



Several food stops along the way, like this one in Maple Corner, provide energy for riders on the Central Vermont Cycling Tour.

A TRAIL THAT CONNECTS US

By SARAH GALBRAITH

A trail connects the communities running from east to west along the river valleys from Lake Champlain to Wells River. The Cross Vermont Trail, or XVT, is described as a patchwork quilt of town and state highways, dirt and paved roads, wooden bridges, recreation paths, dirt, grass and former railroad beds.

The trail is used year-round by walkers, cyclists, horseback riders, snowshoers and skiers and at times shares a route with groomed snowmobile trails. The trail is family friendly and accessible to all ages and abilities, and is a way for nonmotorized commuters to travel to school and work. It's conveniently located for daily outdoor activity and exercise, and is a permanent greenway securing access to the natural world.

The trail enters Waterbury from Duxbury and goes on into Montpelier on a route that includes dirt and paved roads and recreation paths. From Montpelier to Plainfield, it follows U.S. Route 2, dirt and paved side roads, and an old railroad bed, although there is currently a major washout on the railroad bed.

The trail travels through Plainfield village, and, while the route technically follows U.S. Route 2 from there to Marshfield, a section of railroad bed can also be traveled all the way to Groton State Forest. Old rail beds wind through the state forest, crossing Route 232 in places, and into Groton village. Trails and rail bed complete the route from Groton to Wells River.

Ultimately, the entire route is meant to be off-road. The Cross Vermont Trail Association's Keystone Project will get the trail off Route 2 in East Montpelier

and onto a path in the woods, including a new 200-foot bridge across the Winooski River. Additional off-road projects on this section will not require as much effort as the Keystone Project, but it will take several years and many volunteer hours to accomplish this goal.

Cross Vermont Trail Association Executive Director Greg Western says, "CVTA is identifying the least good on-road sections and prioritizing building new trails in those places. (The Keystone Project) will be the hardest part of the statewide route to build, and the most expensive. So, our big story this year is that we are raising money to do the hardest job first."

Western points to the importance of working with landowners to permanently conserve access to the trail. Western notes the XVT signs with the green oval, which drivers see along sections of trail on roads. "Those signs are a call for help," says Western. "They're in places where the trail needs to be moved off road, and we are working with landowners to do that."

The association has worked to raise most of the \$1.6 million price tag to complete the Keystone Project, but about \$250,000 is still needed.

Overall support for the trail comes in the form of memberships and donations,



Signs mark the path of the Cross Vermont Trail from Burlington to Wells River.

and special events like the Central Vermont Cycling Tour, which happened June 22. About 90 riders participated, and the proceeds go to CVTA projects. But Western points out that the money is just one piece of an event like this. "More importantly," he says, "you've got 90 riders out there on bikes, thinking

about the trail."

The trail is part of a broader initiative to build more opportunities for cyclists and pedestrians, like bike lanes, bike parking and designated routes. "There's a lot of momentum in the state to get infrastructure on the ground," says Bill Merrylees, a Cross Vermont Trail Association board member.

Montpelier has embraced a long-term bicycle and pedestrian master plan that includes the formation of a Bicycle Advisory Committee and the development of a multimodal transportation center. As part of the Safe Routes to School program, Main Street Middle School added sidewalk bump-outs and a permanent speed reader to help slow traffic near the school and make walking and cycling safer for students.

"A city where people can walk and bike is a livable place," says Merrylees. Next steps for Montpelier include establishing bike lanes downtown and finishing the section of recreation path

from Hunger Mountain Co-op to Galison Hill Road in East Montpelier.

Improving cycling and walking is good for tourism, too, say advocates. Amtrak, serving Montpelier, will be testing roll-on bike service next year. The city can market itself as a cycling and walking destination, offering car-free vacations, plus expanded gear rentals, lodging and other services.

The Cross Vermont Trail is seen as a critical backbone for this development. It provides opportunities for multiday adventures, allowing residents and tourists to connect inns and campsites along their route. And it provides safe routes to school and an outdoor classroom. U-32 High School in East Montpelier, Twinfield Union School in Marshfield and Blue Mountain Union School in Wells River all connect to the trail.

It also links central Vermont towns. "It goes from community to community to community," says CVTA board member Mike Thomas.

The trail is a conserved greenway, allowing easy access to open spaces. "It's beautiful and peaceful," says Merrylees. "You can get on a section of trail on the Route 2 corridor, and you're out in nature."

For more information on the Cross Vermont Trail, including printable maps and cue sheets, visit www.crossvermont.org. Upcoming events include trail work days, planning for next year's Montpelier Bike Fest, and the 17th annual ride from Groton State Forest to Blue Mountain School on Sept. 27.

Sarah Galbraith is a Vermont writer and adventurer. Find her on Twitter: @adventurevt.