

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 15, 2023

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New Study Touts Economic Impact, Opportunities Ahead for Towns Along Rail Trail

St. Johnsbury, Vt. — A recently released analysis has found that the Lamoille Valley Rail Trail (LVRT) has the potential to generate up to \$4.7 million in total annual sales activity in Caledonia County and beyond in Northern Vermont. The study, which focused on the 38 miles of trail passing through St. Johnsbury, Danville, Walden, and Hardwick (as well as Greensboro in Orleans County and Cabot in Washington County), represents significant economic potential for all of the towns and communities located along the entirety of the rail trail, once it is completed.

The LVRT is a multi-purpose recreation and transportation corridor that follows the former 93-mile Lamoille Valley Railroad (LVRR) rail line from St. Johnsbury to Swanton. The four-season pathways supports walking, hiking, cycling, horseback riding, snowshoeing, cross country skiing, and snowmobiling. 33 miles of the trail are currently opened and the entire trail is scheduled to be complete and open in early 2023.

The analysis was commissioned by the [Northeastern Vermont Development Association](#) and conducted by [SE Group](#), an industry leader in recreation planning with an office in Burlington. The study used an economic impact model that considered current and projected levels of trail use, spending habits of residents and visitors, and case studies of other similar rail trails. The study was conducted using similar methods to a recent economic impact analysis for the [Missisquoi Valley Rail Trail](#) in northwestern Vermont (also conducted by SE Group), which found similar local economic benefits associated with the trail.

The study found that the economic activity associated with the completed trail could support up to 75 full-time jobs and generate \$646,000 in annual tax revenues for Caledonia County, driven by the potential for up to 163,000 trail visits per year.

To achieve this level of economic benefit, the analysis notes that there would need be further investment and coordination amongst towns along the LVRT, including trail promotion, investment in lodging, camping, and other tourism-related amenities, and other community development initiatives, such as trailside parks and river access. According to the analysis, there would still be substantial economic benefit even without these investments (projected at

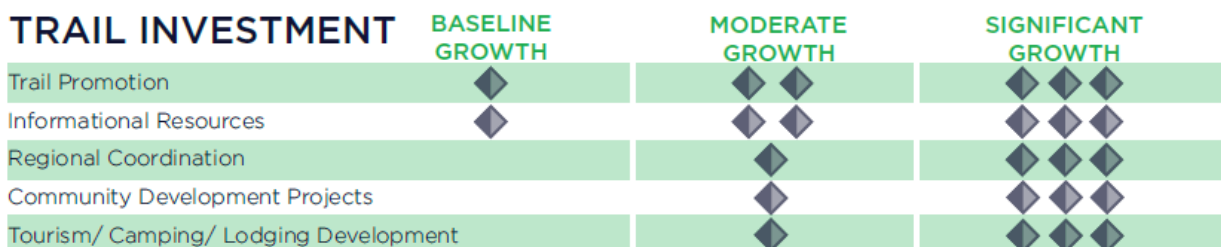
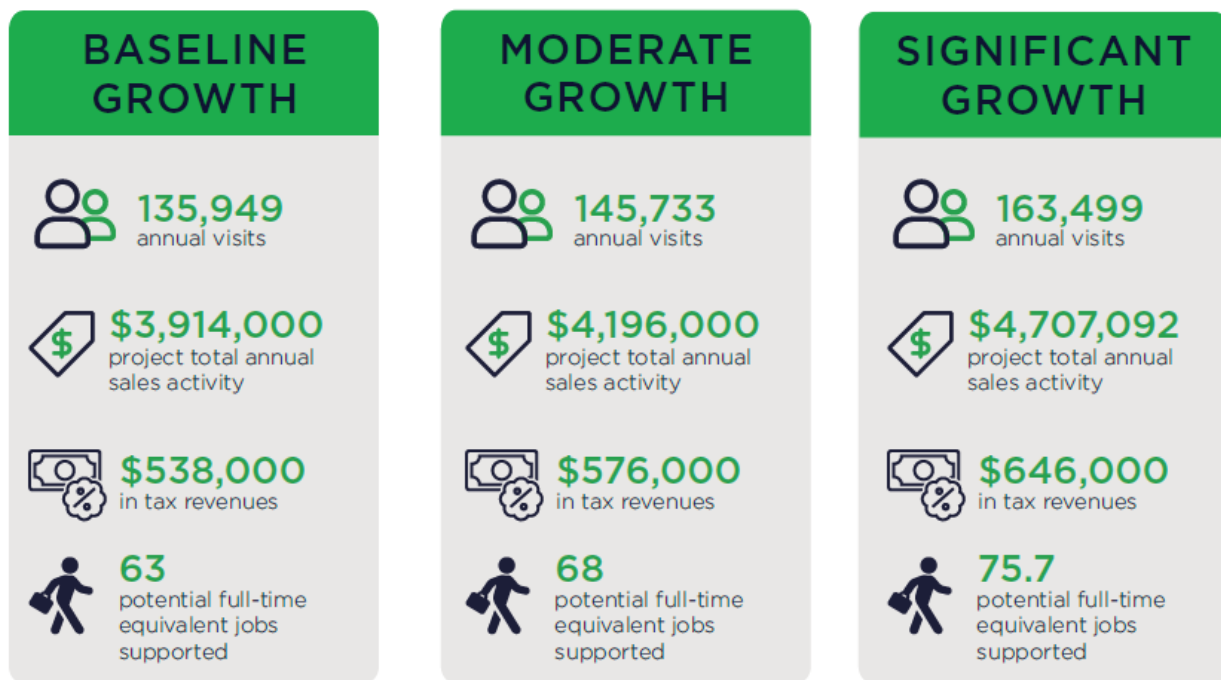
Joe Kasprzak, Assistant Town Manager & Economic Development Specialist for the Town of St. Johnsbury, describes the LVRT as an economic engine that promotes a healthy lifestyle. “The completion of the 93-mile LVRT connecting downtown St. Johnsbury, to Swanton, creates opportunities for communities along the trail. St. Johnsbury is currently working with multiple communities to discuss how best to build infrastructure and invest in amenities that will provide memorable outdoor recreational experiences for residents and visitors alike.”

