Management Plan for Lamoille Valley Rail Trail
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Management Plan For the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail

1.0 Executive Summary

The Lamoille Valley Rail Trail (LVRT) is a year-round multi-use recreation and alternative transportation facility (ATF). The LVRT is located on the premises and right-of-way of the former St. Johnsbury and Lake Champlain Rail Road Company (SJ&LC), as described in the lease executed between the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) and the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers, Inc. (VAST) on September 20, 2006. Most recently managed as the Lamoille Valley Rail Road Company (LVRR).

In 2002 the Vermont General Assembly authorized the State to enter into a long-term lease with a USER for the State owned railroad line beginning in the Town of St. Johnsbury in the east and ending in the Town of Swanton (the Line) in the west. In 2003 the General Assembly of the State of Vermont directed that the State-owned railroad corridor between St. Johnsbury and Swanton should be converted to a year-round, multi-use recreation ATF managed by the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers, Inc. (VAST); and the Line was to be rail-banked and used for interim trail use.

The adoption of a long-term lease and the acceptance of this management plan (MP) by both the State of Vermont, Agency of Transportation and VAST will govern the management and usage of the Line as a year-round, multi-use recreation and ATF. The parties have agreed to be legally bound by the terms of the lease between the State of Vermont, Agency of Transportation (Lessor) and VAST (Lessee). The LVRT Management Plan is a requirement of the lease between VAST and VTrans and it will be the document that will guide VAST in the development and management of the LVRT.

The ultimate responsibility for the conversion of the LVRR rail bed, into a year-round multi-use recreation and ATF and its management, will be borne by VAST. The VAST Board of Directors has established the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail Committee (LVRTC) that will be charged with fundraising, event planning and maintenance planning. VAST is charged with the day-to-day conversion and management activities of the project. The LVRTC, as a committee of VAST, will follow all VAST Bylaws and policies, and adhere to the scope of responsibilities as outlined in the MP. The VAST Board of Directors and VAST staff will produce an annual Development and Maintenance Plan (DMP). The DMP will be based upon the results and recommendations of engineering assessments, planned development and will determine the overall scope of the work to be accomplished. The DMP will identify new construction, repair, and maintenance that will take place for the ensuing year.

This plan further outlines and defines the roles of all parties that will be a part of the LVRT process.

Mission and Vision:

To provide an environment so all users can enjoy nature and the scenic Vermont landscape to its fullest. This environment away from most vehicular traffic will become an inviting place where the elderly and people with disabilities can enjoy more leisurely endeavors and bicycle riders can set their own pace with short rides or multi-day trips. Users will fall into two categories; (1) local users who live within a short distance and will use the ATF on a regular basis; (2) out-of-town and out-of-state users who will commute to a selected location and enjoy their own preferred form of recreation. It is this second category, with the proper promotion, that will provide the positive economic impact to the communities. To varying degrees all user groups will require new dining, lodging and repair businesses to be established to fill the need. The National Rails to Trails Conservancy estimates that a 95-mile rural scenic rail trail in Vermont, after 10 years of proper promotion, should conservatively have 250,000 users per year. These user numbers will drive the economic growth at the local level and provide increased tax dollars at the state level.

The mission of VAST and the LVRTC is to produce and maintain a premier year-round multi-use recreation and ATF that will have national and international recognition as one of the finest Rail-Trails in the US and Canada. We envision a rural ATF that will allow all users to enjoy the natural, scenic Vermont landscape to its fullest, estimated total project cost is $15 million.
2.0 LVRT Purpose & Need Statement

Project Description

The Lamoille Valley Rail Trail (LVRT), project Swanton-St. Johnsbury STP LVRT (1), is a year-round shared-use recreation and alternative transportation path/trail. The proposed path/trail will be 93 miles in length and traverse an east west ‘Cross-Vermont’ route across northern Vermont from the village of St. Johnsbury to the town of Swanton. The LVRT is located on the premises and right-of-way of the former St. Johnsbury and Lake Champlain Rail Road Company (SJ&LC). The SJ&LC was primarily a single-track railroad with a typical right-of-way width of at least 66 feet. In areas of cuts and fills the right-of-way is wider. The easterly terminus is in an industrial area on the south side of the Town of St. Johnsbury (elevation 600 feet) that is located in the Passumpsic River Valley. From St. Johnsbury the line climbs westward through hilly rural country. The line gains elevation for about 28 miles until Greensboro Bend (elevation 1,700 feet) where it crosses the Green Mountain range, passing from the watershed of the Connecticut River to that of Lake Champlain and the St. Lawrence River. Just west of Greensboro Bend the line begins to descend along the westward flowing Lamoille River, which it follows westerly for the next 36 miles to Cambridge Junction (elevation 462 feet). Just west of Cambridge Junction the line turns in a northwesterly direction proceeding across rolling countryside a distance of about 20 miles to Sheldon Junction (elevation 347 feet). At Sheldon Junction, the line begins to follow the westward-flowing Missisquoi River, along which the line continues another 12 miles to its westerly terminus at Swanton (elevation 157 feet) near Lake Champlain. The LVRT will be a predominantly rural trail, separate from automobile traffic except at highway crossings, for bicyclists, hikers, snowmobiles and other users. The LVRT must be in compliance with applicable FHWA standards, including those for ADA, therefore it is logical to build it on the track bed of a former railroad, which has a maximum grade of 2%. The majority of the completed trail will have a compacted surface, not a paved asphalt surface.

