



HHFT Visitation Data Committee Meeting

Date: January 18, 2024

Time: 5:30pm – 7:30pm

Location: (Zoom)

MINUTES

A meeting of the Hudson Highlands Fjord Trail, Inc. Visitation Data Committee took place on January 18, 2024 over Zoom.

Committee Members Present: Henry Feldman (VCS), Jeff Robbins (Philipstown), Phil Cotennec (Philipstown), James Labate (VCS), Chris Winward (Nelsonville), Sarah Mencher (Beacon)

Committee Members Not Present: Greg Totino (Fishkill)

VDC Consultant Present: Georges Jacquemart (BFJ Planning)

Staff Present: Amy Kacala, MJ Martin, Drew Polinsky

Guests Present: Chelsea Anderson, About the Work (AtW), Al Shacklett and John Moss, ORCA Consulting

Agenda

AtW reviewed the agenda for the meeting.

Charge of the Committee

AtW provided a refresher on the VDC's charge.

GEIS and Visitor Management Goals and Purposes

AtW stated that while related, the GEIS and the Visitor Management Study have different goals and purposes. She described the goals and purposes of the GEIS process.

ORCA described the Visitor Management Study with emphasis on its purpose to inform HHFT operations and management decision-making.

AtW and ORCA discussed how ORCA's work informs two separate but related work products: the GEIS and the Visitation Management report designed to guide HHFT's operations.



AtW and ORCA discussed specifically how ORCA's work will inform the GEIS. Data from the User/Visitation Projection will be referenced in the GEIS chapter on Affected Environment and in the Analysis/Conclusions. Recommendations from the VMS will be referenced in the Analysis/Conclusions. ORCA's VMS will also be included in the GEIS Appendices.

VDC Memo and Responses

After review of the reports provided, the VDC and their consultant provided a memo with questions and recommendations. Written responses will be provided. The key topics from the memo were discussed at the meeting.

- **Pedestrian Level of Service Counts (LOS)**
 - ORCA and HHFT will consider the recommendation made by the VCS and BFJ Planning on references in the DGEIS to this analysis.
 - A VDC member asked how traffic studies will get incorporated? AtW: AKRF is doing the traffic study. ORCA added that traffic data will be incorporated into the simulation model as it pertains to the shuttle system.
 - BFJ Planning asked if the AKRF video capture counts will be considered in LOS? AtW stated that there is no place this data is considered in GEIS for projects in the Hudson Valley.

- **Pedestrian Flow Data on Main Street**
 - ORCA commented that the key area of congestion on weekends is west of Fair Street.
 - BFJ Planning requested more photos or videos to support the claim of crowding in the Village. ORCA to share what was taken while in the field.
 - A VDC member stated he has observed pedestrian traffic on Route 9D where there is no sidewalk. ORCA responded that in ORCA's observations specific factors influence this behavior, where visitor parking is pushed east and people take the quickest route to the trails: Mayor's Park parking closed, events on St. Mary's lawn are two examples influencing this. The new parking areas Fjord Trail will build north of the Village will help with this.



- **People At One Time counts (PAOT)**

- ORCA stated that pedestrian flow data on Main St. was taken multiple times of day, on different days/seasons, which gives better accuracy when modeled out and evens out variability.
- ORCA stated that PAOT counts were taken West of Main Street at Dockside to one block east of Route 9D (Fishkill Ave. and Academy St.)
- ORCA confirmed that maximum counts referenced on separate pages of the report are not additive.
- ORCA discussed the importance of timing in gathering data – getting regular pedestrian movement data and noting movement just after MNR and SeaStreak boat arrivals helps illustrate the effects of surge arrivals.
- BFJ Planning brought up the value of video counting in informing models but that the camera count stops at noon each day that was studied by AKRF. AtW to review with AKRF.
- A VDC member wondered if the video stops at noon, wasn't peak crowding missed? ORCA stated that they can extrapolate counts based on the existing data. BFJ Planning acknowledged that while approaching the data with a new formula likely won't make a difference in results, the VDC would like flow numbers on particular corners as it could provide a useful metric.

