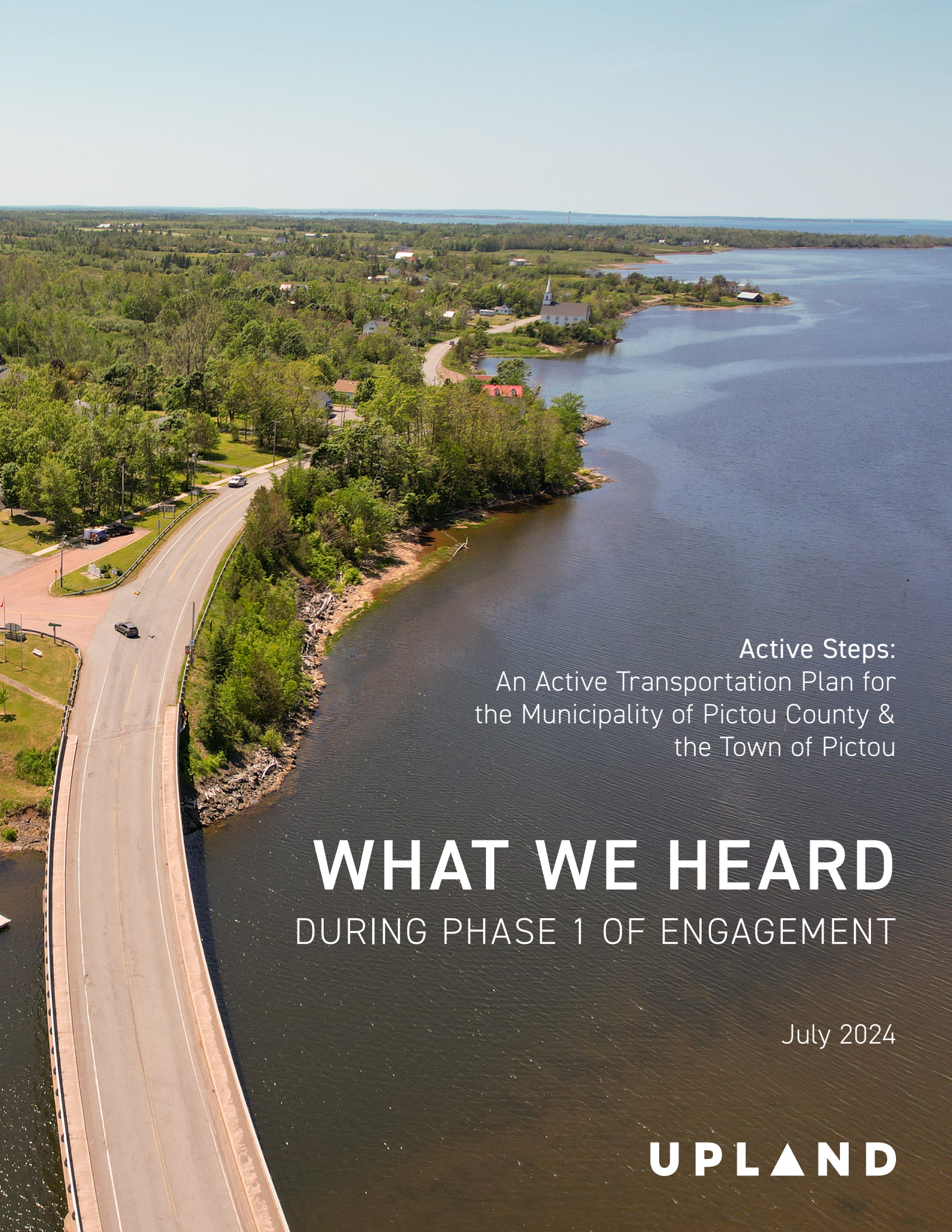


An aerial photograph showing a paved road that curves along the shoreline of a large body of water. The road has a white dashed line on the left and a solid line on the right. A few cars are visible on the road. To the right of the road is a dense line of green trees and shrubs. Beyond the trees, there are some buildings, including a church with a steeple. The water is a deep blue-grey color. In the background, more land and water are visible under a clear sky.

Active Steps:
An Active Transportation Plan for
the Municipality of Pictou County &
the Town of Pictou

WHAT WE HEARD

DURING PHASE 1 OF ENGAGEMENT

July 2024

UPLAND

PHASE 1

WHAT WE HEARD REPORT

July 2024

This What We Heard Report was prepared by
UPLAND Planning + Design Inc.

UPLAND

for the Town of Pictou and the Municipality of Pictou County



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TABLE OF
CONTENTS

1.INTRODUCTION.....1

1.1. REPORT OVERVIEW & PURPOSE.....2

1.2. WHAT IS ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION?.....3

1.3. THE PROJECT.....4

1.4. PROJECT TIMELINE.....5

1.5. NEXT STEPS.....6

2. WHAT WE DID.....7

2.1. PHASE 1 ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW.....8

2.2. ENGAGEMENT METHODS.....9

3. WHAT WE HEARD.....11

3.1. PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS.....12

3.2. MAIN TOPICS.....13

3.3. NETWORK DESIGN & INFRASTRUCTURE.....15

3.4.MAINTENANCE.....21

3.5.AMENITIES.....22

3.6. PROGRAMMING & RESOURCES.....23

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION



1.1. REPORT OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

This report summarizes stakeholder and community feedback received during the first phase of public engagement for **Active Steps**, the Active Transportation Plan for the Municipality of Pictou County and the Town of Pictou.

