



Meeting Notes

Date: January 25, 2022 Notes Taken By: Elisabeth Sundberg

Place: Green Mountain Technology & Career Center & Zoom

Project No.: 58600.06 Re: LVRT Management Plan Public Meeting #1

Lamoille Valley Rail Trail Management Plan Public Meeting Summary

Welcome and Introductions

The meeting started with introductions by David Saladino, consultant team project manager. David introduced the project team and speakers for the evening, including Chris Hunt, Karen Sentoff, Michele Boomhower, and Amy Bell. He conveyed that the primary goal of the meeting is to receive feedback from meeting participants on the opportunities and issues they see or anticipate along the LVRT corridor. He then welcomed Michele Boomhower to provide opening remarks.

Michele emphasized how it is an exciting time for the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail with construction underway on the remaining segments of trail and expected completion in 2022. The funding received from Senator Sanders provided a way to collaborate and coordinate with communities and partners throughout the rail trail network.

Michele shared that she has been associated with this project for 25 years since she began working for the Lamoille County Planning Commission. When she first moved to Vermont in the late 80s there was a state-owned train that was purchased in 1973. Up until 1995 the rail was leased by many operators but severe flooding that year damaged or washed away many connections of the rail system. When the flood occurred, the rail system was operating as a scenic train and did not have enough fiscal backing to continue. The lease was dissolved and the vision for what to do with the corridor next began.

By 1997, the State worked with the Regional Planning Commissions along the rail trail in collaboration with Economic Development Corporations and Chambers of Commerce to examine how they could take this resource owned by the state and preserve this corridor for future generations to use. One way was through approval by the Federal Surface Transportation Board to preserve the corridor for interim uses while retaining the option for rail service in the future if ever it was to be operational and profitable again. In 2004, the Surface Transportation Board approved the State of Vermont to move forward with "Railbanking" the corridor.

Around 2005, the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST), who were wintertime users of segments of the trail for some time, submitted a proposal for reuse of the trail. The state of Vermont selected VAST's proposal and entered a lease agreement. Senator Sanders came forward with funding for the project. With growing construction costs and a lengthy trail corridor, it became apparent that it was not enough money to support the development of the entire length of trail. VAST and other key stakeholders came together to continue development of the trail. She noted VAST played an integral role in engaging community members through a capital campaign to raise funds for the effort. People were very generous in bringing their resources to this project. Because they could view the long-term opportunity for this to be a terrific resource, not only for the local communities along the rail trail, but also for visitors to the state of Vermont who are interested in recreation of this nature.

Michele commented on how exciting it is to be here tonight and undertaking this management planning process, which is the first of its kind for the rail trails in the state. Michele thanked the various organizations and community members that have supported the development of the corridor and who made this project possible, including VAST, Friends of the LVRT, RPCs, local Chambers of Commerce and Development Corporations, towns, businesses, and many volunteers and donors.

Project Background

Karen Sentoff introduced the project team and stakeholder groups, noting that the stakeholder group was assembled to help guide the management planning process and has representatives across many sections of VTTrans, the Department of Tourism and Marketing, the RPCs, VAST, and Friends of the LVRT.

Karen reviewed the agenda for the evening, where the team will provide a brief project background, update on construction project activities, discuss the existing conditions information gathered for the project, introduce the management plan development process, and spent the majority of the evening focused on gathering input from participants both in person and virtually. Following that she gave an overview of the history of the LVRT as a railway. Built in 1877, the rail was under various management over the year. Coined the "St. Johnsbury and Lake Champlain Railroad" – giving indication of the geography. Sustained rail operation through transport of freight and passengers for nearly 100 years. The state purchased the rail in 1973 and ceased rail operations in 1994. A decade later, the Surface Transportation Board approved railbanking of LVRT on February 13, 2004, meaning the rail would be preserved for future use while allowing interim use for other purposes.

She noted the history of the LVRT as a recreational trail, highlighting the lease with Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST) to begin rehabilitation of corridor in 2006. The stated goal was to restore the corridor as a four-season multi-use recreation and transportation corridor. From 2013 to 2018, VAST completed construction of 33 miles of trail. With construction in progress in 2018, VTrans assumed responsibility for constructing the remaining 49 miles. VAST continued management of the trail in accordance with the lease agreement and on July 1, 2022, the management responsibility shifts to VTrans.

