

State of Vermont**District Maintenance & Fleet Division****Rail Trails Program**

Dill Building, 2178 Airport Rd

Berlin, Vermont 05641

Railtrails.vermont.gov | **vtrans.vermont.gov**

[phone] 802-505-8193

[ttd] 800-253-0191

TO: Lamoille Valley Rail Trail Council- Regional Committees
FROM: Jackie Cassino, VTrans Rail Trails Program Manager
DATE: 02/03/2025
RE: Lamoille Valley Rail Trail 2024 Trail User Survey Analysis

This report summarizes the results of the 2024 Lamoille Valley Rail Trail User Survey, an annual intercept survey intended to give a better understanding of multi-use trail use in Vermont and to make the information available to all including trail user groups, administrators, government agencies, and the public. The goals of the Survey are to:

- Understand when, who, how, and why people use the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail;
- Educate stakeholders about trail use patterns, trends, and user demographics;
- Promote active citizen participation in monitoring and communicating the value of trails; and
- Encourage sound trail building and maintenance programs based on data.

The full survey analysis and copy of the 2024 survey can be found in the report below. Survey recommendations shall be prioritized based on overlap with identified Management Plan priorities and available resources. Questions and inquires should be directed to:

Jackie Cassino | Rail Trails Program Manager

Rail Trail Program | Technical Services

District Maintenance and Fleet Division

Vermont Agency of Transportation

Dill Bldg. 2178 Airport Rd. | Berlin, VT 05641

802-505-8193 phone | jackie.cassino@vermont.gov<http://vtrans.vermont.gov><https://railtrails.vermont.gov/>

2024 Lamoille Valley Rail Trail User Survey

Background

The purpose of the survey is to collect self-reported qualitative and quantitative data around the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail (LVRT) user experience during the non-winter months. Survey results are intended to inform the management, continued improvements, and coordination of the LVRT. The questions were designed to collect a broad range of data focusing on the user experience.

This report provides a summary of the 2024 intercept-based survey data collected from trail users on the LVRT following methodologies developed by the Vermont Agency of Transportation's (VTrans) Rail Trail Program, in coordination with the VTrans Active Transportation and Data Analysis Sections.

The LVRT User Survey (the survey) is an annual intercept survey intended to give a better understanding of multi-use trail use in Vermont and to make the information available to all including trail user groups, administrators, government agencies, and the public. The goals of the Survey are to:

- Understand when, who, how, and why people use the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail;
- Educate stakeholders about trail use patterns, trends, and user demographics;
- Promote active citizen participation in monitoring and communicating the value of trails; and
- Encourage sound trail building and maintenance programs based on data.

Survey Data Collection Methods

The survey and methods were developed in accordance with best practices in survey design methods with guidance from a survey advisory team consisting of VTrans Rail Trail Program, VTrans Active Transportation and Data Analysis Sections; and the statewide Rail Trail Councils. Survey questions were based on similar surveys around the country and the National Bicycle and Pedestrian Data Collection Project. The survey included questions about how and why respondents use the trails, maintenance and safety, spending, health, and demographic information and takes about ten minutes to complete. The complete survey is included in Appendix A.

Data was collected via an online survey in Survey Monkey software accessed via a QR code and URL posted on posters (Figure 1) in the vicinity of ten trailheads on the LVRT and on the Rail Trail Program website. The survey notice location was not collocated with counter locations in order to avoid any interference with accurate infrared counting. Data were collected from September 24 – October 30, 2024. The survey had 444 respondents.



LAMOILLE VALLEY RAIL TRAIL USER SURVEY

We want to hear from you!

In order to provide you with a high-quality recreational experience, the Vermont Rail Trails Program is conducting a survey of trail users.

This survey will take about 10 minutes to complete. Survey results will help us to plan for a better experience- from improved amenities like parking along the trail to better connections with trail towns.

The survey will be closed at 11:59PM on Wednesday, October 30. Survey results will be shared with the Vermont Rail Trails Program and the LVRT Council.

Thank you!

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2024LVRT>



Questions? Visit <https://railtrails.vermont.gov/> for more details.

Figure 1: Survey Notice with URL and QR code link to online survey.

The trail survey locations and the sample of users who completed the surveys are not random and therefore may not accurately represent the general trail user population, either for the individual trails or for trail users statewide. Results are reported to provide a general picture of those users who did complete the survey. Results are sufficient to inform local programming and policy decisions and to identify needs for further investigation.

Survey Analysis and Results

A total of 444 surveys were collected for the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail (LVRT). Survey responses that were incomplete (3 total) were removed, leaving a total of 441 surveys collected for the LVRT evaluated within this report. The following sections provide analysis and findings of the survey.

Trail User Demographics: Gender and Age

More trail users surveyed are female than male.