On June 21, 2002 the Vermont General Assembly authorized the Vermont Agency of Transportation to enter into a long-term lease with Vermont Association of Snow Travelers, Inc. (VAST) for the State owned railroad line between the City of St Johnsbury and the Town of Swanton for the purpose of creating a year-round, multi-use recreation trail. To expedite that prior action, effective June 04, 2003, the Vermont General Assembly directed that the State owned railroad corridor between St. Johnsbury and Swanton should be converted into a year-round, multi-use recreation path and that the Line be rail-banked, and is to be used for interim trail use in accordance with authorization from the federal Surface Transportation Board (STB) based on its ultimate action issued on STB Docket No. AB-444 (Sub-No.1X) [Lamoille Valley R.R. Co. – Abandonment and Discontinuance of Trackage Rights Exemption – In Caledonia, Washington, Orleans, Lamoille and Franklin Counties, VT] (served February 13, 2004). The above Legislative and STB actions set the stage for the creation of “The Lamoille Valley Rail Trail (LVRT).”

Purpose

The purpose of the LVRT is:

- to provide a year-round, shared-use, recreation and alternative transportation path/trail between the City of St. Johnsbury and the Town of Swanton, located on the premises and right-of-way of the former Lamoille Valley Rail Road;
- allow widespread access promoting the types of recreation identified in Chapter IV of Vermont’s Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP);
- promote accomplishment of the goals of the State of Vermont outlined in the “Vermont Pedestrian and Bicycle Policy Plan” (VPBPP);
- provide an east-west connecting corridor for adjoining communities to plan and build their own connecting trail systems or to connect their existing trails to this ‘Northern, Cross-Vermont Trail, including the
following north-south trails:
community recreation paths in St. Johnsbury, Morrisville, Wolcott, Johnson, Jeffersonville and Swanton, providing access to and from the villages, and the LVRT;
The Missisquoi Valley Rail Trail from St Albans to Richford which will connect in Sheldon Jct. and provide users further rail trail options to the Canadian border;
The Cambridge Greenway Rail Trail connection, which will provide access to and from the village of Jeffersonville;
The Long Trail that crosses near Johnson Village will provide access for the hikers to and from the village for services and connections north and south;
The Catamount Trail that will cross in Wolcott will provide skiers the choice of groomed or un-groomed trails;
The VAST statewide snowmobile trail network.

Need

The need for the project is based upon the following:

The Vermont General Assembly’s directive, effective June 01, 1993, recognizing the importance of recreational resources for the health, welfare and economic benefit of the State and its citizens by passing legislation that created the “Vermont Trails System,” Chapter 20 of Title 10. Chapter 20 indicates that; “It is the intent of the legislature that whenever a railroad line not already owned by the state of Vermont is proposed for abandonment, and continuation of railroad service is not economically feasible under present conditions, the right-of-way may be acquired by the state of Vermont for rail banking and interim trail use.”
The Vermont General Assembly’s authorization to the Vermont Agency of Transportation, effective June 21, 2002, to enter into a long-term lease with the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers, Inc. (VAST) for use of the State owned railroad line between the village of St. Johnsbury and the town of Swanton for the purpose of creating a year-round, multi-use recreation trail.
The Vermont General Assembly’s directive, effective June 04, 2003, that the State owned railroad corridor between St. Johnsbury and Swanton should be converted into a year-round, multi-use recreation path and that the Line be rail-banked, and used for interim trail use
The goals identified in: the Vermont Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation’s Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) for 2005-2009; and in the Vermont Agency of Transportation’s 2008 five year “Vermont Pedestrian and Bicycle Policy Plan”.

Additional History and Definition

In 2006 the Vermont Legislature passed additional legislation related to the operation and development of the LVRT. Section 271d. of the 2006 Transportation Bill, entitled “Lamoille Valley Rail Trail” established that the State of Vermont would accept the federal earmark for the LVRT and authorized the project to proceed. The language also indicated as follows:
The federal earmark for development of the rail banked Lamoille Valley rail corridor recreational trail shall be classified and administered by the agency of transportation as an enhancement project under 23 U.S.C. § 101 (a)(35) subject to terms and conditions of that classification
In-kind services and donations, including credit for volunteer labor, equipment, and operator time donated by private individuals, nonprofit organizations, and governmental entities, shall be allowed and may be used for any match requirements within the FHWA regulations.
Contractors that are not on the VTrans pre-approved list, but are judged to be a responsible bidder under FHWA guidelines shall be eligible for project related work.
Project funds may be used on construction, reconstruction, restoration, and maintenance on the trails as authorized by FHWA.
The passage of this legislation is significant to the LVRT as it allows a much greater amount of latitude for what can be allowed as an in-kind match and/or for donated services and materials. It must be noted that even though the Vermont Legislature has passed this legislation, FHWA has ruled that the project is one that is funded by Congressional High Priority Funds and that rules applying to these funds will apply. The execution of the long-term lease and the acceptance of this management plan by the State of Vermont, Agency of Transportation and VAST will govern the management and usage of the Line as a year-round, multi-use recreation and ATF. The lease also describes and details the responsibilities of the State and VAST relative to the future use and management of the LVRT. A copy of the lease is attached to this Management Plan as “Exhibit C.”

