



## Meeting Notes

Date: March 29th, 2022

Notes Taken By: Elisabeth Sundberg

Place: St. Johnsbury Welcome Center & Zoom

Project No.: 58600.06

Re: LVRT Management Plan Public Meeting #2

### Lamoille Valley Rail Trail Management Plan Public Meeting #2 Summary

#### Welcome and Introductions

Matt Hogan started the meeting and provided an overview of how the hybrid meeting will work. Shaye Hallee opened the virtual meeting and oriented the virtual participants to the meeting. Karen Sentoff introduced herself and provided some ground rules on how to participate during the meeting, including a demonstration on the virtual polling Pollev with a practice question – what town are you from? Karen then reviewed the agenda for the evening and kicked off the welcome and introductions.

Michele Boomhower welcomed everyone and shared that it was exciting to see the construction happening along the trail on the drive up along VT Route 15. She noted that she has worked on this project for 20 years in different capacities and that in her role now as Director of Intermodal Development she works with a diverse group of folks, including with legislators. She acknowledged the \$5 million earmark from Senator Sanders for construction and the more recent \$2 million earmark, noting that they are working now on how those funds will be deployed to support the communities along the trail. She acknowledged VAST has been fundamental in bringing the project to this point. As the project steps into the next phase, she acknowledged folks coordinating how to manage and maintain this trail and others throughout Vermont, like Amy Bell, Senior Planning Coordinator focused on the Management Plan, and Bill Gray, the on the ground trail person making sure that when there is a washout that it gets addressed. She acknowledged they are looking to replicate this effort across the State.

Michele introduced Jackie Cassino, the new VTrans Rail Trail Manager. Jackie noted that it felt like coming back home to VTrans to work with the rail team after a short time working with the Agency of Commerce and Community Development. She noted that she lived in Lamoille County and worked there for many years, witnessing excitement build for what is happening with the LVRT. It is an exciting time for towns, community members, visitors coming to check it out, and outdoor recreation along the trail.

Karen acknowledged the rest of the project and tech team supporting the meeting and the Stakeholder Group that has helped shepherd this management plan development process. She noted that the management plan development was happening now in anticipation of the trial completion later this year. VAST has been managing the corridor and has a management plan that was adopted in 2016. The management plan currently in development looks to the next chapter of this trail, with VTrans taking over the management role on July 1<sup>st</sup>. A management plan for the entire, 93-mile corridor looks different than for the existing segments. The plan will identify the long-range strategies for the management, maintenance, and operations of the trail. It will also identify ways to support community economic development efforts along the LVRT and provide a model management plan framework for the other rail trails in Vermont.

Karen reviewed the project schedule, noting that we are in the middle of the process. The first public meeting was in Lamoille County, the second public meeting was held here in the northeast at the eastern terminus of the trail, and the third public meeting will be held in the northwest near the western terminus. Currently, the project is in the gap analysis and needs assessment stage of the development process.

#### Construction Update

Chris Hunt provided a construction update. He noted it was a busy time for construction. There are approximately 44.4 miles of trail completed since 2014, including a small section completed in the Town of Hardwick. The priority bridge projects are happening. Looking at the construction schedule, the remaining segments of trail will be completed between now and the end of the year. This provides a sense of how busy construction this season will be to get to our goal. The projects underway include LVRT(10) – Bridges, LVRT(11) – Sheldon Junction to Cambridge, LVRT(12) – Morrisville to Hardwick, LVRT(13) – Hardwick to West Danville. If you drive along VT 15 you will see these projects are under active construction – all the contractors are ready to get to work. Following completion of construction, there

will be a need for a cohesive set of signs across the entire trail, so in addition to the projects underway, LVRT(14) – Sign Project is in development. Looking at other statewide signs we coordinated with stakeholders to see how people will find mile markers, town markers, etc. The sign project does not include traffic control, signs pointing users to individual businesses, services or attractions, or interpretive signs. The expected construction start for the Sign Project will be Spring 2023.

