

## Train rides between Boyertown and Pottstown could begin next fall

10/28/2013

Following a 90-minute rail excursion from Boyertown to Pottstown and back, officials of Berks and Montgomery counties said last week that the opening of the 8.6-mile Colebrookdale Railroad line for tourists and passengers is likely next fall.

"This could be a home run for everyone," said Nathaniel C. Guest, president of the Colebrookdale Railroad Preservation Trust in Pottstown.

Guest estimated that between 20,000 and 30,000 people a year could travel the line, bringing about \$2 million in economic benefits to the communities and the region.

About 270 new jobs would be created through the implementation phases of the project and 80 new, sustained jobs thereafter, he said.

Completed by soldiers just home from the Civil War, the line goes a century-and-a-half back in time but will need passenger boarding facilities, retail stores and dining areas in Pottstown and Boyertown to bring it into the future, Guest said.

"Our goal is to enhance its freight capacity and open it for passengers by October 2014," he added.

Kenneth L. Pick, executive director of the Berks County Redevelopment Authority, joined the agency's staff, board members and nearly a dozen area residents for their first Colebrookdale rail excursion before holding the authority's regular meeting at Boyertown Borough Hall.

They rode in open track cars, or orange and yellow metal "speeders," that hold three passengers each and are very different from the coaches, diesel and steam locomotives that will eventually carry visitors, Guest said.

"I was amazed how scenic it was," authority Chairman Glenn Yeager Jr. said.

Yeager was joined by grandson Calvin J. Yoder, 7, of Muhlenberg Township, who was honorary co-pilot and later called the run "really fun."

Yeager and Kathy A. Miller, authority fiscal officer, said passenger service would be a tremendous asset to the area.

Board members Shirley E. Ludwig and Eileen Kastura noted that Pottstown residents at the end of the line had said they were excited about the project.

Passengers Donald A. Lupacckino of Kutztown and Arthur J. Wander of Gilbertsville said the line would have a lot of appeal for railroad buffs, and Mark E. North of Bear, Del., conductor/operator, said "It's a beautiful railroad line, very scenic and with a lot of interesting natural features."

Pick said that the authority will work in whatever capacity to help with the railroad.

With the advice of Solicitor Pamela J. Cala, the board voted to establish the Berks County Non-Profit Development Corp. to help give the authority greater flexibility with funding sources, donations, helping other agencies and tackling projects.

- By Valdis I. Lacin