

To: Senate Committee on Institutions

From: Michele Boomhower, Director of Policy, Planning and Intermodal Development
Susan Scribner, Municipal Assistance Bureau Director

Date: January 31, 2020

Subject: Proposed Capital Construction Budget Adjustment Amending No. 42 of 2019
An Act Relating to Capital Construction and State Bonding

Section 10. Natural Resources, is proposed to be amended by adding “(i) The sum of \$2,830,000.00 is appropriated in FY 2021 to the Agency of Transportation for completion of the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail.”

Over the past decade, the Vermont Association of Snow Travelers (VAST) in collaboration with the Agency of Transportation and other local and regional organizations, has advanced construction projects for improvements to the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail (LVRT). This includes completion of 15.35 miles of trail improvements from St. Johnsbury to Danville, 17.42 miles from Morrisville to Cambridge, 1.48 miles and rehabilitation of Bridge 93 in the Town of Sheldon, along with replacement of Bridge 68 in the Town of Cambridge and replacement of Bridges 13 & 17 in the Towns of St. Johnsbury and Danville. The original funding for the trail development came from a \$5,232,729 congressionally directed allocation secured by Senator Sanders in 2005. Those funds were fully expended in 2017 at which time the Agency agreed to support the continued buildout of the trail by setting aside up to \$1M annually of federal funding to implement further trail development supported by matching funds raised by VAST for projects ready to be constructed each year. Through this arrangement, the full build out of the trail is expected to take 15 more years to complete, increasing the construction costs based on annual inflation and decreasing the current economic development value a completed 93- mile, cross Vermont trail network, would deliver.

Appropriation of the funds will allow for approximately 60 miles of remaining rail trail to be completed. Once complete, the facility will span 93 miles from Swanton to St. Johnsbury through 18 communities and will be the longest rail trail in New England.

The facility will not only provide opportunities for transportation, it will also provide for community and visitor recreation, health, and economic development. In addition to snowmobilers, use of the trail by walkers, bikers, equestrians and others will translate into

expanded recreational opportunities, health benefits, a means of enjoying the natural environment and trail connected economic development opportunities.

Build out of the trail will enhance the economy by providing construction jobs and supporting sectors related to construction, it will bring both residents and tourists into communities looking for goods and services, it supports other outdoor recreation and it will support outdoor retailers. It will enhance the livability and appeal of the communities bordering or near the trail. There have been studies that demonstrate that proximity to bicycle and pedestrian trails result in positive effects on home values. Marketing of the trail can also be expected to bring new visitors to the State and enhance the State's brand.

VTrans commissioned a study to determine the overall economic benefits of bicycling and walking on the State's economy. The July 6, 2012 report can be found at: <https://vtrans.vermont.gov/sites/aot/files/highway/documents/ltf/BikePedFinal%20Report%20Economic%20Impact%20Walking%20and%20Biking2012.pdf> A video summary of the report can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c5VNfMVNWfQ&feature=g-all-u> In recognition of the many sectors benefitting from bicycling and walking, a task force was convened that included representation from a statewide advocacy group, the Department of Commerce and Community Development, the Department of Health, regional planning, AARP and Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation among others. All the benefits described above are touched upon in the economic impact report.

Buildout of the LVRT is a significant undertaking that will take approximately 4 years and will result in many benefits to the State and its economy. Appropriation of the funding proposed in Section 10 will allow for the build out to be completed more expeditiously, allowing for the full 93-mile corridor to be utilized by residents and visitors to the State much sooner. VTrans is committed to providing the 80% federal funding through our Federal Highway Administration resources, subject to Legislative appropriation.