### **Summary of Progress to Date**

Karen provided a review of the developments since the first public meeting. An existing conditions assessment was assembled, including historic context, corridor inventory, existing LVRT management overview, existing document review to align with what folks are doing at the regional and municipal levels, and a best practice review to understand best practices for trail management, maintenance, and spurring economic development, community connections, and revitalization. She summarized the stakeholder outreach and public input that has been ongoing for the effort, including the first public meeting, stakeholder interviews, stakeholder group meetings, and the website and crowdsource webmap.

Karen reviewed the draft vision and goals for the trail. The vision and goals are the guiding principles for the corridor and how it will be managed into the future. She noted the visioning exercise from the first public meeting where we asked participants for key words or phrases regarding the LVRT and those words and phrases was used to craft the vision statement. Input from the public outreach process was used to define the goals and will help to guide the prioritization of needs.

### **Draft Vision Statement**

*The Vision for the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail is a year-round, multiuse recreation and alternative transportation corridor that is well-maintained and supports economic vitality, fosters community connections, and promotes healthy lifestyles across scenic, northern Vermont.*

Karen asked for reactions and feedback to the vision statement. Many folks in person gave the thumbs up. The virtual participants also gave some thumbs up. Comments included: “really great vision statement” and “I like that alternative transportation corridor is in there.”

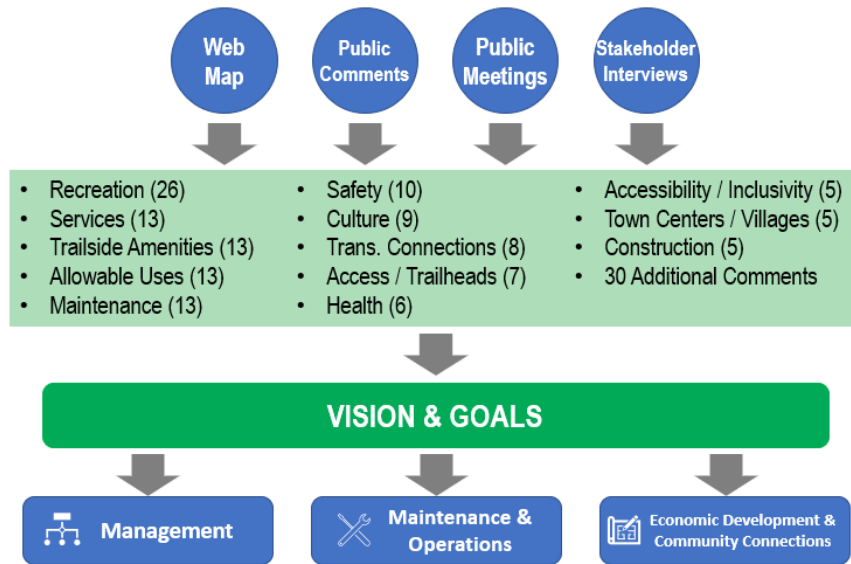
### **Draft Goals**

- *Support the economic vitality of northern Vermont communities*
- *Cultivate community and culture along the trail and in trailside communities*
- *Promote healthy and connected communities*
- *Preserve the corridor and maintain trail condition*
- *Establish a well-managed trail system*

Karen asked for reactions and feedback on the overarching draft goals. Helen Beattie asked if Vermont history could be highlighted in the goals. Karen noted that under the goal to cultivate community and culture there is an objective to promote history of the corridor. Karen encouraged folks to go to the website and share any other thoughts or comments on the goals after the meeting.

### **Management Plan Development**

Dave Saladino described the approach the project team is taking in developing the management plan. He noted that all the comments received have been categorized. The next step is to screen those categorized comments through the vision and goals. Comments or topics that align with vision and goals move to one of the three buckets: management, maintenance and operations, or economic development and community connections.

