

Colebrookdale rail proposal has exciting potential

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The notion of turning the Colebrookdale Spur into a tourism railroad similar to those in New Hope and Strasburg has exciting possibilities.

Both Pottstown and Boyertown would benefit from the destination site the rail would create, and the countryside in-between would get a spotlight for its beauty and history.

Nathaniel Guest, a Pottsgrove alum who has degrees in law and historic preservation, is seeking support for a rail project on the Colebrookdale line.

Guest made a presentation last week to about 30 community and business leaders to see if the local community might — pardon the pun — be on board with the idea of an historic attraction rail line.

"I think a lot of people under-appreciate the resources we have in this area and this is one of them," Guest said of the Colebrookdale line.

Guest compared his proposal to three other tourist railroads which operate successfully in southeastern Pennsylvania, including the well-known Strasburg Railroad in Lancaster County.

Starting small, running weekends and in conjunction with special events, Guest told the gathering he believes the Colebrookdale line could attract as many as 10,000 riders in its first year.

The nine-mile ride along the Colebrookdale — which Guest said could be re-named The Hidden Valley Railroad "because of all the hidden valleys and vistas" — takes about one hour.

Riders could depart and frequent shops or restaurants in Pottstown or Boyertown before returning, he said.

Two rail "experts" in attendance -- Paul Nichini, the president and CEO of the New Hope and Ivyland Railroad, and Ross Rowland who is refurbishing passenger cars for the Greenbrier Express -- said they have ridden the Colebrookdale line and find it among the most scenic rail trips they've experienced. **Continued...**

Community leaders on both ends of the line said it holds great potential for events in Pottstown and Boyertown.

The project is plausible, Guest said, with sufficient determination and resources.

The potential of this project, like others in the region, is exciting because it builds on the unique historical heritage of our region as the birthplace of the coal and iron industries in this country.

The Colebrookdale line passes directly by the site of the first iron-making forge in the colonial era and winds along the Manatawny Creek where the Lenape once roamed and where colonists established some of the first farms in Berks County.

The region's rich history and scenic beauty fit perfectly with the goals of the Schuylkill Highlands Conservation Landscape Initiative to market the Schuylkill River valley and capitalize on the proximity of attractions to the Schuylkill River Trail.

Guest said the next step is developing a nonprofit entity to bring the project to life.

Pardoning another pun, we say: "All aboard" for a project that has true potential for the tri-county area.

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gotitright wrote on Oct 18, 2011 9:30 AM:

" This idea could be nothing less than a "Game Changer"...
However lets try not to get carried so far away with the romantic notion of railroad journeys through the countryside, that we forget the huge infrastructure obstacles that must be met.
Establishing a non-profit, and then what?
seeking donations? This project will drag on longer than the Carousel.
It is a project that will require venture capital, and lots of it.
Finding private investors, who can also realize the potential of such a proposal, will be key to it's success.
"

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