

VERMONT ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT

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BICYCLE STUDY UNDERWAY...AND BICYCLE COALITION FORMS

The bicycle study mandated by the 1974 Legislature is now being carried out by personnel of the Agency of Environmental Conservation. The study includes an inventory of existing bicycle use, bicycle accidents and safety measures; a public survey; a system of registering bikes; and a five-year plan proposal.

Interviews are being carried out with regional planning commissions and state and local officials. Bikeriders' desires have been gathered through random phone calls, questionnaires in bikeshops and interviews with bike clubs, tour groups and bikestore owners.

Preliminary results of the first phase of the study indicate that bikeriders are particularly concerned about bicycle registration. They fear that registration would be the first of many steps to take away the "freedom" of bicycles and lead to endless red tape. In addition, bikeriders are anxious to have highway shoulders widened to safely accommodate bicycle lanes, a plan the highway department supports.

The five-year plan will include recommendations for bicycle facilities, ongoing technical assistance, coordination among interested groups and pilot routes. In addition, the Agency staff is putting together a guidebook for officials and groups interested in building bikeways.

The study is still quite elastic, and any comments or suggestions would be welcomed. Contact Debbie Barlow or Dennis Malloy, Bicycle Study, Agency of Environmental Conservation, Montpelier, Vermont, 05602.

Meanwhile, a Chittenden County group has recently formed the Vermont Bicycle Coalition, linking bicycle users and interest groups in order to improve cycling conditions in Vermont through cooperative efforts and unified support for legislation. The organization's main thrust will be to demonstrate the need for safe bicycling routes. The Coalition intends to share information and experience, influence the drafting of relevant legislation and coordinate lobbying efforts.

Regional chapters are currently being organized; groups and individuals interested in this effort should contact Mrs. Ann Harroun, 14 Wildwood Drive, Essex Junction, Vermont, 05452, 879-0591.

WHAT WENT WRONG WITH BENNINGTON? - Guest Column by Roger Wilson, Conservation Society of Southern Vermont

While construction of a 20-mile segment of Route 7 between Bennington and Manchester has been held up for more than two years in the Courts, highway crews continue work on an adjacent piece of the same road. The \$16 million three-mile Bennington Arterial will include a massive interchange designed to accommodate the intersection of interstate-size East-West and North-South highways. In the spring of 1972, when the Conservation Society of Southern Vermont first asked that reconstruction of Route 7 be delayed until the requirements of NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act of 1969) were met, this segment was left out of the Court's injunction order. The omission was based on the grounds that: (1) this project was farther along in the construction process than other projects; (2) Arterial 7 consisted merely in rerouting and improving traffic north of Bennington; (3) early completion was desirable for both safety and economic reasons; and, (4) the project is unrelated to the rest of the proposed Route 7 construction.

Only later did it emerge that the project would involve immediate four-lane construction. Recently this project has been used as a reason to accelerate additional Route 7 construction. Called the "Highway to Nowhere," this stretch has been described by one Bennington-area legislator as "an expressway to the town landfill." The original massive scale of the interchange was cited as necessary because of traffic that would be generated by additional future construction.

Now, the investment already made is being used to justify and hasten further construction and additional investment.

There is still hope for sane planning to come out on top in Bennington County, however. The remainder of the stretch to Manchester continues under Court injunction until a "master impact statement" on the construction of a new Route 7 from Southern Connecticut through Vermont, as called for by current plans, is properly filed. This decision has been appealed by the Federal Highway Administration and the Vermont Highway Department. Briefs have been filed and hearings are expected to be scheduled late this summer or in the fall. Meanwhile, the bulldozers continue to work away on the "Highway to Nowhere."



Four-lane Bennington Arterial dwarfts Route 7 at far right.

TEMPORARY RESTRAINING ORDER ISSUED IN ROUTE 2 LAWSUIT

In response to VNRC's Court action on Route 2, the highway department has been ordered to temporarily cease construction of the Sleepers River interchange of Interstate 91 in St. Johnsbury. District Judge Albert Coffrin issued the two week temporary restraining order on August 2 to allow time to determine whether the highway department violated the Federal Water Pollution Control Act by its failure to obtain a permit from the Army Corps of Engineers to modify the Sleepers River.

VNRC, along with a group of Caledonia County residents and two local farmers as co-plaintiffs, sought the restraining order on two grounds: (1) that the highway department is required to obtain a permit under the federal water law, and (2) that the highway department's environmental impact study was inadequate to meet requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

Judge Coffrin made it clear that he was not going to stop construction on the basis of a violation of NEPA, but was issuing the temporary restraining order to allow for investigation of a possible violation of the Water Pollution Control Act regulations. Under the federal water law, anyone filling in a navigable waterway must first secure a permit from the Army Corps of Engineers. It remains to be decided, however, whether the Sleepers River is termed navigable under the law. If Judge Coffrin rules that it is navigable, the highway department will have to obtain the permit before resuming construction.

The Court action to date has been costly, and it will continue to demand time and money. Judge Coffrin's decision remains uncertain, and an appeal on the basis of both the Federal Water Act and NEPA is possible—not only to protect stream and farmland in the Northeast Kingdom from this highway, but to set a precedent against other needless highways. At this stage, we cannot turn back—tax deductible contributions to the VNRC-Route 2 Fund are essential.

Enclosed is my contribution of \$ _____ to the VNRC-Route 2 Fund.

Enclosed are my dues for \$ _____ for 1974 VNRC membership.

Enclosed is my additional contribution of \$ _____ to support VNRC programs.

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VNRC CALLS FOR NOMINATIONS

Eight vacancies on the Vermont Natural Resources Council's Board of Directors will be filled at the Council's annual meeting later this year, and the nomination process is getting underway. Anthony Adams of Burlington has been named chairman of the nominating committee by Council Chairman, Jonathan Brownell. He will be assisted by David Marvin of Johnson and Hub Vogelmann of Jericho. Suggestions for nominations should be sent to any member of the nominating committee or to the VNRC office. These should be accompanied by a brief biographical sketch including environmental interests and activities.

Two of the eight vacancies will be filled from nominations made by member organizations while the other six will be suggested by the Nominating Committee. Information on nominees will appear in the VERMONT ENVIRONMENTAL REPORT before the annual meeting.

UVM TRANSPORTATION STUDY

A study of transportation in Vermont is currently underway at the Environmental Program of the University of Vermont. Subjects being examined include economic, financial and land use aspects of recent and prospective transportation developments. Emphasis is being given to the highway program. Results of the study will be presented in the fall, through reports, public meetings and possibly a special ETV program. The purpose of this effort is to contribute to an understanding and resolution of current transportation issues being considered by state and local government agencies.

The study is being directed by Benjamin L. Huffman, a Research Associate of the Environmental Program.

VERMONT NATURAL RESOURCES COUNCIL
26 STATE STREET
MONTPELIER, VT. 05602

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