



**Nova Scotia Share Our Trails Association**

540 Three Fathom Harbour Rd.

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Facebook: [facebook.com/groups/NovaScotiaShareOurTrails](https://facebook.com/groups/NovaScotiaShareOurTrails)

July 12th, 2019

Minister Rankin:

We are the executive of Nova Scotia Share Our Trails Association (NSSOTA). Our membership is growing daily and we have support from several provincial like minded organizations including: Nova Scotia Equestrian Federation, ATV Association of Nova Scotia, Snowmobile Association of Nova Scotia, Marine Riders ATV, Nova Scotia Off Road Riders Association, Lake Charlotte ATV, & Safety Minded ATV.

We have been advised by several of our members that they received written responses from you in response to their letters regarding rail corridor access. Many were disappointed to realize that they received the same generic response.

Listed below are several points that represent our memberships thoughts and concerns:

1. What if the community group who is awarded the LOA is not actually representative of the community? Would it not be prudent for your department to ensure that the LOA holder represents the majority of residents? This seems to be the root of the current concerns for many residents. If you examine the document: "Making Connections -2014-19 Halifax Active Transportation Priorities Plan", on page 13, there is data from an on-line survey and virtually no responses from rural HRM. Yet this is the model that is being used to develop and determine access for the rural Eastern HRM rail corridor! And the majority of Eastern Shore residents are unaware of this document.

2. As you state, rail corridors are crown land. As such, any development or maintenance is ultimately financed by taxpayers. The only group that currently pays users fees for trail development and maintenance are registered OHV's owners. Yet this group is denied access to certain rail corridors and welcome on other rail corridors. Access seems to be dependent on the LOA holder who seems to have the authority to determine access. If rail corridor access was standardized across the province then the majority of issues would be eliminated.

3. Many of our members are residents of the Eastern Shore. And even though a rail corridor travels through their communities, they are advised to travel to another area of the province such as St. Margaret's Bay, Tatamagouche or the Annapolis Valley to travel on a rail corridor that is multi-user. Several of our members property abuts the rail corridor and several pay



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multiple trail development fees in OHV registrations. Sure they could spend more money and join an ATV club and have access to club developed and maintained trails, that are not necessarily on crown land. But there is no stipulation that requires one to join an ATV club to register or operate an OHV.

4. You stated in your generic letter: "Currently there are thousands of kilometers of trails and Crown roads that are available for off-highway vehicle riders to enjoy." The same statement could apply to non-motorized users of federal, provincial and municipal parks, beaches and walking trails. Why are OHV users expected to travel long distances to access trails? Especially if their property abuts a rail corridor. If provincial rail corridors don't offer uniform and consistent access then maybe they should be user pay for all users regardless of the users means of access. For example: if a registered OHV owner lives in the Tatamagouche they can access the rail corridor in their community, but if a registered OHV owner lives in Musquodoboit Harbour they have to travel elsewhere! Absolutely no consistency!

5. Your statement: "lack of legal connections for motorized users to continue along the rail trail". Our membership struggle to rationalize this statement. Logically, this would apply to all rail corridors in the province, as the majority of rail corridors have specific access points. Most users, whether they are walkers, hikers, bicyclists, atv riders or equestrians would be returning to where they entered the rail corridor, which is typically a parking lot. Similarly, most atv trails end at some point and the operator has to turn around and return to where they started. Have you considered abutting landowners to rail corridors? For example: If the rail corridor allows motorized OHV's and an abutting landowner accesses the rail corridor via their driveway that crosses the rail corridor and said landowner holds a valid DNR rail crossing permit for his driveway, would that not be a legal access point for the landowner? We can assure you there would be many abutting landowners in this position.

6. If you consider the rail corridor that Musquodoboit Harbour Trailways (MTA) holds the LOA. This is currently a non-motorized and non-equestrian trail. The legal access points for all users, regardless if they are walkers, hikers, bicyclists, equestrians or OHV users would basically be the same locations. The legal access locations would be limited to all the above users at four access points: the railway museum parking lot, the rail corridor parking lot in Musquodoboit Harbour (off Park Road), Bayer's Mill Road (but this is a gated access point and there is no parking and finally the north rail corridor parking lot near Meaghers Grant. At Meaghers Grant the rail corridor ends for all users as the land was returned to private landowners. We assume that is why there is a parking lot at this location. So unless someone wants to continue along the shoulder of Highway 357, the rail corridor ends. We can assure you, the road shoulder is



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certainly not user friendly or particularly safe for pedestrians or bicyclists. And there are no amenities along that section of highway 357. Our memberships point is: the majority of rural rail corridors would be similar regarding legal access locations, since most rail corridors are adjacent to private landowners. Yet some are multi-user and others are not.

7. Consider the origins of the rail corridor. They were originally designed and engineered to accommodate trains. The right-of-way for a rail corridor is 99' compared to 66' for a trunk highway, like highway 7. If rail corridors are going to be limited to walkers and bicyclists, it is underutilizing a valuable piece of infrastructure. They could and do in many cases accommodate all users including walkers, hikers, bicyclists, equestrians and OHV's. Is it unreasonable to have one unique piece of provincial infrastructure that all users can share and enjoy?

8. There are economic benefits to multi-user rail corridors. There are businesses in this province that offer tourist opportunities to tour on OHV's or horseback. Some of our members are entrepreneurs who rely on tourists to support their businesses. It would certainly be beneficial if rail corridors could be marketed to attract a multitude of tourists. Rail corridors offer a safe and structured trail system with parking, maps, proper signage and amenities which contribute to tourists having a positive experience. Plus they are easy to locate and access by tourists. Our neighbours in New Brunswick have been very successful with their marketing campaigns and immense trail network. Even large corporations like the Irving Group contribute to multi-user trails in New Brunswick.

9. Many of the opponents of multi-user rail corridors seem to share a common trait: they are anti-OHV and anti-equestrian. Considering the difference between OHV's and horses and the fact that both these groups are willing and do successfully share rail corridors the issue seems to be the attitude of those who are not willing to share. Unfortunately, in the case of current LOA holders on the Eastern Shore, the majority are not willing to share an asset they don't own but have been empowered by your authority to restrict access.

10. As you have mentioned, rail corridors are provincially owned crown land. It is evident that some municipalities like HRM, are attempting to influence and even dictate the development and access of rural rail corridors. Unfortunately, they are ignoring their rural constituents and the rural way of life. The rural way of life includes equestrian and OHV enthusiasts. Our memberships goal is to share rural rail corridors. In return we will respect municipalities development of urban rail corridor trails. Is sharing and mutual respect unreasonable?



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In closing, there are many successful multi-user rail corridors in the province that allows the majority of users. If your department had a consistent province wide rail corridor development and access policy it would avoid the current issues and satisfy the majority of rural residents.

Please investigate our memberships concerns.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Executive NSSOTA on behalf of our membership