

Bennington Region TAC mtg
4/28/2021 at 3pm

Attendees:

Cat Bryars (BCRC), Mark Anders (BCRC), Amy Bell (VTrans), Katharine Otto (VTrans), Gordon Black (Manchester), Nick Zaiac (Arlington), Dan Monks (Bennington), Beth Wallace (Bennington Headstart), Karen Dzialo (Sandgate).

Minutes:

1. Welcome

- Introductions

2. Project Updates

- Applegate-Willowbrook Path update. Path connection between two affordable housing complexes provides access to neighboring public elementary school. 500' connection. No other sidewalk access and challenging terrain to develop sidewalk. Project is under construction. Gravel path with two boardwalk sections on helical piles. Will be completed by end of June 2021.
- Trolley Path Scoping Study update. Shared use path between Bennington, VT to Williamstown, MA along abandoned trolley line bed. Would eventually connect to existing and planned shared use paths down to Pittsfield, MA. Scoping study is complete. A citizen steering committee supported study development and may take over advocacy for path development.

3. VPSP2 VTrans Project prioritization process – Regionally-driven project proposals are due May 1.

- Bennington Double Roundabout at VT 7A/Northside Dr/Orchard Rd
 - Score 90
- Bennington Roundabout at VT 7A/US7
 - Score 77
- Manchester Rte 11/East Manchester Rd
 - Score 34
- Arlington Rte 313/Warm Brook Rd
 - Score 33
- Mark will put all VPSP2 documents on a Dropbox for TAC members to view.

4. Future Projects and Priorities

- What types of projects are eligible? Road projects currently, and those can include bike/ped components. Bridge projects and stand-alone bike/ped projects will be eligible in the future.

- Concern about a bridge in Sandgate: Just past Town Hall that enables access to rest of Sandgate. 1928 bridge that has received good and satisfactory ratings online, but not sure these are current ratings. Town wants to be proactive.
 - Increased bike/ped users of gravel roads east of 7A (Shaftsbury to northern Bennington especially, Arlington, but also regional). Strava logs provide some insight on problem areas. Identified gap near Shaftsbury Center. BCRC can develop a one- or two-page report on this to see where it can go.
 - Rte 67 from North Bennington to Bennington College – there are a lot of bikers in this stretch. Bike lane, larger shoulders, and/or sidewalk there. Scoping study for bike/ped program could provide support here.
 - Access to Bennington Rec Center especially for pedestrians with strollers. Need to understand how families with strollers can reasonably access the site. Scoping study for bike/ped program could provide support here.
 - Dorset-Manchester bike/ped path. Manchester has developed a rail trail from Manchester Rec Center to Dorset town line. Dorset wants to connect to this to create a commuter highway between the communities.
 - Bridges will be eligible for next year’s VPSP2 process.
 - Bennington bridge by Depot Street by the former train station.
 - Identify the top ten dangerous intersections and highway sections to inform priority list.
 - TAC members are encouraged to be constantly looking for potential projects in the region.
5. How should the TAC be doing outreach to represent the region?
- Email all the municipal highway departments and select board chairs.
 - Review municipal plan transportation chapters with planning commission chairs to note potential concerns and projects.
 - Calling town managers is also helpful, especially bridges. They can have different perspectives. Can reference assessment ratings to see if their experience differs from the reported asset assessment.
 - Need to involve Stamford, which can feel disconnected from region. Question of future inclusion of Winhall.
6. Paving projects. Next deadline is end of May for paving projects and asset-driven projects determined by VTrans.
- Initial reviews from VTrans. Would like the TAC and the BCRC to review the ratings to make sure nothing is missed, like a nearby asset that’s been overlooked. Does the paving project have local support?
 - Observation that proposed shoulder improvements do not widen them from current 2’ shoulders. Does this comply with Complete Streets policy statewide?
 - These projects have been identified as a need based on reported asset condition. These aren’t yet ‘projects’ that have been scoped and defined yet. If a project moves forward, plans will be developed and sent to town and region for input on things like shoulder width. VTrans encourages the regions to send in questions on points like these.
 - Noted that making shoulders wider doesn’t have to involve widening roads. Instead, lanes can be narrowed in many places.

7. Future Discussions for the TAC?

- Climate change
- Alternative transportation modes
- TAC has not done policy work in the past. Perhaps develop policy statements to share with legislators and VTrans.
- TACs can have members that represent interest groups like environment, business, human services, etc. We usually have someone from DOH and transit agency.
- Freight and rail plan being revised – could be good opportunity to host a presentation and discussion with TAC.
- Maintain rail access to Albany from region.
- Equity factor in future rating system for projects.
- Question about how funding is allocated in the state for vehicle-centric vs. non-vehicular projects. What leeway is there to determine how funds are allocated in the state?
- Small-scale user fees for structures as a possibility to discuss in the future. Example: small-scale, easy-pass style bridge tolling; areas with highly seasonal traffic could have automated billing for use.