

ATV ROAD ACCESS IN VERMONT: LEGAL FRAMEWORK



LOCAL DECISION
STRONGER TOGETHER

Local control. Clear rules. Strong communities.
ATV access on town roads is a local decision—guided by Vermont law.

1 LOCAL AUTHORITY

ATVs are not permitted on public highways unless a municipality takes formal action to allow their use. A town may open specific highways to ATV travel, but routes must be officially designated and clearly posted. Without local approval, ATV use on town roads is not allowed.



Statute:
23 V.S.A. § 3506(b)(1)(A)

2 MUNICIPAL DISCRETION

Municipalities have full discretion. They may choose which roads to open, limit access to certain segments, or decline ATV use entirely. This decision is made through local governance and is not mandated by the State.



Statute:
23 V.S.A. § 3506

3 REGISTRATION & DECAL



ATVs in Vermont are required to be registered, and trail use requires a valid Trail Access Decal. Operators are responsible for complying with all applicable laws, including safe operation and lawful conduct.

Statute:
23 V.S.A. § 3502

4 ENFORCEMENT UNDER LAW

ATVs are regulated under their own section of Vermont law but may be subject to enforcement similar to motor vehicles in certain situations, such as reckless or impaired operation.



Statute:
23 V.S.A. Chapter 31

5 ACCESS DOES NOT CHANGE LAW

Opening a town road to ATVs does not change underlying requirements. It simply allows access on designated routes, while all existing laws and enforcement provisions remain in effect.



MUNICIPAL LIABILITY AND RISK CONSIDERATIONS



OPERATOR RESPONSIBILITY

Operators remain responsible for operating safely and in compliance with Vermont law. Municipal authority determines where access is permitted.



LOCAL CONTROL OF ACCESS

Towns retain control over which roads are opened and under what conditions. This may include limiting access to specific corridors, setting speed limits, restricting hours of operation, and requiring appropriate signage.

Statute: 23 V.S.A. § 3506



ENFORCEMENT REMAINS WITH LAW ENFORCEMENT

ATV operation remains regulated under Vermont law regardless of where it occurs. Violations such as reckless operation or impaired driving are enforceable by law enforcement, not the municipality.

Statute:
23 V.S.A. Chapter 31



MUNICIPALITIES ARE NOT ENFORCERS

Municipalities are not responsible for supervising ATV use or enforcing day-to-day compliance. Enforcement falls to local, county, and state law enforcement agencies.



MANAGE RISK WITH A PLAN

Many towns begin with limited connector routes, evaluate usage over time, and adjust access as needed. Seasonal restrictions, clear signage, and coordination with local ATV clubs are commonly used tools.



WORKING WITH VASA AND LOCAL CLUBS



STATE RECOGNIZED PARTNER

The Vermont ATV Sportsman's Association (VASA) is recognized in state law as the statewide organization supporting ATV trail systems. Local VASA clubs are the primary partners for municipalities.

Statute:
23 V.S.A. § 3501



ON-THE-GROUND SUPPORT

Clubs provide on-the-ground support that reduces the burden on towns, including:

- Trail construction & maintenance
- Signage installation
- Mapping & route planning
- Coordination with private landowners



RESPONSIBLE RIDERS, STRONGER COMMUNITIES

Clubs promote responsible riding and help educate members about local rules and expectations. This creates a structure for accountability that benefits both the municipality and the broader community.



CONNECTIONS THAT MATTER

Trail connectivity often depends on limited use of town highways to link existing trail segments. Without these connections, otherwise viable trail systems may remain fragmented.



DECAL SUPPORTS THE SYSTEM

ATV riders must obtain a Trail Access Decal in addition to state registration. This system helps fund trail maintenance and ensures users contribute to the infrastructure they rely on.

Statute:
23 V.S.A. § 3502



LIABILITY PROTECTIONS REMAIN IN PLACE

Vermont law provides liability protections to landowners, including municipalities, who allow recreational use without charging a fee for access. User fees (Trail Access Decals) are administered by organizations like VASA to maintain these protections and support trail maintenance.



Partnering with a local VASA club allows municipalities to implement ATV access in a managed, supported way, with ongoing maintenance and community engagement built into the system.



BOOST LOCAL ECONOMIES

Carefully managed road access can connect trail systems to villages and business districts, increasing visitation and supporting local services.



LIMITED & LOW-SPEED USE

ATV use is typically limited to designated routes and low-speed travel, often serving as short connectors rather than long-distance roadway use.



ADDRESSING COMMON CONCERNS

Noise, speed, and road wear can be addressed through local ordinances, route planning, and clearly posted expectations. Many towns set limits on hours and avoid densely populated areas.



STRONG COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

Working with a local club helps communicate expectations to riders and encourages respectful use of shared spaces.



PHASED APPROACH WORKS BEST

Starting small, evaluating impacts, and adjusting over time has proven effective in many communities.



LOCAL DECISIONS, LOCAL RESULTS

As with any municipal decision, outcomes depend on how access is implemented.

LOCAL CONTROL. RESPONSIBLE RIDING. STRONGER COMMUNITIES. THAT'S THE VERMONT WAY.

