

Supporting Residents Through Collaboration and Teamwork

By Marlene Melanson, Meaghan MacNeil, and Beth Schumacher

SUMMARY

The Municipality of the County of Antigonish is a rural community in north-east Nova Scotia with a population of just over 20,000 and a land area of 1456.42 square km.¹ The municipality surrounds the Town of Antigonish, which sees its population of just under 5,000 double each year due to the student population at St. Francis Xavier University.

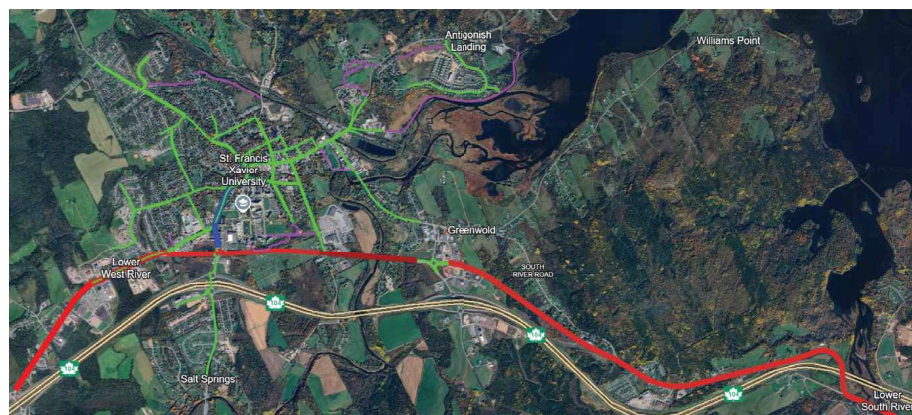
SOMMAIRE

La municipalité du comté d'Antigonish est une communauté rurale du nord-est de la Nouvelle-Écosse, qui compte un peu plus de 20 000 habitants et s'étend sur une superficie de 1 456,42 km². La municipalité entoure la ville d'Antigonish, qui voit sa population d'un peu moins de 5 000 habitants doubler chaque année en raison de la population étudiante de l'université St. Francis Xavier.

How does a community supporting its citizens to undertake a cultural shift to move more capitalize on the opportunity to turn outdated highway infrastructure into the spine of their active transportation network? Through municipal teamwork, provincial partnerships, community engagement, and various funding programs, Antigonish County has succeeded in developing the first stages of their active transportation system.

The Antigonish Active Transportation Corridor runs along the former TransCanada Highway (now Trunk 4) that, when complete, will be nearly 11 kilometres in length and incorporate a multi-use pathway and paved shoulders. The corridor provides an east-west link along the southern boundary of the town, where pedestrians and cyclists previously only had the gravel shoulders of the former highway available. The project will be built in five phases, with phases one and two already complete and phase three starting in 2025.

The multi-use pathway connects to the Town of Antigonish's Active Transportation Corridor and sidewalk network, which provides links to the university, the



The Town (blue) and County (red) Active Transportation Corridors provide a spine to existing sidewalk (green) and pathway (purple) infrastructure in the community. Google Earth.



Completed section of the Town (blue) and County (yellow) active transportation corridor connecting to existing sidewalks (green) and pathways (purple). Google Earth.

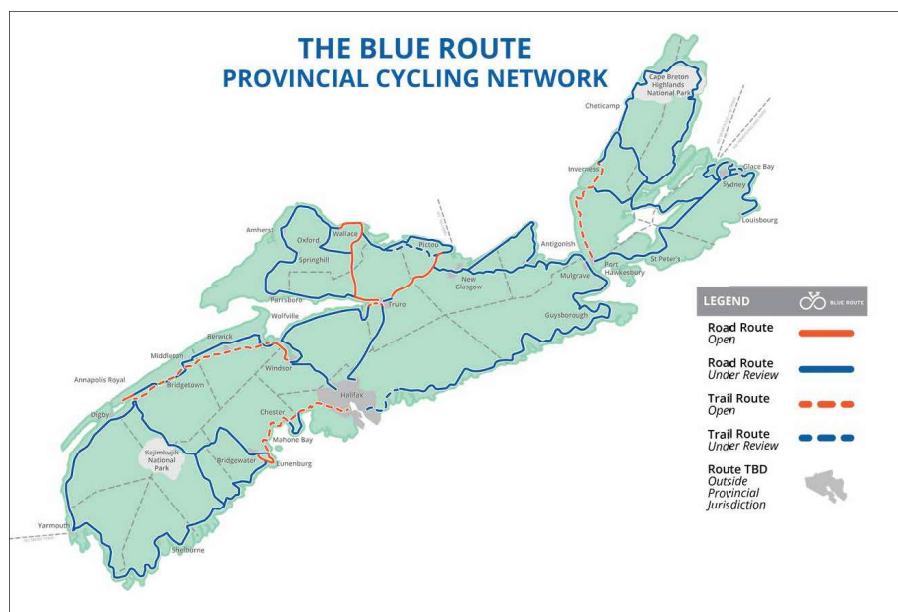
downtown, major recreation facilities, the regional hospital, and other community trails. Further extensions of paved shoulders on either side of the corridor will extend the active transportation network to support the Province of Nova Scotia's Blue Route for cyclists.

