



## Vermont Mushers Association, Inc.

PO Box 514, Waitsfield, VT 05673 · [www.vtmushers.org](http://www.vtmushers.org)

REC'D DEC 08 2006

Mr. Bryant Watson  
Executive Director  
Vermont Association of Snow Travelers  
26 Vast Lane/Berlin  
Barre, VT 05641

Dear Bryant,

We are writing in response to your request for comments on the proposed Management Plan for the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail on behalf of the Vermont Mushers Association. These comments are in response to the October 23, 2006 version of the Management Plan.

In several places in the document our group is referred to as the "Vermont Mushers." The name of our organization is the Vermont Mushers Association.

In the second sentence of the first paragraph of Section 4.0 Trail Uses, the Plan refers to "Dog Sledding" as a compatible form of recreation on the trail. Our organization believes the plan should refer to "mushing" instead. The activity of dog sledding is confined to snow during the winter months and refers only to mushing with sleds. The term mushing encompasses the entire range of dog-powered sports compatible with the trail, such as skijoring and dryland training with bikes, rigs, carts ,etc. and still include dog sledding.

Also in Section 4 the plan states "...including competitive events for the preceding uses." While we admit that we have seriously entertained the economic benefit of a dog sledding race the length of the trail, and can see similar possibilities for walkers and even bicyclists, we do not feel you mean to include competitive snowmobiling in this category. We suggest the sentence should read: "...and may include the possibility of competitive events for some of the preceding uses."

Section 8.3 g refers to the use of bollards that presumably will be used to control vehicular access to the Trail. We are not opposed to bollards in general, and we acknowledge that it is important to control vehicular access to the trail, some of our users train during the cool temperatures of the Fall and Spring (before and after snow) with non-motorized wheeled rigs that have difficulty fitting through narrow spaces. We hope that we may be consulted on the questions of where bollards may be placed and their design.

Herbicide use on the trail is mentioned in the budget printed in the Plan between Sections 14 and 15. We are opposed to the use of herbicides on the trail, preferring natural means of controlling vegetation along the corridor. We feel this way for several reasons. First is the health of our dogs who travel much closer to the ground than we do,

thus becoming exposed to higher concentrations of these chemicals than we do. Second, we envision this trail to be used by many families with children. We do not feel it is appropriate to expose them to herbicides or to any herbicide residue. And finally the LVRT lies close to several rivers and sensitive farmlands. We do not feel it is appropriate to apply herbicides near these valuable resources.

And finally, two sections of the Plan contain what we feel may have disturbing implications for the future. In the penultimate paragraph of Section 11, the Plan states: "...all recreational activities may be subjected to a system of user fees..." And the first paragraph of Section 13 essentially lays fiscal and construction responsibility for the trail during the summer upon the summer trail users themselves. We feel both these sections do not lead the LVRT towards the Mission and Vision you have boldly and beautifully laid out in Section 1.1. The reasons for this are numerous, but we will restrict ourselves here to a few points only.

First, society, in general, has always supported through subsidy of one sort or another those activities that further the health and well-being of its citizenry. Sidewalks, for example, essentially aid only pedestrians, but are deemed crucial to all, and are paid for not by the pedestrians, but by motorists. The healthy lifestyle of the walker is thus subsidized not by him- or herself, but by society in general. In the same vein, bicyclists do not pay for the roads they ride on. Society reckons that the health benefits that accrue to the individual bicyclists and thus to the public, and also to the public in general by having fewer motorists on the roads, pay the share of the costs for the bicyclists. Your proposal flies in the face of years of public trust in this matter.

In addition, these two sections, if followed, do not help lead the LVRT to the levels of economic benefit laid out in Sections 4 and 9. Trail users from out-of-town, out-of-state, and from other countries will not flock to a trail that charges them to ride their bicycle or walk. In order to achieve the high levels of tourist interest and its economic benefit for the region and the state, the trail needs to be constructed and maintained to the highest standards possible. These standards do not include charging fees to the users it most hopes to attract. The trail will suffer and the towns along it will suffer if the state does not recognize that the economic benefit to the region and to itself will far outweigh any subsidy it provides towards the construction and maintenance necessary to attract these visitors.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be a stylized name, possibly "BHG".

for the Board of Directors

Vermont Mushers Association, Inc. bhg