

## State Trails Advisory Committee Virtual Meeting Agenda

May 19, 2021 10-noon

**This meeting was recorded. The recording is posted on Town Hall along with the minutes.**

### Speakers

Senator Emmett W. Hanger, Jr., 24th District of the Virginia Senate  
Cassidy Rasnick, Deputy Sec. of Commerce and Trade; Director, Office of Outdoor Rec.  
Ronique Day, Office of Intermobility Planning and Investment  
Cat Anthony, Virginia Capital Trail Foundation, Virginia Trails Alliance  
Caron Whitaker, Deputy Executive Director, League of American Bicyclists  
Tom Howard, Tidewater Trails Alliance  
Sarah Sanford, East Coast Greenway Alliance  
Samantha Browne, Chief, Office of Greenways and Trails, Florida  
Kimberly Williams, Recreation Planner with Equinox

### Attendees

Champe Burnley, Virginia Bicycling Federation Board  
Sally Aungier, Virginia Horse Council & Virginia Trails Alliance  
Maggi Blomstrom, Piedmont Environmental Council  
Adrienne Kotula, Virginia Director, Chesapeake Bay Commission  
Jim Lynch, Dahlgren Railroad Heritage Trail (DRHT)  
Heather Barrar, Friends of the Lower Appomattox River (FOLAR)  
Shane Sawyer, VA Dept. of Transportation (VDOT)  
John Bolecek, VDOT  
Nathan Hilbert, National Park Service-RTCA  
Janit Llewellyn, Chesterfield County Parks and Recreation  
Pete Eshelman, Roanoke Regional Partnership/Roanoke Outside Foundation  
Sandra Tanner, Virginia Tourism Corp.  
Ellen Shepard, Virginia's United Land Trusts  
John Kirk, VA Dept. of Wildlife Resources (DWR)  
Jason Powell, Virginia Senate Finance & Appropriations Committee  
W. Alan Day, PATC & Friends of Wolf Trap  
Matthew Helt, George Washington and Jefferson National Forests  
Renee Powers, Roanoke Parks and Recreation, Trails and Greenways Coordinator  
Michael Burton, Richmond Parks & Rec.  
Andrew Downs, Appalachian Trail Conservancy  
Bob & Ellen Mueller, Mendota Trail  
Anthony Duncan, International Mountain Biking Association  
Steph Piperno, Capital Trails Coalition  
Kathryn Benedict, Chesterfield County Transportation Department  
Jody Shiflett, Paralyzed Veterans of America  
Liz Belcher, Roanoke Valley Greenways  
Elaine Linn, City of Virginia Beach  
Tiffany Haworth, Executive Director, Dan River Basin Association (DRBA)  
Don Hindman, Shenandoah Rail Trail Exploratory Committee

Pat Calvert, Virginia Conservation Network  
Chris Gensic, City of Charlottesville

DCR staff attending

Clyde Cristman, Director

Tom Smith, Deputy Director of Operations

Nathan Burrell, Deputy Director of Government and Community Relations

Julie Buchanan, Public Communications and Marketing Office

Kelly McClary-Planning and Recreation Resources (PRR) Director

Lynn Crump, PRR

Kristal McKelvey, PRR, Recreation Grants Manager

Kellie Seaton - PRR, Grants Program Planner

Jennifer Wampler, PRR

At 10 a.m., Jennifer welcomed the group and announced the retirement of Dan Mahon from Albemarle County and Liz Belcher (in August) from Roanoke Valley Greenways. Champe Burnley has stepped down as president of the Virginia Bicycling Federation but still serves on the Board. Other attendees were asked to put their name and affiliation in the chat bar.

Jennifer announced that May is Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month and that National Trails Day is on June 5th. Participants were encouraged to email Jennifer with comments or feedback if they didn't get a chance to comment during the meeting due to the packed schedule.

