

# WW Outline for DC Planing presentation

## \*\*\*\* PHOTO: RR BRIDGE FROM A HOT BALLOON

- \* The longest bridge in North America when it opened in 1888.
- \* The RRB tied New England to Washington DC and the rest of the country).
- \* People thought of it at the “Eighth wonder of the world.”
- \* By the 1900's up to 50 freight trains a day, with a total of 3500 freight cars, went over the RRB every day, carrying coal and grain to New England and manufactured goods to New England

## \*\*\*\* PHOTO: RR BRIDGE SHOWING PIERS

- \* Construction required four large piers in the Hudson River. They look small but what you see is the Tip of the iceberg.
- \* The piers go down 120 feet. Below the water they are wooden caissons, 60 feet wide by 100 ft, with stone pillars on top of the caissons above the water.

## \*\*\*\*\* PHOTO: RR BRIDGE ON FIRE IN 1974

- \* In the 1950's the Interstate Highway system made use of trucks to ship goods in the country more economical then the use of freight trains. Train traffic dwindled down. The New Haven Railroad owned the bridge in the 1970's and went into bankruptcy. By 1974 only one train a day was crossing the RRB. On May 8<sup>th</sup> 1974 a fire broke out due to sparks from the brakes as the train when down the grade into Poughkeepsie. The fire damaged a 1000 foot section of RRB over Poughkeepsie, closing it to train traffic.
- \* The section of the railroad line that went over the RRB was known as the Maybrook Line and within a few years after the fire was abandoned. In 1982, the New Haven Railroad, which was in bankruptcy, sold the 13 mile section from Morgan Lake in Poughkeepsie to Hopewell Junction to Dutchess County. Dutchess County purchased it with the intent to construct a road, to be known as County Route 11, primarily, to create a road to the new East Fishkill IBM facilities.

## \*\*\*\*\* PHOTO: ABANDONED RR BRIDGE IN 1993

- 1992 - **Poughkeepsie resident Bill Sepe began to promote the idea** of renovating the RRB into a walkway for local people to have access to it in order to enjoy the peaceful views. To this end he started recruiting volunteers to work on the bridge to fix up areas that needed repairs and put down wooden

planks on the existing ties for people to walk on. He wanted all work to be done by volunteers. He did not want any public funds to be used because he believed public funds should be used only for health and educational, not for a park. He began by inviting people to tour the bridge now and then.

- \* This is what it looked like when I first went up on it with him in January of 1993 after hearing him talk about his project at event put on by Charles Hulziesor.
- \* When I walked out on the bridge with Sepe I fell in love with his idea of creating a walkway over the bridge. I thought it a good idea so that I could bike across it too. For many years I had been an avid bicyclist and was setting up bike rides in the area.

#### **\*\*\*\*\* PHOTO: ROB DYSON TOUR OF RR BRIDGE**

\* After my first visit to the bridge I invited a casual friend of mine, Rob Dyson, to tour the bridge with me and Sepe. I knew Rob was a fun person who liked to do interesting things. Our sons were good friends. Rob and I coached their little league baseball team. We also rode bikes together now and then. He is President of a local foundation which had done a lot of good things for the community so I thought he might like to help with this project.

\* In this photo taken on a cold winter day, February 6<sup>th</sup>, 1993, you can see how easy it was to get on the bridge at that time. A miracle that no one fell off during the 15 years or so that the bridge was abandoned.

#### **\*\*\*\*\* PHOTO: ROB DYSON TOUR OF RR BRIDGE**

\* In this photo on the same tour, as the last photo, February 6<sup>th</sup>, 1993 you can see Rob Dyson taking his first look at the view. After this tour he talked to Sepe a few times but was not happy with Sepe's plan to create the Walkway with volunteers and did not follow up with him or me.

\* I agreed that the project probably could not be done with volunteers but joined up with Sepe and offered to help with the project.

#### **\*\*\*\*\* PHOTO: DC PLANING DEPT TOUR OF THE RR BRIDGE IN 1994**

\* I did a lot of tours of the bridge in order to build up support for the Walkway project so that people would see the view and realize I was not too crazy. These are staff people from the DC Planning Dept. Roger Ackely was head of the department and was a strong supporter. He thought of the bridge as New York's "Eiffel Tower."

#### **\*\*\*\*\* PHOTO: VANTAGE POINT ARTICLE**

On May 3, 1994 the Poughkeepsie Journal published a "Vantage Point" article which I

wrote promoting bicycling tourism. Amongst other things I mentioned turning the Poughkeepsie Railroad Bridge and Maybrook (County Route 11) road bed into pedestrian/bike paths.

