

Strengthening the Ontario Trails Strategy



Report on Consultations and the Environmental Bill of Rights Registry

Purpose



To report on the feedback and information received through the regional consultations, Aboriginal engagement sessions and the Environmental Bill of Rights (EBR) Registry



What We Heard

Consultations
&
Environmental
Registry

Summary of Consultations

Regional and Aboriginal Sessions



This consultation consisted of 5 regional sessions (Ottawa, Ingersoll, Toronto, Thunder Bay and North Bay) and 2 Aboriginal engagement sessions (Toronto and Thunder Bay)

- 251** Total attendees
 - 80** Municipalities
 - 48** Trail Organizations
 - 40** Other not-for-profit organizations
 - 17** Health Organizations
 - 16** Federal or Provincial Government
 - 12** Aboriginal
 - 12** Tourism Organizations
 - 12** Other (e.g., associations)
 - 8** Conservation Authorities
 - 4** Academia
 - 2** Volunteer Organizations



Summary of Consultations

Environmental Registry Submissions



This 48-day consultation was conducted through the Environmental Bill of Rights Registry (October 17 to December 4)

- 80** submissions total
- 21** Trail Organizations
- 20** Public
- 12** Municipalities/Municipal Organizations
- 9** Other not-for-profit organizations
- 4** Health Organizations
- 4** Tourism Organizations
- 3** Conservation Organization/Authorities
- 1** Federal or Provincial Government, includes agencies
- 1** Aboriginal
- 5** Other (e.g., private industry, industry associations)



1. Financial Stability

Stakeholders identified financial stability as the **number one** priority issue.

The government is still identified as a funder, but **alternative forms of funding** need to be investigated (e.g., carbon offsets, health funding, municipal gas tax, crowd sourcing, corporate sponsorships).

Stakeholders also suggest the Province:

- **Increase funding** for trail development, operations and organizational capacity (e.g., signage and promotion, project staff), with an emphasis on trail maintenance
- **Simplify** and **standardize** government funding processes
- Increase **awareness** of funding opportunities
- Explore new **partnership opportunities**
- Provide **support for partnerships and capacity-building** through Regional Trail Committees and best practices
- Explore **removing HST/PST** from insurance

2. Liability

Stakeholders identified liability as the **number two** priority issue.

The issue is very complex and associated costs are high (e.g., insurance, potential legal costs).

Feedback supported the continued need for greater clarity in the *Occupiers' Liability Act*.

There is mixed reaction to having **trail standards** considered when determining liability:

- Some support standardization because it eliminates the possibility of case-by-case ambiguity
- Some do not support standardization because it conflicts with the unique nature of each trail

Stakeholders also suggest:

- The Province provide **support tools** (e.g., plain language guide of the act, training, trail design guidelines, training on risk management)
- **Inter-related issues** be addressed: insurance and associated costs, joint and several liability, and waivers
- There be **protection from legal action** for landowners, not-for-profit trail organizations and volunteers
- There be education resources that explain user liability (e.g., risks attached to certain activities)

3. Securing Land for Trails

This was identified by stakeholders as the **number three** priority issue.

Feedback endorsed continued support of having trail-specific easements that are **not costly or complicated**.

Stakeholders also suggest:

- Providing **landowners' incentives** (e.g., tax relief, recognition programs)
- The Province develop a **trails master plan** to coordinate, catalogue and plan the trails system
- The Province **secure land** for future trail development (e.g., rails, hydro corridors, linear parks, concession roads, waterfront access)
- The Province **simplify the process** to secure provincial land
- Using municipal official plans to develop trail networks
- Improving connectivity and continuity (e.g., use of road allowances, paved shoulders)

Some also suggested right-of-way or right-to-walk **legislation** (e.g., similar to United Kingdom).

4. Trespassing

Stakeholders emphasize that various **types of trespass** should be considered (e.g., intentional vs. unintentional trespassing, motorized vs. non-motorized users).

Feedback endorses continued support for **increased compensation** for damage to property.

Scope of trespassing issue is not well understood and requires specific research.

There is mixed reaction to **increasing fines**:

- Some stakeholders support an increase in fines
- Others would only support this if it is accompanied by an increase in enforcement

Stakeholders suggest a three-prong **approach** including:

- Increasing fines and the amount recoverable in damages
- Education on trail etiquette, respect and responsible use
- Enforcement

Stakeholders also suggest **using trail design** to minimize the issue (e.g., signage, trail connections).

5. Protection of Private and Public Property

This issue continues to be relevant for all stakeholders.

Stakeholders suggest:

- **Education** on trail etiquette
- Design **guidelines** to better protect nature and keep people on the trail
- The use of **regional trail committees and stewardship groups** to improve communication and coordination of multiple parties (e.g., municipalities, landowners, conservation groups, trail users, etc.)
- More **sustainable practices** for multi-use trails

Some stakeholders also suggest:

- An **inventory** of archaeological sites and cultural features to better protect First Nations' sacred land
- **Protocols** on engaging with Aboriginal communities during trail planning and development

6. Training

Feedback indicates the continuing need for **training** and stronger **provincial coordination**.

