



Date: November 30, 2021

Notes Taken By: Cierra Ford

Place: Teams Meeting

Project No.: 58600.04

Re: LVRT Management Plan: Kick-Off Meeting

#### ATTENDEES:

Michele Boomhower – VTrans  
Amy Bell – VTrans  
Jon Kaplan – VTrans  
Jacqueline DeMent – VTrans  
Joel Perrigo – VTrans  
Chris Hunt – VTrans  
Mark Fitzgerald – VTrans  
Matthew Arancio – VTrans  
Melanie Riddle – Lamoille County Planning Commission  
Rob Moore – Lamoille County Planning Commission  
Bethany Remmers – Northwest Regional Planning Commission  
David Snedeker – Northeastern Vermont Development Association  
Ken Brown – Vermont Association of Snow Travelers  
Dave Saladino – VHB  
Karen Sentoff – VHB  
Sam Alger – VHB  
Evan Detrick – VHB  
Cierra Ford – VHB  
Mark Jewell – VHB  
Chris DeWitt – VHB

#### Summarized Agenda

- Introductions
- Project overview
- Review project scope and schedule
- Identify project stakeholders and plan for first round of public meetings
- Data and information gathering
- Discuss anticipated issues and opportunities
- Next steps

#### Meeting Summary

The meeting kicked off with a round of introductions. David Saladino and Michele Boomhower provided a project overview. This project is being conducted in anticipation of the lease for maintenance activities and trail work transitioning from the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST) to VTrans at end of June 2022. The trail, when construction is completed, will consist of 93 miles of east-west rail trail through 19 towns in northern Vermont.

This project coincides with requests from Senator Sanders and Senator Leahy for earmarked funds in the Budget Reconciliation Bill. Senator Sanders has requested \$2 Million for the LVRT. It was added that it is important to note that the funding requested by the Senate delegates is not guaranteed and other funding resources should be explored.

Karen Sentoff reviewed the scope of work, with a focus on the importance of stakeholder and public involvement throughout the project. The primary deliverables associated with each task are as follows:

- Task 1: Memo summarizing data needs and preliminary issues and opportunities
- Task 2: Memo summarizing stakeholder meetings/interviews and public meetings
- Task 3: Memo summarizing existing conditions and draft vision and goals statement
- Task 4: Memo on gap analysis, needs assessment, conceptual plans and cost estimates for enhancements, operations, and maintenance
- Task 5: Final vision and goals, LVRT recommendations and implementation plan, and a 10-year capital improvement plan
- Task 6: Draft and final LVRT Management Plan

It is anticipated that Tasks 2, 3, and 4 will be in progress simultaneously. It was noted that conceptual plans developed in Task 4 may be a hybrid of some site-specific solutions and some "typical" concepts.

VHB reviewed the project schedule, which is anticipated to carry through to the proposed transfer of management responsibilities from VAST to VTrans on June 30, 2022. The question of timing the first public meeting was raised. Preference to wait until after the holidays for the first public meeting was voiced.

It was emphasized that stakeholders will be critical to the project and that part of Task 2 will be to conduct up to 10 interviews with stakeholders. A discussion of possible stakeholders to involve in the project through interviews or other engagement ensued. Michele suggested that state agencies (VTrans, ANR, ACCD) all attend one meeting to provide the opportunity to get all of the agencies on the same page. VTrans offered to help identify the appropriate representatives from each agency. Ken Brown offered that there are a few more layers to VAST than the list indicates. He suggested including businesses that are along the trail and local clubs (approximately 10) that may have different perspectives than VAST. He recommended communicating through Chris Hunt to get the word out to the various clubs. The anticipated level of involvement in this process from the local clubs came up. Ken suggested that the public meeting forum was probably sufficient for the purposes of engaging the clubs and understanding their perspective. He recommended that the clubs be invited to the public meetings and provided the opportunity to follow up if they wanted to be more involved. The suggestion was made to look back at the groups that were active on the LVRT Committee circa 2012. Ken offered to look back at meeting minutes to identify other groups that this effort may want to reengage. Another suggestion was made to involve the Department of Health. Either the chronic disease prevention section or possibly the regional offices along the trail may have interest in being involved. Suzanne Kelly is a possible contact for the Department of Health. Additionally, AARP of Vermont has interest in active transportation.