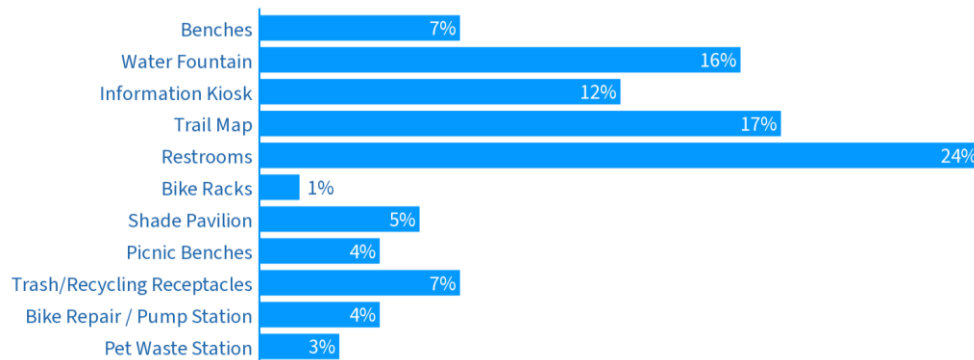


As management of the trail system moves over to VTrans under Jackie Cassino leadership, a new structure for how the trail is managed and maintained will need to be defined. Within the management chapter, we will define the roles and responsibilities, how to plan and budget for the trail, the process for right-of-way use agreements and special use permits, and allowable uses and resolving user conflicts. Maintenance and operations covers asset condition assessments, maintenance plans, and trail access points and amenities.

For trail access, the aim will be to have some consistency at trailheads along the trail. Dave asked **what basic amenities do you hope to see at a formal LVRT access point or trailhead?** In order to get a sense of prioritization, the PolleEV question asked for participants to select their top three choices.

The top responses were restrooms, trail map, water fountain, and information kiosk (see full PolleEV responses below).

### What basic amenities do you hope to see at a formal LVRT access point or trailhead? Please choose your top 3.



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Dave asked **what additional amenities would you like to see at more significant access points and trail junctions?** This was an open ended PolLEV question looking beyond the amenities that were listed for the first question.

Gillian Sewake suggested public art. That idea was seconded by another participant.

Ideas coming through the PolLEV included parking, wifi access (2), ice cream (2), electric vehicle and bike charging stations (4), local food and drink vendors (3), public art (3), playground structures or kids play areas (2), picnic tables and picnic areas (4), pump track, resting spots, bike repair stations (2), snowshoe and ski rentals, bike rentals, pavilions or shade structures, list of community amenities/local businesses/cultural resources with information and distance from trailhead (2), historic and natural area descriptions (2), snack machines, and trail counters.

Helen Beattie asked who will be building and managing these resources? Dave responded that in the railroad right of way any amenities would require agreements with VTrans and any amenities or improvements outside the right of way communities could contribute.

Dave summarized that for the economic development and community connections bucket, some of the topics include trailheads and trail access points, connecting paths/sidewalks/trails, wayfinding, trip planning and information sharing through a website or mobile app, and events and programming. He described the types of community connections to the trail. There are 20 Village Centers or Downtown Districts along the LVRT. The types of connections to the trail vary, with the trail passing directly through some villages/downtowns (e.g. West Danville), within ½ mile of some villages/downtowns (e.g. Johnson), or within 2 miles of some villages/downtowns (e.g. Fairfield). There may be different treatments based on the distance from the trail.

Dave asked when thinking about community connections to the LVRT, **what barriers exist to getting users into trail towns?** This was an open-ended PolLEV question.

Responses included safety concerns, lack of signage (2), lack of knowledge of available amenities/businesses (2), parking for snowmobile trailers and trucks, bike parking/racks/locks in downtown areas (3), lack of awareness of opportunities and wayfinding (3), bike routes marked on streets/roads, lack of safe routes/connections between trail and village (2), lack of connector sidewalks/paths/adequate shoulders, lack of feeder/spur trails, rivers and busy roads (opportunities for bike/ped bridges), parking and routes for snowmobiles, lack of attractions or amenities in towns, and political inertia. Specific examples were offered for Hardwick where there are busy streets to get to village amenities and Danville where projects to improve connections (e.g. construct sidewalk) between the trail and village center were cost prohibitive. One participant offered that a potential barrier to access is a safe place to lock bikes or park snowmobiles.