- **Metro-North and SeaStreak Pedestrian Flows**

- ORCA intentionally varied times and days of the week and seasons in collected data to be methodical. Some observations while in the field illustrated patterns: MNR hiker crowd uses Fair St. to access trails mainly, SeaStreak visitors mainly visit Main Street to shop and dine and then visit Dockside if they have extra time before boarding the boat.
- ORCA said people follow each other in the absence of information, creating large surge crowds. Recommendations: SS crew should offer destination options for passengers before they dock to disperse the crowds; move docking time away from MNR arrivals to avoid the double surge arrival; better wayfinding; encouraging use of West Point Foundry Preserve as a destination option.



- BFJ Planning recommended the use of the Delphi process.
- A VDC member asked if reprioritizing hiker goals by encouraging visits to other parks like WFPF was really possible? ORCA said that if even 2-5% peel off from the crowd it helps relieve surge congestion.
- **Economic Contribution to CS Community**
 - Committee recommended that a note be made that VCS does not benefit from sales tax from Main Street businesses.
 - A VDC member stated there is an assumption that somebody is benefiting from the visitation, but it's not what the community wants. How do you get people not to come rather than make it a better experience? AtW reminded the group that Fjord Trail is a non-profit not benefiting from the visitation but rather tasked with implementing solutions to address the existing visitation and safety issues.
 - A VDC member countered that "lumpiness" has its own problems. Spreading visitation will only encourage more visitors. ORCA stated that distribution of visitation is key to improving quality of life for residents. You have to be proactive with solutions.
 - AtW stated that visitation makes Main Street viable and has workforce benefits. ORCA concurred, a thriving Main St. means a thriving community.
 - ORCA stated that the new VCS parking plan for weekends will generate municipal revenue from visitors.
- **Specific Questions**
 - Goal is to identify baseline visitation right now, look at VCS with recommendations for ways to improve conditions.
 - A VDC member wondered, with ORCA and AKRF using different methods, was enough peak season data gathered. ORCA was out on Oct. 28th this year and reminded the group that ORCA collected data on Memorial Day weekend too and that it was a peak. There were days in October that were rainy and July was impacted by smoke. Independence Day weekend was warmer than expected, which impacts hiking visits. There are no typical peak weekends that repeat



consistently because of weather and other factors. AtW stated that AKRF did fall data in 2022. NY-NJ Trail Conference has provided trailhead data as well. All of the data has been considered. ORCA will take patterns from AKRF morning counts and apply them to develop afternoon counts.

- A VDC member asked if the camera up on Oct. 21 belonged to an HHFT consultant? AtW to confirm.

- BFJ Planning recommended that LOS traffic would be a good data point.

- AtW reminded the group that the GEIS looks at existing conditions and then compares them to no build or built conditions. BFJ Planning stated that the difference between the two determines whether there is a need and, if so, what type of mitigation measures. AtW emphasized that mitigation measures are only for new visitation, not visitation that would exist in the future whether or not the Fjord Trail is built.

- **Additional Work Product Cold Spring Specific Visitation Management Study**

- AtW reminded the committee that HHFT did this study voluntarily to understand current conditions in the Village, identify potential solutions for VCS and its business community to consider, and explore ways in which HHFT could partner with community stakeholders to better manage existing visitation. This document is not required for EIS.

- A VDC member said a lot of the visitation is Cold Spring related and some of the recommendations are related to VCS and have nothing to do with the trail. Is there a plan to make a formal presentation to VCS? AtW said that HHFT had planned to make presentations of this study's recommendations to both the VCS Board of Trustees and the Cold Spring Chamber of Commerce.

Additional discussion of GEIS elements and requirements

- A VDC member sought clarification that there are three conditions studied in the environmental review: existing, built, and no build. AtW stated yes, there is always a comparison to a no build condition.

- A VDC member asked how do you determine the delta and what its impacts are? ORCA stated models will reveal future visitation numbers and patterns.



- A VDC member asked when the committee would see data on new visitors? ORCA answered that the visitation projection study will give this information. ORCA said that multiple sources of data, including surveys and a multitude of existing data sets are pulled from to project visitation.
- A VDC member asked if the committee will get the raw data. AtW answered that some of the raw data can be shared with the committee.
- Wrapping up, HHFT stated that HHFT will release the report, minutes and VDC question document with answers to the public for review in the next couple weeks.
- The HHFT Park Director, introduced himself to the VDC members.

The meeting adjourned at 7:26pm.

Respectfully submitted by:

Chelsea Anderson, About the Work