CHAPTER 8

Wayfinding and Signage

OVERVIEW

Last, but certainly not least, the trail signage and wayfinding along the ALSPT require tactical planning cooperatively with the Hop River Trail Alliance.

Signage is the mechanism by which wayfinding is communicated effectively and wayfinding is a high priority for the ALSPT Region so visitors can navigate the trail, easily determine their locations relative to their starting and ending points, and access services and emergency support if required. Signage and wayfinding should work effectively together as they will play a crucial role in marketing and providing a supportive trail user experience on the Air Line State Park Trail (see Figure 8A).

The primary recommendation in this chapter involves the ALSPT Region collaborating with the Hop River Trail Alliance to create a plan for mileage markers and wayfinding signage. The University of Connecticut Landscape Architecture Program evaluated the ALSPT and proposed a recommended layout for signage. Trail signage and wayfinding markers should be visible, informative, and follow local regulations (see Figures 8C, 8D and 8E). This evaluation is an excellent first step toward an ALSPT Region wayfinding-signage plan. Again, the goal is to enhance the user experience and help visitors navigate the trail easily.

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GUIDANCE FOR WAYFINDING AND SIGNAGE

To ensure that the signs are easy to understand, they should offer clear directions to the trailhead, landmarks, scenic overlooks, as well as access points, parking areas and other locations. The wayfinding signage should provide critical guidance for emergency personnel when needed since EMTs, medics, police and fire officials will use mile markers to pinpoint where on the trail their assistance is needed. The signs will also promote safety and sustainability, encouraging visitors to follow designated paths and dispose of trash properly.
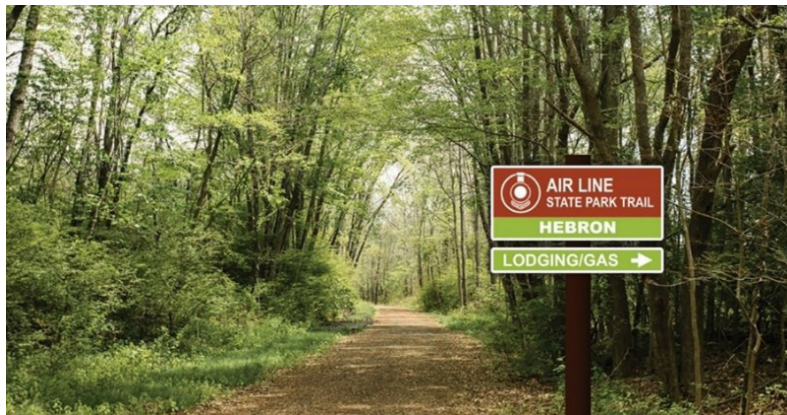
The first wayfinding step to incorporate into future signage involves color coding. Color coding allows the trail user and visitor to the ALSPT Region to quickly correlate their location without reading the details on the signs (see Figure 8A). This is helpful when driving the region, parking at trail heads, and cycling on the trail. Towns can incorporate each color code into signage to begin a process of identifying their relative location to the trail and visitors. This promotes marketing of the towns as well as safety for the trail user.

