

Walk Bike Trails Committee Forum March 31, 2022

1. Welcome & Introductions

Bryan Davis/CCRPC, Jonathon Weber/Local Motion, Bill Regan/Charlotte, Greg Hostetler/BWBC, Adam Morse/FOTW, Ted Grozier/Shelburne, Nic Anderson/South Burlington, Steve Dowd/Essex, Darren Schibler/Essex, Barbara Johnson/Shelburne, Susan Grasso/Shelburne, Shannon Jackson/Essex, Steven Schwartz/Jericho, Susan Bresee/Jericho, John Abbott/Jericho, Greg Western/Cross Vermont Trail, Anne Powell/Shelburne, Dana Farr/South Burlington, Abby Bleything/Winooski, Zoe Richards/Burlington Wildways, Barrett Grimm/Huntington, Chris Kent/Shelburne

2. Overview of Regional Active Transportation Plan (ATP)

- Bryan provided background on the 2017 ATP and current process to update it, which includes high level analysis of using unpaved off-road trails as both transportation and recreation connections. Opened to comments from group.
- Comment that wayfinding and signage needed for off-road trails so people know where they are and where they're going
- In Shelburne people are using informal trails on private property where owners have been tolerant, but there's concern about these becoming advertised or overused. How to move from paths that are informally used to something more formal – is that what this plan is looking to broaden? Bryan responded that this plan, and off road trails specifically will be a high level review for potential connections rather than identifying parcels.
- Comment that in Vermont people are presumed to have right to access property, perhaps historically for hunting, and landowners can post as closed if they don't want people to access land. Any thought about how to protect this sort of right-to-roam, public access to private land as is currently allowed. Bryan notes that CCRPC hasn't pushed on this policy but can be considered or noted in the Plan.
- Bryan noted Act 250 has come into play related to trail development but there is action underway to change that regulatory framework.
- Is there a mechanism for conservation easements for trails as there is for ag use, so a landowner can get a tax break for having trails as they do for ag? Susan commented that Official Maps can help towns identify walk/bike corridors and secure easements when development occurs, but landowner compensation may be required.
- Darren said Essex has some experience with this, the town has active transportation maps used in development review, easements are required where paths are noted, easier for shared use paths that follow roadways. Compensation is an important consideration as Susan noted so one town strategy was to create a conservation reserve fund which can be used for trails easement acquisition in addition to conservation and agricultural easements. It hasn't been used yet but it is there. Other challenge is keeping maps updated to reflect what is practical and desired. There was an instance of relocating a trail that still provided connectivity rather than altering the development plans. Also not aware of any tax incentive as asked earlier but you can offer incentives for development to include the easements as a way of getting higher density or other flexibility in regulations.
- Greg Western responded about the tax break question saying no, that doesn't exist but was discussed in the legislature this year as a current use style tax breaks for allowing public use of

land, but it's not currently the case. Any money that people get would be one time payment for an easement.

3. Discussion: Meeting goal 1 — Understand local priorities for walking and biking improvements in general and gather perspective for ATP development

Key question(s):

- What do you think it would take to get more people walking, biking, and rolling in your community?
- What do you think it would take to get more people walking, biking, and rolling in Chittenden County?

Discussion:

- Thanks for responding to the survey we sent out, responses are posted at the end of these notes. Bryan asked for discussion on what it would take to get more people walking and biking both locally and regionally. Bryan shared the 2017 Active Transportation Plan Vision for consideration:
In the future, Chittenden County residents, employees, and visitors of all ages and abilities are safely connected to origins and destinations by a comprehensive active transportation network. Plentiful opportunities for active transportation make for a healthy community throughout Chittenden County. The network connects towns within Chittenden County and connects to the networks of neighboring counties. Active transportation is an important part of people's lives for transportation, recreation, and health. There are economic, environmental, health, and quality of life benefits that affect the entire population, even those who do not walk or bike. Active transportation becomes the default mode of travel in support of the ECOS Plan and its goals.
- Steven, Jericho – In relation to Jericho as outlier in the county, it's hard to get there from here, especially without impacting other private land. Hard to get people to understand that no one wants to do a land grab. Even connecting the three village centers in Jericho is a challenge, so connecting to other towns like Essex is also a challenge. It would be ideal to have something off the road but it would cut through people's yards.
- Darren – challenge in connecting communities especially in more rural areas is working on state highways that town doesn't control. State doesn't seem to have success expanding shoulders to provide bike facilities, particularly in narrow areas. Can regional level help get this done in local places that aren't having much success? Bryan notes that State of VT completed on-road bike plan recently and seem to be doing better job of expanding shoulders on their roadways.
- Zoe – off leash dogs on trails in Burlington and Winooski is an issue, especially with people who are new arrivals and aren't used to dogs being off leash. Burlington Wildways has done some outreach work with high school students. Also, immigrant communities may not be familiar with some cues like trail markers, difficult for people to tell what's public and private.

4. Discussion: Meeting goal 2 — Local project awareness – Gain understanding of what's happening around the county in terms of trail development that CCRPC and LM might not know about, especially developments that create opportunities for regional connections

Key question(s):

- Are there projects underway in your community that create opportunities for regional connections that CCRPC and LM might not know about? These could be anywhere from at an aspirational level to already in progress.

- Example: A corridor or open space that has the potential to create a regional connection between communities. You've looked at it and said "if only we could put a trail there..."

Discussion:

- Jonathon shared the online map showing input from the group on barriers and desired connections.
- Bryan notes the map will remain open for comments for 2-3 more weeks. It wasn't built for broader public distribution but rather as a tool for this group to provide input.
- Adam glad to see some map input reflected his interests, such as from Swift St connecting to bike path by UVM, a lot of people use Spear St and there's a disjointed path between Swift and the university. Notes dotted line on map and asks where those came from, what level have they been planned and pursued? Jonathon reminded the group that there are imperfections with the map. Bryan notes that the layers underlying this map include projects that CCRPC or others have studies, others that may be desired but not studied like path along I-289. Also included are routes that are commonly used routes but not officially designated with a facility.
- Darren notes that some places that haven't been studied aren't included, Bryan said map will be updated but asks for people to let him know what's missing.
- Goal of map is to collect local knowledge, barriers, desired connections.
- Zoe notes she added desired bridge over Winooski River but not in a location that she thinks is perfect, just as a note that a crossing is desired.
- Bryan notes that partners are working on a federal grant application for a new bridge over the Winooski River connecting Burlington and Winooski. This would include walk/bike accommodations. He also noted that South Burlington received a federal grant for a walk/bike bridge over I-89 at Exit 14.
- John in Jericho supports trails as transportation especially in rural areas, to reach transit access, and connect to other towns. Great goal is for people to not have to use cars for all trips.

5. Discussion: Meeting goal 3 — Understand needs of local groups

Key question(s):

- What kind of support do you need in order to be successful in your efforts? How can Local Motion and CCRPC help?

Discussion:

- Susan – how to provide guidance or create connections with other communities through land use planning. How to be proactive and ensure that development is happening in ways that allow and make it easier for people to accomplish daily tasks by walking and biking.
- Bryan – some towns are using tools like official maps, including South Burlington, Hinesburg, Williston to include walk/bike corridors as part of development review process.
- Susan asks that having the network envisioned can help drive development, is it a lever that can push development to help make it easier for people to walk and bike? Will having the network on paper motivate development to happen in that manner? Bryan responds there a lots of levers that drive development, official map is but one tool to help with development review. Zoning changes, walk/bike comprehensive plans, form based codes, regional ATP can each help with walk/bike/trails planning and seeking grant funding for construction. Bryan shared previous project in Jericho that planned potential road network on undeveloped parcel as a way to guide future development, rather than having structures get built first and then figure out roads.
- Jonathon pointed out that Burlington recently eliminated parking minimums which has an effect on land use. In his role he has to consider how far to push into the land use planning realm.