Construction Update

Chris Hunt provided the construction update. He first thanked everyone from VAST and the many partners that have brought the project this far. He acknowledged that the work that VAST laid out has made it possible to complete this project in 2022. Chris described the map showing completed segments and sections under construction. There are currently four active projects that have been awarded to construction organizations. The priority bridges were awarded to J.P. Sicard and it is the hope that they are completed first because they have the longest lead times. Details Chris shared on each project are below:

- LVRT (10) – Bridge project; Contract awarded to J. P. Sicard, Inc. Removal of abutments and site prep work is underway and will continue through the winter with bridge construction beginning Spring of 2022. Construction contract amount: \$3,472,258.50. Completion date August 31, 2022.
- LVRT (11) – Sheldon Jct. to Cambridge; Contract awarded to Dirt Tech Company, LLC. Dirt Tech would like to begin stockpiling materials in their yard; however, no work is expected to begin until the end of the VAST season. Construction contract amount: \$2,476,651.15. Completion date November 12, 2022.
- LVRT (12) – Morrisville to Hardwick; Contract awarded to S. D. Ireland Construction. Pre-Construction Conference held 1/24/22. Some tree clearing and grubbing may begin this winter, but most of the work is not expected to begin until the end of the VAST season. Construction contract amount: \$6,986,878.50. Completion date November 10, 2022.
- LVRT (13) – Hardwick to West Danville (Joes Pond); Contract Awarded to G. W. Tatro Construction, Inc. Tree clearing, grubbing, and other preparatory work is underway and will continue through the winter with culvert, cattlepass, bridge, and trail work commencing in Spring of 2022. Construction contract amount: \$2,254,046.00. Completion date November 12, 2022

Chris finished by discussing the sign project – LVRT (14), which includes geographic signage to show users how to get to the trail, where they are on the trail, mile markers, and county and town boundary lines. There will be opportunities for community members to provide input and ideas regarding what they would like to see along the trail. He noted that the signage plan will not include signs pointing to individual businesses, events, attractions, or locations of historical significance along the trail. The signage plan should be implemented in early 2023 after the completion of the trail.

Existing Conditions

Karen provided an overview of the existing conditions gathered for the corridor. She noted that an inventory of the trail features has been gathered starting over a decade ago and the inventory was used to provide an overview of the LVRT by the numbers to summarize the many assets and features along the trail.

LVRT by the numbers

- 94.3 Miles of Trail
- 96 Crossings
- 53 bridges
- 5 tunnels
- 525 culverts
- 34 cattlepasses
- 6 fishery accesses
- 26 trailheads
- 29 Historic Sites
- 1700' Highest Elevation
- 157' Lowest Elevation
- 36 Miles Adjacent to Lamoille River

Karen continued to discuss the importance of connecting communities along the trail. With the completion of trail, it will be the longest trail in New England. The trail connects to other trail systems including VAST, Missisquoi Valley Rail Trail, Long Trail, Catamount Ski Trail, Northern Cross Vermont Trail, and many other trails and spurs. The completed trail will span 5 counties and 18 towns, providing many opportunities. Several towns' plans propose improvements to create LVRT connections. Examples included revitalization of the Danville train station as a Welcome Center, wayfinding improvements including signs, information kiosks, destination and trail maps, and bicycle and pedestrian improvement projects to provide connections to village and town centers.

Karen identified a number of management plans and guidance documents that were reviewed for best practices in the management plan development process. These resources help to set the foundation for elements to consider in the LVRT Management Plan. She pulled forward some of the key components from the management plans reviewed. The three main categories that were considered across the resources were management, maintenance and operations, and economic development. Some key topic areas for each included the following:

- Management
 - Policies and liabilities
 - Planning and budgeting
 - Surveys and counts
- Maintenance & Operations
 - Coordination at all levels
 - Roles and responsibilities
 - Routine and remedial maintenance
 - Scheduled condition assessment and maintenance tasks
 - Security and enforcement
- Economic Development
 - Community connections
 - Services and amenities
 - Align with local and regional planning initiatives

Management Plan Development Process

The existing VAST management plan was adopted in 2016. This document sets the stage for the development of the new management plan. As the management responsibilities shift from VAST to VTTrans, focus shifts to the longevity of the trail rather than the completion of the trail. The plan needs to describe a cohesive vision for the completed trail; strategies for management, maintenance, and operations; and support opportunities for community connections. The Management Plan for the LVRT will serve as a framework for management of other rail trails in Vermont. The process will gather input from the community and stakeholders to help define the vision for the trail and guide development of the management plan. The project team will look to gather input at public meetings like these, stakeholder interviews, an active website, an interactive crowdsourcing tool, and outreach through social media.

