportunity to speak before you today.

Clearwater is a member-supported organization working to preserve and protect the Hudson River and its tributaries. For over five decades, Clearwater has educated the next generation of environmental stewards, providing river-based education programs to hundreds of thousands of students, and engaging the public in celebration of and advocacy for the Hudson River.

For the last 55 years - our organization has taken school groups and community members out on the Hudson River aboard our 106-foot sloop - our sloop sails the length of the tidal Hudson River estuary from New York City to Troy, stopping in towns for educational and community sails. Each day from launch in mid-May until haul out in late fall we see the life-long impact of being able to access the Hudson River has on those who live on its shores. The role of the Hudson River in the history, legacy, and future of the communities of Valley Bearing cannot be understated. The river was, and remains a touchstone for culture, recreation, reflection, sustenance, and commerce, - and is the very heart of this region.

The community's unwavering desire to regain access to their Hudson River shoreline is a reasonable request. Using modern technology, crossings can be designed to balance safety and access. I urge the NYSDOT to carefully review the case studies presented in the 2018 White Paper: At-Grade Passenger Rail Pedestrian & Trail Crossings Empire Corridor South published by Scenic Hudson.

Continued prevention of the community's access to their municipal riverfront park is inconsistent both with the stated values of the Agency - particularly integrity, and partnership - but is also inconsistent with the public access policies of the New York State's Department of State's Coastal Management Program, the Town of Schodack/Village of Castleton's Local Waterfront Revitalization Program, and Scenic Hudson's Hudson River Access Plan.

Each day, the local community continues to experience the repercussions of their lack of access to their municipal riverfront park: lost years of water-related recreation, sustenance fishing, reduced quality of life, and the ability to steward their river.

This moment presents not only an opportunity to meet the terms of a three-decade-old agreement but also a chance to make a Hudson community a true river town once more - a community with safe, public, and equitable access to their Hudson River shoreline park.

In closing, Hudson River Sloop Clearwater stands with the Village of Castleton-on-Hudson and urges the NYSDOT to restore community access to the Hudson River by providing a safe crossing at Scott Avenue.