- Greg H – in Burlington space is competing with auto use and storage (parking). Demand for parking spaces and travel lanes is a big issue. Also transportation demand management can play a role in behavior change.
- Barbara – thinking of assistance for students walking to school, can events be held more often, like once a month? Conflicts with vehicles backing out of driveways, and conflict between vehicles and walking/biking at schools. Remote drop off locations as potential solution? Role of Local Motion – Jonathon and Local Motion team has programs that can help address issues and support walking and biking.
- Nic – South Burlington has used official map as an effective planning tool, like Swift St extension going across Hinesburg Rd, it's been on a plan for a long time, it used to be a farm with a house, but recently sold and developer is aware that they will provide a connection across the property. Another example is an official map amendment for beside I-89 bridge connection, we've added a line through the Staples plaza right through the building as a way to signify this is important connection in the long term.
- Barrett – walking to school encapsulates all of these issues, the time that people want to walk to school is the same time as the morning commute, and they're all funneling onto the same busy road. We have landowners who are willing to let people cross their property on that walk but they don't want it advertised and they don't want to grant an easement because there's no incentive for them to do so. We can't spread the word that people can use this alternative, so how do you get people to allow paths on their property, that's the biggest challenge that we face.
- Bill echoes that point in his rural community, getting easements is a challenge. People say they love trails, they want more trails, they use trails all the time, but over their dead body would they allow trails on their own property. There are few incentives that we can offer besides our undying gratitude for landowners to give up some control of their land.
- Susan – I mentioned "right to roam" previously, she did a recent walk around Shelburne to look for connectivity possibilities and came across large property that was posted but said "you are welcome here" which was refreshing. Also have neighbors with same sentiment, so how many people are out there that share that philosophy and if there's an opportunity to have a pilot program or set of guidelines, maybe a list of those landowners, and provide resources to support them.
- Ted talked to someone who has short path and heard their concern is liability. Whether or not they are liable, they are concerned. Discussion about VAST, VMBA, other groups that have worked to limit landowner liability.
- John – Jericho strategy is to work closely with zoning administrator and development review board so when there is a subdivision or development or property exchange, the zoning administrator has been great about reaching out to the trails committee, and really all committees that have some vested interest in the future of the property, and to make contact with landowner and engineer and have a chance to make formal request if there are trails that currently exist, or are part of a network or have been identified as being critical to connectivity in future vision. Strategy relies heavily on neighborliness and idea of contribution and official map referenced earlier is a place of authority that can be used. It's a big ask for people, and strategically to make these networks connected and vibrant and have value that we see, to offer fair market value and purchase those easements is likely the most intelligent way to go. I wish it were different but in our experience it seems to be where things are heading.
- Susan – we don't have to think of it as all or nothing, could there be a structured, not permanent, shorter term arrangement for landowners to allow use for say 3 years through an

agreement and see how it goes. There has to be something in between totally informal and permanent easement that has rules and structure for people to see value and benefit and then choose to continue or cancel arrangement. Abby in chat suggests this might already exist. Bryan notes that access could be added to policy recommendations in the ATP.

- Steve – would like to connect with other towns/groups on potential connections looking at maps before contacting any landowners.
- Adam – liability issue for off road connections that are part of networks like Fellowship of the Wheel is part of VMBA (VT Mountain Bike Assoc) network, comes with liability exemption. As a landowner signs on to allow access, it comes with liability exemption. To Abby's chat comment, and how VAST has been successful, how can we look beyond winter connections and into summer connections that meet transportation needs, like farm roads.
- Barrett – to Susan's point about shorter term permissions, we've had problems with projects that put in infrastructure using grant funding, those grants can require long term access like 10 year easements. People not picking up after dogs is an oft cited reason people close access to their lands.