Kelly McClary welcomed the group and provided some background on the Shenandoah Valley Rail Trail feasibility study that was assigned to DCR by the General Assembly. The report is due by Nov. 1, 2021. There have been four listening sessions with stakeholder groups. VDOT has contracted with Baker Engineering to study the bridges and estimate costs associated with development of the trail. The towns have identified potential trail heads. A Metroquest Survey is active ([www.virginiadot.org/projects/staunton/rockingham,\\_shenandoah\\_and\\_warren\\_counties\\_-\\_rail\\_trail\\_study.asp](http://www.virginiadot.org/projects/staunton/rockingham,_shenandoah_and_warren_counties_-_rail_trail_study.asp)), and a virtual public meeting will be held in July.

Jennifer described a map of the trail corridor that included trail connections. It goes through a number of historic towns and near battlefields sites. The entire trail falls within the Shenandoah Valley Battlefields National Historic District. The George Washington and Jefferson National Forest parallels the trail, and there could be a connection to Shenandoah National Park at Front Royal. The Tuscarora Trail, a segment of the Great Eastern Trail intersects the trail at Toms Brook. The trail terminates at Front Royal, near the confluence of the north and south forks of the Shenandoah River

Kelly introduced Tom Smith, DCR's Deputy Director, and Clyde Cristman, who has been the Director of DCR for eight years. Clyde welcomed the committee members and thanked them for their great work. He introduced Senator Emmett Hanger, who represents the 24th District, and Cassidy Rasnick, who serves as the Deputy Secretary of Commerce and Trade. He also

introduced Ronique Day, who serves as the Deputy Director of Intermodal Planning and Investment.

### Outdoor Recreation Caucus

Senator Emmett Hanger, who serves as the co-chair of the Outdoor Recreation Caucus, also serves as the co-chair of the Sportmen's Caucus. He said the Shenandoah Valley Rail Trail project was started by the mayors of the small towns the railroad passes through. Last week, there was a meeting with Norfolk Southern, current owners of the corridor. The Shenandoah Rail Trail would be an economic engine for the Valley. He was pleased to announce that \$10 million was appropriated for trails in this year's state budget. A new state park in Loudoun is also getting funding.

### Outdoor Recreation Office

Cassidy Rasnick provided an introduction to the Office of Outdoor Recreation ([www.governor.virginia.gov/outdoor/](http://www.governor.virginia.gov/outdoor/)). State offices of outdoor recreation are a new trend. The first one was created in 2013. Virginia announced its office in 2019.

Virginia is unique in outdoor recreation offerings because there are so many types of experiences available. The outdoor recreation industry is bigger than the pharmaceutical industry. There are 200+ outdoor-focused businesses in Virginia.

Her office compared specific industries with regional assets. Hiking/camping, watersports, and food & beverage were three industries that had the most connections throughout Virginia.

Her office is focused on three things: business recruitment and expansion, promoting Virginia as an outdoor destination and brand, and coordinating agencies' work with industry. They have done trip planning for Governor Northam. To preview some of the marketing for outdoor manufacturing, visit <https://www.governor.virginia.gov/outdoor/>

Virginia could use regional offices within the Outdoor Recreation Office to help build connections and introduce groups and companies to each other.

### Budget Amendments

Ronique Day with the Office of Intermodal Planning and Investment reviewed recent budget amendment items. Her office works on the statewide transportation plan (VTRANS). Included in the budget items from this year's session was the \$10 million for regional trails mentioned by Senator Hanger. Her office will be pulling together a policy working group with DRPT, DCR, House appropriations staff, finance staff, and STAC to evaluate and recommend a prioritization process for multi-use trail opportunities, a master planning process, and a funding needs assessment. They have a report due October 15, 2021. If you have questions, reach out to Ronique at [Ronique.day@oipi.virginia.gov](mailto:Ronique.day@oipi.virginia.gov)

### Q&A

Q: Are canoes/kayaks being included in watersports?

A: Cassidy: yes, watersports includes those.

Q: Will horses be allowed on the Shenandoah Rail Trail?