Suggestions of project stakeholders are listed below:

- State agencies (VTrans, ANR, ACCD)

- Regional planning commissions (NRPC, LCPC, NVDA)
- VAST
- Local Clubs
- Businesses along the trail
- Friends of LVRT
- Northwest Rail Trail Council
- Municipal representatives (Highgate, Swanton, Sheldon, Fairfield, Bakersfield, Fletcher, Cambridge, Johnson, Hyde Park, Morristown, Wolcott, Greensboro, Hardwick, Stannard, Walden, Cabot, Danville, St. Johnsbury)
- VT Trout Unlimited
- Outdoor Business Alliance
- VT Mountain Bike Association
- Local Motion
- Organization of Bike Shops (if such a thing exists)
- Vermont ATV Sportsman's Association – Note: ATV use is prohibited on the trail
- Local chambers of commerce
- VT Department of Health
- School districts
- AARP Vermont

The preference for the first public meeting would be to target the second week in January. The format of the meeting was discussed. The state has been trying to provide hybrid opportunities for public meetings, similar with the RPCs, some of which have to provide a physical location. VHB will plan on a hybrid meeting. The question was raised of whether construction updates should be integrated with the public meetings in anticipation of there being some questions about the construction on the remaining sections. VHB will be proactive and give the latest construction update at the public meeting.

The topic of data and information gathering was discussed, with a focus on data needs for the study.

GIS resources that have been gathered are based on 2008-2009 inventorying done for the corridor. Some sections have been updated based on the design and construction of intermediate sections.

Part of final documents package for LVRT design plans is a signage plan. This plan will cover signage along the trail as well as destination signs to direct users to and from the trail. The plan will include locations for signs and what they will look like.

Parking access for the trail was discussed. VAST has agreements for parking during the winter but these agreements may not exist during other seasons, so this effort will need to focus on year-round users and not just a single user group. Rob Moore also indicated that signage should be considered in this way too, much of the current signage is seasonal and will need to serve year-round users. It would be helpful to know about established parking areas and identify areas that are being used for parking as these areas could be candidates for creating formal parking. Ken Brown noted that Cambridge Junction has a parking area that has been expanded three times. These expansions included asking permission of a property owner. There are no documented parking studies, but VAST and user groups

have some anecdotal knowledge base for parking needs. Ken also offered that VAST has a shape file for LVRT interactive map (including parking point locations).

In terms of count data for the corridor, David Snedeker noted that NVDA has completed traffic/pedestrian counts along the completed section from St. Johnsbury to Danville.

Amenities along trail route should be included in the inventory. Things that trail users will want to know about or supporting services they might require like where to get a bike fixed, proximity to lodging, food/drink, etc.

David Snedeker also noted that they had worked recently with White Out Solutions to do an aerial flyover with a drone from St. Johnsbury to the Lamoille County line along the trail route. That LiDAR data is now available. VHB will connect with David on this.

One data need identified by Bethany was any known adjacent brownfields, hazardous materials, contaminated soils, etc. A note was made that some of the data from the existing inventory is from the 2008 inventory and if there are updates available regarding these data resources those should be incorporated.

Examples of using a map interface to gather information and interact with the public was shared with the group. One example shown on the screen was the Vermont Freight Plan, where an interactive map with a comment tab was available for the public to identify ideas or issues. There was a short survey available through the same interface to ask targeted questions. Another example was a story map approach used on a Burlington-based project, where maps and concepts were shared and interspersed with survey questions. One benefit to creating an interface like these is that it can be available to the public outside of the public meeting period. Jon Kaplan added that the on-road bike plan crowdsourced input from the public several years ago and it was pretty well received.

