

**State Trails Advisory Committee Virtual Meeting Notes
October 27, 10:00 AM -Noon (EDT)**

Link to meeting recording: <https://youtu.be/bJy1vgmuMNI>

Attendees:

DCR Staff

Mary Bishop, PCMO; Morgan Tassone, PRR; Samantha Wangsgard, PRR; Allison Tillett; PRR, Kellie Seaton PRR; Kristal McKelvey, PRR; Joshua Ellington, State Parks; David Bryan, State Parks; Derrick Bolen, Special Assistant for Policy; Frank Stovall, Deputy Director for Operations; Andrew Smith, Chief Deputy Director; Matt Wells, Director

Other Participants

Travis Davidson, South Hampton Roads Trail
Reed Perry, Chesapeake Conservancy
Reed Nester, Tidewater Trails Alliance/Historic Triangle Bicycle Advisory Committee
Angel Deem, VDOT
Kristine McCormick, Visit Virginia's Blue Ridge
Sara Kidd, Hampton Roads Planning District Commission
Cat Anthony, Virginia Capital Trail Foundation
Ursula Lemanski, National Park Service, Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance
Bethany McCunn, VDH
Nick Donohue, Capitol Transportation Consulting
Charlie Grymes, Greater Prince William Trails Coalition
Joanne Wieworka, Chesterfield County
Shane Sawyer, VDOT
Nathan Burrell, Virginia Outdoors Foundation
Wayne Clark, retired, Cisco Systems
Justin Doyle, James River Association
Nathan Hilbert, National Park Service, Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance
Gary Wilmouth, VDOT
Steve Lambert, Virginia Beach
Ellen Shepard, Virginia's United Land Trusts
Andrew Downs, Appalachian Trail Conservancy
Brantley Tyndall, VBF / Sports Backers
Emily Stock, DRPT
Frank Maguire, Roanoke Valley Greenways
Marty Trussell, Blue Ridge Off-Road Cyclists
Alister Perkinson, James City County
Chris Gensic, City of Charlottesville
Curt Smith, Middle Peninsula Planning District Commission
Don Hindman, Shenandoah Valley Rail Trail
Katy Miller, DRPT
Kirk Millikan, VDOT
Michael Burton, City of Richmond
Rebecca Murphy, Northern Virginia Regional Commission
Jim Lynch, Friends of Dahlgren Railroad Heritage Trail
Marc Upton, Rocktree Trails

Champe Burnley
Max Goldman, DWR
Walter T. Camp, City of Virginia Beach Active Transportation Advisory Committee
Janit Llewellyn, Chesterfield County
Catherine Van Noy, Mill Creek Creative
George Mapp, Citizens for a Better Eastern Shore
Jimmy Walters, Tobacco Heritage Trail
Phil Riggan, PlanRVA
Alan Day, Great Eastern Trail Association
Lindsay Webb, Roanoke County
Heather Barrar, Friends of the Lower Appomattox River
Jeff Monroe, Potomac Appalachian Trail Club
Ashley Mills, Accomack-Northampton Planning District Commission
Kalli Krumpos, Capital Trails Coalition
Thomas Smith
Emily Monroe, Carytown Bicycling Company
Elliott Caldwell, East Coast Greenway Alliance
Andy Clarke, Toole Design
Natalia Sanchez, National Park Service, Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance
Jill Kaneff, Northern Virginia Regional Commission
Kim Williams, Alta Planning and Design
Brett Meadows, Chesterfield County Planning
Kevin O'Brien, Washington Area Bicyclist Association
Andrew Dupuy, Rails-To-Trails Conservancy
Wendy Austin, Friends of the Lower Appomattox River
Heidi Mitter, VDOT
Mona Burwell, VDH
Pete Eshelman, Roanoke Outside
Dan Reese, Alpha Trace Consulting
Joe Elton

At 10 a.m., Samantha Wangsgard welcomed the group and turned the meeting over to DCR's Director Matthew Wells. He said the agency is working to allocate funds provided to DCR in the state budget. He mentioned the new hotel opening at Foster Falls later this year and the groundbreaking for a new trail center at High Bridge State Park.

