

The Pulse of Parks:

Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park

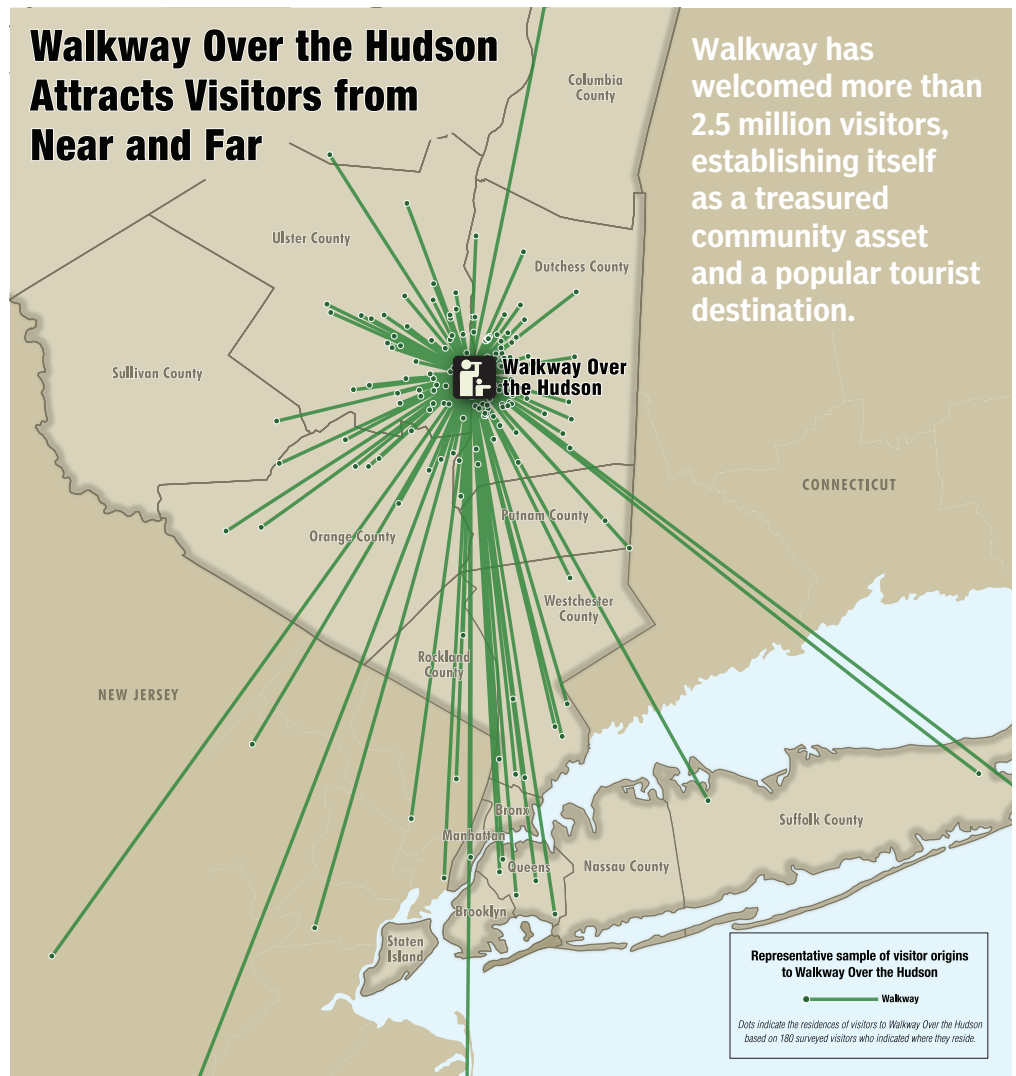
A source of renewed pride for local community and valuable tourism destination

A REPORT OF THE OPEN SPACE INSTITUTE'S ALLIANCE FOR NEW YORK STATE PARKS WINTER 2014

"I've gone to Yellowstone, to Hawaii, to Europe, and this place just reminds me of how beautiful it is where I live. I am so lucky to be 15 minutes away from here."

"This place is bubbling. It's great to see groups of school kids, families, all ages. It's wonderful...the Central Park of this part of New York. It draws everybody across the board."

Walkway Over the Hudson Attracts Visitors from Near and Far



Walkway has welcomed more than 2.5 million visitors, establishing itself as a treasured community asset and a popular tourist destination.

Unique state park welcomes more than 2.5 million visitors, inspiring local residents and attracting out-of-town visitors

Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park is a pedestrian bridge spanning the Hudson River between the city of Poughkeepsie in Dutchess County and the town of Lloyd in Ulster County. Located one and a half hours north of New York City, the linear park sits atop a converted 19th century railroad bridge. At 212 feet high and 1.28 miles long, it is the longest elevated pedestrian bridge in the world.