A: Clyde: We are still studying the feasibility of the trail, but the use is definitely being considered, since similar trails allow horses.

Q: Is DCR receptive to new State Parks?

A: Clyde: There is legislation that limits DCR's ability to acquire new state parks without General Assembly approval, but they are generally supportive. Virginia's 41st state park, Clinch River, will open within a month. Two more parks are in the works. But ultimately it is up to the General Assembly to approve and provide funding support.

A: Senator Hanger: What they have not been able to do is to keep up with funding for operations and maintenance.

Q: Is the office of Intermodal Planning working with our Congressional members to coordinate any potential earmarks for trails?

A: Ronique: We are working with federal representatives to get more funding for trails.

Q: Some trails will have utility easements on them, whether currently installed or not. Is there a general policy or recommended "best practices" approach to deal with utilities (above or below ground)?

A: John Bolecek: VDOT does not have specific guidance, though there are plenty of examples of where it has been overcome, such as the Fall Line Trail.

Q: Is there Smart Scale funding for the Eastern Shore Rail Trail?

A: John Bolecek: There is no SMART SCALE funding for the Eastern Shore Trail project. CTB modifications for Hampton Roads on page 166 of this PDF:  
[http://www.ctb.virginia.gov/resources/2021/may/ctb\\_workshop\\_meeting\\_may\\_2021.pdf](http://www.ctb.virginia.gov/resources/2021/may/ctb_workshop_meeting_may_2021.pdf)

### Virginia Trails Alliance Updates

Cat Anthony said the Virginia Trails Alliance formed about two years ago. They are working on white papers regarding trails and access to the outdoors. She created a listserv to share trail resources. They are working with Virginia's United Land Trusts (VAULT) to get dedicated funding resources for trails. They are also inviting legislators to get out on trails. The Alliance meets four times a year. Cat encouraged everyone to be active and support each other, the more trails we have, the better for all of us. Contact Cat at [cat@virginiacapitaltrail.org](mailto:cat@virginiacapitaltrail.org)

### Congressional Update

Caron Whitaker, the Deputy Executive Director for the League of American Bicyclists said funds are available now for RAISE grants and Senate Earmarks. With RAISE grants (previously BUILD, TIGER), the administration is focusing on sustainability and equity. Biking and walking are expected to be successful projects with this administration.

Congress has brought back earmarks for appropriations. The Senate has said they will do \$40 billion total (so ~40 million per senator), but this will include many types of projects. Look at projects in the \$3-5 million range that can break ground in the next 4-6 years, with community benefit and support. Themes this year include climate, equity, people-centric, modernization, and local control.

Transportation is a category within the American Jobs Plan. Biking and walking could fit into these categories: roads and bridges, road safety, transformative projects, and equity. The roads and bridges category includes \$5 billion for Transportation Alternatives (~26 million/year for 5 years for VA). Road safety includes ~40 million/year for 5 years. Equity includes 25 billion to redress historic inequities, such as reconnecting neighborhoods.

The Jobs Plan is only a plan. It isn't legislative language, policy change, all or nothing, or bipartisan. The Republican response has vast differences in roads vs. transit, the importance of rail, and traditional vs. reform spending.

There currently is a bipartisan transportation bill that may be reconciled later. The goal is to get a bill this calendar year. In 2019, the Senate passed a bipartisan deal. In 2020, the House passed a partisan deal that included more climate issues. This year, the House is pressured to be bipartisan, while the Senate is more likely to be partisan.

Caron shared a table with funding history and the amounts currently on table. Transportation Alternatives and Recreational Trails will have significant increases if the bill is passed as is.

Under the Ways and Means Committee they are considering Buy America Bonds. Buy America Bonds were used in 2009 as an infrastructure financing tool for local governments. Right now the language excludes railbanking, but there is a proposal to include it in next bill.