State Trails Office

After providing an overview of the meeting purpose and agenda, Jennifer Wampler introduced VDOT's Chief of Policy, Angel Deem, who said the Commonwealth Transportation Board will prioritize the General Fund dollars allocated for planning, development, and construction of multi-use trails throughout the Commonwealth. General fund investments in trails by year are as follows: 2021 (\$10 million) 2022 (\$37.5 million), and 2023 (\$41.5 million). Federal pass through funding includes \$7 million from Transportation Alternatives set aside for these purposes in each fiscal year (2023 and 2024).

VDOT is setting up the State Trails Office with \$800,000 from FY23 funding (funding two positions and consultant services to assist with the State Trails Plan and State Trails Information Clearinghouse). The Office will be supported by two divisions--Transportation Mobility Planning and Investment (lead) and

Local Assistance. VDOT is moving ahead with filling two of the three positions identified for the Trails Office at this time.

Five high priority trails (as directed by the General Assembly) include the Shenandoah Valley Rail Trail, Craig Valley Scenic Trail, Peaks to Creeks Trail in Lynchburg, the Tobacco Heritage Trail, and the Eastern Shore Rail Trail. While specific funding amounts are not assigned, the CTB has approved up to \$1 million for each high priority trail to support project evaluations, scoping, right of way acquisition and planning. Prior to additional funding, project scopes and cost estimates will need to be presented to the CTB with additional funding requests.

Of the \$14 million available through federal Transportation Alternative funds, \$11.8 million have already been assigned to projects, leaving \$2.2 million currently being assigned.

VDOT's next steps include evaluations of the five priority trails, filling three positions in the matrixed State Trails Office, beginning outreach and coordination, and beginning development of a state trails plan and state trails information clearinghouse.

Questions/Answers: The legislature decided to house the trails office at VDOT instead of DCR. It is too early to tell if any natural surface trails will be included in current funding and planning efforts.

State Rail Plan

Emily Stock, DRPT Chief of Rail Transportation was joined by Rail Planning Analyst Katy Miller to share information on the State Rail Plan. Katy is now DRPT's Rail Planning Contact 804-972-4596, katy.miller@drpt.virginia.gov. The Rail Plan Policy Framework prioritizes the preservation of rail right of way for rail and transportation use while facilitating proposals for co-located recreational uses as appropriate. The Virginia Passenger Rail Authority (VRPA) was created to advance passenger rail opportunities and interests. As of 2022, the Authority has ownership of rail corridor from Richmond to Washington; Ridgeway, NC to Petersburg; Clifton Forge to Staunton; and New River Valley to Roanoke.

The draft [Statewide Rail Plan](#) 30 day public review period closed on October 27. An updated version is expected in December or January.

Emily provided updates on the [Long Bridge pedestrian and bicycle crossing](#), the Eastern Shore Rail Trail, and the Ridgeway NC to Petersburg Southeast High Speed Rail projects.

Questions/Answers: The potential for any given rail-with-trail depends on the railroad operator/owner, its requirements for separation of uses, and the availability of adjacent right-of-way for trail development. The best source for information on the Southeast High Speed Rail project and any future acquisition of rail line is [VPRA's website](#).

Dahlgren Railroad Heritage Trail feasibility study

Jennifer Wampler said the direction for the Dahlgren Railroad Heritage Trail feasibility study came from House Bill 30, which directed DCR to review the properties of the Dahlgren trail and make recommendations for the trail as a recreational area for incorporation into Caledon State Park. The trail is currently on private property, and a no-cost permit is required to use the trail.

The study included public outreach with stakeholder phone and email interviews, a stakeholder listening session, and adjacent landowner outreach. A needs assessment compiled information from other studies in the region, including the [Community Health Improvement Plan](#) (CHIP) from the Rappahannock Area Health District.

[ESRI products](#) were used for the market study, for both a [drive time analysis](#) and to estimate the sports and leisure market potential. Walking for exercise had the most participation (37.7 percent of households) in the block group that includes Caledon State Park.

The report identified additional items that need to be resolved before feasibility could be determined, including additional property acquisition needed for trailheads and sight distance at crossings. DCR staff are waiting on the General Assembly for future direction.

