

Go-ahead for the project “Laghi e Monti Bike”, which links VCO Province to paths beyond the Gotthard Pass

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The **San Giacomo Pass**, in the **Upper Formazza Valley**, a symbol of **Alpine cycle tourism**, is a point of reference for anyone who loves cycling on tracks and paths surrounded by nature. This is a custom that is becoming increasingly widespread, thanks also to the use of **electric mountain bikes**.

This summer, at an **altitude of 2313 metres**, on the **San-Giacomo Pass**, as soon as the snow melts, work will begin on building the **Bike-Grill**. This is one of the main interventions in the **Italy-Switzerland interregional** project, “**Laghi e Monti Bike**” (Biking around the Lakes and Mountains). The Bike-Grill will provide a moment of respite, assistance and refreshment for the cyclists. It is being built in the place where the old barracks of the Italian finance police used to stand, and it will use natural building materials that have a high energy efficiency, and **renewable energy sources**.

“Laghi e Monti Bike” also includes the extension, from **Sotto Frua** (near the town of Formazza), to the foot of the **waterfall on the River Toce**, of a path that has no architectural barriers, towards the valley floor.

The project has the **Upper Ossola Mountain Union** as its Italian lead partner, and the **Lake District** is one of the other partners. On International Earth Day, **22 April**, **Francesco Gaiardelli**, the President of the Tourist Board, said, “We want ‘Laghi e Monti Bike’ to become a real **opportunity to promote**

cycle tourism in our areas; this form of tourism pays attention to environmental sustainability and to respectfully experiencing a journey to discover the wonders of our planet.” The project is of strategic value for the development of cycle tourism from the North to the South of Europe, from the Alps to the Mediterranean area. **Verbano Cusio Ossola (VCO) will be the starting point of the Via del Mare**, the Piedmont cycle route that will cross Monferrato and Langhe, to reach **Imperia**, in Liguria.

“Thanks to this route, mountain bike enthusiasts will be able to reach Ossola on their bikes, from Switzerland’s inland cantons,” Gaiardelli went on. “Moreover, the post-pandemic scenario foresees an increase in the demand for outdoor tourism, including cycle tourism, especially with the spread of e-bikes. This is why it is important to work to create a tourist offer in the area that is attentive to the needs of this type of clientele. We’re dealing with a tourist who is looking for **sustainable holidays, who is aware of the beauty of the landscape and who respects the environment**. He appreciates places that are in tune with this vision, that can offer suitable services for those who travel on two wheels. This is a new opportunity for the area to generate employment.” The project also entails the creation of a cross-border network of services for cyclists: from renting to assistance, with interventions planned by Laghi e Monti Bike that will also make it possible to expand the range of barrier-free routes, which are ideal for accessible tourism. “This is another sector,” Gaiardelli concluded, “in which we are investing and will continue to invest, in order to put tourism within everyone’s reach.”

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