Additional signage would provide locational and explanatory information about unique features on the trail, such as footbridges that have panoramic views and historical landmarks like the parking lot in East Thompson, the site of the train crash. Signage will highlight these features, providing information about their significance. Local history and culture could be incorporated into the design of the signs by featuring artwork and graphics that are unique to the region.
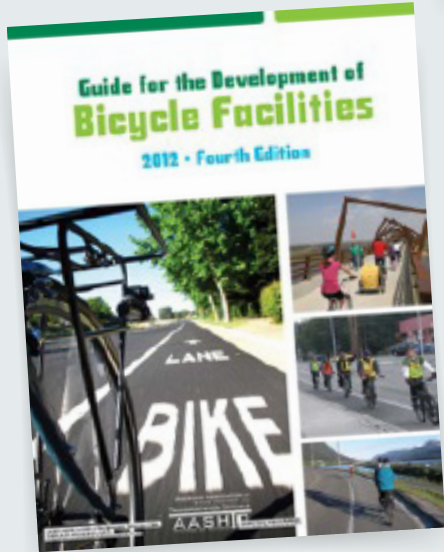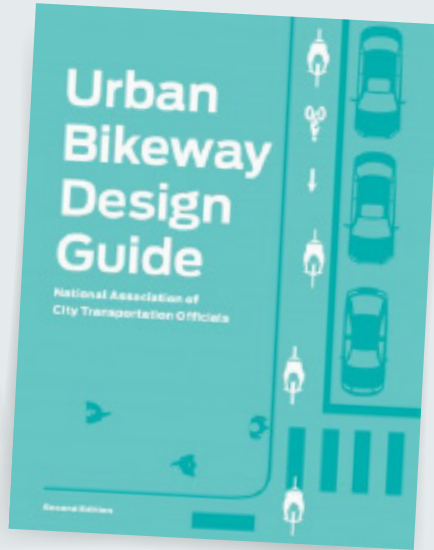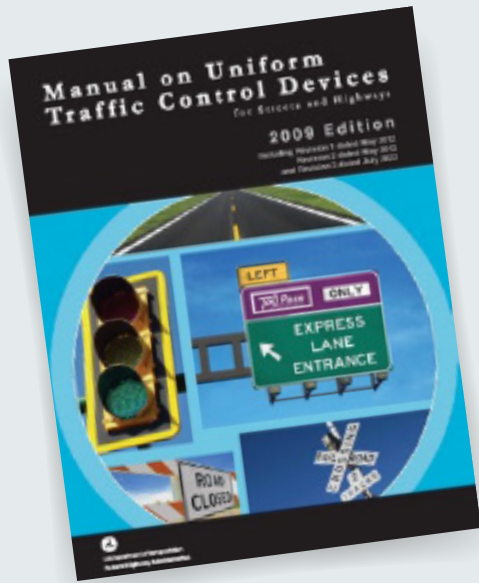

Example of how color coding might be used for trail signage. Note that the train icon can be changed to ALSPT Logo.
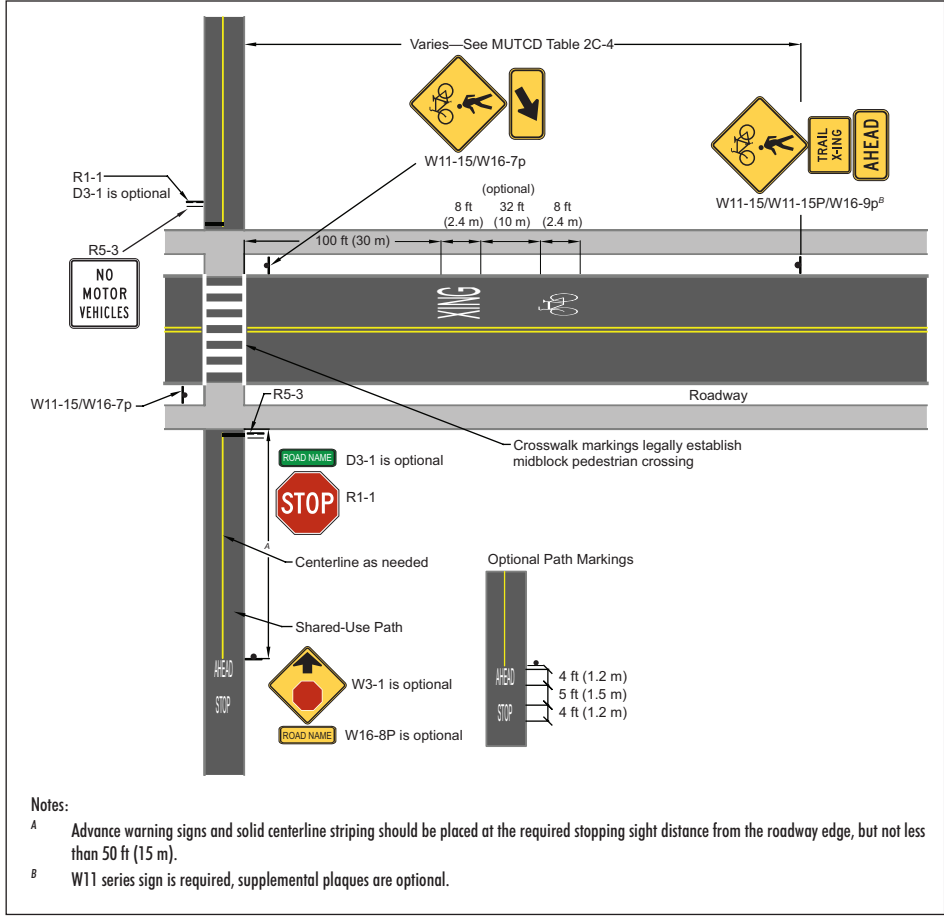