56% of respondents identified as female while 43% identified as male, 23% identified as other. The population of the state of Vermont is 50.4% female and 49.6% male.

Trail users surveyed are older than the general population of Vermont.

85.26% of survey respondents were over the age of 45 and 46.26% of survey respondents were over the age of 65 (Figure 2). According to the US Census, 27.7% of the general population is over age 45 and 22.1% of the general population is over age 65¹.

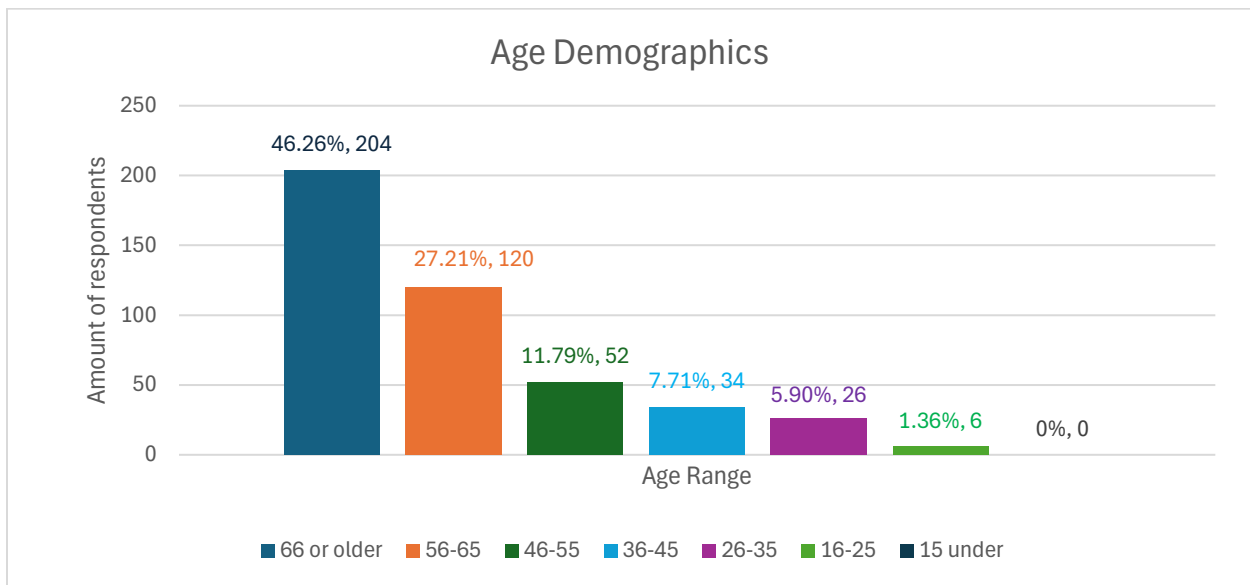


Figure 2: Bar chart showing age demographics of the LVRT with percentage of total respondents and number of respondents per category at the top of the bar.

Use Frequency, Duration, Location and Type

The LVRT is used frequently.

49.77% of survey respondents use the trail regularly, at least once a week. 75.34% use the trail at least once a month (Figure 3).

¹ US Census Bureau (2023 Population Estimates). *American Community Survey 5-Year Estimates*. Retrieved from [U.S. Census Bureau QuickFacts: Vermont](#)