The ultimate responsibility for the conversion of the LVRR rail bed, into a year-round multi-use recreation and ATF and its management, will be borne by VAST. The VAST Board of Directors has established the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail Committee (LVRTC) that will be charged with fundraising, event planning and maintenance planning. VAST is charged with the conversion and management activities of the project.

3.0 Development of Partnerships

The LVRTC is actively pursuing partnerships that will ensure the success of the LVRT. Partnerships have been formed with the three regional planning commissions that are impacted by this project, The Friends of the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail and other user groups including the Vermont Mushers Association, Lamoille Valley Anglers and the Vermont Bicycle and Pedestrian Coalition. The LVRTC will continue to reach out to other interest groups to request input and assistance to ensure that the LVRT is a success. The LVRTC will also form partnerships with municipalities to help to improve and maintain sections of the trail.

Public Involvement

The LVRT Management Plan is a requirement of the lease between VAST and VTrans and it will be the document that will guide VAST in the development and management of the LVRT. The public’s concerns are reflected in this Management Plan. The general public will have opportunities to review the Management Plan and to make comments about the plan’s future content. The public will be able to view the LVRT Management Plan on the LVRTC website (www.lvrt.org) and they will be able to make comments, via e-mail, to the LVRTC from that site. In addition, the public will have the opportunity to review and comment on Management Plan amendments every two-years from the original adoption date of the plan and/or as otherwise required by the lease. Public involvement will be welcome and sought throughout the facility conversion process.

4.0 Governance Structure

The VAST Board of Directors has oversight responsibility for the LVRT.

Lamoille Valley Rail Trail Committee (LVRTC)

The Purpose of the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail Committee; hereinafter, referred to as the LVRTC, shall be to oversee event planning, community outreach, fundraising and maintenance planning. The LVRTC shall include representation from the motorized and non-motorized users. The LVRTC will consist of five motorized users, five non-motorized users and three multiuse users, with a maximum of thirteen committee members. It shall further be the responsibility of the LVRTC to develop a policy for resolving issues and conflicts as they arise. VAST and the LVRTC shall also establish and update a five-year “General Maintenance Plan” that details annual maintenance of the LVRTC and its associated costs and it is to be included within the annual DMP.
LVRTC Authority

The authority of the LVRTC shall be as directed by the VAST Board of Directors and shall not exceed the authority necessary to complete the stated purpose(s) of the LVRTC and/or exceed the authority of the VAST policies and By-Laws.

The Project Manager will be an employee of the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers, Inc. and covered by all applicable rules, regulations and policies.

It shall be, in part, the duty of the VAST staff assigned to the project to perform the following functions:

Plan and oversee all engineering, construction, state and federal reporting, plans for future development and on-going construction and maintenance of the LVRT.

Process and maintain all financial accounting including payables and receivables, scheduled audits, employee payroll, federal financial reporting and invoicing to VTrans. Maintain the LVRT contractor / grants tracking spreadsheet. Prepare monthly financials for the LVRTC and VAST Board.

Coordinate with adjoining landowners including addressing any issues or concerns.

Work with LVRTC and any sub-committees and provide necessary information for members to make informed decisions and guarantee a constant flow of successful initiatives.

Prior to the implementation of any of the above, the VAST Board of Directors shall approve said plan and policies.

LVRTC Membership

The LVRTC shall be made up of volunteer members representing both motorized and non-motorized recreational activities. Volunteers serving on the LVRTC shall not be paid for their services; however, they will be asked to document their time spent on this committee to potentially be used as match for any federal grants. LVRTC members will be paid mileage, at the appropriate IRS designated rate, for their attendance at all meetings of the LVRTC. The expertise needed from volunteers on this committee may change over time as the conversion is completed and the emphasis changes to one of trail enhancement, maintenance, fundraising and promotion.

1. The LVRTC shall consist of no more than thirteen (13) members. The makeup of the LVRTC shall be as follows:

   The VAST President shall appoint directors as needed to the committee and will follow the make-up directed by VTrans below. The committee shall be made up of five non-motorized members, five motorized members and three multi use members. One member shall be a representative of the Vermont ATV Sportsman’s Association (VASA) and be considered a motorized member and this representative shall be by the choice of VASA and approved by the VAST President.3

   Members of the current LVRTC in addition to the Regional Planning Commissions (RPCs) and the “Friends of the LVRT” may assist in reaching out to the various user groups and may make recommendations to the VAST President on potential candidates to represent trail user groups. VASA will continue to hold its seat on the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail Committee (LVRTC) even though the use of ATVs is currently not allowed. One (1) LVRTC member shall be the Chair.

   All members will be appointed by the VAST President after the VAST Annual Meeting. The LVRTC will elect their own officers in October of each year. A list of those officers shall be submitted to the VAST office and provided to the VAST Board at their regularly scheduled October meeting.
The VAST Executive Director shall act as an advisor and a resource, as well as an ex-officio of the LVRTC as she/he is to all VAST committees. In the event that any member of the LVRTC sustains three consecutive absences the LVRTC shall contact the absent member and determine whether there is continued interest in serving on the committee. The term of all LVRTC members shall be for two (2) years, but there shall be no maximum number of terms that can be served.

LVRTC Officers

The officers of the LVRTC shall be the Chair, Vice-Chair, Secretary, Finance Reporting Officer VAST Executive Director as Ex-officio.