The question of where the website and any web-based engagement tools should live was raised. Currently there are two websites for the LVRT, one VTrans managed site and one VAST managed site. Ken suggested that once management of LVRT transitions away from VAST, he doesn't anticipate they'll need to hold on to website or content. Snowmobile information is on a different website. LVRT.org is a project of VAST. There does not need to be a separate VAST website for LVRT. Currently the construction information is the main information on the VTrans LVRT site. Jacqueline offered that VT Tourism and Marketing will have some insight into a long term website for the trail and where that might live. She suggested bringing that up with that group. It was noted that Heather Pelham from VT Tourism and Marketing will be invited to future stakeholder meetings.

Bethany added a note that the NRPC has some studies and plans to pass along, including a conceptual design for the Sheldon Junction parking area at the intersection of MVRT and LVRT, a 2013 Fairfield study for proposed trail connections to LVRT, and a 2020/2021 Marketing Plan for MVRT. VHB will follow up by email for these resources.

## **Issues and Opportunities**

The question of what the most important things that the report contains and/or addresses should be was raised.

From the current management perspective from VAST, the two most important things are funding and schedule. Management is currently being done reactively. Now as they prepare to turn the facility back to VTrans, they are

running into things they should have been proactive with (like bridge decks rotting). In many sections the corridor is a functional trail, but might not be meeting user expectations (i.e. grass growing, rust, other more aesthetic reasons). Maintenance for this length of trail would be constant.

David Snedeker offered that communities along route are already planning for the day new sections are open. How can we work closer with those communities and bring them to the table? Jacqueline suggested some communities have municipal planning grants to look ahead to see what the trail will bring for them in the future. Some areas identified in those efforts where they want to develop are rail owned assets. This could become an issue as communities start envisioning their downtown areas and connections to the trail to make their amenities accessible to users. Michele suggested that this plan should spell out the agency policy and provide guidance on how the agency will manage everything along the rail corridor.

Mark offered that in property management they do long term leases for the area. The critical information becomes what is proposed to be developed, who is developing it, and what is the long-term maintenance plan. The goal is to keep the railroad corridor intact somewhat. The approach has been to look at every project and how it'll impact the corridor and who is responsible. Long term leasers will invest time/money into the trail. We will want to have that protocol outlined in the Plan so people understand the approach and can plan for advancing projects which may occur in the rail ROW. Making connections from the trail to communities is essential to realizing the economic benefits of the trail.

Jon Kaplan noted that there is a project that UVM Transportation Research Center is pursuing for funding to collect counts along the LVRT. This would entail setting up a counting program with some semi-permanent counters and temporary counters over a 3-year period. The idea is to share that data with local businesses so that they understand the number of trail users and opportunities for drawing in business. The grant is an opportunity that each New England state has the potential to receive. It is noted that the grant application is due soon so they will know in the spring if it is successful. It was suggested that trail counting be part of the management plan.

The point was made that parking is a serious concern. Making sure there is adequate parking along the trail so people are not parking in illegal or inappropriate locations to access the trail will be critical.

Identifying scheduled maintenance needs and laying out what is required over time so that maintenance of the trail's assets are dealt with proactively. It will also be important to understand the costs associated with these maintenance needs so the budget for the proactive maintenance schedule can be programmed appropriately. The next step is really understanding what it is going to take to maintain this asset as an attractive amenity over time.

### **Next Steps**

The next steps on the horizon for the project include:

- Technical memo summarizing feedback from today's meeting;
- Scheduling interviews and planning for the January public meeting; and,
- Jumping into the existing conditions assessment.

The next meeting with this stakeholder group is currently scheduled after the public meeting. This meeting will serve as an opportunity to digest the takeaways from the public input.