SIERRA CLUB
VERMONT CHAPTER

March 10, 2026

Dear Members of the Vermont Senate Committe on Judiciary,

The Vermont Sierra Club supports passage of S.261, "*An act relating to liability limitations for certain railroad and utility property open to the public for recreational use*".

Vermonters have long enjoyed the open access to trails, unused roads, swimming holes, streams, and general walking around in the woods that has been provided by Title 12 V.S.A. § 5792 "*Limitations on Landowner Liability*". This fits well with the Sierra Club's motto, "Explore, enjoy, and protect the planet". However, as we become increasingly aware of the GHG emissions and fossil fuel consumption of transportation, it is also necessary to increase support for everyday walking and bicycling. Public health, the well-being of village centers, and the forested environment have all been impacted by our transportation system, which is focused on only a vehicular mode of travel.

Sierra Club Vermont has been advocating for "*Clean Transportation for All*" for several years. We are also a strong supporter of Rail Trails. Improving protection of the state's rail lines would further both of these goals.

One important example that S.261 would support is the proposed Connecticut River Valley Trail, a greenway running from the northern end of the Farmington Canal Trail at Northampton, MA (which extends through Massachusetts and Connecticut down to Long Island Sound), up through Vermont's section of the Connecticut River Valley to La Route Verte trail network in Quebec. This corridor was surveyed by VTrans as a result of H.177, introduced by sixteen House Representatives in 2023, and the survey found unanimous agreement that walking and bicycling conditions were poor to very poor along Route 5. Not only would a Connecticut River Valley Trail fill in an important missing link to connect the 10 Rail Trails that run east-west from the valley for recreation, exercise, and tourism, it would also better serve the bicycle and walking needs of 1/6th of Vermont's population who live in the valley towns just along Route 5. This valley corridor often has Route 5, I-91, and the rail line sandwiched between the river and ridge, and having access to a route alongside the rail line in certain locations would help to build a better greenway and local bike networks.

The Vermont Sierra Club supports passage of S.261. As we update our transportation system to better serve current needs, having better access to rail and utility corridors would be an important tool for connecting bicycle and pedestrian networks.

Thank you,

Karl Kemnitzer Hartland, VT
Vermont Sierra Club Transportation Committee

Robb Kidd, Montpelier, VT
Vermont Sierra Club Chapter Director