Helen Beattie asked how wide the right of way is? Dave responded that it varies along the length of corridor and Chris noted that VTrans acquired the right of way that was established by the rail line when it was first put in. There is no standard width and it generally depends on the extent of side slopes. You can get a sense of the rail right of way and where it abuts different properties through the VTrans right of way viewer.

Dave asked **are there specific trail connections or access points that would benefit from a concept sketch?** He noted that there is an opportunity to develop a few concept sketches for improving these gaps in trail to community connections and estimate what the cost would be to bridge that gap. One example location provided was Railroad Street connecting the trail into Johnson. He asked folks to name the town and what that connection or location where it would be helpful to sketch out some potential solutions.

Responses included snowmobile parking within walking distance to St. Johnsbury and Hardwick, the trail crossing on Church Street in East Hardwick, switching LVRT and Route 2 in West Danville for safety, Highgate Ice Arena, the Danville Train Station and corridor improvements connecting to village center, Greensboro Bend was mentioned twice (noting the community is working on concepts and that there are complicated property ownership issues for the old station), identifying parking locations connecting directly or indirectly to the trail, the connection between the trailhead in St. Johnsbury and the Welcome Center, and the LVRT/MVRT trail junction in Sheldon.

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Gillian Sewake suggested an area that would benefit from a concept sketch would be connections to get people from the trail corridor to our welcome center in St. Johnsbury.

Dave asked **what design features can be used to draw users into trail towns?**

One idea that was offered was some sort of stamp book. Dave noted that in the Upper Valley, the Valley Quest is a great program that encourages people to find their way at each area along the trail. Other ideas offered by participants included community bulletin/amenity boards (3), beer/pubs/breweries with directory/signage (5), lodging/camping options (2), QR code and notice of current events, consistent/colorful/informational signs for attractions/amenities/restaurants/historic sites (5), trail kiosks (2), guidance for other trails or bike loops accessed from the LVRT, increase the number of access points with small parking areas that would bring people into areas for shorter rides, safe paths for bikes and pedestrians with list of services in town, volunteers stationed at trailheads on weekends, engage AmeriCorps volunteers, gelato pop up shop, restaurants that are bike friendly (e.g. provide bike parking), help with comprehensive marketing/communications plan, public art by local artists, interactive town maps (2), updated app or online trip planning tool with attractions/services/businesses (3). One specific example was offered to create a safe way to cross Route 2 to access the Red Barn Brewery. Another example was offered for a business directory with information at trail kiosks and interactive maps like those being developed for the MVRT. Dave noted that overall, the aim is to get people excited and go visit those communities along the trail.

Dave summarized the approach for the development of the management plan, where we will be taking those recommendations in each of the management, maintenance/operations, and economic development/community development buckets and describe how to put those into action. The implementation plan will articulate who is responsible, who are the partners, what are the costs, etc. and that will guide the VTrans team as the trail moves into VTrans control.

Dave described the next steps for the management plan development effort. With the gap analysis and needs assessment wrapping up in April and development of the recommendations and implementation plan in May, we will be back for a final public meeting hosted in the northwest region in early June and deliver the final management plan in July. Dave then opened it up for any general questions, comments, or feedback.

A participant from Danville offered that they are happy to hear that consistency along the trail regarding look and feel was a priority. They noted that towns along existing segments of trail have already made a big investment and towns are willing to make more investment but need some guidance as to what that consistent branding and other features should be.

Another participant commented that with a greater number of users and many different types of uses there needs to be guidance on the flow of traffic along the trail. Signage is needed to inform users who has the right of way and who is expected to yield, spelling out the appropriate trail etiquette.

Jon Kaplan suggested checking out the website for the Empire State trail.

Marcy Larrabee asked about whether there might be grant money for emergency services and response to the trail. Dave offered that this topic area regarding access to the trail for emergency services has come up and will be considered as part of the management plan.

One participant asked whether there has been any consideration for a couple of non-motorized days per week in the winter season. Dave responded that thus far there has not been discussion of this concept.