The duties of the officers are as follows:

Chair - The Chair shall preside at all meetings of the LVRTC and Executive Board. The Chair shall be an ex-officio member of all subcommittees of the LVRTC. The Chair shall facilitate the charges of the committee as set forth in this management plan and as directed by the VAST President in coordination with the VAST Board of Directors. The LVRTC Chair shall be elected by a majority vote of that committee. Vice Chair - The Vice-Chair shall, in the event of absence, disability, resignation or death of the Chair, possess all the powers and perform all the duties of the office of Chair, until such time as the LVRTC has named an individual to fill the vacancy. The Vice-Chair shall also perform such duties as the Chair may designate. The Vice-Chair shall be elected by majority vote of the LVRTC.

Secretary - The Secretary shall keep minutes of all meetings of the committee, or shall designate a minute keeper. The Secretary shall notify members of regular meetings ten-days in advance and special meetings at least 24-hours in advance. The notice shall include the time, place, and general nature of the business to be transacted. All requirements for meeting notice for public meetings shall be followed. The secretary shall perform other incidental functions as necessary. The Secretary shall be elected by majority vote of the LVRTC.

Financial Reporting Officer - The FRO shall be elected by majority vote of the LVRTC. The FRO shall be ready to assist VAST staff and Treasurer on issues of funding and documentation if and when needed. The FRO shall receive financial documentation from the VAST office to present for the LVRTC to review at its monthly meetings.

LVRTC Subcommittees

The LVRTC may appoint subcommittees, as it deems appropriate.

LVRTC Executive Board

The LVRTC may appoint an Executive Board, consisting of its Officers, to carry out the work of the LVRTC between regular and special meetings of the LVRTC.

LVRTC Meetings

Regular - The LVRTC shall meet monthly.

Special - Special meetings of the LVRTC or Executive Board may be called at any time by the Chair, or by petition of at least five members of the LVRTC. If the LVRTC does call an executive session, the VAST Executive Director will be asked to be present and the VAST President will be advised in advance. Meeting Notice - The Secretary shall notify members of regular meetings ten-days in advance and special meetings at least 24 hours in advance. The notice shall include the time, place, and general nature of the business to be transacted. All requirements for meeting notice for public meetings shall be followed.
Annual Meeting - The annual meeting of the LVRTC shall be held in September of each year.

LVRTC Quorum

A quorum for a LVRTC meeting shall consist of a majority of the members, one of which shall be the Chair or Vice-Chair.

Amendments to Management Plan

The VAST Board of Directors shall approve the Management Plan and any subsequent changes made to it. Changes may be proposed by a two-thirds majority of those members voting on proposals of amendments at a duly notified meeting of the LVRTC. Such proposals for amendments shall be set forth in the notice of the meeting and changes to the amendment dealing with the same subject matter may be proposed from the floor. After changes are made, the Management Plan shall go to VAST and the LVRTC for review and approval. A final version shall be approved by the VAST Board prior to being submitted to VTrans for approval. Once approved by VTrans, the Management Plan will be presented for public comment through a scheduled interactive TV meeting. Several meeting locations are available within the area covered by the LVRT. Public comment will also be accepted through the LVRT website, where the Management Plan will be posted for review.

Rules of Order

Business shall be conducted in accordance with the most recent edition of the “Roberts Rules of Order.”

Fiscal Year

The Fiscal Year of the LVRTC shall be the same as that of VAST, October 01 to September 30 of the next year. VAST shall be responsible for developing an annual budget for the LVRTC. The proposed budget shall be capable of supporting the work and maintenance plans necessary for the next fiscal year. The budget shall include the funding source(s) that will be used to accomplish the work as outlined in the annual DMP. The proposed budget shall be presented to the LVRTC, for review, no later than May 15, preceding the start of the new fiscal year.

5.0 Trail Uses

We envision a rural rail trail facility which will provide an environment so all users can enjoy the recreational benefits, nature, and the scenic Vermont landscape to its fullest. Recreation activities like the following will take place: Walking; Hiking; Biking; Equestrian; Cross Country Skiing; Dog Sledding; Sleigh Rides; Snowmobiling and many other compatible forms of recreation including competitive events for the preceding uses. The State of Vermont shall decide on any ATV use on the trail on a case by case basis through a public decision making process that includes public hearings conducted by the State; guided by the Federal Guidelines for motorized use on Rail banked trails.

VAST may authorize or issue non-renewable permits for special events which do not exceed 10 days and are recreational in nature or that facilitate temporary agricultural access, not to exceed 10 days duration, to adjoining and adjacent lands for agricultural purposes. VAST shall consult with and coordinate all special use permits with the VTrans. VT statutes annotated under Chapter 60 §3431 of Title 5, “Aeronautics and Surface Transportation Generally” covers agricultural access, to railbanked railroad rights-of-ways. (4) Competitive events and commercial use of the trail shall require additional coordination with VAST, VTrans and the LVRTC. A special use permit may be required.

Notwithstanding the provisions of section 213 of Title 1, when railroad operations cease on railroad rights-of-way owned by the state or municipality, the title or interest held by the state or municipality in such rights-of-way shall be retained by the state or municipality for future transportation purposes and such
other purposes as are not inconsistent with future transportation purposes; except that such rights-of-way shall not be used by members of the general public without permission of the state or municipality. The state or municipality shall allow abutting farm operations to use the land over which the rights-of-way pass for agricultural purposes. Unless use and occupancy of railroad rights-of-way adversely affect railroad safety, broadband facilities and wireless and other telecommunications facilities that are installed along or within the railroad right-of-way in compliance with applicable operations and safety standards at the time of installation are consistent with existing and future transportation purposes. (Added 1981, No. 187 (Adj. Sess.), § 1; amended 2007, No. 79, § 8, eff. June 9, 2007.)

