



**LVRT History Outline (updated on March 28, 2018)**

**Respectfully Submitted To: Vermont Senate and House Committees on Transportation**

**March 29, 2018, by Cindy Locke, Vermont Association of Snow Travelers**

- Early 2000's State of Vermont put the LVRT out to bid. VAST was one entity out of two that bid on the project to do something with the deteriorating railbed.
- VAST was told in the planning process that the LVRT would not fall under ACT 250 jurisdiction (it is the only rail trail in Vermont that was designated to have to do so)
- VAST received a 5.2-million-dollar federal earmark (*Sanders money*) from the Federal Bike Pedestrian program (which was what the total cost of the railbed was thought to cost in 2005)
- VAST finds out they do have to go through ACT 250. VAST applies for the permits, delaying the project by nearly a decade and costing VAST more than \$500,000 in permitting costs and lawyers.
- VAST begins construction on two sections in spring of 2014. Construction on these sections last three years. These sections equal 1/3 of the entire trail and use up all the federal earmark of 5.2 million dollars.
- During the 2017 legislative session, language is added to the miscellanies transportation bill to state in short: The State of Vermont will match VAST 80% to 20% and up to one million dollars a year to continue construction.
- VAST receives a donation of \$240,000 to run a two-year capitol campaign. VAST hires staff, build marking materials, and works hard to raise the private funds (20% needed to help draw down the remainder of the Sander's money and also the new match of VTrans (federal dollars).
- VAST petitions the Surface Transportation Board in DC because the LVRT is an exempt railbed and not subject to state permitting. VAST with the help of VTrans works out a deal to have the LVRT under a new and less cumbersome form of ACT 250, overseen by VTrans. VAST does not give up the ability to challenge the Surface transportation Board in the future if needed.
- VAST is now at a point where, while we are still trying to raise money, mostly through small foundation grants, we just do not have any more funds to give to this project to pay for the 20%

match. We cannot use federal money to match federal money, so the money must come from private sources or state dollars. Although we had high hopes with our capitol campaign and we did hire three different professional folks over the years as fundraisers we just could not get the private sector to invest into the project. Over all the reasons we have been given by possible large private donors and sponsors of why they will not help pay for the construction of the LVRT:

- 1) The railbed is a state-owned entity and resource, and private funders don't see the reasoning behind having to pay to see it built.
- 2) Some have expressed that they feel it would have cost less overall if the State of Vermont had just built it themselves twelve years ago not using federal dollars which put the project construction under federal highway guidelines and regulations. This they believe drove up the cost of the project. Whether that is true or not, it is the perception.
- 3)

#### **TODATE**

- Total Construction/Permitting (C/P) VAST has paid \$2,245,050.78
- Total VAST has paid for other expenses including construction related salary, marketing, maintenance is \$139,121.24
- Total expenses paid by VAST over the years is 3,203,627.67

**Subtract all donations made to the project for construction and maintenance of \$341,549.68 over the past decade and VAST has put into this project: \$2,862,077.99, \$651,535.39 of which just since June 1, 2016.**

*Please note: We received a donation of \$240,000 to run a capitol campaign. This account has paid for all things related to this campaign including staff to help run it, marking and advertising, etc. This campaign still is running, but the money is running out. This money is also in a separate account with its own budget, so it does not get mixed up with any of the other money amounts I have told you about.*

In conclusion, attached is a graph that shows usage of the trail in the open sections for the past two years. This is done using electronic counters that we have hidden along the trail.