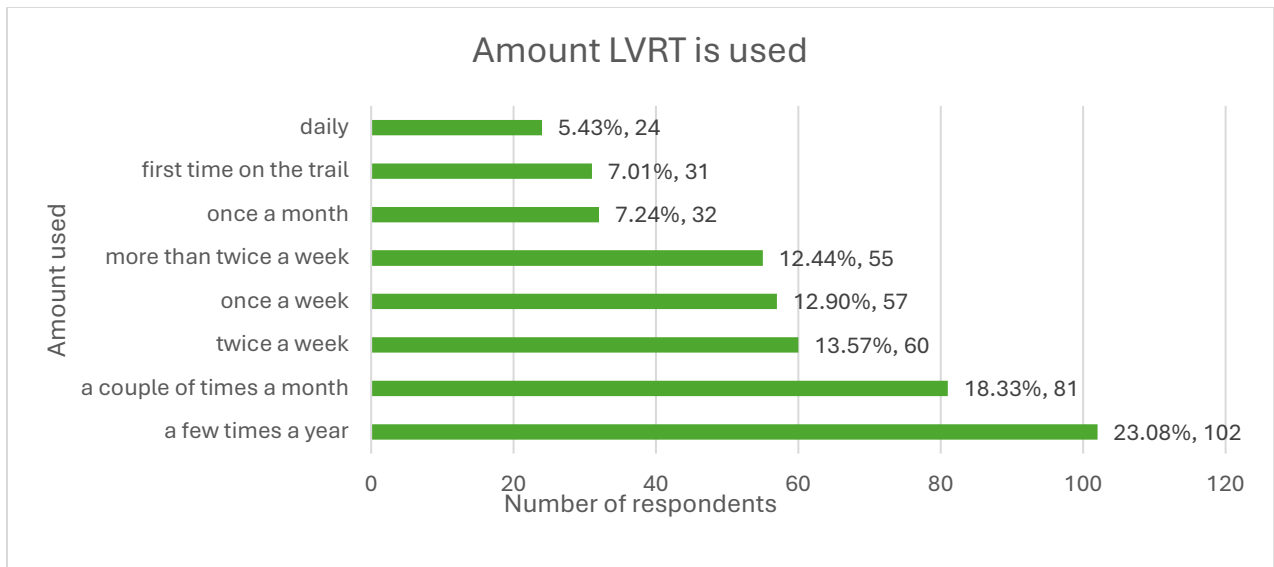


Figure 3: A format chart showing the frequency respondents use the LVRT. Respondent amount and percentage of total respondents are shown for each bar at the end.

The rail trail is a form of social infrastructure. 78% of survey respondents report regularly using the LVRT with friends and family. 20% of survey respondents report using the trail alone. The trail is used on both weekends and weekdays, with 60% of survey respondents reporting regular use the trail on weekdays and weekends, 26% survey respondents report trail use only on weekdays and 14% of survey respondent reporting trail use only on weekends. 78% of survey respondents report regularly using the trail for more than an hour, 38% of survey respondent report regularly using the trail for 1-2 hours, and 37% of survey respondents reporting using the trail for more than two hours. Less than 3% of survey respondents report using the trail for less than 30 minutes, while 23% of survey respondents report using the trail for 30 minutes to one hour.

The LVRT functions as a multi-modal transportation infrastructure, used for both recreation and transportation. 96% of survey respondents report using the trail for recreation; 48% of survey respondents report using the trail for health and exercise, and 2.48% of survey respondents report using the trail for commuting. One (1) survey respondent reported using the trail to travel to school, and four (4) respondents reported using the trail for other purposes, which may include access for paddling, fishing, swimming, and hunting.

Primary non-winter activity is biking.

Survey respondents reported that the primary activity during non-winter months was biking (Figure 4). 70% of survey respondent reported their primary activity is biking (e-bikes & traditional) and 24% of survey respondents reported their primary activity as pedestrian-oriented (walking, hiking, jogging, and/or running). Notably 1% of respondents are using the trail for other activities, ranging from photography to swimming. Of note, 80% of survey respondents reported that trail has had an influence on the type and frequency of activities they participate in.

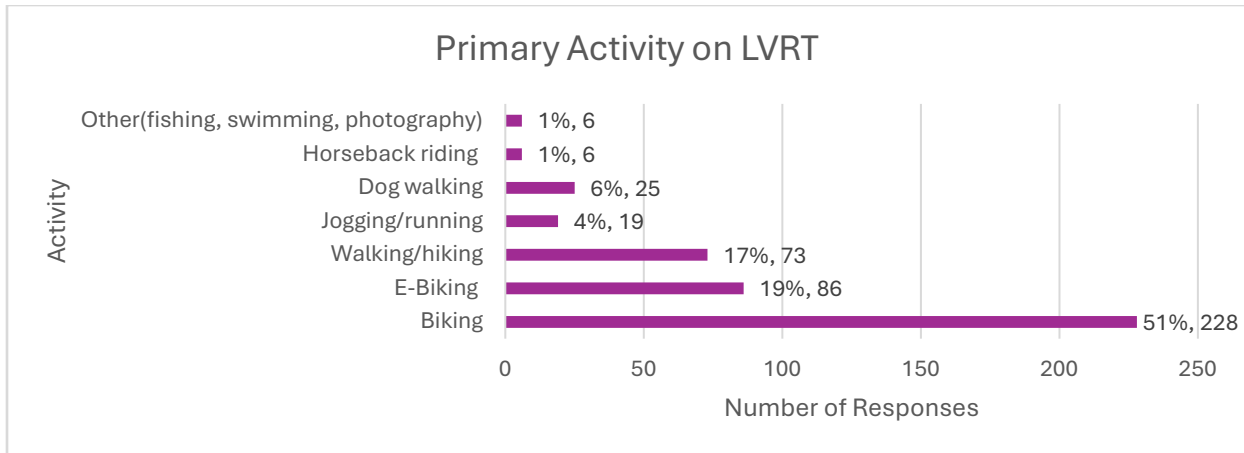


Figure 4: Format chart that shows the primary activity respondents use the LVRT for. Respondent amount and percentage of total respondents are shown for each bar at the end.

Western sections of the trail are used less frequently.