Karen noted that the project team is looking for input from communities along the corridor, stakeholders, and the general public to define the vision for the corridor, guide development of management plan, help to identify existing or anticipated issues on the corridor, and opportunities for trail improvements or enhancements.

Public Input

David kicked off the public input portion of the meeting by introducing the vision development for the management plan. He shared the vision from the 2016 management plan to build off for the vision of the updated management plan. Dave prompted both the online and in person participants with the question "What is one key word or phrase that comes to mind when you think about the completed the LVRT?"

Responses included:

- Active
- Recreation
- Development
- Growth
- Connection
- Connected communities
- Health
- Economic opportunity
- Celebrating history
- Inclusive
- Great attraction for locals and tourist
- Connectivity
- Functional route
- Capacity
- All users
- Reminds me path in Scotland
- Tourism money funnel
- Nature

He noted that these words or phrases will be used to construct vision statements and begin to articulate goals for the management plan. The main recurring themes that David pointed out were connectivity, economic promotion, and development.

Issues and Opportunities

- What are issues you experience on the existing LVRT segments?
- What issues do you anticipate when the trail is complete?

One person stated that they utilize the trail to commute from Sheldon to Swanton and that he is already experiencing grooves in the path from ATV users. Who will manage this to make it usable for all types of users?

Another person brought up the necessity for the trail to be accessible to paramedics to provide assistance. They pointed out that having an emergency on a trail is different than in a town. Trails have different labeling systems and having a cohesive one will allow for paramedics to safely locate the person.

Chris responded to this comment that there will be consistent mile markers as part of the signage plan, so users and responders can specify where they are on the trail. Emergency service providers will be engaged in the planning and construction process.

Issues identified in the chat included:

- Dog and horse poop on trail between Morrisville and Cambridge
- Dominance by one culture (bike)
- Vandalism
- Consistent mowing and maintenance
- Accessible toilets

Another participant presented a future issue for active transportation. They stated that bike racks and bike locks in strategic locations would be essential to encourage transportation use of the trail.

Another person asked where the zero-mile marker is. Chris chimed in to say that mile zero begins in Swanton.

Another anticipated issue is the increase in the number of people wanting to travel the whole corridor from start to finish. Will there be an opportunity for people to camp if they do the whole trail? The commenter offered that they have done a cross country bicycle trip where it was very common for towns along the way to open their public parks to transient people for camping. The protocol was to call the local police department and let them know they were camping.

One participant suggested resources that bring people to the community. The example of toileting was offered – provide resources so it can be done in a healthy way.

Another participant chimed in to offer that in the Midwest you can camp in the town centers where there are already facilities. Perhaps farmers along the trail could bring in income for camping permits on their property. They noted the ample opportunities for food truck events and other similar events.

A question was raised of how much state property is owned along the LVRT. Specifically, what is the width that state owns for the length of the corridor? Chris responded that when the rail came through, they took a lot in terms of right of way. The general rule of thumb is that the steeper the side slope along the trail the wider the right of way. He also mentioned that there is a right of way resource on the VTrans website where you can view a map of the property extents.

Comments from the chat included:

- Beds breakfast and bikes
- Campsites
- Bridge decking gets slick traction in places, how to aid this?
- Trash cans in place and benches
- Beautifications
- Bike rentals available
- Great opportunity to connect commuters
- Local groups allowed to use trail for events and 5ks

Hearing the many opportunities from the virtual participants, David posed the question - What opportunities do you see for the LVRT?