6.0 Connectivity

Trail Systems

The LVRT will accomplish two very important functions. First, it will act as a starting point for the communities to plan and build their own trail systems. These community systems will provide the economic growth by connecting the rail/trail with the business district. Secondly, an east-west trail provides the linkage connecting the following north-south trails: Planned community recreation paths in St. Johnsbury, Morrisville, Johnson, Jeffersonville and Swanton will provide the access into the villages from the rail/trail. Missisquoi Valley Rail Trail from St Albans to Richford will connect in Sheldon Jct. and give the users further rail trail options.

Cambridge Greenway Rail Trail connection will provide access into the village of Jeffersonville.

The LVRT will provide access for Long Trail hikers into Johnson Village for services. The Long Trail crosses the LVRT west of Johnson Village, and follows a short section of the trail.

The Catamount Trail that crosses in Wolcott will provide skiers the choice of groomed or ungroomed trails. VAST snowmobile trail network with 21 connections.

These trail systems will expand the trail options available and enhance the recreational user’s opportunities and enjoyment.

7.0 Compatible Multi-Use

Plans from the beginning have been to build a rail/trail facility that would be available for multi-use recreation activities. The committee comprised of representatives from various user groups or interested individuals from along the corridor will manage the development of this trail to be sure all user groups collaborate on the project. By having user group experts available the final product will be a user-friendly trail for everyone.

Major user groups will work with VAST on this conversion project as needed and such as; the Vermont Trails and Greenways Council, Green Mountain Club, VT Mountain Bike Assoc., VT Horse Council, bicycle tour groups (2), Friends of the LVRT, Vermont Mushers Association, Vermont Bicycle & Pedestrian Coalition and the Lamoille River Anglers.

Municipalities that the trail passes through will also be included as VAST works with them to resolve concerns and/or to incorporate their local path plans, and local ordinances, with the plans of the LVRTC. When a higher grade of path, such as asphalt pavement is desired/preferred, a written agreement will be enacted allowing the municipality to install and maintain that surface as long as the overall multi-use plans are not adversely affected.
8.0 Hours of Operation
The rail/trail will be open for use 24 hours per day, 7 days per week, 52 weeks per year, without any planned restrictions except as noted below:
Walking/hiking/jogging - unrestricted year round use, except as noted in section i) below.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accessibility - restricted by trail condition, suitable hardened surface for wheel chair use from approximately May to November. Winter time use is allowed, but would be difficult.

Bicycles - year round, mostly in late spring through the fall season. Winter biking on snowmobile trails is becoming popular and will be allowed.

Horses - to lessen the damage when the trail surface is soft, use will be restricted from March through May as well as other times as dictated by the condition of the ATF surface, and as noted in i) below. Use during the winter months must be approved by the LVRTC, and must be coordinated with other winter uses.

Snowshoe/x-country skiers - unrestricted from first snow to spring thaw.

Snowmobile – Snowmobile use will be allowed during the legal Open Season, December 16 through April 15. The hours of operation will be as described in the LEASE between VTrans and VAST. A speed limit of 35 mph will be posted and enforced.

ATV’s - not allowed for recreational use unless approved through the process outlined in section 5.0). The exceptions will be ATVs used for maintenance during daylight hours May through December 15, law enforcement and emergency service vehicles, all with appropriate markings and flashing lights.

Motorized wheeled vehicles - not allowed. The exception will be maintenance vehicles, law enforcement and emergency service vehicles with appropriate markings and flashing lights motorized wheelchairs, and when state or local regulations permit, electric bicycles per 23 U.S.C. § 217.

If necessary, the trail may be closed for its entirety, or certain sections due to floods and other natural events. The trail may also be closed during late fall and early spring to ensure the integrity of the trails surface and to prevent it from being torn up by late or premature use while the trail is wet. During these closures proper signage will be installed.

Nothing in this Management Plan shall prohibit a municipality from establishing local ordinances that control legal uses of the LVRT, but in no case shall the ordinance prohibit legal uses during legal hours of operation.

9.0 Required Facilities
Parking Facilities

There are currently suitable public parking lots in every town along the corridor. As the need arises for new parking facilities or expansion of existing facilities, local municipalities will be consulted to determine if a partnership can be developed to meet local needs as well as the LVRT needs. A map of parking lots available to users and their accommodations will be developed and made available in marketing materials and on the website.

Path Connectivity

Adequate interface with communities will be provided as the number of local paths and increases following the opening of the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail.

Trail Enhancements & Amenities:
**Fishing & Canoeing Access**

82% of the LVRR corridor runs adjacent to the Missisquoi River, Lamoille River and Black Branch Brook. We will work with VTrans, Trout Unlimited, Northern Forest Canoe Trail and other interested fishing groups, and several canoe touring agencies that currently utilize these waterways utilizing Department of Fish and Wildlife as a Resource Agency.

**Benches, Resting & Picnic Areas**

Coordination with local communities and path committees for planning, installation, and maintenance.