FIGURE 8A — **Examples of Color Codes for ALSPT Region Towns**

Resources for Signage Design

There are abundant industry standard resources that provide information and guidance on the design and placement of signage on trails and public roads, these resources should be followed when signage is placed within a road's right of way and when appropriate in all other locations.

Sample Schematic of Signage at Intersection

Notes:

[A]   Advance warning signs and solid centerline striping should be placed at the required stopping sight distance from the roadway edge, but not less than 50 ft (15 m).

[B]   W11 series sign is required, supplemental plaques are optional.

Example of mid-block path–roadway intersection. Path is stop-controlled for bicyclists.

Layout of Signage at Trail-Road Crossings: UConn Landscape Architecture Program

At the intersection of State Route 203 in Windham and the Air Line State Park Trail, there are no cross walks, no lighting and minimal signage identifying the intersection. Trail signage indicating an approaching crossing should be located 60' from the intersection. Roadway signage on the roads should be placed at distance from the crossing as indicated in the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices.
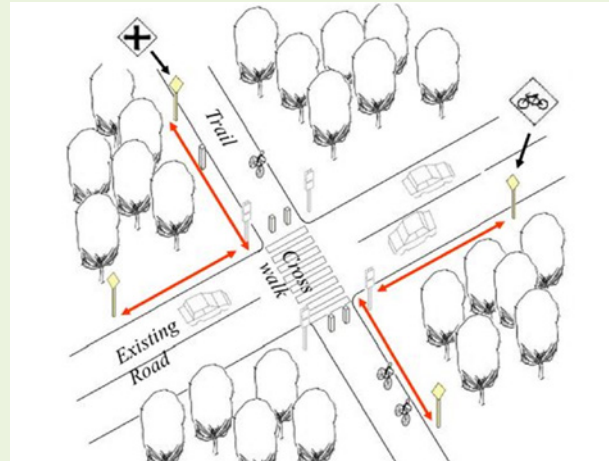

2001

2021

FIGURE 8D

Layout of Site Features at Trail Heads: UConn Landscape Architecture Program

All site features (signage, bollards, fences, etc.) need to be organized for maximum clarity and safety. This can be done by using two "regulating lines" as a guide for placement of site features. Line "A" is parallel to the road and is set back a uniform distance from the road edge. The setback distance will vary according to the type and width of the road. Line "B" is parallel with the center line of the trail and 3' from the trail edge.
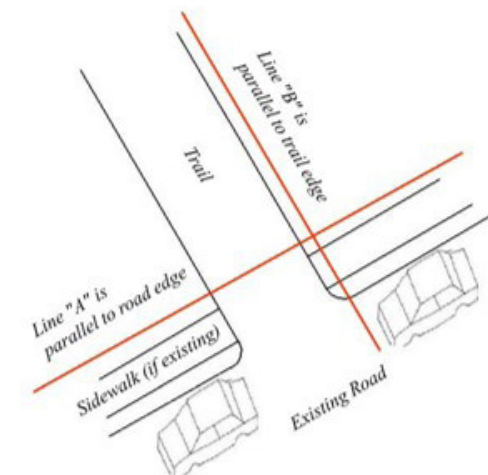
Sign Type and Placement

TRAFFIC CONTROL SIGN

Locate bollards and gates to stop vehicular traffic from entering the trail. The type of bollard and/or gate will be determined by the character of the area, urban or rural.

IDENTIFICATION SIGN

All crossings require signage and site features to ensure safe crossing conditions for trail users.These signs serve as trail identifications for both the trail user and vehicular traffic and should be situated at the intersection of line "A" and line "B". Since each road crossing varies in intensity, three types of signage can be used and the type of sign should be determined by the urban or rural context.

REGULATORY SIGN

These signs outline the types of activities and behaviors regulated on the trail and should be placed at road crossings and in parking areas.