A number of ideas were offered, which included:

- Excitement to ride the whole length
- Envisioning bumper stickers that you rode the whole length
- Farm to fork bike rides
- Connecting our village and all recreational opportunities – mountain biking, hiking, canoeing,
- Connecting with adjacent landowners and farms

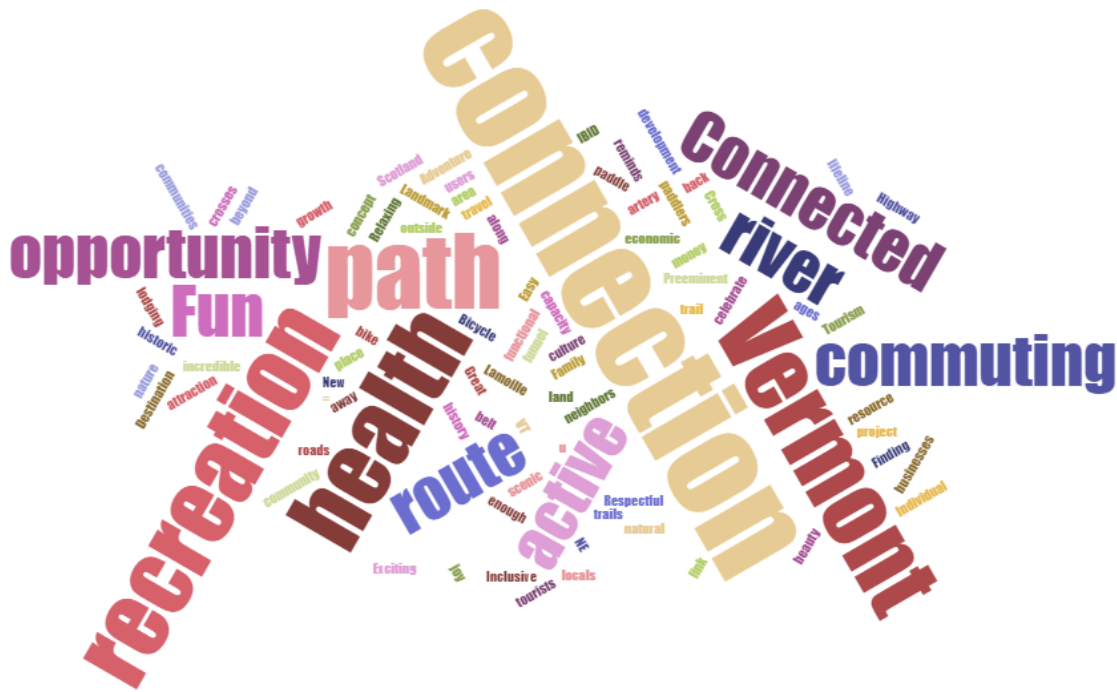
- Small villages can now support small businesses
- Connecting people with the river for recreation and repairing habitat
- Good north-south connection with the Long Trail – adding a bridge across the Lamoille River to connect north, south, east, and west
- Accessibility to e-bike charging stations
- Crowdsourc Input Tool – to share more ideas
- Use the trail to highlight historic sites along the route for education

One Morrisville resident offered that as the development of the trail is completed, there will be an increase in traffic using it. He has ridden finished portions. There may be an opportunity to have transportation from one end to the other, so if you bike one way a shuttle could bring you back to your car.

A suggestion was made specifically for Johnson to increase the number of bridges between the LVRT and other areas. There was an old stone mill bridge, the 54th bridge, that connected the two sides of the Lamoille River in the past.

David began to wrap up the session by thanking everyone in person and online for participating in the meeting. He introduced the Crowdsourc Input Tool as a resource for people to document any suggestions, ideas, and feedback on a map. The tool allows for people to comment and like previous comments or suggestions.

David presented the word cloud that was created by the ideas brought forward in the visioning exercise. He explained that the size of font relates to number of times a word or phrase shows up in comments. The most prominent words were connection, Vermont, commuting and recreation.



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Michele asked if people could add vision statements or other thoughts on the website?

David responded that any further vision ideas, comments, or questions can be forwarded to the project team through the website or directly, providing contact information as follows:

- Amy Bell | amy.bell@vermont.gov or 802-279-0783
- Karen Sentoff | ksentoff@vhb.com or 802-497-6130

David wrapped up with the next steps and timeline for the project:

- Wrap up Existing Conditions | January
- Conduct Stakeholder Interviews | February
- Gap Analysis & Needs Assessment | March
- Public Meeting | March
- Public Meeting | April
- Recommendations & Implementation Plan | May
- Final Management Plan | June

Project Team Attendees:

