



Atlantic AT Summit Community of Practice

Background

In 2017, the Active Transportation Committee of the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities (then the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities) initiated the process of coordinating the Atlantic Active Transportation Summit. One of the goals of the Summit was to bring together active transportation practitioners from across Atlantic Canada to allow them to connect with one another toward establishing a regional Community of Practice.

The concept of a community of practice is widely used in many sectors and is defined as “a group of people who share a concern or a passion for something they do, and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly”. The idea behind a community of practice is that by coming together, practitioners will be exposed to learnings that shape their individual work in their respective communities.

The Atlantic AT Summit

On May 24, 2018, over 70 active transportation practitioners from across the Atlantic Region and beyond were present for a session that was focused on shaping an Atlantic-wide active transportation community of practice.

The session was kicked off with three presentations from four professionals:

- Sara Kirk of Velo Canada Bikes on their initiative to build support for a National Cycling strategy and connect cycling stakeholders from across Canada;
- Eliza Jackson of the Ecology Action Centre and Bekah Craik of the Municipality of the District of West Hants on the Active Alliance, a community of practice in development for active transportation practitioners in Nova Scotia; and
- Kate Whitfield of Alta Planning on the different roles that need to work together to create a culture of active transportation within municipalities.

Following the presentations, organizers hosted a World Cafe-style discussion with the attendees to facilitate the sharing of ideas about developing a community of practice in Atlantic Canada. The discussion was shaped by 2 questions:

- How can we help each other to advance active transportation in the Atlantic Region?
- What are the next steps needed to help that take shape? How do we want to build on what has happened here at the Summit?

Insights

A key insight from the discussion, and from the Summit in general, is that each of the Atlantic provinces faces similar challenges in promoting and creating access to active transportation in their respective communities. From the discussion and the feedback provided, several key themes emerged



for the importance of and strategies for collectively advancing active transportation in the Atlantic Region.

Educate

Not everyone understands what active transportation is and not everyone understands the benefits of creating access to walking and cycling in their community. This impacts everything from how people use infrastructure to how decision-makers prioritize investment to how municipal staff and departments understand how to bring an active transportation lens into their work. Participants in the discussion identified the need for education for several audiences to elevate the profile of active transportation and create more awareness.

Activate

As awareness around active transportation increases and public support grows, it can create a push for decision-makers to identify active transportation as a government priority and establish funding to make change happen on the ground. Participants at the AT Summit identified the need for high-level policy for active transportation with associated funding to allow for implementation.

Coordinate

Despite the challenges that many active transportation practitioners in the Atlantic Region face, including a lack of financial resources compared to more urban centres in Canada, there is a push to develop solutions that are sensitive to the local context and making the best of the resources that are available. Because many community share similar challenges, these approaches should be shared to advance active transportation across the region. Among all of the suggestions for coordinating the work of practitioners, there was strong support for developing a community of practice for Atlantic Canada to enhance the work that individuals are doing in their respective communities.

Evaluate

At the Summit, we heard about initiatives to collect, synthesize, and disseminate data about active transportation. During the community of practice discussion, participants highlighted the opportunity to develop a set of performance indicators that could be used across the Atlantic Region to streamline data collection processes and create comparable data sets.

Next Steps

Amongst participants of the AT Summit, there seemed to be strong support for developing a community of practice for the Atlantic Region and creating opportunities to learn from and with each other. The following are a list of potential actions for such a group:

Educate

- Look for opportunities to educate planners and engineers early on in their degrees
- Host an AT Summit for politicians
- Educate non-AT colleagues on how to bring an AT lens into their work



Activate

- Connect active transportation with broader community mandates and mission
- Seek ways to introduce and coordinate high level policy and funding for active transportation

Coordinate

- Gather examples and case studies of active transportation initiatives from the Region and beyond
- Establish a set of provincial AT coordinators who can connect with each other and share information/knowledge
- Create a mechanism or forum for knowledge sharing and exchange, like a resource library, to make the best of few resources

Evaluate

- Develop a list of indicators that are transferable to communities and provinces across the Atlantic Region