

CROSS VERMONT TRAIL



Strategic
Plan



2021-2025



Cross Vermont Trail Association

OUR MISSION is to create and maintain a multi-use trail across Vermont through the Winooski and Wells River Valleys between Lake Champlain and the Connecticut River.

OUR VISION is:

Public recreation that is inviting and accessible to all people.

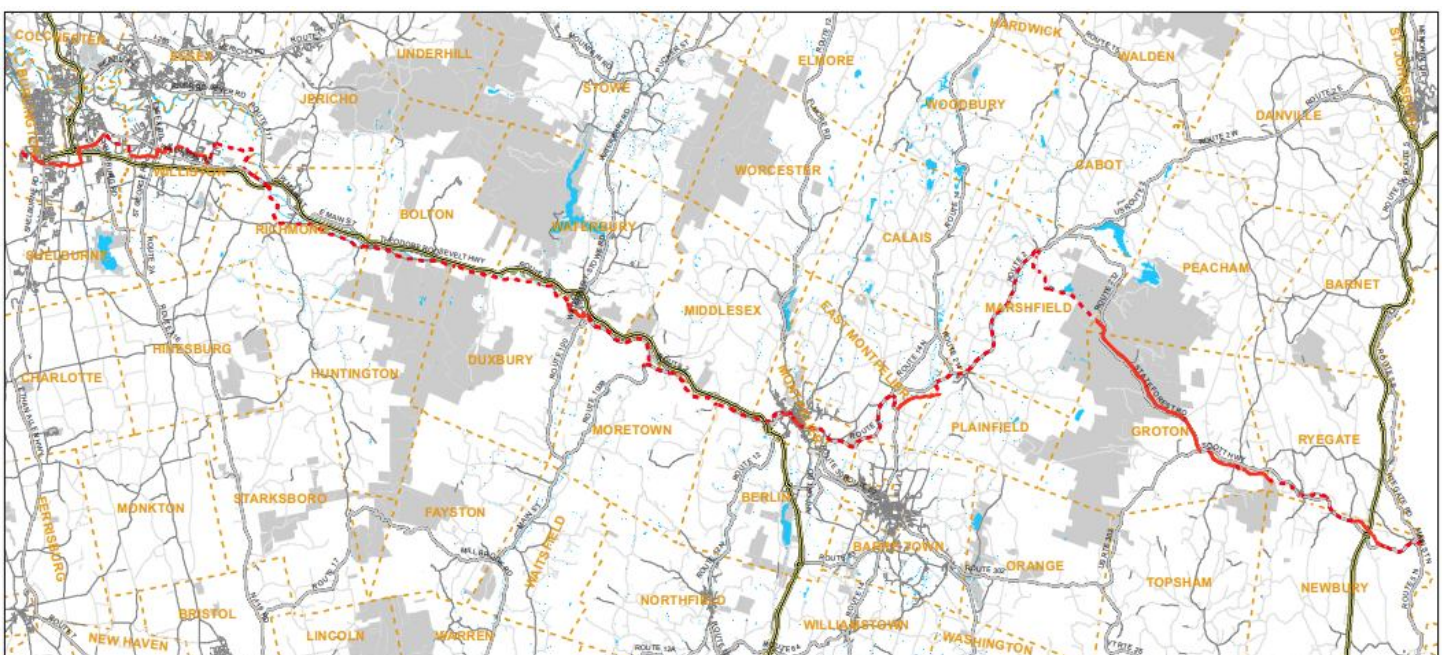
Safe off-road travel to desired destinations for walkers, cyclists, skiers and others.

Convenient locations for daily exercise and healthy outdoor activity.

Permanent greenway for easy local access to the natural world.

Collaboration of landowners, community groups and local governments to foster regional networks with the Cross Vermont Trail as the connection among them.

- Town boundary
- CVT off-road route
- - - CVT on road route
- Public Land
- Rivers & lakes



Our History



The Cross Vermont Trail begins with a big idea – the idea of a continuous trail through the Winooski River and Wells River valleys that is not one built path, but a route formed by connecting local community trails to span the entire width of Vermont. Cross Vermont Trail Association (CVTA) celebrates local trails and highlights them as part of a statewide route, while leading the creation of new trails to make critical links and a complete network.