INFORMATION SIGN

These signs display the types of activities found along a section of the trail. Many of these activities or educational notes are displayed in a graphic manner.

REFERENCE SIGN

These signs are located along the trail over the entire length of the trail system and are uniform in design. Such signs would include mile markers, small logos, QR codes for the ALSPT Region, and regulatory information as needed. Another type of reference sign would be located at educational features or points of interest.

SOURCE: UCONN LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE PROGRAM
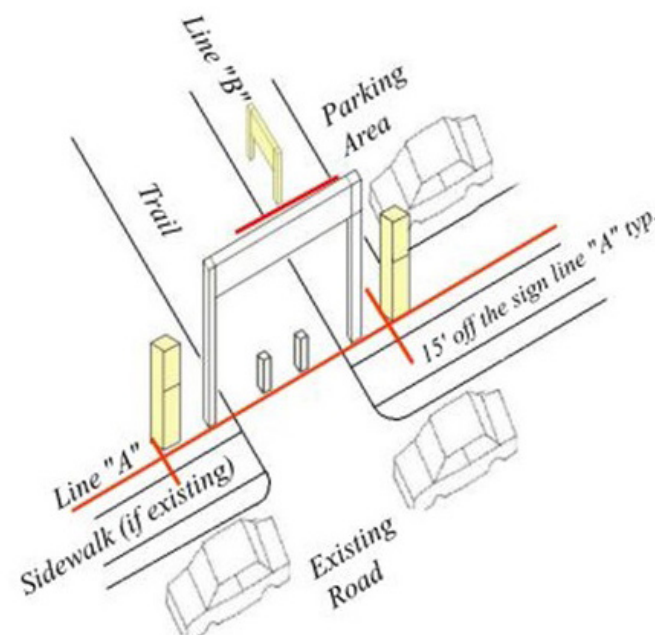
Trail Identification: Trailheads need to be identified to help users access the trails. The scale of the trail identification sign should depend on the importance of the trailhead, the surrounding context, and cost implications. Below are a few examples of regulations appropriate for multi-use trails. These symbols can be stacked vertically on 8' x 8'. posts.

TOWN-TO-TRAIL WAYFINDING

Signs will connect the Air Line State Park Trail to local communities and businesses, and color coding can accentuate the connection with the ALSPT (see Figure 8E). Color-coding by town on signage can incorporate information about nearby attractions, restaurants, stores, and lodging options. Effective coordination of uniform wayfinding and signage is crucial for economic growth in all 12 towns along the Air Line State Park Trail. Encouraging visitors to explore the diverse offerings through this type of wayfinding is fun, engaging and welcomes ALSPT Region visitors with attention to their comfort and safety. The signs along the trail will generate significant economic impact for the partner towns.

As part of the Trail Town's initiative recommended previously in this plan, businesses can adopt the same color coding in their messaging to ALSPT Region visitors. By incorporating these elements into the design of its wayfinding and signage, the Air Line State Park Trail can effectively market itself as a regional destination and attract more visitors.

Signage As an Important Tool to Connect the Trail and Towns

New signage in Pomfret uses color coding of blue to identify town (A) and work as designed by UConn's engineering students for the East Thompson Trail Parking Lot could be the next step toward color coding for Thompson and signage at the trail head (B). The existing sign in Portland could be redesigned using the color coding for Portland and East Hampton (C).
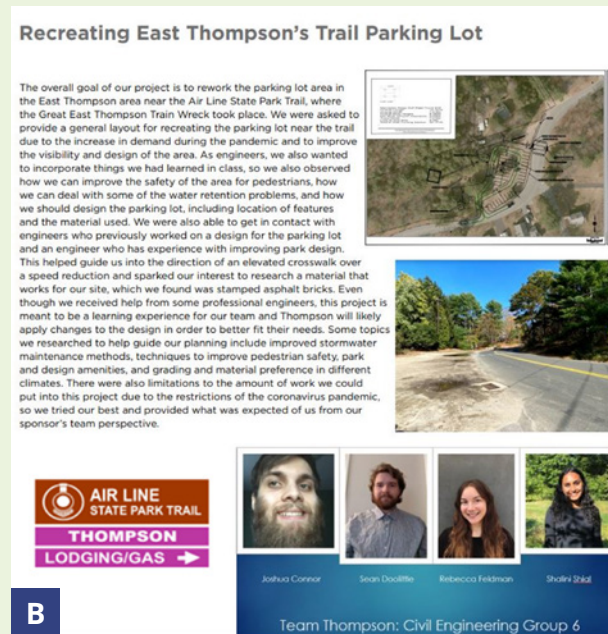
QR CODES SUPPORT WAYFINDING AND EDUCATION

