

Livingston Avenue Bridge Talking Points

High Speed Rail is on the way. The Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) and the New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) have completed a [Tier 1 Draft Environmental Impact Statement \(DEIS\)](#) to evaluate proposed system improvements to intercity passenger rail services along the 463-mile Empire Rail Corridor, connecting Penn Station in New York City with Niagara Falls Station in Niagara Falls, New York. This corridor includes the stretch of track between the Rensselaer Rail Station and the Schenectady Rail Station.



A DEIS describes the positive and negative effects of a proposed government sponsored project by outlining alternative scenarios that may be chosen for a particular project in order to make informed decisions. The DEIS is used to accurately assess the environmental, physical, social, and financial costs of each project alternative. The Empire Corridor DEIS proposes four Alternative Scenarios for the implementation of High Speed Rail in New York State. The scenarios are grouped together by estimated average speed of travel: Base (current), 90mph, 110mph, and 125mph. The Base alternative does not address replacement of the Livingston Avenue Bridge. Each of the remaining scenarios proposes the replacement of the Livingston Avenue Bridge.

The current Livingston Avenue Bridge was constructed in 1902 with a pedestrian walkway that provided safe and simple access to both sides of the Hudson River and permitted crossing on foot between the Cities of Albany and Rensselaer. The Walkway, having suffered from years of neglect, was closed decades ago. The likely replacement of this bridge provides an opportunity to reestablish a bicycle and pedestrian connection that is both safe and cost effective. Several transportation studies and municipal and county resolutions on both sides of the bridge acknowledge the critical importance of restoring access to the waterfront and reestablishing this critical link in the growing regional bicycle trail network. You read more about these studies and the advocacy effort [here](#). **The Empire Corridor Draft Environmental Impact Statement does not acknowledge the walkway, support for the facility, Federal Rail's own report outlining best practices for developing rail with trail facilities.**

It is critical to speak up today. This could be the public's only opportunity for public comment on the project. It also will set the stage if and when a project specific meeting does occur. The Livingston Avenue Bridge Walkway is a critical connection that can be built safely in a cost effective way. It has significant support both locally and regionally. You can lend your voice to ensure that the Federal Rail Administration and the New York State Department of Transportation update the DEIS and provide the following, helping to ensure that when the Livingston Avenue Bridge is replaced, the walkway is constructed:

Acknowledge support and benefits of the Livingston Avenue Bridge Walkway in each and every alternative scenario

Both Albany County and the City's Common Council passed resolutions of support of the re-establishment of the Walkway and highlighted the benefits of restored access in several state and federally funded plans including the *Albany 2030 Comprehensive Plan* (2011), *Albany Master Bike Plan* (2009), and the *Patroon Creek Greenway Plan* (2004). The Walkway has also received significant support from Rensselaer County and the City of Rensselaer – both passed resolutions in favor of restoring access to a new bridge. Local planning studies that acknowledge the Walkway include the *City of Rensselaer Local Waterfront Revitalization Program Update* (2011) and the *Rensselaer County Trail from the Livingston Ave. Bridge to the Troy-Menands Bridge* (2004).

The Hudson River Valley Greenway and Greenway Conservancy also passed a resolution acknowledging the role the Walkway could play in connecting local, regional, and a statewide system of trails. Studies that identify the regional opportunities of the Walkway include the *Hudson River Crossing Study* (2008), *Tech Valley Trails Regional Trails Plan* (2007) and *REVEST (Regional Enterprise for a Vital Economy and Sustainable Transportation)* (1998).

Recognize the conclusion of a 2002 Federal Rail Administration report on Rails with Trails that identifies best practices for co-locating and managing rail with trail facilities

In 2002, The Federal Rail Administration, at the direction of the U.S. Department of Transportation, developed a report for the purpose of examining safety, design, and liability issues associated with the development of shared use paths and other trails within or adjacent to active railroad and transit rights-of-way. This comprehensive document not only outlines the risks and benefits associated with rails with trails, it also highlights several case studies, presents best practice design guidelines, and provides sample legal agreements for trail managers and rail road operations. When the report was commissioned, there was an estimated 400 miles of rails with trails in the US. By 2007, Rails-to-Trails Inc. estimated the total US mileage of Rail with Trail had grown to nearly 900 miles of safe, accessible, and popular trail adjacent to, and in close proximity to operating freight, passenger, and inner-city light rail (including lines with CSX and Amtrak traffic). The findings of FRAs report should be included as an appendix to the Empire Corridor EIS as to document the opportunities, not just for the Livingston Avenue Bridge, but for the entire corridor, for rail and trail to safely coexist.

Conduct a Title VI and Environmental Justice Analysis for each the scenarios

Restoration of the Walkway, and High Speed Rail in general, is a critical Title VI Environmental Justice issue that must be considered in each and every one of the alternative scenarios. Census tracts immediately adjacent to the Bridge have strikingly high unemployment rates, percentage of individuals on public health coverage, percentage of households receiving public assistance, percentage of families receiving SNAP/food stamp benefits, and families living below the poverty level. These families will see no direct benefit from High Speed Rail, but they will must bear the noise and emissions from living near the new bridge – access for the neighborhood is of critical importance. The Environmental Justice issues in the areas surrounding the bridge must not be ignored.

Additional talking points can be found [here](#). Comments should be addressed to:

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The deadline to submit comment is March 24. Community members will also have the chance to speak at a public hearing to be held **Tuesday, March 4** at the Albany Nanotech Complex, **257 Fuller Road, Albany, NY 12203**. An Open House will be held from 4-8 pm and Public Hearing 6-8 pm.

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