The Cross Vermont Trail was launched in 1992 by trail enthusiasts from across the state who recognized they had a shared vision and saw a wider association as a way to address common needs.

The 1990's were a time of broad outreach and exploration. The founders of CVTA carried out public surveys, convened community meetings, pored over maps, and organized group bike trips and walks to find the best potential trail corridor. Opportunities were identified, such as a former railbed in the eastern part of the state, and the active local greenway planning underway then to the west. Challenges were also clear, such as the barriers created by I-91 in Wells River and the Winooski River in East Montpelier. State support was instrumental in these early days as a staff person housed in the Agency of Natural Resources, and then later in the Agency of Transportation, supported the still ad hoc CVTA working group. In these years, the first miles of Cross Vermont Trail were designated on State owned land – most significantly the old railbed in Groton State Forest was saved from being broken up and became officially a rail trail.

In 1999, the Cross Vermont Trail Association (CVTA) incorporated as an independent non-profit, and hired an Executive Director. We soon established three critical organizational partnerships that have been a big part of our story ever since.

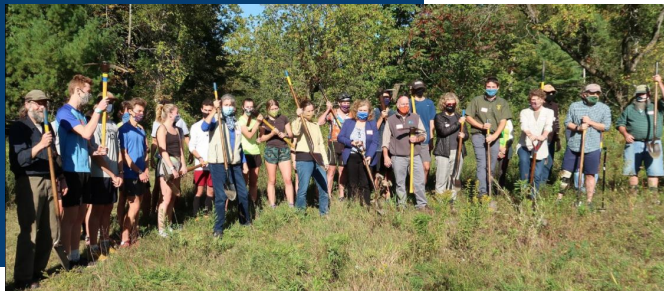
1.) *Vermont Housing and Conservation Board*, is key to our organizational strength. We are incorporated not just as a trail association, but also as a land trust. We are members in good standing of the national Land Trust Alliance, and comply with their high standards for organizational governance and financial controls, including annual fiscal audits. Furthermore, as a land trust we are affiliated with the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, which provides to us, through a competitive grant process, annual funding for basic operations and also allows us to access larger amounts of grant funding for specific projects, purchasing land and easements to conserve trail corridor.

Imagine walking out your front door and within minutes, stepping onto a system of paths leading through village centers, to schools, parks, wild areas and beyond-- a network of local trails, for people of all ages and abilities – interconnected.

This is the dream of the Cross Vermont Trail.



Winooski Bridge & Groundbreaking event





2.) *Regional Planning Commissions*, are natural partners for CVTA. We worked closely with the Two Rivers-Ottawaquechee Regional Commission through the early 2000s. And for many years now, we have settled into office space within the Central Vermont Regional Planning Commission; which allows us to have the physical presence of a larger organization, while keeping our overhead costs to the minimum.

3.) *State of Vermont project grants* of federal funds, through both Agency of Transportation and Department of Forests, Parks and Recreation. CVTA is qualified to apply for larger federal grants through State programs, and periodically winning grants like these has been a big part of how we have gotten work done in the past twenty years.

Success as an independent organization able to take initiative and lead big endeavors. Though partnerships are a key part of how we work, the independence of CVTA is the ingredient that makes it possible for us to achieve our vision. We were founded to be a member based, charitable group governed by a volunteer Board of Directors. Currently, hundreds of people each year are counted as members when they donate or volunteer.

Steady growth of accomplishments over twenty years. We started with a bang in 2003, building a trail underpass beneath I-91. Then we moved our focus to developing the even larger Winooski Bridge, now built! In 2005 we closed on our first permanent easement conserving a portion of trail corridor, and have done over a dozen land conservation projects since then, with an increasing number in recent years. In 2008 a complete statewide route was approved by landowners and municipalities – over 30 miles of off road trail, though nearly 60 miles are still on roads for the time being – with signage installed and detailed maps made. Every year we work with local partners to perform trail maintenance and projects of all sizes statewide, repairing old trails damaged by storms and building new trails; recent significant work has been done in collaboration with Richmond Trails, East Montpelier Trails, Groton State Forest, and Blue Mt Union School.