Another participant asked how landowner issues will be addressed. Dave offered that the process for handling these issues will be addressed in the management plan and Jackie Cassino will likely be the point of contact for directing these types of issues and other comments and concerns to the appropriate resources within VTrans.

Rails-to-Trails Conservancy asked whether it is possible to get trail user counts this spring so that when the trail construction is complete, we can see what the increase in trail use has been? Dave responded that this would provide an interesting data point but would not necessarily be an apples-to-apples comparison. There has been some discussion on trail counters along the trail. Bill Gray offered that they have installed trail counters on the MVRT and monitor any increases or decreases in activity with those counters. He suspects that as the LVRT gets developed they will install counters and monitor those sites as well.

A participant asked how community groups should best coordinate with planning efforts? Dave suggested that Jackie Cassino will be the point person for this after July 1<sup>st</sup>, and in the interim reaching out to anyone on the panel today and/or the regional planning commissions for coordination.

Paul Weaver noted safety concerns at the Route 2 crossing in Danville near Larrabee's. He noted there are other crossings that have raised concerns for others, particularly where vehicle speeds are high. Dave noted that the team is aware of these concerns and looking in to some of those crossings in a bit more detail. Paul suggested installing flashing crossing signs at those locations.

One participant asked about the what the policies would be for submitting public art proposals along the rail trail. Dave noted that the team will be discussing this and similar topics over the next couple of weeks with folks within VTrans and documenting the appropriate processes for these types of programs. Jackie noted that there is a recently developed [policy document](#) for public art proposals on state transportation facilities that was developed in coordination with the Vermont Arts Council and that she is a good point of contact for those inquiries.

A participant asked if there will be opportunity for historical markers or if that is still in the planning phase? Bill Gray offered that there will be historical markers and that they are actively working with preservation on historical marking along the trail.

One question raised was whether we will be generating a communications plan to inform local efforts. Dave offered that one of the key roles that the VTrans rail trail manager and other VTrans staff will serve is to establish that open communication with trailside communities and stakeholders along the corridor.

Another question asked was whether there was a plan for funding beyond the appropriations. Dave offered that general transportation funds, likely some mix of federal and state dollars, will be used for ongoing maintenance. Federal Appropriations will likely go to one-time enhancements along the trail rather than ongoing maintenance.

Dave wrapped up the meeting thanking everyone for their participation and a reminder to visit the [website](#) and provide comments via the [Crowdsourcing Input Tool](#).

#### **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)  
Jackie Cassino, VTrans Rail Trail Manager  
David Saladino, Project Manager with VHB (virtual)  
Karen Sentoff, VHB  
Matt Hogan, VHB  
Shaye Hallee, VHB (virtual)  
Elisabeth Sundberg, VHB

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**Attendees**

Jen Grant	Norma
Kate Whitehead	Paul Weaver
William Gray, VTrans	Jason Bahner
Gillian Sewake	Chesarek
Patty Conly	Ridgeline Outdoor Collective
P. Barra	Brendan
Bruce Markwell	Kristina Michelsen
Molly Markwell	Dean Pierce Northwest RPC
Laural Ruggles	Branden Roberts
Conrad Meadows	
Andrea Otto	
Robert Moore	
Northern Forest Center	
Tyrell Cirilo	
Mark FitzGerald	
Marcel Carrier	
Bethany Remmers	
SW Hallee	
Shaye	
Roger Fox	
Howard Romero	
Helen Beattie	
Ken Linsley	
Rails-to-Trails Conservancy – Tom Sexton	
Finn	
Jim Brown St. J. Planning Commission	
Roger Fox	
Leslie Smith	
Ingrid	
Kingdom Access	
David Gross	
Anonymous	
Irene Nagle NVDA	
Marcy Larrabee	
Jon Kaplan - VT Agency of Transportation	
Janice Gearhart	
Amy Adams	
Mike Burns	
Lois Parmelee	
Peter	
Ken Brown	
Richard	
Kellie Merrell	
Brian Gilmartin	
Casey Romero	
Andrew Luneau	