

Railroad to arrest bicyclists who cross tracks

Official warns bike path users not to trespass on Guilford site

By **BILL BYRON**
Gazette Reporter

ROTTERDAM JUNCTION - Cyclists using the county bike rail may not be stopped by just railroad cars blocking the like path. Now they are in danger of being arrested if they cross the tracks, a railroad official said on Tuesday.

The Bike-Hike Trail, which runs throughout Schenectady and Albany counties, crosses three Guilford Rail System tracks at Scrafford Lane in Rotterdam Junction. Those tracks have been regularly blocked by railroad cars since last year, and the company has no plans to move the obstructions.

In fact, last week the company made it even more difficult to cross the tracks. Guilford removed pavement that made it easier for a bicycle to cross the tracks and placed large cement barriers on either side.

"Our police will be out there patrolling, and if people are on the tracks, they'll be arrested," said David Fink, executive vice president of Guilford Rail. "The railroad has their own police and have been patrolling in the area. We'll ask them politely the first time but the chronic abusers will be arrested."

Fink claims that Guilford allowed a private crossing over the tracks for the resident of a nearby home owned by Richard Tauzel. But since that house burned down a few years ago, Guilford claims the crossing rights are no longer necessary.

"The crossing was a private crossing to serve the home on the other side of the tracks," Fink said. "That home is gone - so the crossing is gone."

Although pedestrians and cyclists used the crossing for more than 20 years, Fink said the crossing existed only so the resident of the house could reach the property.

Now that railroad cars are regularly left idling across the path, cyclists must crawl through the cars or double back on the path, taking Route 5S for several miles to connect to the other side of the path.



Dottie Aunchman walks her dog on the bike path near the railroad tracks in Rotterdam Junction on Tuesday. The bike path used to cross the tracks, but the tracks' owner now is threatening to arrest trespassers.

"We either have to crawl under the train or go over the train connections now," Dottie Aunchman, a path user said on Tuesday. "Or we have to use 5S and go all the way down to Myers Tavern and then use a side street."

Guilford has been negotiating with the county to build a tunnel connecting the two portions of the path, Fink said.

But county officials are not even sure it is their responsibility, county Director of Public Works Joseph Ryan said.

"Our maps indicate that it is a town road," Ryan said. "We're assessing whether the town or the county will be the lead in this."

Rotterdam town Attorney Thomas DeLorenzo was unaware of the situation and said the history of the documents must be researched.

"The preference would be the railroad would come to the table and remedy this. They seem to have more or less created this problem," Ryan said.

The county bike path came to an end on Scrafford Lane until an extension was built in 1998. From the former termination on Scrafford Lane, a path user must cross the tracks, travel less than a mile north on 5S to Iroquois Street.

From Iroquois Street, the path continues for another 1.3 miles, where it now ends.

Without crossing the tracks, a user must travel several miles out of the way to reach the Iroquois path.