

KINGSTON

## Catskill Mountain Railroad reports ridership record in 2023



The Catskill Mountain Railroad train can be seen at its Kingston Plaza location on Monday, Feb. 12. TANIA BARRICKLO/DAILY FREEMAN

KINGSTON, N.Y. >> The Catskill Mountain Railroad posted record ridership in 2023, carrying 51,610 passengers, the railroad announced in a press release.

The railroad said all of its offerings posted increases over 2023.

The most popular offering was the holiday-themed Polar Express, which carried 31,589 passengers averaging 400 passengers per train, according to the press release.

Other theme rides offered by the railroad in 2023 included Easter Bunny rides, Catskill Summer Flyer with Ice Cream Sundays, Twilight Limited, Fall Foliage and Pumpkin Express.

The railroad said 86.5% of its customers, or 44,467 passengers, came from outside of Ulster County, mainly from downstate and New Jersey.

“These out-of-county customers generate net economic benefits to the County by patronizing local businesses for food, lodgings, entertainment and shopping, especially in Kingston Plaza, Midtown and Uptown Kingston,” the railroad said in the announcement.

The railroad estimated these passengers brought an economic benefit to small businesses in Ulster County of \$5.3 million and its expenditures, including payrolls, added another \$1.7 million in economic benefit to the area.

The Ulster County Regional Chamber of Commerce named the Catskill Mountain Railroad its Best Tourist Attraction of 2023.

The railroad recently had its operating permit extended for five years by Ulster County Executive Jen Metzger and the Ulster County Legislature by a unanimous vote. The trains depart from its Westbrook Lane Station near the Hannaford supermarket at Kingston Plaza and travel a portion of the Ulster and Delaware Railroad corridor.

The railroad said it hopes to work in the future with Metzger and the Legislature to extend the ride another 1.7 miles to Basin Road at the eastern trailhead of the Ashokan Rail Trail. The railroad said if permission is granted, it would complete the extension entirely at its own expense.

The railroad said it signed a long-term lease in 2021 with a local landowner for a future terminal at Basin Road just east of the Ashokan Reservoir. Railroad officials said the lease includes the right to run a parallel bike trail next to the tracks, part of a long-term plan to run a trail adjacent to the tracks from Kingston to the Ashokan Reservoir.