Survey respondents reported using the central and eastern segments of the trail most often, with the Morrisville to Cambridge section reporting the most frequently at 26.83% (Table 1).

Segment of the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail Used Most Frequently	
St. Johnsbury to Danville	11.70%
Danville to Hardwick	21.33%
Hardwick to Morrisville	23.62%
Morrisville to Cambridge	26.83%
Cambridge to Sheldon Junction	7.34%
Sheldon Junction to Swanton	9.17%

Table 1: Table showing the trail segments survey respondents use most frequently.

Spending and Business Patronage

LVRT users are contributing to the local economy.

The survey reveals that the LVRT has an impact on local businesses. 60% of survey respondents reported being influenced by their use of the LVRT to purchase goods. In conjunction with recent LVRT trips, respondents purchased beverages, meals at restaurant and cafes, and breweries along the trail. Respondents also reported buying snacks at gas stations (Figure 5).

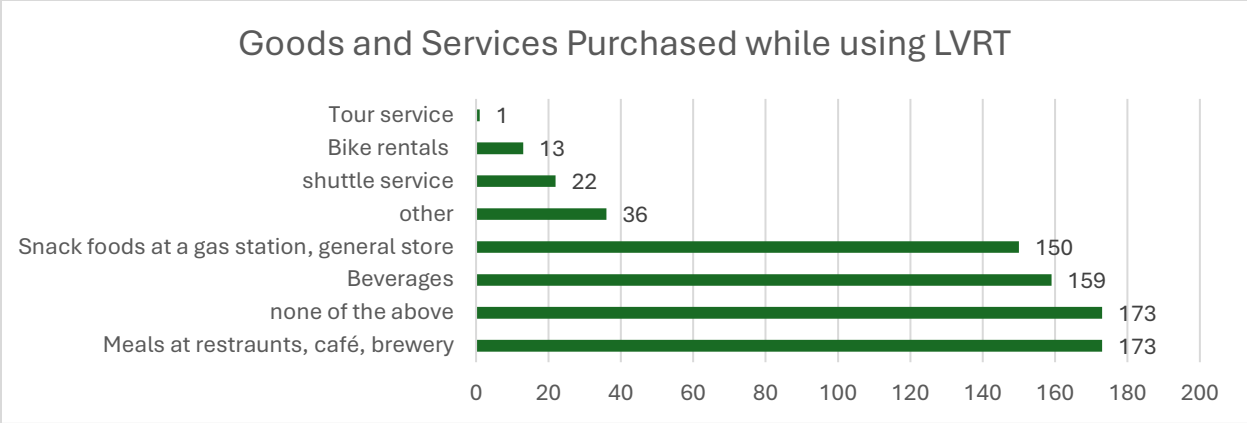


Figure 5: Graph showing amount of people who purchased a good and services while using the LVRT.

Other goods and services purchases while using the LVRT are places to stay (hotels, camp gear, camp sites) and gas (Figure 6).

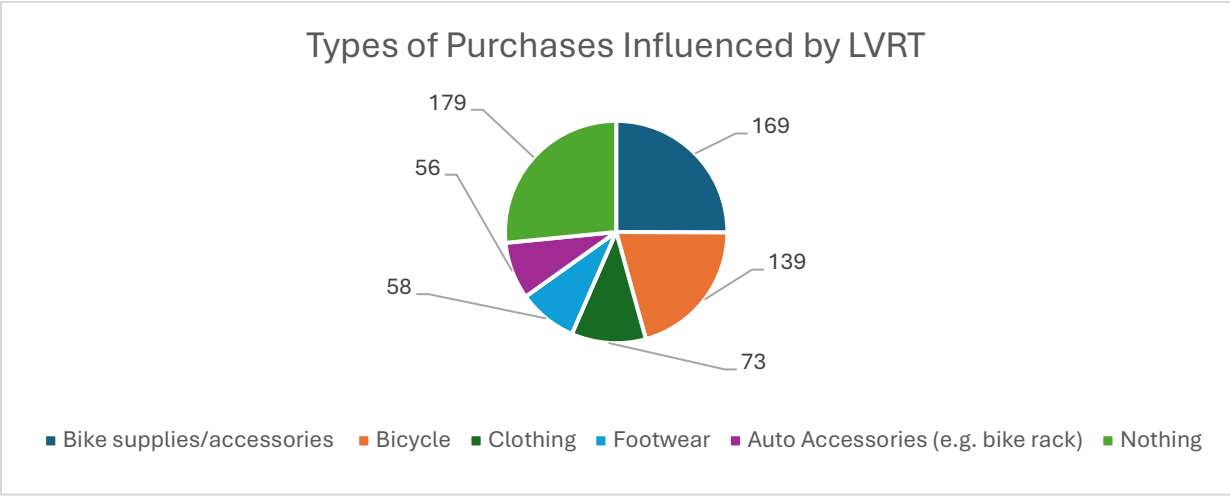


Figure 6: Pie chart showing the types and number of purchases influenced by LVRT use.