Now is a pivotal time. Now is the time to make a new Strategic Plan for the future, because:

- As the long planned Winooski Bridge Project, a primary focus of our organization for many years, comes to fruition, we look ahead to future projects and being a leader in the creation of a rich network of connected trails, across Vermont.
- When we met and exceeded the \$250,000 “Build the Bridge” campaign goal, raised with the donations of hundreds of local individuals, and needed as local match to over a million dollars in federal grants, we crossed a milestone in proven fundraising ability. This plan builds on what we have achieved to further diversify our financial footing and be a sustainable organization.
- We recognize the need to grow our organization methodically to keep pace with our success and increasing obligations. At present, CVTA staff consists of an Executive Director assisted by 1 or 2 seasonal AmeriCorps members and many volunteers on trail crews and at events.
- We have a great story to tell now. Telling the story of the Cross Vermont Trail - our successes and our vision for the future - and stepping up our outreach and visibility are ways that we can meet vital needs. We want new audiences to discover our trail, and the excitement of a continuous cross-state route, which is a welcoming experience for all ages and abilities.

Our Planning Process

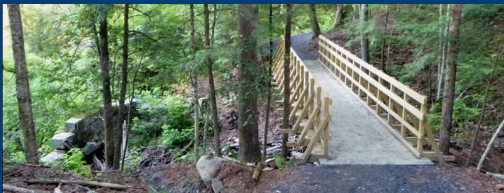


Through winter 2020 into summer 2021 we carried out an intense internal and external assessment. CVTA engaged a consultant to guide and facilitate the Board and staff through the planning process. Themes came to light that led to fresh takes on the organization's mission and vision. Based on these, we then developed goals and strategies, formally adopting the plan in September 2021. Now we continue, finalizing action plans and implementing our strategic priorities.

The **Eastern region** from Wells River to Groton ties together small towns in scenic rural settings, including Groton State Forest. CVTA is an active leader in helping to save the Montpelier & Wells River railbed as a trail where possible, and in developing new trails.



In the **Central region** from Marshfield to Waterbury much of the potential trail route is privately owned. As elsewhere, here we engage in collaborative approaches with landowners and local towns.



The **Western region** from Bolton to Burlington is a more developed area that has a broad array of existing trails and bike paths with active community groups and municipalities. As we look to the future of our route within this mix, we will expand our contributions as a partner, advocate, and convener.



Partnering is an essential part of who we are. Our planning process began with the insights of over 30 stakeholders. We spoke with landowners and long-time supporters, trails and rivers organizations, VT State agencies, Regional Planning Commissions, donors, local businesses, and the Cross New Hampshire Adventure Trail.

Regionalized approaches are important in how we have made our plan. Different regions and localities across the state have distinct characteristics. Local needs guide the balance of roles we pursue in each place we work.

Capacity building underlies all of this plan's thinking. Expanding our capabilities makes us ready to take on the real, growing needs facing CVTA. Our accomplishments to date are remarkable in light of an extremely lean organization: a single employee (our Executive Director) and a small working Board. Looking ahead, this plan will enable us to develop financial resources to incrementally grow to a right size. Our mission calls us to think well beyond any one five year plan. Building relationships and developing projects are long term efforts. We are making a Cross Vermont Trail Association that is fit to be passed on to future generations. As we mature in this way, we are planning now for a period of steady growth in order to build sustainability for years to come.

Thank you for grant funding from Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, National Life Group Foundation, and Vermont Community Foundation, which allowed us to hire an experienced consultant and benefit from their guidance. We the CVTA Board have spent many hours over this past year in deep conversation and thinking seriously about the future of the Cross Vermont Trail—now we are excited to put this plan to work!



GOAL 1:

Increase off-road mileage of the eastern, central, and western regions of the 90-mile Cross Vermont Trail.

STRATEGIES

- A. Build the complete Winooski Bridge Project including five miles of new trail between Gallison Hill Road in Montpelier and Rte 14 in East Montpelier.
- B. Collaborate with landowners to determine the best trail alignment between Rte 14 in East Montpelier and Groton State Forest in Marshfield; securing right-of-way permissions to get the Cross Vermont Trail off ten miles of Rte 2.
- C. Identify and prioritize future CVTA-led projects emphasizing useful lengths of new off road trail, with logical trailheads, that separate trail use from the least safe and least desirable on road locations.
- D. Pursue a regional approach to expand our efforts, in locally appropriate ways, statewide throughout the trail route and connected network.
- E. Prepare to meet our long term obligations to maintain trail and steward land as we succeed in building new trail and conserving right-of-way.