Karen Woods, head of the Dutchess County Tourism Agency called me a few days later and said that I "created quite a stir" with my "Vantage Point" article

I was appointed to be on the DC Tourism Agency after that article was published and maps were published for which I received a Tourism Award

#### \*\*\*\*\* POUGHKEEPSIE JOURNAL ARTICLE

In March of 1995 I spoke before Dutchess County Environmental Planning Council to advocate for the road bed to be turned into a rail trail. A Poughkeepsie Journal reporter was there and he wrote this article which appeared in the paper on March 25<sup>th</sup>. I argued that plans to build a road along the Maybrook right-of-way faded over the years as most people realized it would be too expensive to build. Also most local residents were opposed to turning it into a "highway" and with IBM downsizing from 20,000 employees to 12,000, it was not necessary.

#### \*\*\*\*\* PHOTO: Poughkeepsie Journal Editorial on 3/29/95

On March 29, 1995, a few days after the prior article appeared, the Poughkeepsie Journal published an editorial favoring my proposal to turn the Maybrook line land purchased by Dutchess County into a rail trail.

In the spring of 1995, Kealy Solomon, who was the county planning board member preparing the county's bicycle plan, and I went to Massachusetts and New Paltz to ride existing bike trails since there were none in the area. I took photos of the trails which I later used in my presentation to the County legislators.

**\*\*\*\*\* PHOTO: DUTCHESS COUNTY RESOLUTION TO  
SELL MAYBROOK ROAD BED**

In early 1995 Jim Sproat, a Dutchess County Legislator, introduced a resolution titled "REQUESTING COUNTY EXECUTIVE TO DEVELOP A PLAN TO SELL COUNTY ROUTE 11 ROADBED. The full resolution mentioned the possibility to consider alternative plans. Luckily I saw an article about it in the Poughkeepsie Journal and spoke to my County Legislator, Suzanne Horn. She talked to Jim Sproat, who invited me to attend the Public Works Committee meeting on the resolution.

**\*\*\*\*\* PHOTO: EXISTING RAIL TRAILS**

I attended the committee meeting and presented photos of existing trails and explained why it would be a good idea.

**\*\*\*\*\* PHOTO: RRB TOUR WITH JIM SPROAT**

I took JIM SPROAT for a tour of the RR BRIDGE and told him about the possibility of connecting the rail trail with the Walkway eventually.

**\*\*\*\*\* PHOTO: RAILS TO TRAILS REVISITED ARTICLE**

I had a relationship with the editors of TACONIC NEWS so I wrote any article urging the DC LEGISLATURE to create a bike trail on the railroad bed.

\*\*\*\*\* PHOTO: DUTCHESS COUNTY RESOLUTION TO  
CREATE AN “INTERIM TRAIL”

On May 8, 1995 I attended a meeting of the DC Legislature and made my presentation to the 35 member group. They voted on a resolution that “the Maybrook right-of-way may be considered for use on an interim basis as a recreational trail...” The resolution passed the County Legislature by a 34 to 1 vote.

On June 1, 1995 I met with County Executive Steinhaus at his office and told him about my reasons for the right of way to become a rail trail. Up to this point he had been silent with regard to this issue. He told that the County had no money to do the trail. I told him my plan, which was for each of the four Towns that the trail went through to do their portion of the trail that went through their town. I showed him pictures of people riding on the Wallkill Valley Rail Trail and he agreed that creating a recreational trail for the Maybrook right of way may be a good idea. The Harlem Valley Rail Trail, which the county was working on, was not open yet. He agreed to support my efforts and to allow the DC Planning Board to help with it.

After that I had a couple of meetings with the DC Planning Board with regard to proceeding on the trail.

On July 3, 1995 I was invited by County Executive Steinhaus to attend a press conference on the Maybrook right-of-way at its intersection with Overocker Road. At the press conference Steinhaus announced that Dutchess County would seek funding for and construct the Dutchess Rail Trail from Hopewell Jct to

Poughkeepsie.

**\*\*\*\*\* PHOTO OF SEPE DOING WORK ON RRB**

\* For seven years (1993 to 2000) Sepe continued making renovations to the bridge which I did not take part in since I have no skill for construction. He did appoint me to the Board of Directors of the Walkway Not For Profit Corporation that he formed around 1995. I limited my activity to taking people on tours of the bridge.

\* In 1998 Sepe managed to get a deed for \$1.00 giving title of the bridge to the Walkway organization from a guy in Pennsylvania who brought it for a \$1.00 from investors, who had bought it for a \$1.00 from the Trustee's in bankruptcy of New Haven Railroad.