Chesapeake National Recreation Area

Reed Perry, Manager of External Affairs for the Chesapeake Conservancy, a watershed wide conservation non-profit that undertakes land conservation, restoration, geospatial mapping and analysis, said the organization has from the beginning been focused on increasing public access to the Bay and promoting the Bay's significance as a national treasure. He shared a [video](#) available on [website](#) about the effort underway to designate a collection of new and existing parks and public lands along the Bay as the new Chesapeake National Recreation Area. The goal is to establish a national park unit dedicated to the Chesapeake Bay to increase park and recreation access points along the Bay and improve existing sites.

Previous National Park Service efforts to enhance the Bay include the Chesapeake Bay Water Trails Program (provides Gateway grants, [one active now](#)) and the Captain John Smith National Historic Trail. With the establishment of a National Recreation Area, cooperative agreements could be authorized between NPS and existing state and local parks that would unlock federal funding and NPS support. A working group is creating a draft Bill for Congress, expected to be released in November 2022. Before the full Bill is introduced to Congress, the public will have a chance to weigh in on the draft language.

Understanding the Commonwealth Transportation Board

Nick Donohue, Principal with Capitol Transportation Consulting and previous Deputy Secretary of Transportation, provided some history on how the current General Assembly funding for trails came to be. A [report](#) from the Office of Intermobility Planning and Investment had three recommendations that were carried forward in the budget language: establishing a state trails office, completing a state trails plan, and developing a trails clearinghouse. The report also identified a need for dedicated funding for trails.

The CTB is a 14 member Board appointed by the governor with staggered terms. Members vote on how to allocate all state and state-controlled federal transportation dollars in Virginia. The Board has played a large role in the selection of Transportation Alternatives projects. The Board is comprised of nine members representing geographic districts, and five at-large members who represent state-wide urban and rural interests.

In terms of next steps, Nick recommended creating a trails plan that demonstrates importance and need. One way to quantify need is to report requests for funding that exceed the amounts allocated under various programs.

Questions/Answers: In response to a question about how the CTB allocates funding, Nick said some programs have requirements that mandate how funds are distributed, while others rely on VDOT staff recommendations to the Board.

Economic Impact of Trails- Cisco presence in Research Triangle, NC

Wayne Clark, retired from Cisco Systems, said he served on a committee in the '90s that was put together to find a location for Cisco's East Coast headquarters. A big factor in the selection was the bike infrastructure in Raleigh. NCDOT has a [Division of Bicycle and Pedestrian Transportation](#) supporting this infrastructure.

At peak, Cisco employed 8,000 in Raleigh, and served as a magnet for other companies to move to the area—an overall economic impact in the tens of billions of dollars.

Amazon's second headquarters (HQ2) search included bicycling infrastructure in their [RFP](#) (page 4 under sustainability).

Also see [How the East Coast Greenway Benefits the Health and Economy of North Carolina's Triangle Region](#), Alta Planning and Design (September 2017).

Alternatives to Bollards

Andy Clarke, Director of Strategy at Toole Design, provided information on alternatives to bollards at road/trail intersections. He recommended following the World Bollard Association on Twitter. [@worldbollard](#). He suggested the default option should be no bollards, and that land managers should really consider if a bollard is needed, because they can be a safety hazard. Bollards are currently used to stop vandals with vehicles and stop confused drivers, while still allowing for maintenance and emergency access. If bollards are absolutely needed, do not hide them or make them hard to navigate. If using removable bollards, make sure they are safe (removed flush with the surface), and put them in the right place. Perhaps a better option to consider is a planter alternative that can be driven over.

Virginia Trails Alliance Update

Cat Anthony, Executive Director of the Virginia Capital Trail and President of the Virginia Trails Alliance said a number of organizations have come together to advocate for trails and trails funding through the Virginia Trails Alliance. She maintains a listserv for timely exchange of information among members. If you would like to be added, email cat@virginiacapitaltrails.org.

A shared goal for next months is to create a letter outlining Alliance priorities to send to legislators and other decision makers.

DCR Updates

Kristal McKelvey, Chief Recreation Grants Manager, reported on the results of the 2022 Recreational Trails Program grant round. There were 22 applications and \$1.5 million awarded, although over \$5 million was requested. The next RTP grant round is projected for late spring, depending on a pending announcement from FHWA.