How Did We Get Here?

In 2013, the Town of Antigonish and Antigonish County initiated the process to develop an Active Transportation Plan. In 2014 a comprehensive Antigonish Town & County Active Transportation Plan was adopted by the Municipal Council. The County established an Active Transportation Advisory Committee in 2016, with the mandate to provide feedback on this plan and make recommendations on actions and strategies to move the plan forward. 2018 saw the completion of an Active Transportation Implementation Plan. The plan contained five main goals and twenty-four objectives; one of which was to "create an Active Transportation corridor along old highway 104 (now Trunk 4)."

With Cycle Nova Scotia as the lead community partner, a feasibility study was started in 2019 for the development of two intersecting bikeway corridors within the Town and County of Antigonish. This process was guided by a steering committee comprised of representatives from the Town, County, St. Francis Xavier University, community energy groups, and various provincial departments. Community consultation was undertaken in two phases during this study, to identify preferred routes and then to get feedback on preferred facility types, and involved two public meetings, a public workshop, and an online survey. Participation in the consultation was representative of both the Town and County, with slightly more participation from county residents. Support for the project cited the positive health effects and encouraged facilities to enhance safety for people and children on bikes or walking. Concerns raised through this process focussed on the cost of the investment, and unease about the additional danger for drivers if other users were on a shared roadway.

In the spring of 2020, Town and County councils were presented with a functional design and recommendations for the



The Blue Route Provincial Cycling Network. <https://blueroute.ca/interactive-blue-route-map>. Accessed February 11, 2025



Rest stops along the corridor will house benches, signage, and other amenities.

two active transportation corridors: one in the Town and one in the County. Later in the summer of 2020, the Municipality submitted an application to the province's 'Green Infrastructure Projects that Reduce Greenhouse Gas Emissions for Climate Change Mitigation in Nova Scotia' for a multi-use pathway along Trunk 4. This was followed by submitting an application to the Government of Canada's Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP)

by the Nova Scotia Department of Public Works who, as the owner of the Trunk 4 infrastructure, was the applicant to the ICIP program with the Municipality named as a project partner. As a result of this partnership, in addition to the construction of the active transportation corridor, two intersections will be replaced with roundabouts, another intersection is being re-configured, and a bridge will be replaced.

Design Considerations and Program Tie-Ins

While working to develop the conceptual design for the Town and County corridors, the steering committee established five priorities to guide the project. Through consultation, the communities expressed that they wanted the corridors to be:

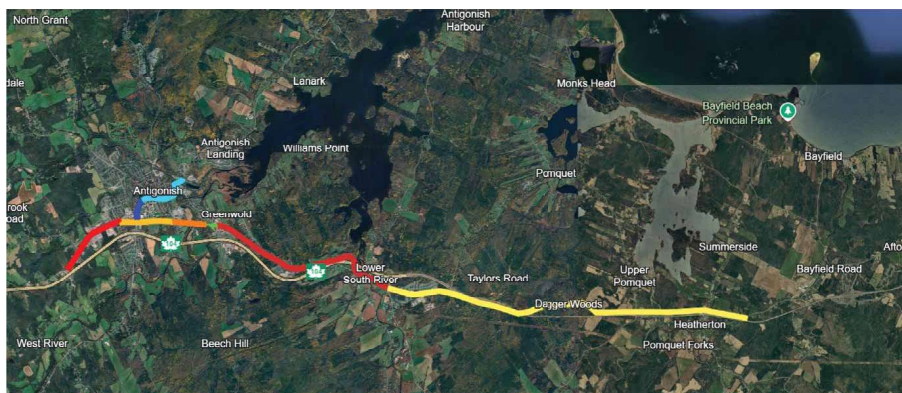
- A world class showcase project in Nova Scotia.
- A project for all ages and abilities – accessibility was key.
- Focussed on right sizing existing legacy infrastructure.
- Something for all modes of transportation.
- To connect communities by creating an active transportation spine through the community.

