

Free the Schuylkill River Park Coalition

Philadelphia Residents Fighting For Safe Access to the new Schuylkill River Park

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Citizens Rally for Safe Access to Schuylkill River Park

Hundreds Call on CSX Railroad President to Meet Residents before Forcing Fence Closing

Philadelphia - City residents marked President's Day by rallying at the site of the new Schuylkill River Park today demanding that CSX Transportation not fence off existing Center City access points at Locust and Race St. Meeting at the Locust Street access point, near 25th and Locust Street at noon today, they called on CSX President Michael Ward to meet with the citizen organizations and government officials to negotiate safe at-grade crossings.

"CSX is forcing the City to fence off a valuable new Center City resource without considering the safety of Park users", said Sarah Clark Stuart, Coordinator of the Free the Schuylkill River Park Coalition. "We need CSX, the City, and the State to agree to construct 'state of the art' at-grade crossings at the Locust and Race Street access points. This problem can be solved if everyone gets on track."

Schuylkill River Park has been in the works for more than thirty years. After several delays, a new bike and pedestrian path is near completion on the east bank of the Schuylkill River continuing south of the Philadelphia Art Museum and the newly renovated Water Works. The paved path extends south past Locust Street. CSX Transportation maintains a spur line along much of the new path and is requiring the City to maintain a six foot high security fence between the Park and the tracks as per a 1979 agreement with the former owners of the tracks.

"CSX's fence is not designed to keep us safe from their tracks – it only serves to keep the Park off limits to residents," said Russell Meddin, another Coalition Coordinator. "If Michael Ward and the CSX Transportation care about safety, then they should meet with us to work out a safe solution for Park users, residents and emergency vehicles to get across those tracks."

More than 350 Philadelphia residents and 25 Civic, Recreation and Neighborhood Groups have expressed their support of safe at-grade crossings in letters to CSX and Governor Ed Rendell. Local elected officials have supported the cause with their own letters to both CSX and the Governor, calling for negotiations. The Rendell administration allocated \$500,000 to complete the park in 2003.

"The Governor needs to know that \$14 million dollars of public investment will be wasted if a park is created that can't be effectively accessed" said Sam Little, a transportation expert who lives near the park. "Safe at-grade crossings will give us a new park that we all will be proud of – while fencing off access will give us an unsafe park that people won't use," he concluded.

The Free the Schuylkill Park Coalition was formed in November 2003 when the City began constructing the fence. "What better way to celebrate the birthday of the President who freed those who used the Underground Railway than by having lots of folks come out to tell this railroad to free Schuylkill River Park," said Andy Toy, a community activist and Park neighbor.

See <http://freetheriverpark.typepad.com> for background information and pictures of the park