The park is managed and maintained by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation and is served by an active and effective friends group.

“I was shocked by the amount of people who walk this area. It’s one of the most popular attractions in Poughkeepsie right now.”

Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park officially opened to the public in October, 2009, and have welcomed more than 2.5 million visitors. The park’s storied history and transformation, unique and highly accessible features and early, popular success has made the Walkway a source of tremendous community pride and a favorite tourism destination for the region and beyond.

Historic Park Has Become a Key Cultural and Recreational Asset

In the few short years since the Walkway Over the Hudson opened it has become a local valued community asset, appreciated for the physical and mental wellness benefits it offers visitors.

A survey conducted over a series of weekday and weekend days in 2012 found that thirty percent of visitors were on the bridge for the first time. Nearly all the rest came frequently, either several times a week (26 percent) or several times a month (40 percent).

Local residents emphasize the physical benefits gained by walking and exercising on the bridge, while valuing the views and beautiful scenery.

A First-Class Tourist Destination

The Walkway Over the Hudson is credited with providing a major economic boost to Dutchess and Ulster Counties. The park has proven to be a popular tourist destination and has spurred economic activity in the surrounding areas.



About This Study

A capital needs assessment completed in 2010 by the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation identified a statewide backlog of more \$1 billion. The state parks suffer from broken and outdated facilities, the result of decades of insufficient funding for regular maintenance and infrastructure improvement. Recognizing the parks’ importance to all New Yorkers, Governor Cuomo and the state legislature have taken first steps to remedy the problem.

To evaluate the merits of continued investment, the Open Space Institute, with the support of the Dyson Foundation, commissioned a study of Walkway Over the Hudson State Historic Park. The study, aimed at finding out who visits the park and how they value it, was

conducted by the Public Space Research Group at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York and completed by volunteers of the Walkway’s Ambassador program.

Surveyors conducted a quantitative demographic survey over three days in September 2012, adhering to standard protocols for random sampling, data collection and analysis, and the results (based on 180 responses) can be considered statistically reliable.

Surveyors then interviewed visitors over three additional days later that month. This qualitative survey’s open-ended questions were designed to elicit information about how and why people use the park.



“You have a wide mixture of people here. You have students, you have elderly folks... doing their daily walks. You have visitors, you have joggers... The mixture of people is a very good thing.”

“The people saved their own great walkway. They honored it by saving it.”

Since the Walkway opened, the park has beaten attendance expectations; attracting more than 2.5 million people. The 2012 survey found that just under 40 percent of visitors came from beyond Dutchess and Ulster Counties, with a majority of those visitors traveling from downstate. Visitors come from all over the world to take in the magnificent views and appreciate the Hudson River and its surroundings.

Accessible Outdoors

The ample width and easy grade of the Walkway makes the park uniquely accessible for visitors of all ages. The setting also supports a lively social scene and diverse forms of movement from daily walkers and runners to dog-walkers, bicyclists and young parents pushing strollers.

Although the park is utilized by visitors of all ages, there is a distinct appeal to older individuals, with adults 61 and older comprising 41 percent of survey respondents.

Saving the Bridge

Once an abandoned railroad bridge and local eyesore, today the Walkway Over the Hudson is a transformative and unique Hudson Valley destination. The conversion took 15 years of steadfast advocacy and community activism.

Leading the effort was Walkway Over the Hudson, a nonprofit organization, that today works to support and improve the park by building new amenities and features. The group also provides program and event support and recruits and trains volunteers to serve as guides and ambassadors.

The history of the bridge and the community effort that went into saving it and building the Walkway adds to the emotional connection local visitors have with the bridge. It is a symbol of cultural identity, social progress and a beacon of hope for economic development in the region.



Digital interpretations are one of the hallmarks of the Walkway and are available via Mobile Web Tour at walkway.marist.edu and at 32 locations on the Walkway. Recordings are in both English and Spanish and soon to be Mandarin Chinese.

More information

This report is based on one of three studies of New York State Park user demographics. The other studies involve Jones Beach State Park and Harriman State Park's Lake Welch. Reports are available for download at www.osiny.org/Publications_Alliance.

The Open Space Institute's Alliance for New York State Parks works to protect and enhance state parks and historic sites for present and future generations. To learn more, visit www.osiny.org/alliance.

Protect Their Future: New York's State Parks in Crisis describes the status of state parks.

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walkway.org