The most a respondent reported spending was \$13,000.00. A fourth of respondents spent more than \$500.00 with another fourth spending between \$100.00-\$500.00. The last quarter spent no more money due to LVRT influence. The vast majority of LVRT users do not stay overnight: 84% of respondents did not stay overnight anywhere, 5% stayed in hotels, 5% in campgrounds, 4% in bed and breakfasts, 2% stayed with friends and relatives, and 4% with air B&B or another like service.

39.2% of respondents indicated that they patronized a business along the LVRT for purchases such as meals at cafes, restaurants, and breweries. This was the largest response rate reported for spending. 10.4% of respondents reported home zip codes outside of Vermont. Preliminary reports such as the [Caledonia County User Projections and Economic Impact Analysis](#) found that the LVRT has the potential to generate up to \$4.7 million in total annual sales activity in Caledonia County and beyond in Northern Vermont. The 2022 Analysis provided that while the majority of LVRT users in Caledonia County are local day users (70.8%), it is the non-local day users (22.9%) and overnight

users (6.3%) that have a larger spending profile and significant impact on the local economy. In order to support a moderate growth scenario (15% increase for local users and 25% increase for non-local day and overnight users), a coordinated investment in trail promotion, informational resources, regional coordination, some investment in community development projects (e.g., trailheads, trailside parks), some investment in tourism/camping/lodging development is needed. Within the moderate growth scenario, trail users generated approximately \$4,196,000 in sales, 68 jobs and \$576,000 in federal, state, and local sales and income taxes in the local economy from direct and indirect impacts.

Maintenance, cleanliness, and safety

LVRT safety, security, and cleanliness reported as good to excellent.

Trail users were asked a series of questions about their experience and perception of the LVRT. The majority of users (over 50%) responded that that conditions and safety along the trail were good to excellent (Figure 7).