Q: With the future Reauthorization, is there any chance of breaking down silos between transportation alternatives and recreational trails, since there is no real distinction between transportation and recreation on our highways?

A: Rec trails community wanted them to be together since funding comes from recreational trail users.

Q: Is there anything that addresses rural communities and funding share? Finding match money is difficult for small rural counties.

A: This bill would say that the whole program would have to be 80-20, but the state could allow some communities to do a smaller match and others to do a larger match. And state highway safety dollars could be used as match.

Q: Would a \$10-million-dollar project be less likely to receive funding than a \$3 to 4-million-dollar project?

A: The State will decide how to disperse funds, whether a few large or multiple smaller projects.

Q: What about the Great American Outdoors Act and opportunities for localities or municipal governments?

A: Matt Helt: USFS gets 15% of GAOA funds. USFS does not have a specific approach for localities to be involved or use these funds. But USFS has been working with ATC-Appalachian Trail Conservancy and SAWS-Southern Appalachian Wilderness Stewards to do work on USFS lands with the funding.

Ursula Lemanski: NPS Outdoor Recreation Legacy Partnership (ORLP) funding for urban areas has been announced.

Caron: With RAISE and other initiatives, there is a push for planning grants to get communities ready for projects.

Kristal McKelvey: Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF) stateside will have approximately \$8 million for development and acquisition projects in our fall grant round (this is a 50-50 match, reimbursement program).

### Trail User Concerns

Jennifer introduced four panelists for this session. Sarah Sanford, the Virginia and North Carolina Coordinator for the East Coast Greenway Alliance, Samantha Browne, the Bureau Chief for the Division of Recreation and Parks in Florida's Office of Greenways and Trails, Kim Williams, Senior Environmental and Recreation Planner for Equinox, and Tom Howard, Chair of the Tidewater Trails Alliance.

Tom said this panel came about from discussions on a state-wide trail designation system. NC and PA have systems underway.

Sarah, who is based in Durham, NC, is originally from Virginia. She discussed the need for some type of state trail designation system in Virginia to address barriers. A current barrier relates to signing the trail. The East Coast Greenway Alliance cannot install standard East Coast Greenway signs on state right-of-way. The Alliance installs and maintains their standard signs, which are not [MUTCD](#) compliant. The cost would rise significantly to install MUTCD-compliant signs, which cost thousands of dollars. Localities do not want to pay this. Virginia is the only state along the greenway from Florida to Maine where the Alliance does not have permission to install their wayfinding signage. This is also a safety issue. A statewide trail designation system could change this.

In North Carolina, there are currently nine state-designated trails serving a range of users. When a trail is designated, it becomes a unit of the state park system. There is a legislative process to be officially designated. Sarah has been working on a bill to have the East Coast Greenway designated in NC. There is no funding attached to the bills, so they are easily passed in legislature. Benefits in NC are twofold: 1) trails are eligible for a wider variety of funding

sources once they are part of state government, and 2) there is access to state resources, like state trail staff to help with land acquisition and planning studies.

Samantha Browne said she works for a planning office within the state Division of Recreation and Parks. Florida created a designation program so that trails can be designated through an easy process. Limitations were set to address the issue of liability for private landowners. A landowner cannot charge anyone a fee to access their land, but they do not have to say the land is safe and do not incur any duty of care towards a person who goes on the land. They also do not become liable for any trail-related injury to persons or property. These landowners are eligible for grants to make trail improvements. Adjacent land is also eligible for protection. The State posts signs on the boundary of the greenway or trail. The agreement is not an easement, so it is easy for landowners to stop participating. Any state-designated trail gets additional points for Recreational Trail Program grants and Land and Water Conservation Fund grants.

Kim Williams spoke about her experience with state trails. The Cumberland Trail is a state trail in Tennessee. In 1976, their legislature created state scenic trail designation. The Cumberland Trail is the only designated state trail, and it is a unit of the state park system. Designation has helped with agency coordination and prioritization of land acquisition funding.