Amy Bell, VTrans Project Manager
Chris Hunt, VTrans Construction Deputy Project Manager
Michele Boomhower, VTrans Director of Policy, Planning, and Intermodal Development
Jacqui DeMent, VTrans Deputy Project Manager (virtual)
David Saladino, Project Manager with VHB
Karen Sentoff, VHB
Matt Hogan, VHB
Alan Belniak, VHB (virtual)
Elisabeth Sundberg, VHB
Samantha Alger, VHB (virtual)

Attendees:

Bobbi Rooney	David Snedeker (NVDA)
Matt Rooney	Eric
Dianna Osborn	Melanie Riddle
Rusty Gregory	Sara Schlosser (Sandiwood Farm Wolcott)
Bill Westermann	Laural Ruggles
Heidi Westermann	Clare Salerno (she/her)
Casey Romero	Michael Hogue
Louis Bushey	Chris
W. Gray	Branden Roberts
Tom DeKornfeld	Kate Wanner
Martha Battle	David Polow
Anea LeLong	Fred Pond
Ken Brown (VAST)	Joyce
Wendy	Lori
Ruth	Lauren Masseria (she/her)
Amy Adams (NRPC)	Scott Campbell
Duane Howard	Jim Ryan
Paul Fixx	Gillian Sewake (she/her)
Jim Rose	Al Spitzer
Ted	Tommy Gardner
Katharine Otto (VTrans)	Juliana Beecher
J. Warner	John Elkins
David T. Gross	Howard Romero
Dave K.M.	Bruce Kaufman
Claudia	J. Robinson
Laird MacDowell	Sandra Hamel
Nancy Banks	Mike O'Hara (Caledonia Trail Club)
Ethan Hill (VASA)	Roger Fox
Don	Terry Carpenter
Mark A. Snyder	Bevin Barber-Campbell
Nancy Hill	Gina Kurrle
Robert Moore	Peter Ingvoldstad
Ken Linsley (Danville SB)	Mark Bushey
Ruth Brown	Danny Hale
James Roy	Anonymous Phone Participant
James Farnsworth	Lisa Crews (she/her)
Eric Osgood	Anonymous Zoom Participant
J. Owen	Scott
Bethany Remmers	Carol
Bob Arnell	Robin Arnell
Lois Parmelee	Keith Gross
Dan Predpall	Peter
Jon Kaplan (he/him) (VTrans)	Anonymous Phone Participant
Jane Williams	Denise Oconnor
Salvador Morales (LCPC)	Linda Fox
Kevin Hudnell	

Virtual Meeting Chat Input

LVRT Vision – Keyword or Phrase

Connected communities	Landmark project for VT
Health	Inclusive
Relaxing	Great attraction for locals and tourists
Opportunity	Health in beauty
Active	Capacity
Economic opportunity	Functional route
Cross Vermont	All users
Incredible resource	Finding Vermont
Recreation development	Historic
Connection growth	Respectful of nature and neighbors
Easy travel along a natural area away from roads	Tourism funnel
Artery for health	Connected with the Lamoille river paddlers trail = paddle down river and bike back up
Scenic- connections to Vermont culture	Reminds me of the belt path that crosses Scotland
Celebrate history	New commuting path
Exciting and fun	Connection with other NE trails and beyond
Bicycle highway	IBID commuting path concept
Fun for all ages	Link to community recreation and businesses
Lifeline	Family and individual adventure route
Connection to land and place- joy in being active outside	
Permanent recreation destination	

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Issues / Concerns

Not enough lodging

Lack of parking

Access to drinking water, particularly outside of business hours

Limited access points

ATV illegal use

Lack of enforcement of irresponsible trail use

Trail width

Safe road crossings

User conflicts horses vs. dogs

Accessible access and benches for rests

Risk from hunters

Safety for users, especially at dusk/ or in remote areas

Trash can need to be placed (and maintained) by the benches also

Inconsistent cell/Wi-Fi connectivity, an issue for safety as well as the need to connect users to local information

Dominance by mono"culture" e.g. cyclists to the exclusion of equine use?

Access to the river for fishing and swimming on public and private land without trespass

Repairs are timely, summer mowing is regularly scheduled

Few accessible toilets

Parking for trail access

Dangerous crossing on route 2 in West Danville. Need some flashing lights to slow down motor vehicles

Need more safety at Willow Crossing in Johnson

Wayfinding and access to services in villages

Places to pull off trail for picnic or rest without trespassing on private land

Need to mow the sides of the trail to remove ticks

Vandalism

Completed trail- potentially a wildly popular trail creates landowner-user conflicts

Riders traveling off trail onto private property

Places to get water

Bicycle maintenance kiosks

Pet control

Not enough parking or trailheads

Some sections will be super popular. how will this be managed?