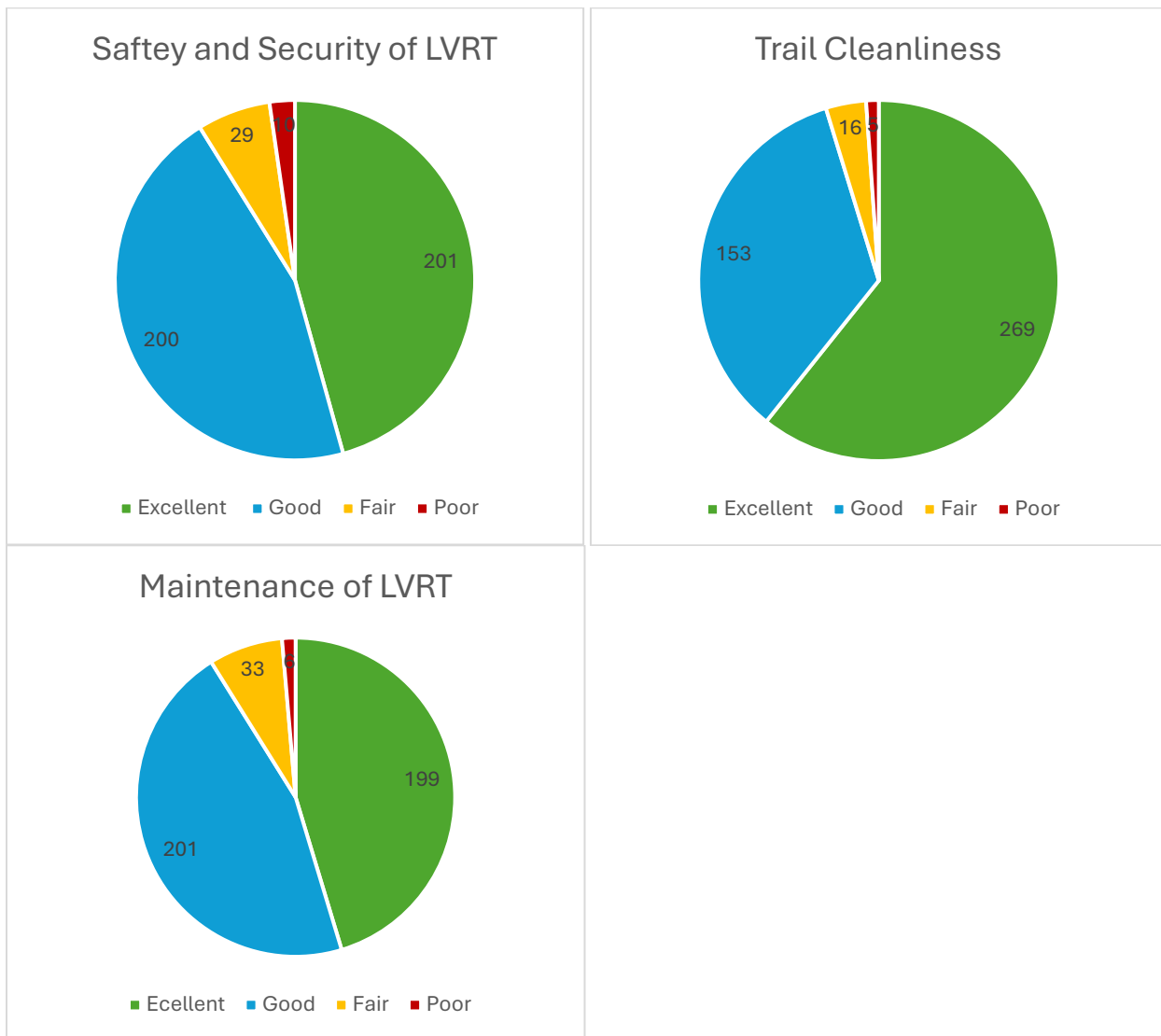


Figure 7: Pie charts showing the trail user experience and perception of trail conditions and safety.

Open ended questions

Survey respondents were asked the open-ended question, *“Is there anything else you’d like us to know?”* Five themes were identified amongst the open-ended responses. Comments were sorted under the themes: trip planning; amenities and trail connections; education and outreach; maintenance; and safety. The categories had both positive and negative responses with many responses falling to more than one. The summary below focuses on constructive feedback identified.

Improved trip- planning tools.

Survey responses identified the desire for more and easier access to information that can support trip planning. Respondents desire physical maps/brochures and more easily accessible information around shuttle services, lodging (hotels, camping areas, hostels), businesses (food, drinks, branded merch), trail closures and conditions, and trail systems near the LVRT.

More on- and off-trail amenities and connections.

Survey responses identified the desire for more amenities on-trail and connection to off-trail amenities. On trail amenities are desired at trail heads and periodically along the trail. Desired on trail amenities include signage about streams/ecosystems and historic buildings/views, potable water, bathrooms, rest areas (benches/picnic tables), trashcans, dog poop bags, shoe/bike/dog cleaning stations, and RV parking spots. Desired connections to off trail amenities include swimming and fishing holes, businesses, and lodging. Improved wayfinding signage for local businesses and trail towns/downtowns/villages within walking/riding distance. One negative comment of note related to amenities is that the respondent feels as if the LVRT is turning into a highway and losing its natural feel with more signage and amenities being installed.

Improved education and outreach to improve trail etiquette.

Survey responses identified the need for improved user interactions, safety, enforcement, and outreach. Enforcement and safety concerns related to picking up after animals (dog/horse), keeping dogs on leash, passing on the right, not using private property for trail access, and speed and presence of ATVs, dirt bikes, E-Bikes, quads, and motorcycles. Outreach and communication methods for concerns related to infrastructure damage, maintenance concerns, and farms spraying pesticides are desired. Outreach through signage around trail rules and trail etiquette is desired.

Improved maintenance.

Survey responses identified the need for more frequent mowing, addressing invasive species, and improved trail surface. Reasons for more frequent mowing being desired were safety (ticks, enough room for passing, visibility at road crossings.) Surface texture concerns were identified in relation to the ease of use of the LVRT, with some trail sections as being “slower” to bike across. Medium loose pebbles increase the resistance of biking and make it unpleasant. Many folks commented that they avoid the section of the LVRT where such surface conditions exist. The loose stone is also noisy and dangerous near the shoulders and middle as it is harder to control your bike on it. Loose sand is also dangerous. Trash, animal feces, and potholes were also frequently mentioned as concerns.

Improved safety.

Survey responses primarily mentioned signage, vertical barriers/railings for steep slopes, emergency contact process (no cell service in patches of the trail,) enforcement issues (off lead dogs, ATVs, homeless folks camping.)

Lamoille Valley Rail Trail User Survey: Findings & Recommendations

The Lamoille Valley Rail Trail (LVRT) User Survey collection process helps VTrans, the LVRT Council, and communities better understand who is using trails and why, where to make sound investments in physical infrastructure, amenities, and programming. The results of this report should be used to inform trail planning, development, and policy based upon the LVRT Management Plan process. Additionally, the survey results should be used to develop and deploy annual surveys along the other VTrans managed rail trails. Future survey result analyses should also incorporate trail counter data. Major findings are explained below.

Understand barriers and increase trail use by new audiences.