**\*\*\*\*\* PHOTO: POST CARD OF HENRY HUDSON  
BRIDGE OVER HARLEM RIVER IN  
NEW YORK CITY**

\*\*\* Sometime around 2001 I found on EBAY a post card from 1909 of a bridge over the Harlen River in New York City. It was constructed in 1909 to celebrate the 300<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Henry Hudson sailing up the Hudson River. It gave me the idea to do the Walkway project in honor of the 400<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of Henry Hudson's voyage, which was coming up in 2009.. It turned out to be the leverage we needed in 2007 to get NYS to contribute \$20,000,000 to the project.

## \*\*\*\*\* PHOTO: SEPE GOODBYE PARTY

- \* In the year 2000 or so Sepe did work on bridge with volunteers. A volunteer was seriously injured. The Town of Lloyd got a court order prohibiting Sepe from doing any further work on bridge and from giving tours. Sepe continued to advocate for the Walkway but it came to a standstill.
- \* In June of 2003 a small “group” of volunteers started meeting at my office at 12 Raymond Ave in Poughkeepsie. The group discussions revolved around how to get the Walkway project moving forward despite Sepe’s rejection of advice from others to seek public funding and use professionals to do the work.
- \* Sepe had formed a non-profit corporation so this group proposed six new directors, including myself for the Walkway membership to vote on at annual meeting of the organization. We won the vote and Sepe resigned. I was elected Chairman of the organization. We gave Sepe a goodbye thankyou party as shown in the photo.
- \* I settled the lawsuit with Town of Lloyd so that I could do tours on RR bridge with VIPS and small public groups, which I did on a regular basis. I also did slide show presentations at community clubs, organizations and events.

## \*\*\*\*\* PHOTO: TOUR OF RRB BY DYSON BOARD OF DIRECTORS

- \* On May 16, 2005 Rob Dyson revisits the Walkway with his Foundations Board of Directors and the Foundation gives a \$

45,000.00 grant to inspect the underwater caissons.

\* On August 8, 2007 me and two Walkway Board members met with Rob Dyson and he said he would give the Walkway organization a grant of \$1,500,000.00 to inspect the RR Bridge and design the proposed Walkway.

\*\*\*\* PHOTO: RR BRIDGE BEING INSPECTED

\* In June of 1997 engineers started an inspection of the Railroad Bridge. They looked at every inch of the bridge by repelling off the bridge. Cost for inspection was one million dollars. Report indicated bridge was one of the greatest bridges ever built and only needed five millions dollars in repairs. Estimate to put on deck and railings was another 38 million.

\* Cost to take the bridge down would be \$53 million dollars so our renovation made more sense. The width of the deck was reduced a bit so the final cost of the Walkway project was 38.5 million dollars.

\*\*\*\*\* PHOTO: PUBLIC HEARING

1/12/ 2008 Public Hearing staged by Walkway engineering company for environmental impact statement; attended by over 500 people. Presentations of project by engineers and NYS representatives; public comment were all in favor of project. A few people had questions but there were negative statements.

\* I sent out about 245 personal emails to the contacts I gathered during my tours and presentation the last few years asking them to attend the SEQRA public

hearing. Five hundred people showed up, all in favor of the project. State representatives were impressed that there was so much support and enthusiasm. No one spoke against it.

**\*\*\*\*\* PHOTO: FRED SCHAEFRER AND U.S. SENATOR SCHUMER**

U.S. Senator Schumer joined in support of project after he toured the bridge in April 18,2008. He helped us get the one mile section of the old railroad bed leading up to the Walkway on the east end of the bridge in Poughkeepsie. It was stilled owned by CSX. We needed it for an entrance where the bridge ended and for a parking lot. He also helped obtain from CSX the RR bed from the parking lot to Morgan Lake, which was still owned by CSX too.

**\*\*\*\* PHOTO: GROUND BREAKING ON May 28, 2008**

**\*\*\*\* PHOTOS: PANELS BEING INSTALLED ON BRIDGE FOR NEW DECK**

11/19/08 - DIY TV show does video of extreme work which was aired later in 2009 at Shadows

**\*\*\*\*\* PHOTO: LAST PANEL ON THE WALKWAY INSTALLED**

9/4/2009 - Last panel put on the bridge, completing the Walkway deck; all we need now is railings and east side ownership of the CSX land east of Washington Street for the parking lot

\*\*\*\*\* PHOTOS:    OPENING WEEKEND

10/03/2009 - Opening ceremony was attended by NYS Governor Patterson, US Senator Schumer, and NYS State Parks Director Carol Ashe. Forty thousand people crossed the bridge the opening weekend.

Summary: I think my success in getting this done was a result of:

    Using my photographs to show people the magnificent view from the Walkway and its potential for a tourist attraction..

    Promoting the bridge as an economic win fall to make the area economy.

    Using my networking abilities to gather a ground swell of support by doing many tours of the Walkway and presentations to community groups

    Taking advantage of the history of the RR Bridge