6. Discussion: Meeting goal 4 — Make connections and improve collaboration

Key question(s)

- Do you feel that there is enough collaboration and communication between your group/community and others when it comes to walk/bike/trails projects? If not, how can we increase collaboration and communication between the groups and communities represented in this meeting?
 - Are there examples of this happening successfully that we might learn from?
 - Would folks be likely to participate in a county-level walk/bike/trails committee? (Jonathon)
 - Are annual or semi-annual meet-ups sufficient? (Jonathon)
- Darren – interested in future meetings of this group, similar to how CCRPC hosts housing meetings.
- John – reminder about VT Walk Bike Summit May 6, Middlebury www.vtwalkbikesummit.org, he's found it a valuable way to connect with other people working on similar projects.

7. Next steps

- a. Next steps and timeline for ATP
- b. Anything else we should know about or discuss in a future meeting?

Key points from Zoom chat:

From Zoe Richards (Burlington Wildways) to Everyone 09:43 AM

Burlington has a Conservation Legacy Fund that we use to purchase lands and easements. We have had our fund for 20 years and has been key for us. Last year the city provided the funds for the purchase the development rights for Rock Points trails/lands. Rock Point still owns the land, Lake Champlain Land Trust holds the easement, and residents can now walk the trails.

From Abby Bleything to Everyone 09:44 AM

Designing walking and biking facilities with our most vulnerable in mind (children, elderly, disabled), making sure facilities offer direct routes to places

From Susan Jean Hull Grasso to Everyone 09:46 AM

I agree with Abby. I also wonder about whether we can do a better job with encouragement events to actually get more people out walking and biking, so they can decide if and how it could fit into their daily lives.

From Greg Hostetler to Everyone 09:47 AM

I agree with Abby. We need to make walking and biking as safe, comfortable, and convenient as we have made driving.

From Darren Schibler | Town of Essex to Everyone 09:49 AM

We'd echo Zoe's point about dogs, this has come up in Essex recently as well.

From Susan Jean Hull Grasso to Everyone 09:52 AM

This is a significant point (about dogs). I have also worked in Dearborn, MI, which is home of the largest Arab and Muslim population in the US. They are culturally also concerned about dogs in their social space. To the point that dogs are not only not allowed to be off leash anywhere, but they are specifically not allowed in city parks (for "public health reasons").

From Zoe Richards (Burlington Wildways) to Everyone 09:57 AM

Burlington is also on leash everywhere in the city but enforcement is not really possible so we are trying to change the culture of dogs on leash. Just like it used to be ok to smoke indoors, we would like to change the culture so that it is no longer ok to have dogs off leash because it excludes lots of folks from the outdoors as well as has significant Wildlife impact. Also there are implications with farms in the Intervale and dog waste.

From Nic Anderson SBBPC to Everyone 10:01 AM

Adam-The Spear St path between Swift and the Forest Service building is very much in active planning. Hoping to break ground in a couple of years. Layout being done now and will have a public hearing soon on that design.

https://www.southburlingtonvt.gov/residents/spear_street_bike_ped_improvements.php

From Susan Bresee to Everyone 10:04 AM

<http://vpic.info/Publications/Reports/Implementation/OfficialMap.pdf>

From Zoe Richards (Burlington Wildways) to Everyone 10:13 AM

also as schools renovate, walk bike isn't always part of the planning process. We have noticed that school district doesn't know or take into account city's plans around walking and biking because they really are like a separate municipality

From Abby Bleything to Everyone 10:18 AM

Hasn't VAST figured out a lot of this stuff? Utilizing private lands for public use/removing liability from the property owner?

From Bill Regan (he/him) Charlotte Trails Committee to Everyone 10:18 AM

Charlotte provides a liability exemption for private landowners giving us easements.

From Susan Jean Hull Grasso to Everyone 10:20 AM

Thanks Abby and Bill.

From Zoe Richards (Burlington Wildways) to Everyone 10:22 AM

I am not expert but I think those licensing agreements exist.

From Bill Regan (he/him) Charlotte Trails Committee to Everyone 10:23 AM

Our challenge is that the Town would not spend money on a potentially temporary facility.