More survey respondents were over sixty-five years old compared to other ages. **Additional questions in future surveys regarding race and income levels will provide a more comprehensive understanding of trail user demographics. Additionally, broadening the survey period to summer months may increase the diversity of survey respondents.** Regardless, efforts to increase use of the trail by broader demographics and user types will need to involve engagement of a broader and more diverse audience than existing trail users in the planning and design process, with the goal of understanding what prevents other audiences from using trails and what would increase use. Given that these trails are public resources that promote physical and mental health along with alternative transportation routes, these are significant and relevant issues for all populations.

Continue to support the Trail Ambassador Program

Although survey responses reported an overall satisfaction with current trail maintenance and operations, open ended response questions indicated the continuing need to support education and outreach around maintenance practices, etiquette, and overall information sharing.

Continued support for the [LVRT Ambassador Program](#) is needed to address such concerns.

Trained LVRT Ambassadors are volunteers that trail users may meet along the LVRT who are ready to share local insights and hear about users' experiences on the trail. They are the "eyes and ears" of the trail.

Improve community connectivity and amenities.

There is high demand for restrooms, mileage markers, and signage. The need for increased trail user amenities, such as restrooms, mileage markers and signs, and improved maintenance is clear based on the open-ended survey responses. Additionally, many locations on the LVRT are not connected to amenities or places where people naturally congregate such as downtowns, business districts, schools, and parks. The requests for bathrooms and signage along with the percentage of trail users patronizing businesses identify areas of improvement. VTrans, along with key partners such as the Rail Trail Councils, the Vermont Department of Tourism and Marketing, and local Chambers of Commerce should think systematically about how to better integrate trail and outdoor resource amenities with transportation needs as well as connections to schools, parks,

playgrounds, and business districts. The access points in the Towns of St. Johnsbury, Danville, Hardwick, Morrisville, Hyde Park, Johnson, Highgate are opportunities for connections. **This can be accomplished through an annual assessment of existing amenities and service gaps, the establishment of additional trailheads, improved amenities at exiting trailheads, improved signage connecting trail users to existing amenities in downtowns and villages, and investment in comprehensive wayfinding signs corridor-wide.**

Support initiatives that invest in the recreation-based economy

Preliminary reports such as the [Caledonia County User Projections and Economic Impact Analysis](#) found that with a moderate growth scenario, the LVRT has the potential to generate up to \$4.2 million in total annual sales activity in Caledonia County and beyond in Northern Vermont. To support this growth, a coordinated investment in trail promotion, informational resources, regional coordination, some investment in community development projects (e.g., trailheads, trailside parks), some investment in tourism/camping/lodging development is needed. Recommendations include:

- **Future surveys including questions regarding the location of trailside and regional businesses patronized to better understand current barriers to existing business access;**
- **Investment in on-trail amenities such as wayfinding signs;**
- **Continued and expanded investment in promotional activities such as the [Rail Trail Friendly Business Program](#), online trip-planning tools, marketing campaigns, brochures, and Trail-Friendly Business lists at key regional and trailside locations and online; and**
- **Coordination with Rail Trail Councils and other key State and community partners to support small-scale lodging and camping establishments.**

Lamoille Valley Rail Trail (LVRT) User Survey

1. Lamoille Valley Rail Trail (LVRT) User Survey

We want to hear from you! In order to provide you with a high-quality recreational experience, the Vermont Rail Trails Program is conducting a survey of trail users.

This survey will take about 3-5 minutes to complete. Survey results will help us to plan for a better experience- from improved amenities like parking along the trail to better connections with trail towns.

The survey will be closed at 11:59PM on Tuesday, October 15. Survey results will be shared with the Rail Trails Program and LVRT Council.

Thank you!

1. What is your ZIP code?

2. Please identify your age group (check all that apply if you are traveling in a party):

- 66 or older
- 56-65
- 46-55
- 36-45
- 26-35
- 16-25
- 15 and under

3. If traveling in a group- how many are in your party?

4. What is your gender?

- Male
- Female
- Other

5. How often, on average, do you use the trail?

- first time on the trail
- a few times a year
- once a month
- a couple of times a month
- once a week
- twice a week
- more than twice a week
- daily

6. What is your primary activity on the trail during the non-winter months?

- Biking
- E-Biking
- Walking/hiking
- Jogging/running
- Dog walking
- Horseback riding
- Other (fishing, swimming, photography, geocaching, etc.)