GOAL 2:

Expand the visibility of our trail, our vision, and the work of our organization to engage users, partners and funders.

STRATEGIES

- A. Develop and implement a master plan for marketing, including consistent graphic styles and accessible media, so that CVTA is recognized when active in communities across the state.
- B. Update signage and wayfinding guides enabling people to clearly find trailheads and follow the Cross Vermont Trail between Lake Champlain and the Connecticut River.
- C. Engage the public in using and valuing each segment of the Winooski Bridge Project, totaling five miles of new trail, as each segment is built and opened in well explained sequential phases.



Our Strategic Goals



GOAL 3:

Build capacity to be a sustainable and resilient organization capable of completing and stewarding the vision of the trail.

STRATEGIES

- A. Build the foundation of human capacity, knowledge, capabilities, and resources that will enable achievement of strategic goals.
- B. Recruit proactive, committed Board members with a variety of relevant skills, experience, and regional representation. Engage additional non-Board volunteers to be involved in committees or local advocacy to advance CVTA's strategic goals.
- C. Support Board in carrying out its responsibilities by developing useful structures including active committees and online collaboration tools. Develop a Board risk management plan.
- D. Implement multi-year financial planning that aligns with strategic priorities, organizational growth and stewardship responsibilities.
- E. Make an updated five-year fundraising plan with diversified revenue from grants, charitable gifts, sponsorships, memberships, and events, with formal donor cultivation.

GOAL 4:

Leverage partnerships to build the trail, strengthen the regional trail network and increase community vitality.

STRATEGIES

- A. Expand partnerships as a way to leverage shared capacity to achieve our mission and to support partners with co-aligned missions.
- B. Strengthen partnerships in Chittenden County by carrying out joint advocacy and collaborative trail work. As the area continues to develop, convene with partners in order to explore and identify the best current options for the route of the Cross Vermont Trail through this region.
- C. Engage in partnerships with businesses and civic organizations that benefit from proximity and access to outdoor recreation.



Cross Vermont Trail Association is organized to lead the creation and care of a statewide trail well into the future, far beyond the five year term of this plan.

Our enduring purposes are defined in our bylaws as:

1. Work in partnership with governmental entities; other conservation, recreation and economic development organizations; landowners; and interested individuals to link existing trail networks using the Trail as the connection among them.
2. Assist member trail organizations in the creation and distribution of educational and promotional information (newsletters, maps, natural, historical and cultural details) for the increased enjoyment of the trail.
3. Apply for and administer grants for trail acquisition, improvement and maintenance.
4. Conduct trail awareness activities, including advertising and publicity, in or by any suitable manner or media.
5. Act as a clearinghouse for information and as a source of technical assistance to all involved partners.
6. Foster cooperation among user groups and encourage their respect for private land and landowners' rights.
7. Encourage and assist with educational programs by all involved groups to promote awareness and appreciation of Vermont's natural and cultural resources.
8. Fund raise to support the CVTA's objectives.
9. When necessary, act and perform all the functions of a land conservation organization as it relates to the conservation and protection of the trail, its corridor and its viewshed, including holding property or easements.
10. Encourage local economic development through travel and ecotourism associated with the natural and cultural resources along the Trail.
11. Conduct any other lawful activities related to achieving its purpose.

Staff and
Board of
Directors



**Plan prepared and approved by
CVTA Board and Staff; September 2021**

Staff:

Greg Western, Executive Director

Board of Directors:
(with town of residence)

Nancy Everhart, Town of Marshfield

Rick Hopkins, Town of East Montpelier

Kim McKee, Town of Calais

Rose Paul, Town of Plainfield

Ben Rose, Town of Williston

Mike Thomas, Town of Newbury

Dan Towle, City of Montpelier

Western Region
Winooski River
Chittenden County

Central Region
Winooski River
Washington County

Eastern Region
Wells River
Caledonia & Orange Counties



CROSS VERMONT TRAIL STATEWIDE ROUTE



Detailed map set (printable and digital) and turn by turn cue sheets at: <https://crossvermont.org>.