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Press Release

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IMMEDIATE

Metro-North Teams Up with NYS Parks, NYS DOT, Scenic Hudson and Town of Fishkill to Build Trail Connector at Breakneck Ridge

First Phase of Proposed Seven-Mile Trail from Cold Spring to Beacon

The Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA) today announced that its Board has approved a lease to the Town of Fishkill to build and maintain a three-quarter-mile hiking trail connecting Metro-North Railroad's rustic Breakneck Ridge Station to the trailhead of the Breakneck Ridge Trail in Hudson Highlands State Park, straddling Dutchess and Putnam counties.

The popularity of the Breakneck Ridge Trail is drawing a growing numbers of visitors to the area each year. Metro-North has experienced increased ridership due to the convenient location of the Breakneck Ridge Station and has recently increased its frequency of service to the station to address growing demand. The means of access to the trailhead as of today is a combination of informal dirt footpaths and the shoulder area of Route 9D.

The trail to be built, known as the Breakneck Connector, will be located between New York State Route 9D and Metro-North Railroad's Hudson Line, from which it will be separated by fences. It is the first segment to be built of the proposed Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail, a roughly seven-mile trail that would link the Village of Cold Spring and the City of Beacon.

MTA Metro-North Railroad is a member of a steering committee working with a consortium of state and local stakeholders, including New York State Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation, the New York State Department of Transportation, the Town of Fishkill, Scenic Hudson and other groups, to progress the development of the trail. New York State Assemblywoman Sandy Galef secured \$200,000 in MTA Capital Program reserve funding towards the trail project.

The Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail will provide healthy, active connections between Beacon, Cold Spring and Metro-North stations, and allow railroad customers to explore the great hiking opportunities in the Hudson Highlands State Park Preserve and all that the scenic region has to offer. The Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail will be designed to provide a safe and comfortable area for hiking, more clearly defining park areas along the Hudson River and in the Hudson Highlands. Every effort will be made to provide universal access.

Metro-North's Breakneck Ridge Station – which is north of Cold Spring, New York, on the railroad's Hudson Line – provides weekend and holiday service to customers interested in hiking the popular Breakneck Ridge Trail. The Station's convenient location to the trail offers hikers an attractive alternative to driving, particularly given the limited parking capacity at the location.

The Breakneck Ridge Connector addresses the growing popularity of the Station and makes access to the trail safer and more inviting to visitors. Rather than navigating ad hoc pathways, trail users will be able to take a 12-foot-wide trail that provides a separate and protected direct path from the Station to the trailhead. Along Route 9D, formalized parking areas will be created, as well as making the area safer for hikers and visitors crossing the road. The current low-level platforms at the Breakneck Ridge Station will be replaced with mini high-level platforms that provide ADA accessibility.

New fencing will be built to help discourage trespassing onto Metro-North tracks, and railing will be installed along elevated sections of the trail. When hikers arrive at the trailhead, they'll be greeted by a welcome center and trail information signs. On weekends, NY-NJ Trail Conference Stewards are also on hand to provide orientations to arriving hikers on what to expect from the challenging mountain.

With its variety of trail loops, rock scrambles, and panoramic views of the Hudson River, Storm King Mountain and Hudson Valley, the Breakneck Ridge Trail is considered one of the best hiking trails in New York State, and also one of the most difficult.

Metro-North President Joseph Giulietti said: "The proposed Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail underscores that Metro-North is much more than a commuter railroad. We support regional tourism and give customers a convenient way to explore the area's scenic beauty. Metro-North is pleased to work with New York State Parks, New York State Department of Transportation, Scenic Hudson and the Town of Fishkill to develop a trail that will give people easy access to celebrate the great outdoors."

MTA Board member James Vitiello said: "The construction of the Breakneck Ridge connector is a wonderful example of the broader role that Metro-North plays helping to enhance our region. The Breakneck Ridge Trail is a vital natural resource, and the proposed path between Metro-North's station and the trailhead will provide safe, easy access for residents and visitors alike to experience the Hudson River and its majestic landscape."

MTA Board member Neal Zuckerman said: "The Breakneck Ridge trail is one of the most popular day hikes in North America. The proposed path will make access between the Metro-North Station and the trailhead even easier, supporting tourism and exploration of the area's scenic beauty. On behalf of the elected officials of Putnam County and the Town of Philipstown, I want to extend thanks to the Town of Fishkill for overseeing the construction of the trail, as well as to Metro-North Railroad for its contribution to the development of the Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail."

New York State Senator Sue Serino said: "This project will help enhance what is already a major draw for tourists, further increasing access to the natural resources that help make our area so unique. A win for both tourists and community-members alike, we are thrilled to see the first concrete step being taken to complete the much anticipated Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail. It is a great example of what can be accomplished when leaders at all levels come together to make our natural environment and community engagement a priority."

New York State Assemblywoman Sandy Galef said: "The coordinated efforts between so many public and private agencies has made it possible to create and expand a space for safe and fun enjoyment of our natural resources. The Hudson Highlands Fjord trail will play a valuable role in safety and recreation for the communities connected by the trail as well as those who come to the area to enjoy the Hudson River views."

Dutchess County Executive Marc Molinaro said: "Dutchess County is excited to be a part of what will be a true economic and tourist engine in our region with the creation of the Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail. The establishment of the Breakneck Connector is an important first step in this process, and we are grateful to the MTA for their support in our efforts to move forward with this project. We appreciate our continued partnership with the MTA, NYS Parks, NYS DOT, Scenic Hudson, and the Town of Fishkill to see this project to completion, resulting in a safer way of travel for pedestrians and hikers as they enjoy the beautiful scenic views afforded by this new trail, connecting to the popular Mount Beacon Park."

Putnam County Executive MaryEllen Odell said: "Putnam County has many 'world class' hiking trails and values our partnerships with the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, Metro-North Railroad and New York State Parks. I applaud MTA's efforts to link the Breakneck Ridge Station to the NYS Parks Breakneck Ridge Trailhead. Putnam boasts a unique natural beauty and access, and convenience to these vistas is important as we continue to invite many outdoor enthusiasts to the spectacular views of the Hudson Highlands. This well utilized dedicated Station welcomes hikers who arrive leaving the hustle and bustle of NYC to enjoy a day of serenity and the challenge of the great outdoors in Putnam County, 'where the country begins.' This connector trail is an enhancement to all who visit and allow people to access the trailhead safely and conveniently. We look forward to future partnerships as we enhance infrastructure around the Hudson Fjord Trail and enhance the Putnam County experience."

Bob LaColla, Town of Fishkill Supervisor said: "We truly appreciate the commitment, energy and resources Metro-North has dedicated to the entire project. By way of this lease, Metro-North Railroad keeps the project on track to provide essential traffic and safety improvements while we work to create this world-class recreational asset."

Amy Kacala, Scenic Hudson, Inc., Senior Planner and Hudson Highlands Fjord Project Manager said: "The Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail will create a safe and inviting gateway to the spectacular Hudson Highlands State Park Preserve. This initial half-mile section of the trail will address the most congested area where high pedestrian volume, chaotic roadside parking, and high travel speeds combine for a dangerous situation. That is why this area was prioritized for construction first. We're looking forward to breaking ground later this year."

Linda Cooper, Regional Director, NYS Parks said: "What began as a way to make the Route 9D corridor safer has grown into a fabulous collaboration. This public private partnership will provide countless visitors with a better way to access the Hudson Highlands State Park Preserve and enjoy the Hudson River and surrounding communities."