From Jonathon Weber (he/him) - Local Motion to Everyone 10:29 AM

<https://vtwalkbikesummit.com/>

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March 2022 Survey Responses from Chittenden County Walk/Bike/Trails Groups, Committees, and Partners

What would you like to know/learn from CCRPC and Local Motion?

- One thing I am curious about is the complex interaction between biking trails and walking trails (especially off of roads). It would be great to acknowledge some of the complexity at this meeting. With a dense population the two are often not great shared space (sometimes they are) and it would be helpful to consider this in planning. It is something I deal with in my partnership group regularly and there are complex interactions around "who the trails are for " and how to make them welcoming. Thanks for considering!
- As you are probably aware, Shelburne is in the middle of a Walk/Bike Connectivity Study so I am looking forward to the recommendations that come from that. Our group has been actively involved with Local Motion over the years so we feel comfortable reaching out for support when needed.
- What are some of the priority goals and projects for the next few years? A combination of dreams and attainable outcomes would be great to hear.
- Everything on creating new trails/paths: what grants are available, what resources are out there, what works/doesn't work when trying to create new trail networks, any previous success with bordering towns working together to link networks, etc.
- Where to seek funding and consultative support for a comprehensive bike/ped transportation design for Town of Jericho.
- How to get scoped SUP projects funded, status of Susie Wilson corridor changes, how to work better with VTrans to get bike/ped infrastructure on state routes (including VT-289).
- What plans are there for biking/walking trails in adjacent towns like Colchester, Williston, and Jericho? Also, are there any regional examples of trails along highway connectors?
- How Huntington can better plan and implement trail networks in our town to connect with neighboring towns. What are available planning resources? How can we fund planning and development?
- I feel like I've been to several of these meetings over the past 20 years between local, regional, and different non-profit partners. I am happy to share where I see investment and action as the highest priority and would also like to hear what's been happening, what some accomplishments are, and where the next best connections could be made.

Are you working on or interested in pursuing any specific efforts that are significant from a regional standpoint (connecting communities, linking trail systems, etc), that you think CCRPC and Local Motion likely do not know about? If yes, please describe below!

- We are just beginning preliminary conversation around linking trails in Essex Junction to community centers and parks.
- Long-term planning to link our trail system to neighboring ones.
- Milton is in the preliminary planning stage of a multi-year plan that would (hopefully) use a combined network of multi-use nature trails, gravel paths, sidewalks, and bike paths to connect multiple locations around Milton, with the ultimate goal of connecting to or near the Colchester Park & Ride. If approved locally, the ideal scenario would see us working with Colchester to get all the way to the Park & Ride.
- In SoBu we get a lot of complaints about lack of courtesy- bikes/ped/cars all groups don't always share well. A regional education plan of some sort seems like it would be helpful as oftentimes drivers may be from other communities.
- Interconnectivity between Shelburne and South Burlington first comes to mind. It just occurred to me that perhaps bike/ped trails could parallel the railroad running north and south in Chittenden County (?).
- Recreational trail connectivity goals between towns of Jericho and Richmond are on CCRPC and LM radar. Also interested in understanding connectivity to potential with Essex via Saxon Hill and beyond and Williston heading toward Catamount Family center...
- Yes! Updating local trail / bike route maps; Constructing SUPs along VT-15/Pearl St and VT-15/Main St between Town and Village; adding a SUP or trail to VT-289 to connect to other nearby routes; adding bike lanes / widened shoulder on River Road / VT-117.
- Yes, still in the brainstorming stage; however, Essex CTC is interested in linking main street to 289 connector with trails alongside the extension.
- Huntington is in the very early stages of assessing how to design and build a multi use trail connecting the two Huntington villages, and ideally further north into Richmond, loosely following the Huntington River.
- Learning how to reach out to engage with other towns' entities to drive a linked path plan.
- I think all of the ideas I'd consider highest priority have been voiced and are public: a safe way from the Richmond P&R to town, connect over Williams Hill to Huntington and Hinesburg to stay off paved roads. Expanding the River Trail to be a loop from Richmond to the Jonesville bridge on both sides of the Winooki. Better bike commuting access from Richmond to

Burlington, especially from Tafts Corners West. More dirt trails for trail running and MTB/gravel commuting off of roads.

