

MEDIA STATEMENT

Embargoed until: Wednesday, April 3, 2024 at 9:00 PM

Statement by Visitation Data Committee Members Regarding Fjord Trail Visitation Projections

The undersigned members of the Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail (HHFT) Visitation Data Committee (the Committee), from Cold Spring, Nelsonville, and Philipstown, release the following statement in response to information presented on April 3, 2024 at Dutchess Manor regarding visitation projections for the Fjord Trail:

The Visitation Data Committee was announced by HHFT on June 12, 2023, with the stated goal to “help review the ongoing traffic study, pedestrian counts, and visitation projection for the project.” This Committee has dutifully spent the last 8 months reviewing these studies and projections.

At this time, we feel it is important to inform the public of significant concerns we have about one of the reports that HHFT is developing for the DGEIS submission. On March 26, 2024, the Committee met with HHFT’s consultants, ORCA and AKRF to discuss a visitation projection report [available on the HHFT website at: <https://hhft.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Fjord-Trail-Use-Projections-Report.pdf>] and their response to our prepared questions. We found the report to have several concerning elements which have not been addressed:

- The selection and comparability of parks used to project visitation was not adequately justified and key characteristics of our area such as access by train and close proximity to large cities do not appear to have been closely considered in choosing comparable parks. Moreover, the HHFT study has chosen a composite comparable visitor growth rate of only 4.2% based on those parks.
- Actual data from the NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP) does not appear to have been used in the visitation estimates for the project area. Currently available attendance data for the Hudson Highlands State Park from OPRHP shows a 10.7% average annual growth rate in visitation from 2016-2023. The ORCA report shows the same park with only a 7.6% annual growth rate for the same period.
- Data from surveys of potential visitors were not tested for selection bias or statistical significance.
- One survey-based estimate presents a 10% increase in potential new users under 55 years of age. This does not seem to take into account new categories of users such as families and cyclists, in addition to those who currently hike the more challenging mountain trails.
- The impact of marketing and social media was also not included in projections.

We were equally troubled that the report they shared with us was not the full report and it did not contain the full data set, citations to sources or the underlying

calculations performed. As of this date, the additional data requested by the committee has not been provided.

We have also had material concerns about (i) the adequacy of the data collected by ORCA and AKRF to study pedestrian visitation to the Village of Cold Spring and the broader area and (ii) the methodology and coding of HHFT's Alternative's Analysis, which omitted less dramatic options and included elements that favored HHFT's preferred route from Dockside Park over the alternatives studied. Specific Committee questions submitted in mid-March about the possible presence of Submerged Aquatic Vegetation (SAV) within the preferred route's alignment and the lack of that SAV's presence in the AKRF alternatives matrix have also gone unanswered.

We feel it is necessary to share this information with the public, as was the committee's charge, because the information that is being portrayed in public meetings has not been adequately examined and does not take into account the informed recommendations of Committee members from the communities most impacted by visitation to this trail. We hope that HHFT will revise their research and analyses consistent with the Committee's feedback in order to make the estimated projections more reliable. Until then, the public should not assume that the Visitation Data Committee is satisfied with the information and analyses presented.

Signed,

Chris Winward, Mayor of Nelsonville and Visitation Data Committee Member
Phil Cottenec, Philipstown Visitation Data Committee Member
Jeff Robins, Philipstown Visitation Data Committee Member
Henry Feldman, Cold Spring Visitation Data Committee Member
James Labate, Cold Spring Visitation Data Committee Member

HHFT's description of the Visitation Data Committee provided upon its creation in June 2023:

"To work with the HHFT visitation management and environmental review consultants to understand and inform the gathering and analysis of data for traffic and pedestrian visitation patterns and counts. The group will also have early review and discussion of the visitation projection, and the methodology used to determine it, before it is shared with the public at the announced fall workshop. A stipend will be made available for the committee to hire outside technical expertise to assist them in reviewing methodology and interpretation of results. The committee is advisory in nature, but has an opportunity to proactively and meaningfully inform the data collection process and visitor projection to ensure we're achieving robust analysis in keeping with established industry best practice. It is also expected of each volunteer that they keep their respective municipal officials and other stakeholders, as appropriate, informed of key process and decision points along the way for transparency. This community liaison role accounts for half of the anticipated time spent in between meetings."