There is mixed reaction on developing **provincial trail standards** (e.g., planning, design, maintenance, signage):

- Some stakeholders want provincial **standardization**
- Others are opposed due to the varying types of trails and financial implications

Stakeholders also suggest:

- **Training** municipalities, developers, planners, tourist operators and trail organizations on best practices such as:
 - Responsible use
 - Proper trail design
 - Accessibility standards
 - Risk management
 - Creating trail connections and regional trail networks
- Increasing awareness by improving **training opportunities**
- Engaging schools to **educate children** on trail safety, nature and physical activity

7. Need for Policy Development

Feedback advocates to continue to support the inclusion of trails in the **Provincial Policy Statement** and other land use policies.

It also endorses the continued development of policies in the following areas:

- Use of **former rail lines**
- Incentives for **private landowners** to participate in trail routing
- Collaboration with existing and planned **transport infrastructure** (e.g., highway overpasses, concession roads, road allowances, paved shoulders).

Stakeholders also suggest the Province:

- Develop a **trails master plan** to help establish a framework for trail development (e.g., current trail inventory, available corridors, what is needed next)
- Develop **policies** on:
 - Protecting and using utility/hydro corridors
 - Active transportation
 - Trails connectivity
 - Recognizing trails as a recreational and transportation asset
 - Emerging motorized vehicles (e.g., e-bikes, motorized scooters, side-by-side ATVs)

8. Conflict Among Trail Users

Improved **collaboration and communication** has helped address this issue.

The trails community would like to see this issue framed in a more positive manner.

Feedback endorses continuing to support the need for a **code of ethics** that is broadly shared.

Stakeholders also suggest:

- Design outreach and education **strategies** to further minimize conflict
- Develop **regional trail committees** to continue improving communication, coordination and education of trail operators, municipalities, landowners, etc.

Additional Issues/Proposals Identified by Stakeholders:

Need for a **trails classification system** (e.g., by trail type, difficulty, etc.)

Need for increased and standardized **trail signage**:

- Way-finding signage
- Access point signage
- Trail markings

Address **changing population demographics**:

- Developing a greater number of access points
- Creating a comprehensive list of accessible trails

1. Enhancing Trails Tourism

Stakeholders identified this as the **top priority** opportunity.

Areas of focus include:

- Establish and catalogue trail tourist **destinations**:
 - Educate **local businesses** on the range of various public needs and expectations
 - One-window **information resources** for visitors
 - Capitalize on geo-caching and local food **opportunities**
- Market an **Ontario Cycling route** that includes trails
- Develop a trails **brand identity**
- Improve **collaboration** between the trail and tourism sectors
- Promote **geo-caching** to encourage more trail use
- Develop a **best practice guide** for the marketing of trails

2. Strengthening the Role of Trails in Active Transportation

Stakeholders identified this as the **second** priority opportunity.

Areas of focus include:

- Encourage development that incorporates **principles** of active transportation and safe routes to schools
- Continue to build into **municipal official plans**
- Consider **changing demographics** in the design of active transportation routes
- Create **regional trail networks** that link municipalities
- Recommend the Province facilitate **trail connectivity** and eliminate existing gaps between trails
- Recognize trails as a **transportation asset**
- Promote **benefits of active transportation** to successfully meet physical activity recommendations

3. Promote Trails More Effectively

Stakeholders identified this as tied for the **third** priority opportunity.

Areas of focus include:

- Provide one-window **information resources** for effective and accessible trail maps and way-finding
- **Standardize** signage, categories and branding
- Leverage existing **technologies and social media** (e.g., Google Maps, Map My Walk)
- Improve **public awareness** (e.g., school programs, marketing and promotional activities)
- Target **non-traditional users**
- Incorporate **local history** (e.g., First Nations, mining, lumber, fur trade)

4. Conduct Trail-Specific Research

Stakeholders identified this as tied for the **third** priority opportunity.

Areas of focus include:

- Trails **inventory**
- **Partner** with universities and colleges
- Have a **repository** of trail data and best practices (e.g., health, economic and social benefits, user information, user feedback)
- **Environmental impact** of different user groups

5. Maximize Water Trail Opportunities

Areas of focus include:

- Develop and provide waterway **maps and information** to increase awareness and reduce safety concerns
- Create an **inventory** of boat launches, access points, parking, portages, etc.
- **Promote** water trails
 - Heritage routes, such as the fur trade
 - Destinations (e.g., Northern Ontario, Mattawa River)
- Recognize the importance of water trails within the **Ontario Trails Strategy**

Other Information



Environmental Registry Posting: www.ebr.gov.on.ca (EBR Registry Number: 011-9565)

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