The balance of trail signage is important and requires careful planning and consideration. QR codes are helpful to reduce the need for educational signage related to trail features such as geocaching, natural resources of the trail, history and other amenities. The most important aspect of QR codes is the ability to help visitors with wayfinding and information on and about the trail. This requires strong cell signal service on the trail. That said, a plan for design and placement of QR codes can enhance the trail wayfinding experience if incorporated correctly.

The ALSPT Region organization should work with CT CT DEEP, CT Trail Finder and CT Visit to coordinate and consolidate a unified strategy with a lens toward the visitor's virtual awareness of the ALSPT Region and the ALSPT.

Here are examples of several virtual options to get information about the Air Line State Park Trail, none of which are complete or conclusive about the trail system and the ALSPT Region.

- https://portal.ct.gov/DEEP/State-Parks/Parks/Air-Line-State-Park-Trail
  NOTE: need to incorporate CT Trail Finder and link to ALSPT Region onto webpage

- https://www.cttrailfinder.com
  NOTE: make sure you type in bicycling to find the ALSPT in the list view)

- https://www.facebook.com/groups/154317004770544/
  NOTE: volunteer managed Facebook site

- https://www.traillink.com/trail/air-line-state-park-trail

- https://explorect.org/air-line-trail

- https://www.ctvisit.com/listings/air-line-state-park-trail
  NOTE: need to connect to new ALSPT Region website

- https://www.alltrails.com/parks/us/connecticut/airline-state-park-trail

Use this QR Code to visit the new Air Line State Park Trail Region website!
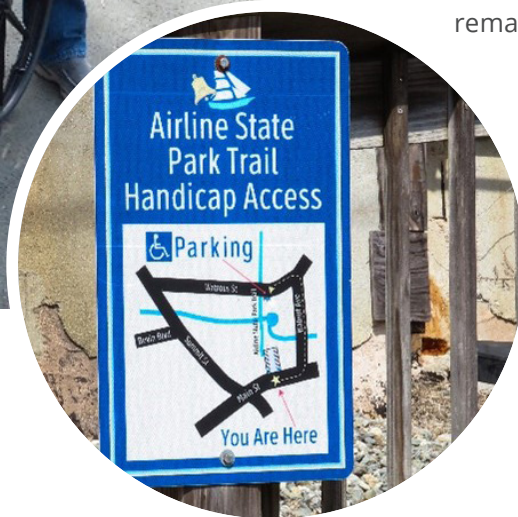
ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility is an important aspect of infrastructure since it provides knowledge and wayfinding for those who need accommodations. The CT DEEP Air Line State Park Trail webpage notes that, "This park is generally not handicapped accessible; however, some sections in East Hampton, Colchester and Hebron are wheelchair accessible". While a major goal for building out the ALSPT is the provision of accessibility and defining the limits of accessibility on the trail, wayfinding information on the CT Trail Finder and the ALSPT Region website should map and direct people to sections of the trail that are accessible since it is anticipated that this trail will mostly remain unpaved (see Figure 8F).

The Last Green Valley conducted an accessibility study on a portion of the trail that provides an example for a more complete evaluation of the full ALSPT system. This type of information as presented by TLGV is invaluable to people with limited mobility seeking access to the trail (see Figure 8G).

In this plan, accessibility is not limited to physical improvements. The trail's accessibility will also improve when signage is translated into languages other than English and options are provided for people with hearing or sight impairments.