In late 2023, the County opened the first phase of the multi-use pathway along Trunk 4, while the Town of Antigonish opened their first phase of multi-use pathway in the fall of 2024, linking to the County's pathway along a main roadway to the downtown. The County's multi-use pathway provides an important east-west pedestrian link between two major shopping areas anchored by grocery stores, running along the southern boundary of St. Francis Xavier University with trail connections to campus. Connections already in place with the pathway provide access to existing sidewalks along arterial roadways to residential communities.

Community members can be seen walking and cycling along the route daily. Antigonish County is one of five provincial Make Your Move communities that are being supported by the Department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage, the Healthy Tomorrow Foundation, and Dalhousie University to develop and implement a focused and intense initiative that aims to create a shift in culture to incorporate more activity into daily life. The timing of the development and opening of the multi-use pathways coincided with this initiative, and use of the facilities features frequently in promotional materials.

Collaborative Funding and Project Management

A great deal of support from other levels of government, including financial resources, helped to get the project to where it is now, including:



Future expansion of the active transportation corridor into the community. Google Earth, earth.google.com/web.



From the County's Active Transportation Corridor, users can connect to the Town's Active Transportation Pathway to head into town.

- *The 2014 Antigonish Town & County Active Transportation Plan (MMM Group)*
 - Funded by the Town of Antigonish, the County of Antigonish, and the provincial department of Communities, Culture, Tourism and Heritage
- *The 2018 Antigonish Active Transportation Corridors Functional Plan (WSP)*
 - Funded by the Town of Antigonish, the County of Antigonish, and Connect2 at a cost of around \$70,000
- *Construction of Active Transportation Corridor & Reconfiguration of Trunk 4*
 - Funded by three levels of government
 - Government of Canada – \$ 9 million
 - NS Government of Nova Scotia – \$6.9 million
 - Municipality of the County of Antigonish – just over \$ 2 million
- *Streetscaping Plan*
 - With Municipal and Connect2 funding, the development of a 'streetscaping plan' along the multi-use path is underway, which will focus on landscaping, signage, lighting.

Once complete, maintenance and operations will be done through a partnership between the Municipality and the Nova Scotia Department of Public Works. All infrastructure is owned by the province, and they will continue to maintain and operate the roadway. The municipality will be responsible for maintenance and upkeep of the multi-use pathway,

with details governed by a memorandum of understanding.

As the Network Continues to Grow

Creating partnerships and building relationships has been key to the success of this project. This project has certainly been the epitome of the phrase ‘it takes a village,’ and that’s exactly what it took to make this project a reality. Recognition and thanks go out to the Town and County Councils, Town and County staff, Cycling Nova Scotia, the Federal and Provincial governments for their funding contributions, and the provincial departments of Public Works (serving as project managers and lead through design and construction), Natural Resources and Renewables, and Communities,

Culture, Tourism and Heritage for their involvement and support with the project. Acknowledgement is also due to the community organizations and individuals who advocated for active transportation infrastructure in the community, for providing their input throughout the process and continuing to support the development of the network.

Ten years after the initial steps to create a plan were initiated, the residents of the community were able to benefit from the first phases of this active transportation project, with future phases stretching out to connect rural hubs and trails to this central active transportation spine. The Antigonish Active Transportation Corridor and Network demonstrate that yes, a small rural community CAN do it.



Marlene (left), Meaghan (right), and Beth (photographer) test out the Active Transportation Corridor before it officially opens.

Endnotes

- ¹ Statistics Canada, “Focus on Geography Series, 2021 Census of Population, Antigonish County.”

Marlene Melanson has served as the Director of Recreation for the Municipality of the County of Antigonish since 1992. She has been an active community volunteer for many years, including as a member of the organizing committee of the 38th Nova Scotia Regional Acadian Games hosted in Antigonish in 2023. Marlene also currently serves as the president of the Société acadienne Sainte-Croix. **Meaghan MacNeil** has been the Active Living Coordinator for the Municipality of the County of Antigonish since 2016. She uses her background in physical education to inspire the residents of Antigonish County through a variety of programs, most recently as the lead on the Make Your Move Antigonish initiative. **Beth Schumacher** LPP, MCIP has been the Deputy Clerk for the Municipality of the County of Antigonish since 2014. She enjoys opportunities to use her planning background to support her colleagues with their active transportation projects and enhance the walkability of her community. ■

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