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## Catskill Railroad boost: Grants propel expansion and sustainability

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The Catskill Mountain Railroad, a tourist attraction in New York, has been granted a significant boost with a total of \$4.4 million in funding from the New York State Department of Transportation's Passenger and Freight Rail Assistance Program. This financial support is part of a broader \$111.1 million initiative aimed at enhancing the state's rail infrastructure.

The railroad, which initiated its operations in 1982 by leasing a 38-mile segment of the former New York Central branch line, currently offers a scenic five-mile journey from Kingston, N.Y. These funds will facilitate the expansion of its route through the construction of the new Basin Road Rail Terminal, advancing the railroad to the Ashokan Rail Trail's entrance. This expansion is not just a mere extension but an integration that promises to bolster tourism significantly.

The allocation of a \$667,000 grant will be directed towards building a station and parking lot at the new terminal, marking a significant step in the railroad's development. Additionally, the railroad is set to construct a new engine house and connecting track with a \$1.5 million grant, enhancing its operational capabilities.

The largest grant of \$2.3 million is earmarked for the re-engineering of an Alco RS-1 locomotive, which is anticipated to reduce emissions and operational costs, signifying the railroad's commitment to sustainability. The President of the Catskill Mountain Railroad, Ernie Hunt, has highlighted the strategic benefits of these grants, noting the positive environmental impact and the reduction in operational expenses through the adoption of a lower-emission engine and the exploration of bio-diesel alternatives.

Following a period of operational challenges, including the termination of its Phoenicia operation and the conversion of 11 miles of track into a rail trail, the railroad's fortunes seem to be improving. A new lease agreement through 2028 and a record passenger count in the previous year underscore the railroad's resurgence as a significant tourist draw.

The envisioned connection between the CMRR and the Ashokan Rail Trail, as expressed by Hunt, is set to transform the region into a major attraction, linking Kingston directly to the trail and promoting Ulster County as a prime destination for rail enthusiasts and tourists alike.

[Image Source: Catskill Mountain Railroad]

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