Overnight visitors to the trail represent the largest economic opportunity; these visitors are projected to spend \$160 per person per day on travel-related expenditures on average.

Accordingly, efforts to create camping, lodging, and tourist amenities associated with the LVRT would likely have the most economic impact. These findings were based in part on case studies of other similar rail trails, such as the [P'Tit Train du Nord](#) in Quebec. Along the P'Tit Train du Nord, many former train stations have been converted into trail rest stations with art exhibits, public restrooms, and trail information, and are often paired with public parks that provide gathering spaces for residents and visitors, as well as amenities such as lake and river access and playgrounds. The towns along the trail feature many camping, lodging, and food establishments as well.

To support this type of local investment in the LVRT, the Vermont Agency of Transportation (VTrans) has developed a [Community Grant Program](#) specifically for communities along the LVRT. Approximately \$2 million in grants were made available to support feasibility studies, design, and construction of trail amenities, which could include things like trailhead facilities, pedestrian and bicycle connections to the trail from town centers, art installations, pavilions and benches, and other infrastructure. Through this program, NVDA has been awarded \$64,000 for a scoping study to identify alternatives, issues, and costs and provide recommendations related to construction of public amenities at trailheads along the LVRT in the towns of St. Johnsbury, Danville, Cabot, Walden, Greensboro, and Hardwick.

For more information on the LVRT, visit the [VTrans project page](#) or contact Jackie Cassino, VTrans Vermont Rail Trails Program Manager, at jackie.cassino@vermont.gov.



Economic development growth scenarios for the LVRT. To achieve higher economic returns, a variety of promotional and community development will need to be deployed.

About Northeastern Vermont Development Association

Formed in 1950, at the same meeting where U.S. Senator George D. Aiken coined the term "Northeast Kingdom" to describe Caledonia, Essex and Orleans counties, the Northeastern Vermont Development Association has served the people, municipalities and businesses of this region as both the Regional Planning Commission and Regional Development Corporation.

As the Regional Planning Commission, NVDA assists municipalities, organizations, committees and individuals with a wide variety of planning and technical services. As the Regional Development Corporation, NVDA works on infrastructure improvements, assists companies relocating to the area, helps existing businesses to grow, and administers revolving loan funds.

About SE Group

SE Group has been the industry leader in the planning and design of mountain resorts since 1958. Over the years, our team has grown to include landscape architects, community planners, environmental analysts, and economic advisors that are pioneering how communities across the country think about recreation, tourism, and outdoor spaces. Whether it's a multi-season mountain resort or a schoolyard playground, our clients trust us to lead them from first spark of inspiration to final phase of implementation.

With hubs in Utah, Colorado, and Vermont, we are lucky live in the heart of some of the amazing recreational communities we serve.

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