- Providing infrastructure to easily cross between jurisdictions. The Winooski bridge into Burlington and the two interstate interchanges leading into Colchester provide significant barriers for those on foot and bike.
- Connecting trails to Essex

What do you think it would take to get more people walking, biking, and rolling in Chittenden County?

- A better system with consistent signage, destinations, distances etc... More knowable, not just for the brave...
- Making roads less car centric and more safe and accessible for pedestrians and bicyclists.
- Safer and more well-landscaped sidewalks
- (First thought, comical response - Warmer winters). More thoughtfully, I think multi-use recreation paths are an incredible resource and encourage people to run, walk, bike, etc. I grew up in suburban Boston and think about the rail/bus system there and how it all connects in ways to bring you to different towns. On a town by town basis there may be some nice forested spaces or recreation paths, but are there efforts to connect them all to each other similar to a metropolitan rail/bus system? I think this would promote safe travel to/between recreation centers and encourage any residents/businesses along the way to get outside for recreation or commuting. I lived in Burlington south end for 11 years and loved the connectivity of the recreation paths around town, but venturing outside of Burlington left me with limited options to get to quieter roads or other recreation paths without traveling major roadways.
- More safe off-road alternatives or protected on-road options.
- More connecting networks. More incentives for bikers. More town support.
- Raise prices on cars/gas.
- Road line striping to offer reasonable bike lanes. A focus on SAFE movement via walking and biking in any given community. A sidewalk alone, does not translate necessarily into safe passage (thinking of a number of roads in Shelburne). Giving voice to children, the elderly, those less-advantaged to inform about how this is important to them!
- Aggressive development of bike lanes on existing roads, multimodal path connectivity to neighborhoods and population/commercial centers in rural towns like ours. Education and

outreach initiatives that demonstrate communities with commitment to multimodal infrastructure, experience increases in property values and little by way of collateral impact.

- Health education, fun incentives and activities, mandatory physical education for all school grades.
- End-to-end access to sidewalks, paths, and trails (i.e., out your front door); feeling of safety on commuter and recreational routes; culture of active transportation.
- Linked trails, wide paths for all abilities, privies, viewing points, nearby shopping.
- More trails that better connect to other networks. Better parking and access. Wider road shoulders or dedicated non-motorized paths.
- Building critical mass.
- Better protected infrastructure/paths.
- More local access to trails - not having to drive to use trails lowers barriers and increases use.
- Better and more consistent infrastructure. Make sure bike/ped paths and routes are the most direct routes. Prioritize active transportation over motorized modes. Help communities access the resources they need to maintain infrastructure (sidewalk plows, thermoplastic paint and machines, etc.)
- A more connected trail network.
- Access and communication.

We are inviting organizations focused on walking, biking, and trails, including walk/bike committees, trails committees and non-profits, and conservation and planning committees (see list at the bottom of this form). What would you like to learn from the other organizations?

- What they are working on...top priorities.
- How can we partner in fundraising and planning efforts. How can we connect all the micro-communities into one cohesive Chittenden County that allows for [response ended there]. How other organizations have overcome obstacles to building trails in their communities, including residents unwilling to consider trail easements or pay for trail building.
- What are other communities doing, specifically, to impact the car-centric focus that so many folks are living.
- Hear more about their experiences, strategies, efforts to get public buy-in and guidance for funding...

- How to work better with VTrans to get bike/ped infrastructure on state routes; process for mapping desired future trails / bike routes; policies on requiring sidewalks in new developments (OK on just one side? Not necessary on dead-end low-traffic streets? Required on private roads, and in rural areas?)
- What are they working on and how can we work together to promote walking and biking.
- How to go about planning and funding projects. What professional resources are out there.
- What projects are shovel ready and what's happening soon!
- How we can connect and collectively fund infrastructure to make continuous and consistent routes.