

Nova Scotia Rural Active Transportation Summit

Final Report

Overview:

The Nova Scotia Rural Active Transportation Summit took place on June 9-10, 2011 at Dundee Resort in Richmond County, Cape Breton Island. The event was hosted by the Municipality of the County of Richmond and co-sponsored by the county and the NS Department of Health and Wellness. Approximately 110 delegates gathered from across the province. The delegates represented various provincial departments, municipalities and community groups that have an interest in the development of AT in the province. There were also representatives from community health boards and some private citizens. The purpose of the summit was to bring stakeholders together to focus on AT in the rural context and to build collaboration among stakeholders in the advancement of AT in the province (See Dundee Declaration).

The summit had a full schedule of presentations on the two days. All sessions were open for all delegates to attend. Each presentation was an hour in length. Presenters were asked to present for 40-45 minutes and to leave 15-20 minutes for questions and discussion at the end. Most presenters stayed within the allotted time frame. Some went over which left less time for discussion and questions. A few built discussion time into the main body of their presentations. Presentations were selected by a program committee composed of AT practitioners from across the province. Four streams – AT on Rural Roads, AT on Rural Trails, AT and Rural Schools and AT in Hub Communities – were identified and presentations were selected based on their adequate fit with these stream areas. The program committee unanimously agreed that they wanted a panel specifically composed of Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal staff and a panel that represented all provincial departments that are involved in AT. These two panels were created and were the focus of the afternoon session on June 9th. Other panel presentations were organized around school travel planning, trails development, communities in the forefront of AT development in the province and the impact of AT on tourism and community development. In addition to the panels, there were numerous individual presentations around the 4 themes, including a guest presenter, Sue Shikaze, who presented success stories from Haliburton, ON. Details of the presentations are posted in the schedule and PowerPoint slideshows are available on the website at www.richmondcounty.ca.

On Friday, June 10th, Maureen MacDonald, the Minister of Health and Wellness, opened the day with welcoming remarks. In her speech, she formalized an inter-departmental committee on AT and mandated that they develop a provincial AT policy (see Minister MacDonald's speaking notes).

Evaluations:

Evaluation forms were filled out by 1/3 of the summit delegates. They were asked to comment on each presentation as well as the overall summit experience. Detailed results are attached. Overall, the evaluations were positive. People generally liked and learned from each of the presentations and the overall summit. People specifically liked the opportunities for networking and for speaking about AT in a rural context. Many people welcomed the opportunity to engage directly with TIR and the other government departments, although some expressed that they would have liked to hear more and have more time for discussion with these government officials. A number of people reported that they appreciated the honesty from TIR and that the panel gave them a better understanding of the challenges TIR faces in developing AT infrastructure. Some expressed disappointment that there wasn't more engagement from the Department of Education and would have liked to hear from that department during the many occasions when school AT was being discussed.

The most common criticism of the summit was that there wasn't more time built in for large and small group discussion. The organizers recognized that this was going to be an issue before the summit began and did their best to allow for opportunities for large group discussion. However, the organizers recommend that if another summit of this sort is held, that small group discussion time be built into it. This was the first summit focused on rural AT and we wanted to include all the appropriate presenters. The second summit could be lighter on presentations and heavier on discussions. In fact, the logical next step would be to bring people together for further discussions around issues that continually surfaced during the presentations. That said, the organizers aimed to provide as much opportunity for people to express themselves as possible. We had pages with lightbulbs on them for people to write their bright ideas and thoughts. We had a map of NS on a wall for people to provide feedback about areas of concern for AT development. We also presented delegates with the opportunity to provide their feedback on the Dundee Declaration. This feedback was then incorporated into the final document.

Notes:

1. The facilities were rated highly by participants. However, it was pointed out that Dundee isn't accessible. This will need to be addressed for future gatherings.
2. The food was rated highly but vegetarians reported a lack of protein in the vegetarian options.
3. Entertainment, square dancing and physical activities were rated highly and appreciated by all. Assets of rural areas were illustrated through these activities.

Dundee Declaration

The Dundee Declaration is attached. This was a document that was put together by a number of delegates on June 9th. It was then posted on a wall and all delegates were asked to read it and provide feedback by posting stickies on the document. The feedback was then incorporated into the document. At the end of the summit, the final document was presented and delegates voted to approve the Dundee Declaration. It is essentially an agreement to work together to promote and develop AT in NS, particularly in rural areas.

It includes a commitment to share within our own organizations and to personally practice and promote AT. Please see the attached declaration.

Major Successes:

1. The development and adoption of the Dundee Declaration with a focus on collaboration and continuing momentum.
2. The formalizing of the provincial inter-departmental committee on AT.
3. The commitment from the province to develop an AT policy.
4. Sharing and networking, especially the opportunity to dialogue with TIR and other provincial departments.
5. Bringing together a vast and varied collection of people and organizations to work together toward improving the health, environment and safety of our province.
6. Starting and continuing the discussion around some of the major challenges to AT development in rural areas.

Some Challenges:

1. Engaging the Department of Education in a meaningful way in discussions around school AT.
2. Engaging more elected officials at all levels (no MLAs or MPs attended the summit; all MLAs were invited; a handful of municipal councilors attended but many left early).
3. Finding common ground and tackling the difficult debates amongst those advocating for AT development. Future summits or gatherings on a regional and provincial level could help address this.

Next Steps:

1. All information from the summit will be posted on the www.richmondcounty.ca website and shared by email with all delegates.
2. Delegates will continue networking and discussions to move AT forward, including following what was agreed to in the Dundee Declaration.
3. A second summit may be organized to further discussions – with a focus more on delegate participation and less on presentation.