

Catskill Mountain Railroad Among County's Top Tourist Attractors **New business plan calls for doubling economic impact**

Kingston, NY -- February 17, 2015 -- The Catskill Mountain Railroad (CMRR) posted total ridership of 40,270 for 2014, a major increase from 14,823 passengers in 2013. Revenues also increased to an estimated \$1 million in 2014/2015 up from \$117,210 in 2013/2014, according to a statement released this week by the organization. The CMRR estimates its economic impact on Ulster County rose to over \$3 million in 2014 from \$1.3 million in 2013 with 75% of that impact centered in Kingston.

“If you look at the county’s major tourist attractions,” said CMRR President, Ernie Hunt, “you see Belleayre Mt. Ski Center, HITS, and the Headless Horseman. With more than 40,000 visitors between Kingston and Phoenicia, we are now within the top five tourist attractors in the county, and certainly the biggest in the city of Kingston.” Hunt went on to say that CMRR had incredible support from the Kingston area business community and “we couldn’t have achieved these results without those collaborations. They provided critical goods and services that made these events special.”

Kingston train operations saw passenger numbers climb to 31,289 , up from 4,575 in 2013, an increase of nearly 700 percent overall, while the rest of the 40,270 riders boarded in Phoenicia. Of the Kingston riders, at least 21,278 came from outside Ulster County (21% NYC and Long Island, 21% Orange County, 18% Dutchess County, 17% other Lower Hudson Counties, 11 percent from other NY State Counties, and 12% from out of state) according to zip code analysis. The CMRR delivered significant numbers of riders directly to the doors of Kingston area restaurants and shops last year to do additional spending through the CMRR’s “Railroad Dollars” coupon program. Additionally, the CMRR purchased more than \$300,000 in goods from 21 different Ulster County businesses.

Building on the improvements gained in 2014, the railroad has also released a new document “CMRR Business Plan 2015 to 2020” (http://www.catskillmtrailroad.com/cmrr_business_plan_kingston.pdf) for the Kingston segment of its operations. The plan outlines how the CMRR can more than double its economic impact on Kingston and Ulster County to \$7 million a year by extending its Kingston operations an additional five miles to the Glenford Dike on the Ashokan Reservoir. Its plan shows how the addition of a scenic destination such as the Glenford Dike, and adult-themed passenger rides, which require a longer ride and a scenic destination, will transform the CMRR into a major regional tourist attraction focusing on “experiential” tourism.

“Understanding ‘experiential tourism’ is a critical concept for economic development in a tourism economy. Tourists not only travel to see scenic beauty, but also seek entertainment,” says Hunt. “Unlike recreational parks and trails, the railroad can combine the scenic beauty of the Catskills with the entertainment of a theme park. This is why the railroad experienced such huge growth in Kingston in 2014, through adding nationally-branded entertainment to its rides.”

Having identified the potential positive tourism and economic impact in the CMRR's new business plan, Hunt, said a December compromise offered by the County Executive was a good first step in creating a comprehensive plan for the Ulster and Delaware corridor that includes a viable tourist train operation in Kingston. "Although we were never given a copy of the Executive's proposal, the compromise as described in the executive's press release to newspapers does seem to show that our differences in the city limits of Kingston are minimal. Even though we may differ on what length of railroad is optimal to create the maximum economic contribution to Ulster County, there is no reason we can't immediately start working together on what we agree on, i.e., the railroad's place in Kingston."

Hunt called for an end to the pointless litigation between the County and the railroad based on the County's ongoing goal to terminate its lease prior to the natural 2016 expiration date. "As we enter into the last year of operation on our 25 year lease, the County's continued efforts to terminate the lease serve no purpose, especially since the County seems to want the special events planned by the railroad to continue in 2015." Hunt called on the County to cease its efforts to terminate its lease and put this litigation behind us so we can sit down and work out the best mixture of rail and trail in the corridor to create the most economic value for the County. More information on the CMRR and all of its activities is available at www.catskillmtrailroad.com.