**Signage & Markings**

Warnings for trails and roads, speed limits and other safety related signage will be installed as required by applicable sections of the MUTCD. Later installation will include informational, mile markers and distance signs. Mile markers and their location will be coordinated with VTrans Rail section prior to installation to maintain a single marking system.

**Access Points**

Access points from local and state road systems, including VT Routes 2, 15, 108 and 78 will be correctly configured and defined in accordance with Vermont Standard Drawing B-71.

Recreational Facilities and Sporting Fields –

Will be identified with “where and what” information signs and kiosks.

**Bike Racks**

May be added as user density grows

**Bollards**

Installed as necessary to control unauthorized vehicle access, if issues occur on a regular basis.

**Information Kiosks**

Posting of information on local amenities will be coordinated with the respective chambers of commerce and recreation and conservation committees.

**Restored stations or sheds –**

Specifications and guidance will be coordinated with local historical societies, State Historic Preservation Officer, and VTrans.

**10.0 Conflict and Dispute Resolution**

From time to time user conflicts of the LVRT may develop, as well as conflicts and/or disputes with adjoining landowners. There may also be times when disputes may arise over decisions that have been made over trail maintenance, operation and development. In the eventuality that conflicts and/or disputes do arise the following steps shall be taken to resolve conflicts or disputes that arise:
VAST and VTrans

In the event that a dispute between VAST and VTrans arises, the terms spelled out in Article XVII (Dispute Resolution; Exhaustion of Administrative Remedies) of the lease between the parties shall be used to resolve it.

All Other Conflicts or Disputes

Step 1 – The aggrieved party shall state their grievance in writing to the Executive Director and President of VAST, or may complete the form located on the LVRT website. The Executive Director and President of VAST shall coordinate with the LVTRC in reviewing the grievance. A written response to the grievance shall be completed within 14 days. If the aggrieved party is not satisfied with the results the process will go to step 2. Notification shall be mailed to VAST/LVRT, 26 VAST Lane/Berlin, Barre VT 05641.

Step 2 – If the aggrieved party is dissatisfied with the ruling of the Executive Director and President of VAST, they may petition the VAST Board of Directors to hold a hearing on the issue. The Board shall hold the hearing within 21 days of receipt of the request and issue their decision within 7 days of the hearing.

Step 3 – If the aggrieved is not satisfied with the VAST Board of Directors’ decision they may appeal it to the Vermont Transportation Board under 19 V.S.A. § 5(h), the notice of appeal must be filed with the Secretary within 30 days of the decision from which the appeal is taken. The Secretary shall promptly forward the notice of appeal to the Board, together with the Agency’s record of decision.

Step 4 – In accordance with 19 V.S.A. § 5(c), a final order of the Board may be reviewed on the record by the superior court pursuant to Rule 74 of the Vermont Rules of Civil Procedure.

11.0 Citizen Concerns, Requests and Complaints

From time to time citizens may have concerns, requests for information, or complaints about the LVRT. The following procedures will be used to document citizen concerns, requests or complaints, as well as outlining the steps that will be taken to resolve their issues.

The Lamoille Valley Rail Trail Committee (LVRTC) oversees the promotion, community outreach and maintenance planning of the trail, the LVRTC meets on the third Wednesday of each month at 5:30 PM. The location of these meetings shall be indicated on the LVRT website www.lvrt.org. The LVRTC will provide the necessary forms for citizens to use to register their complaint, concern, or to facilitate a request. The forms are available from members of the LVRTC for distribution and are available through VAST and the LVRTC website. It will be the citizens’ responsibility to submit their issues in writing, either mailed or e-mailed, on the appropriate form to:

VAST
Attn: LVRT Issues 26 VAST Lane
Berlin
Barre, VT 05641
Or email to: lvrt@vtvast.org

Understanding the Process

Whether a citizen submission is made directly through VAST or the LVRTC, it is required that the citizen provide all of the information requested by the complaint form. VAST or the LVRTC will send an acknowledgement of receipt form to the individual filing the complaint within 10 days. The concern, request, or complaint will be entered into the issues database and forwarded to the LVRTC Chair and VAST for action.

VAST and the LVRTC will consider the submission and apply one of the following options:
Seek additional information from the citizen, if needed;

Take action and report to relevant parties;

Seek counsel from other relevant parties and then implement option #2 above;

Request an extension for more time to consider the issue and seek resolution.

Regardless of the option chosen, it is the LVRTC/ VAST goal to issue a response to the submission within 30 days. The response will include a summary of actions taken, an explanation of the next steps to be taken, and information on who to contact in order for the citizen to follow-up.

Conflict Resolution Process

If a citizen submits a complaint, and they are unsatisfied with the results of this protocol, they may consider pursuing their issue using the Conflict Resolution Process as described within the Section 10.0.B (All Other Conflicts or Disputes) of this plan.

Process Exhibits

Appendix “A” in the rear of the Management Plan shows a flowchart that outlines the “LVRT Protocol for Citizens Concerns, Requests, and Complaints.” Appendix “B” in the rear of the Management Plan is a copy of the form to be used to register a citizen concern, request or complaint that may also be found on the LVRT website.

