

**Mount Beacon Incline Railway
Restoration Society**
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MOUNT BEACON
INCLINE RAILWAY
SINCE 1902

Project Executive Summary

The Mount Beacon Incline Railway Restoration Society (MBIRRS) is working to restore one of the Hudson Valley's preeminent attractions and landmarks. The Incline Railway is listed on both the **New York State and National Historic Registers**. Located in the City of Beacon and the Town of Fishkill, this classic mountaintop funicular ascends Mount Beacon, a landmark in its own right and the very mountain adorning the shield of New York State's great seal. Built by the Otis Elevator Company in 1902, the 109 year-old incline was once the **steepest passenger railway in the world**, thrilling over 110,000 visitors annually. Taller than the Empire State Building, it remains the steepest passenger incline on the East Coast and second steepest in the United States, with a **maximum gradient of 74 percent**.

MBIRRS, a **501(c)(3) nonprofit organization**, formed in 1996. It immediately began a grass roots campaign to preserve the railway's ruins and to engender support for its return to service. Chartered by the New York State Education Board in 1998, the Society supported the efforts of **Scenic Hudson, Inc.** to protect the railway and its immediate environs from residential development. After Scenic Hudson acquired the railway property in a series of purchases between 1995 and 1998, it created **Mount Beacon Park**. In 2002, Scenic Hudson and the Incline Society signed a park co-management agreement which remains in force today. Scenic Hudson agrees in principle to the railway's restoration and has applauded "the Incline Society's vision to build a new incline as a vehicle to connect people to the Hudson River Valley and its important landscapes and to make the summit accessible for people of all abilities."

Beginning in 2009, the Incline Society, under the leadership of current President **Anne Lynch**, adopted a more business-oriented posture. Inspired by the success of Walkway Over the Hudson, a project which faced similar challenges, the Society sought to expand its professional associations and increase its organizational capabilities. It joined the Environmental Consortium of Hudson Valley Colleges and Universities, the Association of Railway Museums (ARM), the Museum Association of New York (MANY), the American Association of Museums (AAM), the Beacon Chamber of Commerce (BCC) and the Dutchess County Regional Chamber of Commerce (DCRCOC). The Society established a Board of Advisors and also appointed **Mike Colarusso** as its first Chief Operating Officer. Colarusso is a retired Army officer who previously served as the Director of Operations at the United States Military Academy, West Point.

Both municipalities in which the railway is located are committed to the Society's restoration efforts. The City of Beacon's Comprehensive Plan explicitly supports restoring the railway to service, and **Steve Gold**, Mayor of the City of Beacon, is co-founder and current Vice-President of the Incline Society. **Joan Pagonis**, Supervisor of the Town of Fishkill, also supports the restoration and joined the Incline Society's Board of Trustees in 2009. In the last year, several other distinguished community members have become trustees, to include **Fred Schaeffer**, immediate past Chairman of Walkway Over the Hudson, **Clara Lou Gould**, Beacon's former mayor, **John Atherton**, immediate past Chief Clerk of the Dutchess County Court, **Sara Pasti**, Beacon City Councilwoman and Neil C. Trager Director of the Samuel Dorsky Museum of Art at SUNY New Paltz, **John MacEnroe**, President, Dutchess County Economic Development Corporation, and **James Sedore**, Partner, Sedore and Company.

Site inspections by civil and railway engineers have determined that the incline's rails are in remarkably good shape and that its old powerhouse can be preserved and interpreted. Other elements of the railway, to include its upper and lower stations, require complete reconstruction. The Society has completed a detailed topographic survey of the railway site and has also received reconstruction proposals from multiple railroad construction companies in the tri-state area. As the restoration will embody best practices in both **historic preservation** and **sustainability**, the Society has also secured the services of LEED certified engineers, architects and environmental professionals regarding the design of the railway's facilities. **ADA compliancy** will be a key design feature as well. Based upon proposals received to date, the total cost to reconstruct the railway and commence operations is approximately **\$19 million**.

Current plans call for the railway and its parent organization to be economically self-sustaining, generating revenue through ticket sales and concessions, as well as through continued donations and fundraising efforts. In May 2010, a provisional economic and fiscal impact analysis of the restoration effort was completed at West Point, New York. The study concluded that the railway will draw hundreds of thousands of visitors annually, generating millions in regional economic activity. This was followed in January 2011 by a much more comprehensive business and market feasibility study funded by the **Dyson Foundation**. The new study is being provided by **ConsultEcon, Inc.** of Cambridge, Massachusetts, a top tier economic and management consulting firm. Of note, ConsultEcon is carefully assessing throughput constraints upon the high visitor demand forecast in the West Point study. Their analysis will help the Incline Society "right size" annual attendance, ensuring the number of visitors is within the comfortable carrying capacity of the surrounding community and Mount Beacon Park.

Once MBIRRS completes reconstruction conceptualization, it will present its plan to Scenic Hudson for comment and approval. When both organizations are in full agreement, an aggressive Capital Campaign will begin. The Society will seek funding through a combination of membership contributions, private donations, fundraising events, corporate and government grants, and financing. Because the purpose of the railway is to **put the beautiful vistas of the Hudson River Valley within the reach of as many people as possible**, the Incline Society has a goal of securing full project funding before opening the railway, ensuring that construction costs are not passed on to visitors. Near term development and fundraising efforts are focused upon increasing organizational capacity to move the project from planning to execution.