Regular need to resurface trail exposed to silt and removal of center grass strips

Horse drawn carriages should be accommodated NOT only horseback if we want to be truly inclusive (Disabled individuals unable to ride horses, bicycles, etc....)

Use of electric bikes - is usage compatible with human powered bikes? This has been a controversial topic in Acadia Natl Park

Access to the construction group to make minor adjustments to trail on key crossings

Bridge decking can get slick. Can some friction surface be added?

Need more restrooms

Uniform trail mileage markers- mile 1 is the same either at St. J or Sheldon

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Navigating the truck traffic and potholes in Morrisville between Oxbow parking and the LVRT

Japanese Knotweed infestations on parts of the trail. Any plans to deal with that and/or other invasive species

Opportunities

Economic opportunity for very small, rural communities

Need bike rentals

Good rest stops

Connectivity to the Lamoille River Bike / Canoe experiences with accessible camping for participants

Smooth connection to the towns

Business opportunity to provide service for one-way riders/walkers

It would be amazing if future rural public transit planning efforts can serve trailheads as they hopefully expand.

Great that the Cambridge section is accessible from the commuter bus

VT Huts is looking into the lodging opportunities

I agree need campsites

Make as much of trail as possible ADA compliant and elder friendly (AARP)

Low budget overnight accommodations

B & B & B = Beds, Breakfasts & Bikes

Improve access of public transportation to bring less fortunate

Great opportunity to connect commuters

Stabling for equines using the trail as an economic driver ((Think of these as equine B&B's)

Farm to fork bike rides

Dog and horse poop on trail between Morrisville and Cambridge

Signage referring to The Bend between Danville and Hardwick. The bend is not mentioned now.

Connecting to our village and all recreational opportunities around each town - mountain biking, hiking, canoeing

Big economic opportunity for all the towns that the LVRT runs through.

Connect with adjacent landowners & farms to encourage their participation in economic opportunities

Connecting downtowns to the rail trail in all communities

Opportunities - partnerships with healthcare to promote as a physical activity and social connection resource

Small villages will now be able to support businesses such as campgrounds, diners, etc.

Connecting people using the trail with the river for recreation and the riparian habitat

Clean water project demonstration area opportunities

We host farm to fork and other events at our Sandiwood Farm and are so excited for this trail to come through Wolcott to help the economy

Use the trail to highlight historic and natural resource features along the whole length. Education opportunity

Lots of opportunities to collaborate with local rec programs and building youth programs for running, xc skiing, cycling. Trail also goes past several high schools and there can be opportunities there too

Shuttle service is an entrepreneurial opportunity - build it and they will provide them

E-bike charging stations

General Ideas / Questions

Look to Northern Forest Canoe Trail for some aspects of the management plan and managing user traffic

We need flexibility with regard to use of VTrans land adjacent to trails

Will there be State Park Rangers to patrol for first aid & assistance?

Would local groups be allowed to use the trail for running events and races?

Can you discuss the longer-term plans of a linear state park for the rail trail?

MVRT has been well maintained by VTrans the past years

Will permits be required for events above a certain size. Thinking of foot races or bike races?

Will State Police be responsible for patrolling / safety

What is the plan for bathroom facilities?

I have a rustic off the grid camp on the shores of Joe's Pond. The only access to the camp is via the trail, about 100 yards. My husband and I are senior citizens who go to the camp about 4-5 times a summer we have to bring in a heavy generator as well as drinking water and supplies for our short visits. We are more than willing to help maintain our small trail section in exchange for limited access dropping off supplies when we visit. How can you help us?

Are you seeking local advocacy groups as subcontractors to manage outreach and community engagement activities?

I have some serious concerns about construction efforts in Walden. Who can I contact about that?

The ROW viewer shows the Town of Hardwick, not State of VT, as owner in the completed section through town. Will towns be contacted for formal input? Who qualifies as a stakeholder?

I hope you are going to mention that VTrans is hiring a full-time rail trail manager who will work with the outcome of this plan as well as the other VTrans owned rail trails.

What are the plans to "brand" the trail? Things like consistent logos, wayfaring signs to local attractions, informational kiosk etc.