Due to NPS requirements, only six projects were authorized under the Land and Water Conservation Fund's State and Local Formula Program. This was the first time in many years that development projects were eligible under DCR's program. Projects must be ready for construction with this federal pass-through program. Timing for a future grant round has not been determined.

The Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership Program is currently open. Pre-applications are due to DCR on November 15. Only 18 cities and towns are eligible for this program that targets economically disadvantaged urban communities. Trail planning can play a role in future ORLP rounds due to the walkability requirement (the proposed park/project site must be within or abut the city, but must still be within a 10-minute walk).

Governor's environmental excellence awards [applications](#) are due on Dec. 8th. One category is implementation of the Virginia Outdoors Plan.

Allison Tillett has joined DCR and is working to coordinate the next Virginia Outdoors Plan. Kellie Seaton is the grants coordinator and administers RTP. Use the email recreationgrants@dcr.virginia.gov for all grant-related questions.

Jennifer Wampler shared a link to the recently updated FHWA bike/ped federal [funding opportunities matrix](#).

In other updates, a new hotel is opening up at Foster Falls along New River Trail, and ground has broken on the High Bridge Trail Center. The extension of High Bridge Trail to Pamplin is underway.

Mendota Trail has made remarkable progress over the past six years, with just over a mile to go to finish this 12.5-mile trail from Bristol to Mendota, part of the Beaches to Bluegrass Trail.

The Appalachian Trail Conservancy and the Town of Damascus opened the [Damascus Trail Center](#) on August 27, which will serve as a hub for outdoor recreation in Southwest Virginia.

Roanoke County is providing a seasonal [trailhead shuttle](#) serving hikers heading to McAfee Knob on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays.

More regions are engaging in regional trail planning. The Northern Virginia Regional Commission recently held a [Recreational Trails Summit](#), and Hampton Roads Transportation Planning Organization issued a [regional trails report](#). The Elizabeth River Trail [Glow Line](#) opens October 29th.

Jennifer shared these resources for those wanting to explore further:

- [VDOT's Local Assistance Division and workshops](#)
- [Office of Intermobility Planning and Investment InteractVTRANS Map Explorer](#) (working with the regions on a regional multiuse trails layer to add to this interface)
- [Prioritizing Active Transportation, Health, and Safety in Virginia \(PATHS\)](#)
- [Virginia Walkability Action Institute](#)
- [Pedestrian Crossing Accommodations at Unsignalized Approaches](#) (new guidance from VDOT)

Feedback Received on STAC Priorities

Jennifer provided a summary of feedback she received via email on STAC priorities that can be discussed further at the next meeting. Some people indicated they would like to see more attention paid to completing long-distance, priority trails in Virginia (i.e. the East Coast Greenway), while others want more emphasis on the importance and inclusion of natural surface, sustainable, multiuse public trails, especially trails in parks.

Others want DCR to build a relationship with the Office of Trails and figure out what mechanisms to put in place so that STAC can be a resource for the formation and structure of the Office.

Many would like to see a needs assessment that puts a price on needed maintenance for trails as well as what it will cost to build all the trails that are proposed.

And the need for a comprehensive map of current and proposed trails hasn't gone away. With ArcGIS online, there are some promising new methods to get that information with a collaborative approach.

DCR was also asked to take a fresh look at the trails program strategic plan from an accessibility and equal opportunity lens.

Topics for Next Meeting

Please send ideas for topics to cover at our next meeting to Jennifer Jennifer.wampler@dcr.virginia.gov. This will be an in-person meeting at the Virginia Land Conservation and Greenways Conference in Harrisonburg, April 25-27, 2023. You do not need to register for the conference to attend the meeting.

Next steps

Jennifer provided information on upcoming conferences and workshops and other next steps, and the meeting was adjourned at 11:41 a.m.

- VWAI applications due Oct. 28
- [ORLP](#) grants due Nov. 15
- [Agritourism virtual conference](#) Dec. 6-7
- Agritourism in-person conference March 28-30
- [Virginia Land Conservation & Greenways Conference](#) April 25-27 (Session Proposals due on Nov. 18).
- Next STAC meeting on April 26- 8:30-11:30