



***Speaking Notes***  
***The Honourable Maureen MacDonald***  
***Minister of Health and Wellness***

***Active Transportation Summit***

***Friday, June 10, 2011***  
***Dundee Resort***  
***2750 West Bay Highway, West Bay***  
***8:30 A.M.***

*Check against delivery*

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Good morning.

Last week Nova Scotia marked a first by proclaiming and celebrating June, as Active Transportation Month.

This celebration brought together partner organizations and government departments who were key organizers of the proclamation for Active Transportation Month.

I hope you have been able to participate in some of the events and activities that took place.

Today we are championing another first in our province. The first-ever RURAL Active Transportation Summit in Nova Scotia.

I would like to extend my thanks and congratulate the Municipality of Richmond for their leadership in organizing the Summit and the many volunteers.

I believe that every one of us here share common goals. We have the prosperity of our province and the health and wellness of Nova Scotians in mind.

When I arrived last night, I had an opportunity to have a closer look at the Summit's very ambitious agenda. I saw presenters listed from across the province and across the country. Like all of you here, I value the opportunity to listen and learn from professionals and volunteers in the field. It's an opportunity to take away what we hear today and find ways to apply it within our communities. It is a chance to see what works and what doesn't.

What many do not realize is that Nova Scotia has a large rural population. These rural areas have different needs and challenges, as well as opportunities.

For the past four to five years, rural communities throughout the province have been making strides in active transportation.

Through policy, enabling by-laws, collaborative planning, engagement, education, community design and infrastructure, municipalities have shown tremendous insight and commitment to active transportation.

There has been a lot of progress so far from the local level. From Yarmouth to Bridgewater... Wolfville to HRM... and Pictou to CBRM... there has been significant advancement and investment.

Your commitment to active communities makes it easier for school to do School Travel Planning with the support of the Ecology Action Centre. It supports the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Nova Scotia to promote walking, and for the Nova Scotia Bikeways Coalition to realize the Bikeways Vision.

Regardless of urban or rural living, active transportation provides a number of significant public health, social, economic and environmental benefits.

Across Canada, we have a childhood obesity issue. We live in an age where technology and modern forms of entertainment result in more time spent in front of a screen, which causes us to be stationary for longer periods of time -- and it's taking its toll.

A Childhood Obesity Prevention Strategy is a core priority of this government and involves a number of departments including Health and Wellness, Transportation, Service Nova Scotia, Environment, and Education to name a few.

This strategy is expected to deliver public policy recommendations for physical activity and healthy eating.

Active transportation is being positioned as a key pillar of the physical activity component as it represents one of the best investments we can make because of its potential to be integrated into daily life.

We are not the only ones who reap the health benefits from leading an active lifestyle. It is also good for our environment. Providing the means and encouraging active recreation and transportation on roads and community trails, reduces greenhouse emissions giving us cleaner air and a healthier environment in which to live, work and play.

And let us not forget about the economic and social benefits. Although active transportation in small and rural communities is more often used for recreational purposes, it can be used in conjunction with other modes of commuting.

By offering a range of transportation options, communities can help retain employers and residents, draw visitors to the region, maintain the local economy, ensure equal access to services, jobs and educational opportunities.

It can also address the needs of an aging population.

Addressing active transportation helps the province and municipalities advance important strategies and programs including the Strategy for Positive Aging, Age Friendly Communities, Active Kids Healthy Kids Strategy, Integrated Community Sustainability Plans, the Sustainability Transportation Strategy, and the Tourism 2011 Plan.

While these are just a few of the great benefits and reasons why active transportation is important, I believe we all, ultimately, have the desire to make active transportation a more viable option and priority for Nova Scotians. To do this, stakeholders, various interest groups, health professionals, business, and all levels of government need to work together.

Making active transportation a priority is everyone's business.

Just recently, the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal proclaimed to law, Bill 93. This step forward was rung in with cyclists from across the province.

Informally known as the 1-metre rule, the law outlines requirements for cyclists and motor vehicle operators, which will make roads safer for cyclists. It takes a shared responsibility approach, but promotes a healthy and safe environment for cyclists.

At the Department of Health and Wellness we recognize that to stem the physical inactivity crisis and prevent further increases in chronic disease, population wide approaches to physical activity must be implemented; more people must be more active in a variety of settings and circumstances. On a daily basis department staff champion active transportation through representation on numerous committees and assist groups in developing active transportation projects, plans and networks.

Through the Municipal Physical Activity Leadership program active transportation is being addressed and advanced.

We are working on a new provincial user-friendly Active Transportation website, which to improve communication between active transportation stakeholders. This website will store cutting-edge information and engaging functions.

In partnership with the Ecology Action Centre we are supporting Active and Safe Routes to Schools, and are developing an Active Transportation 101 toolkit document, which will provide active transportation champions with a road map toward realizing an active transportation friendly community or municipality.

And, we are looking forward to continuing our active participation on the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities Active Transportation Committee.

In March, the province received a letter from the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities requesting that government take a leadership role and commit to a stronger approach regarding active transportation.

I am pleased today, to announce that government is moving forward with this request.

As I mentioned earlier, as many as ten government departments are contributing to active transportation in ways that are consistent with their respective mandates.

These departments currently network and address shared issues and concerns, but I want to take it one step further by formalizing this working group into an interdepartmental committee. This committee will be mandated to prepare a proposal to develop a provincial policy and plan for active transportation.

We look forward to continuing to playing a significant role in building on the work already started by the provincial departments, associations, communities and municipalities

Thank you and I hope you enjoy the rest of your Summit.