12.0 Law Enforcement

As more and more Vermonters, as well as visitors to Vermont, begin to participate in all forms of recreational activities there arises a need for recreational education and law enforcement. The LVRT will ultimately need a presence of law enforcement both to educate the public as well as to ensure that all Vermont laws are properly and adequately enforced. Vermont statutes do not grant VAST any law enforcement authority; therefore, the LVRTC and VAST will address public education, signage and public outreach to reduce the number of incidents on the trail that require action by a law enforcement officer. VAST and the LVRTC will cooperate with all Vermont law enforcement agencies in an effort to secure adequate funding for recreational law enforcement for the LVRT.

VAST and their partners through the LVRTC will strive to educate each of their memberships as well as the general public and/or visitors to Vermont of the laws, rules and regulations that govern the use of the trail. This will be done through the development of brochures; outreach to members through various newsletters and publications; signs at entry points to the trail and along the trail; general public outreach and education. The LVRTC will explore the option of creating a volunteer monitoring process for users of the trail. This will allow for “eyes and ears” on the trail at times when law enforcement officers are not available.

VAST has purchased and installed devices that record the time and speed of all snowmobiles that pass over the trail. These devices have been strategically placed at five locations along the trail and they will give us valuable information about the use of the trail; especially, after curfew use as well as the speed of those using the trail. This information will allow us to better inform law enforcement as to when violations are taking place; specifically, if we have a location where it appears that a pattern of misuse is apparent. With this information law enforcement will be able to target special areas during the time frames of misuse. Curfews are the hardest of all laws to enforce and to some extent there will never be 100% adherence; regardless, of the time frame of curfews. It is hoped that the steps that have been taken will work and the
information that we are able to compile will allow law enforcement to more adequately enforce imposed curfews and speed limits on the LVRT.

The issue of sound is one that VAST is trying to address. Another difficult law to enforce is the one that pertains to the allowed decibel level of snowmobiles. The Society of Automotive Engineers (SAE) has devised a new standard that allows an effective field test to ensure that all snowmobiles adhere to the legislated decibel level. VAST has introduced legislation that will allow Vermont law enforcement officials to utilize this new test to ensure that all snowmobiles are in compliance with the law. VT law enforcement agencies will be conducting tests using this standard to see how effective it is in the field.

The following law enforcement agencies shall be the primary sources for law enforcement for the LVRT: Caledonia County – Caledonia County Sheriff 1126 Main Street, Suite 2, St. Johnsbury VT 05819 1-802-748-6666

Lamoille County – Lamoille County Sheriff 222 Main Street, PO Box 96, Hyde Park VT 05655-0096 1-802-888-3502

Franklin County – Franklin County Sheriff 330 Lincoln Avenue, PO Box 367, St Albans VT 05478-0367 1-802-524-2121

All violations of VT law, including trespass related issues should be reported to the County Sheriff. County Sheriffs will be responsible for investigation and follow up for all complaints and violations of law regarding the LVRT. County Sheriffs will also be responsible for patrols on the LVRT and will be working cooperatively with the VT Department of Fish and Wildlife in an effort to provide these services. If a caller is unable to contact the Sheriffs’ Departments they are to call the VT State Police Dispatcher in their District and advise them that they have a Lamoille Valley Rail Trail issue and ask that the on call VT Fish and Wildlife Warden, for their District/County (Caledonia; Lamoille; Franklin), be advised of and dispatched to investigate the violation of law. The on call Warden will respond to the call or complaint. The telephone numbers for the Regional VT State Police offices are as follows:

Caledonia County 1-802-748-3111
Lamoille County 1-802-878-7111
Franklin County 1-802-524-5993

VAST; currently, has a “cooperative agreement” with the following Vermont law enforcement agencies: Vermont Department of Public Safety (State Police); Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife (Law Enforcement Division) and the Vermont Sheriffs’ Association, a copy of that agreement is included as Appendix “P” of this plan. This agreement is renewed on an annual basis, and will be modified as necessary to include investigation and response to LVRT complaints that are registered with the identified agencies.

13.0 Project Funding

The estimated total cost to rehabilitate and convert the former LVRR rail bed into a four-season multi-use and ATF will range between $5,800,000 and $12,000,000. Congressman Bernie Sanders has been an ardent supporter of this project for many years, and was successful in obtaining a Federal Transportation earmark in the amount of $5,800,000+ included within the renewal of the Federal Highway Transportation Bill in the summer of 2005. The re-authorization of the Federal Highway Bill is a part of the Federal funding mechanism for all highway construction and maintenance. The appropriated amount has subsequently been reduced to $4,900,000+ due to Congressional rescissions during the impacted budget years.

VAST and The LVRTC will work to find available options for grants, from private foundations and/or other entities that may have the potential to help achieve the requirement for 20% matching funds for this
important project. VAST may also facilitate a capital campaign to raise further funds and will rely on the members of the LVRTC to work on this campaign along with VAST staff and any contractors VAST hires. VAST and the LVRTC will also investigate ways to raise any additional funds needed to complete the project. Other options that will be investigated include Transportation Enhancement Program funds.

14.0 LVRT Proposed Alternative Description

VAST is acting as a town or municipality for the purpose of following the project development process.