From installing Spanish language trail information in the central areas of Windham where there is a large Latino population to cell phone adaptation of trail information to promote knowledge and wayfinding for all, a cohesive plan adopted by all stakeholders who build infrastructure and design information for the trail is a must for the ALSPT.
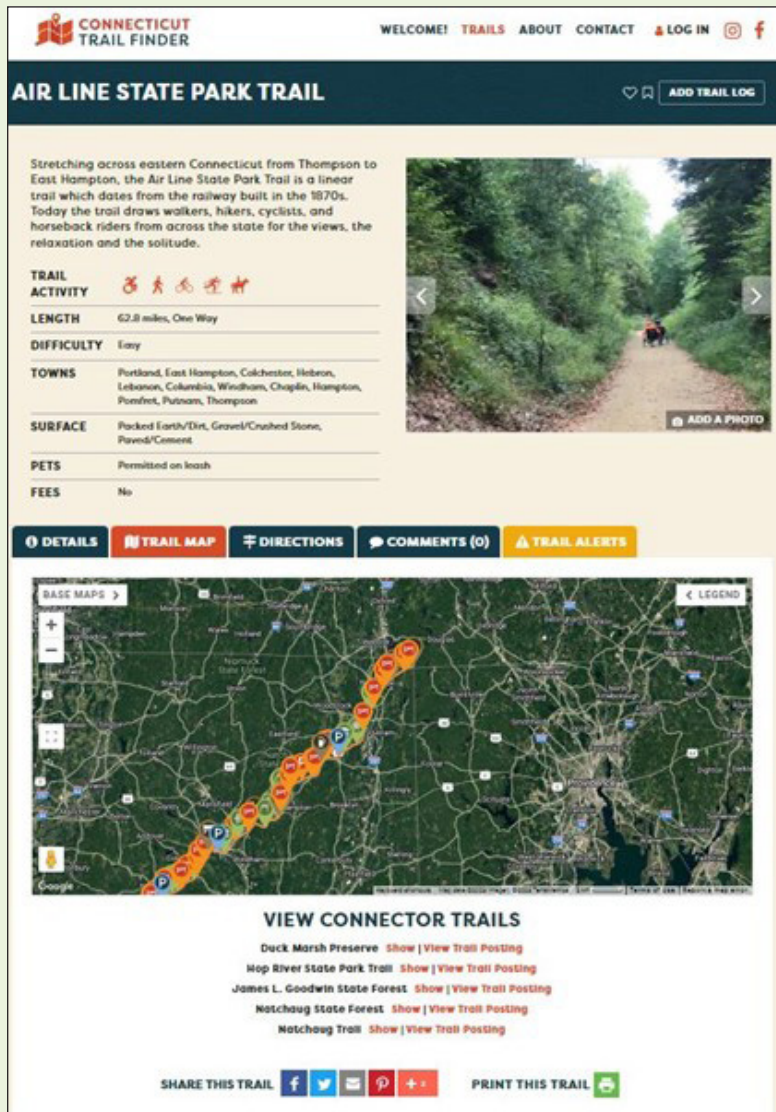
FIGURE 8F   Wayfinding to "CT Trail Finder"

FIGURE 8G   The Last Green Valley Accessibility Study

RECOMMENDATIONS: Wayfinding and Signage

01 Conduct a workshop with the support of the Eastern Regional Tourism District, CT DEEP, the University of Connecticut (CT Trail Finder) and The Last Green Valley and the East Coast Greenway for business leaders and municipal officials to outline the importance of signage and wayfinding in economic growth of the ALSPT Region. The NVCOG CT Plan provides a template for building a wayfinding-signage plan for the region.

02 Hold a moderator-led roundtable/workshop for organization who incorporate the ALSPT into their websites and social media to coordinate on-line wayfinding for trail users and ALSPT Region visitors.

03 Have each ALSPT town adopt an ALSPT Region code color for uniformity and mapping of the trail and improved experience for the trail user. That color would be incorporated into future signage near the trail and within the town's business districts.

04 Coordinate with the Hop River Trail Alliance and East Coast Greenway in the planning for wayfinding and signage over the next two years to coordinate signage and wayfinding for both these trails and the two regions.

05 Create an accessibility plan that connects accessibility infrastructure (especially at trailheads), surface design, signage and virtual wayfinding to the appropriate ALSPT-related websites via website information, links and cellphone applications.

06 Develop signage plan along the trail that offers clear directions to the trailheads, landmarks, scenic overlooks, as well as access points and parking areas.

07 Develop signage and wayfinding that promotes local restaurants, trail-related businesses, lodging and amenities that produce mapping and related information that is both website- and cellphone-friendly. Careful planning for QR Codes can assist with this process.