Pennsylvania does not have official state-designated trails, but they do have an official state trail map. They have streamlined priorities with other state agencies (PennDOT, DEQ, etc.). They have 10-15 gaps they are putting resources into.

In Virginia, designation could benefit rural trails, like the Mendota Trail, where there is less access to funding, expertise, etc.

Tom Howard finished the session by expressing the need for a central repository for trail information in Virginia.

#### Q&A

Q: Would a trail connected to a state park be a higher priority?

A: Samantha: In Florida, we worked with each county, then they combined that data and mapped it all to identify opportunities and priorities.

A: Sarah: In North Carolina, connecting to state parks is prioritized to provide access to campgrounds, restrooms, amenities.

Q: Is there funding for maintenance on these trails in other states?

A: Samantha: In Florida, there is an acquisition program called Florida Forever. Ten percent of acquisition funds are set aside for maintenance.

A: Kim: In Pennsylvania and North Carolina maintenance relies on non-profit partners or municipal land owners. In North Carolina, if it is on state-owned property, the state covers these costs. In Tennessee, there is a small amount of state funding for the Cumberland Trail. In Virginia, each state park is required to be revenue generating, so establishing new linear parks can be a challenge.

Q: Can the state designate trails on federal lands?

A: Jennifer: The Potomac Heritage and Appalachian Trail national scenic trails are already federally designated, so there is no need for designation at the state level unless the federal partner sees a benefit. Where the Beaches to Bluegrass Trail crosses Mount Rogers National Recreation Area, for example, more conversations need to happen to ensure a seamless experience for the trail user.

A: Matt Helt: Some federal areas may not be designated, but that would not preclude putting up signage. USFS would want to be consulted in the process.

#### Topics for next meeting

Chris Gensic suggested that the Dept. of Rail and Transportation provide a briefing on the state rail plan at the next meeting. Champe Burnley would like to add the Eastern Shore Rail Trail to the list of topics. (Adrienne Kotula said the Chesapeake Bay Commission is planning a retreat on the Eastern Shore and they are interested in questions or ideas). Lynn Crump suggested a discussion about local contributions to the Virginia Outdoors Plan. Jim Lynch would like a report on the Dahlgren Heritage Rail Trail.

Jennifer reminded everyone that RTP and Trail Access Grant application are due on June 30. Recorded webinars explaining these programs are accessible on DCR's grant page at <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational-planning/grants>.

The following helpful links were placed in the chat bar.

- Trails and Utilities: <https://www.railstotrails.org/build-trails/trail-building-toolbox/basics/utilities/>
- Virginia Trails Alliance: <https://www.railstotrails.org/build-trails/trail-building-toolbox/basics/utilities/>
- White paper on increasing support for trails and outdoor recreation: <http://vcnva.org/increasing-support-for-trails-and-outdoor-recreation-2/>
- Visit [Shenandoahrailtrail.org](http://Shenandoahrailtrail.org) for information on the proposed Broadway to Front Royal trail AND for a link to participate in the Metroquest survey released yesterday.
- Please see <https://www.dcr.virginia.gov/recreational-planning/grants> for information for Recreational Trails Program (application open until June 30th), Trail Access (due June 30th), and future LWCF Stateside updates
- To access a Rails-With-Trails Liability study by UVA law students, visit [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1lt5vt\\_TnH1dRacNytulu3PRMyI2TGrd4/view?usp=sharing](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1lt5vt_TnH1dRacNytulu3PRMyI2TGrd4/view?usp=sharing)  
Three Notched Trail advocates are hopeful that the Commonwealth's purchase of the CSX line from Doswell to Clifton Forge (the Buckingham Branch line) may help route segments of the trail that would be adjacent to the rail line. A trail beside the tracks could double as maintenance/emergency access roads for the railroad operators. Railroads were specifically added to the state recreational use statute to address their liability concerns.

The next STAC meeting will probably be scheduled in early November. The meeting adjourned at 11:56 a.m.