The LVRT is a rail-banked ROW owned and controlled by the state. Federal law behind the railbanking process precludes “moving” the ROW off its surveyed alignment. A state law, Section 17, Act No 56 of 2003, passed by the General Assembly and effective 4 June 2003, directs that the rail-banked corridor ROW be converted into a rail trail, and another law, Section 16, Act No 141 authorized the state to lease the ROW to VAST for the rail trail. Other than the “do not build” alternative, there are no other feasible alternative routes for the trail, assuming VAST is to use the federal funds, and the wishes of the public (legislation passed by the VT General Assembly), the Vermont Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), the three Regional Planning Commissions, and the Vermont Pedestrian and Bicycle Policy Plan (VPBPP) are to be honored. All work on the trail will be in compliance with the Federal Highway Administration’s requirements and guidelines as established by their Transportation Enhancement Program and applicable sections of the Americans with Disabilities Act. When applicable, Vermont’s Pedestrian and Bicycle Facility Planning and Design Manual, VTrans standards for vertical, horizontal and hydraulic clearance, shall be used when developing plans for the trail; and to prevent injury to nearby property, both public and private.

Next it is useful to review the sources of opinion and guidance VAST utilized in developing this trail alternative: Those sources include the results of the public hearing held on the trail management plan (written comments from which are posted on the LVRT website), discussions and meetings with the Friends of the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail, and the LVRT Advisory Committee, and discussions with a broad variety of trail developers, users, and critics. Because of the time, cost, and complexity associated with ROW actions, the only trailheads considered in this alternative, in this project, are those located on the Val Plans’ ROW. Further, these may be easily eliminated if resource review and investigations reveal that the sites will cost the project significant funding, delays, or mitigation efforts. As a completed LVRT matures, more trailheads will be added, or subtracted, by the local communities, and the will of the public.

15.0 Maintenance:

For the purposes of this trail maintenance plan, seasonal maintenance falls into the two practical seasons on this trail, winter maintenance during the snow-covered, winter activity (snowmobiling, mushing, cross-country skiing, etc.) portion of the year- generally December to April, and the non-winter maintenance during the remainder of the year when the trail is either closed between the two seasons for snow melting and/or to dry out, and for users such as equestrian, bicycling, hiking, running, walking, etc.

Winter Maintenance

Local snowmobile clubs, in coordination with VAST, will be responsible for additional maintenance for their sport such as additional temporary signage, law enforcement of posted speed limits, clean up of trash, limiting of use with curfew hours, snowmobile trail grooming and marking areas where the path has a higher volume of joint use with cross country skiing, school functions or other user groups.

Non-Winter Maintenance
It is suggested that local municipalities be contacted to assist with summer tasks such as mowing and brush clearing as they would likely have the equipment required for these tasks. Some work may be accomplished using volunteer work groups made up of members of the various user groups. Typical requirements for maintenance shall be outlined in the annual DMP. The LVRTC will form partnerships with municipalities to help to improve and maintain sections of the trail.

16.0 Capital Improvements for Future

- Fencing in accordance with 5VSA§3642

Farm Style Fencing will be maintained along the corridor where it is necessary to protect crop fields or to prevent livestock from entering upon the pathway from abutting pastures and as necessary to meet statutory obligations. VAST will meet with landowners along the corridor who have expressed concerns and their fencing needs have been documented. Farm Style Fencing consists of 6’ posts installed in the ground approximately 2 feet, leaving 4 feet showing above the ground. Attached to the posts will be two strands of electrical wire strands. Said fence installation will be constructed at the limits of the pathway right-of-way.

6’ Woven Wire Fencing will be proposed at areas where pathway and extended village areas require separation for safety reasons. This could be as an attachment to a bridge located within the Town limits to prevent people from hanging off the bridge abutments. Installation of woven wire fencing may also be needed for safety along the village area pathway sections where there is a drop off bank situation or for separation in an area where a parallel roadway is below the grade of the rail bed.

Note: In the development of a “natural” path to be used as a multi-use trail it is not the intention of the Committee to fence the entire rail corridor. Such action would cause non-access areas to the adjoining rivers in the western end now used by anglers and canoe enthusiasts. We need to include access off the pathway to areas that are considered recreation areas and abut the corridor. Also, it would impair the free movement of wildlife that inhabits the entire rail corridor and is a vital part of a “natural pathway.” The LVRTC desires to keep this pathway open as much as possible for the pleasure and enjoyment of the users as well as unencumbered use by wildlife.

- Control Barriers

In an effort to eliminate as much fencing as possible control barriers may be erected along steep slope areas. These control barriers will be designed and engineered to applicable standards. Another option would be the planting of boundary line trees along areas where there are summer vacation homes (such as the Joes Pond Area) between the tracks and waterway. Also, this method could be used in Village or Town Areas to create a sound barrier between the corridor boundary and an abutting landowner’s house.

Control Unauthorized Vehicle Access – A system will be developed that will limit access to the LVRT by unauthorized motorized vehicles, with the exception of snowmobiles during the open snowmobile season.

- Village and Town Areas

Village and Town areas may wish to upgrade the path surface material. These limited conversions can be addressed with a written agreement between the village or town, VTrans and VAST. Nothing in this plan shall limit the ability of a municipality to establish stricter standards, through the adoption of municipal ordinances, for the use of the trail within the boundaries of the municipality. However, permitted legal uses during permitted hours shall not be prohibited by a municipal ordinance.

In previous discussions with town Select boards, it was stressed that the conversion would try to
accommodate the wishes of the individual towns. If a town is interested in something special, such as asphalt pavement in the village area, the LVRTC will work with them in order to accomplish their goals. The added cost of installation and future maintenance would be the town’s responsibility, and would be handled with a written agreement between VAST and the town.