7. Has the trail had influence on the type or frequency of activity you participate in?

- Yes
- No

8. Generally, when do you use the trail?

- Weekdays
- Weekends
- Both

9. In general, how much time do you spend on the trail when you use it?

- Less than 30 minutes
- 30 minutes to 1 hour
- 1 to 2 hours
- More than 2 hours

10. Would you consider the main use of the trail to be for...?

- Health and exercise
- Recreation
- Commuting to work
- Event training
- Walk/ride to school
- Other

11. What portion of the trail do you use most often?

- St. Johnsbury to Danville
- Danville to Hardwick
- Hardwick to Morrisville
- Morrisville to Cambridge
- Cambridge to Sheldon Junction
- Sheldon Junction to Swanton

12. Which trail access points do you use when you access the trail (check all that apply):

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> St. Johnsbury — LVRT Trailhead, 543 Main Street | <input type="checkbox"/> Hyde Park — LVRT Trailhead, Depot Street Extension & Town Highway 62, 43 Mill Street |
| <input type="checkbox"/> St. Johnsbury — Park & Ride — 100 U.S. Route 2W, at junction of U.S. 2B and U.S. 2 W | <input type="checkbox"/> Johnson — Informal parking at Dog’s Head Falls, East River Rd |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Danville — 421 U.S. Route 2, informal parking across from Marty’s 1st Stop | <input type="checkbox"/> Johnson — LVRT Trailhead, Old Mill Park, 22 Lendway Ln |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Danville — Danville Town Recreational Fields, 450 Peacham Rd | <input type="checkbox"/> Cambridge (Jeffersonville) — Cambridge Junction Trailhead, Rail Trail Park, Cambridge Junction Rd, Jeffersonville |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Danville — LVRT Trailhead Danville Train Station, Peacham Rd | <input type="checkbox"/> Cambridge/Jeffersonville — Jeffersonville Park & Ride, 5464 VT-15 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Danville — West Danville Park & Ride, 2749 U.S. Route 2W | <input type="checkbox"/> East Fairfield — LVRT Trailhead, East Fairfield Community Center, 124 School St |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Greensboro Bend — LVRT Trailhead- Main St. Crossing | <input type="checkbox"/> Sheldon — MVRT/ LVRT Trailhead Sheldon Junction (Junction of the MVRT/LVRT), 25 Severance Rd |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Hardwick — LVRT Trailhead, Hardwick Historical Society, Creamery Rd | <input type="checkbox"/> Highgate Center — LVRT Trailhead Highgate Center, Highgate Falls Arena, 243 Gore Rd |
| <input type="checkbox"/> East Hardwick — Informal parking off Stevens Lane, parallel park along the road | <input type="checkbox"/> Swanton — Park & Ride, 10 Elm St., Swanton |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Wolcott — LVRT Trailhead, Wolcott Town Offices, 28 Railroad Street | <input type="checkbox"/> Swanton — Swanton Recreation Commission, 16 Jewett St., Swanton |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Morrisville — Morrisville Trailhead, Oxbow Park, 257 Portland St | <input type="checkbox"/> Swanton — Swanton Historical Society, 58 S. River St. |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other (please specify) | |

13. Has your use of the trail influenced your purchase of...?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bike supplies/accessories (e.g. tubes/tires, repair kit, water bottle, panniers, bike trailer, etc.) | <input type="checkbox"/> Footwear |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bicycle | <input type="checkbox"/> Auto Accessories (e.g. bike rack) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Clothing | <input type="checkbox"/> Nothing |

14. Approximately how much did you spend on the items above in the past year? Enter 0 if not applicable.

15. In conjunction with your most recent trip to the trail, did you purchase any of the following? Please check all that apply.

- Beverages
- Meals at a restaurant, cafe, brewery along the trail
- Snack food at a gas station, general store along the trail (e.g. ice cream, sandwich, etc.)
- Bike rental
- Other (please specify)
- Tour service
- Shuttle service
- None of the above

16. About how much did you spend per person on the items above? Enter 0 if not applicable.

17. Did your visit include an overnight stay in one of the following types of accommodations? Check all that apply.

- Friends or relatives home
- Motel/hotel
- Campground
- Bed & Breakfast
- Private (e.g. Air B&B, VRBO, HipCamp)
- Other
- N/A (Did not stay overnight)

18. How many nights did you stay in conjunction with your visit to the trail? Enter 0 if not applicable.

19. Approximately how much did you spend on overnight accommodations per night? Enter 0 if not applicable.

20. In your opinion, the maintenance of the trail is...

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

21. In your opinion, the safety and security along the trail is...

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

22. In your opinion, the cleanliness of the trail is...

- Excellent
- Good
- Fair
- Poor

23. How did you find out about the trail?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Word of mouth | <input type="radio"/> https://railtrails.vermont.gov/ |
| <input type="radio"/> Driving past | <input type="radio"/> Other website |
| <input type="radio"/> Roadside signage | <input type="radio"/> Vermont Welcome Center |
| <input type="radio"/> Advertisement (print, radio, social media) | <input type="radio"/> Bike Shop |
| <input type="radio"/> https://vermontvacation.com/ | <input type="radio"/> Other (e.g. live in the area, etc.) |

24. Anything else you'd like us to know?