The purpose of this report is three-fold:

First, it seeks to represent “what we heard” and provide accountability to the community that their ideas have been captured and listened to. It aims to provide the Municipality of Pictou County, the Town of Pictou, stakeholders, and any interested community member the opportunity to learn about the project and to see what public input has been received so far.

Second, this What We Heard report, along with the background work and research conducted thus far, will inform the creation of the draft Active Transportation Plan.

Third, this document provides an important touchstone in the project timeline and an opportunity to reflect on whose voices have been heard or not heard, to identify any gaps in knowledge or understandings, and to reach more participants to help inform the next phase of the project.

This report provides a brief overview of the **Active Steps** project, and then shares the Phase 1 engagement process and the “What We Heard” findings, presented by category and geography. Key overarching themes are also shared to present an overall sense of engagement findings and direction for this project.

1.2. WHAT IS ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION?

Active transportation (AT) is a broad term that refers to all modes of human-powered transportation, including walking and wheeling (referring to the use of assistive devices), cycling, rollerblading, and skateboarding, as well as seasonal activities such as kayaking, canoeing, skiing and snowshoeing. Additionally, it encompasses some motorized forms of transportation like e-bikes and electric assistive devices. Some people depend on active transportation to get where they need to go due to a lack of alternative transportation, while others deliberately choose active transportation as their preferred form of commuting, exercise, recreation, or leisure.

Active transportation is typically used for two purposes:

Utilitarian active transportation includes trips where active transportation is used to get to a destination, such as work, school, the store, or appointments.

Recreational active transportation includes leisure, recreational pursuits, and fitness, and often takes place in off-road locations.

In some cases, both utilitarian and recreational active transportation can occur at the same time. Understanding the multifaceted nature of active transportation is essential for developing comprehensive plans and infrastructure that accommodate the diverse motivations and needs of individuals utilizing these modes.



Photo: Nova Scotia Tourism / Charcoal Marketing



1.3. THE PROJECT

This Active Steps project arises at an important time. The Municipality of Pictou County and the Town of Pictou are on the verge of growth. Over the past five years, the region has experienced population growth, increased development activity and a burgeoning tourism industry. Recently, the Town of Pictou completed a Waterfront Development Plan, and the Municipality of Pictou County has embarked on developing its first-ever Municipal Planning Strategy and Land Use By-law. Recognizing the momentum that is underway, the Municipality and Town are looking to join forces to develop a new Active Transportation Plan for their combined region.

This initiative aims not only to enhance physical connectivity but also to foster social cohesion among the diverse communities within the region. By prioritizing well-being and quality of life for residents and visitors alike, the plan seeks to promote healthier and more sustainable modes of transportation, while also aiming to:

- Identify specific areas requiring upgrades to facilitate increased active transportation.
- Explore new opportunities for developing active transportation infrastructure.
- Educate community members on the safe and efficient use of active transportation while highlighting its benefits.
- Expand active transportation options around schools, community spaces, and business hubs. (continued...)

- Establish connections with the Provincial Blue Route cycling initiative.
- Develop an implementation strategy outlining priorities, behavioral change best practices, and decision-making processes.

The final Active Transportation Plan will include a comprehensive network plan, recommendations related to programs and facilities, and a phased implementation strategy based on variables such as population density, development, traffic volume, safety concerns, and more. The data contained in the Plan may be used in budget forecasting and future project planning, providing both staff and Council with a clear direction on where active transportation development should take place each year and why.

1.4. PROJECT TIMELINE



1.5. NEXT STEPS

The drafting of the Active Steps Active Transportation Plan is underway, incorporating community ideas and insights, including what is noted in this What We Heard report, our comprehensive findings from engagement, and the information noted in the Background Report. Once the draft Plan has been developed, further public, community partner, and stakeholder engagement will be held in person and online in August and September 2024 to refine the Plan and ensure it aligns with community desires, strategic planning, and regional needs.



Photo: Mark Stosberg / Unsplash

WHAT WE DID



2.1. PHASE 1 ENGAGEMENT OVERVIEW

Input from community members is essential to understanding local active transportation experiences and needs. This Active Steps project planned for two phases of engagement with the public, community partners, and stakeholders: Phase 1 is the Initial Engagement prior to the Draft Plan, and Phase 2 come afterwards to consult the community on, and therefore refine, the Draft Plan.

Engagement Aim

The aim of Phase 1 engagement was to gain an initial overview of active transportation desires, challenges, opportunities and experiences to inform the draft plan. A main goal of this engagement was to identify key areas for focus and to set priorities.

Guiding Questions

This engagement was informed by the following questions:

- What is currently working well for active transportation in Municipality of the County of Pictou and the Town of Pictou?
- Where is existing active transportation infrastructure falling short or not meeting needs?
- Is there anywhere that you would like to use active transportation to travel, but are unable to? What are the barriers?
- How can the Municipality of Pictou County and the Town of Pictou make active transportation more welcoming, inclusive, and accessible?
- What excites you the most about this project?

To promote the Active Steps project and provide a hub for engagement and updates, the **Active Steps Pictou County** website was launched (<https://www.activestepspictoucounty.ca/>). This website provides access to online engagement tools, notices of in-person engagement opportunities, and background information. Posters were put up in the region to promote the project, and a series of social media posts shared the website and engagement opportunities.



2.2. ENGAGEMENT METHODS

Public Engagement

Public engagement on the project occurred from April through June 2024. Community members were invited to share their thoughts in a variety of ways.

Online Map

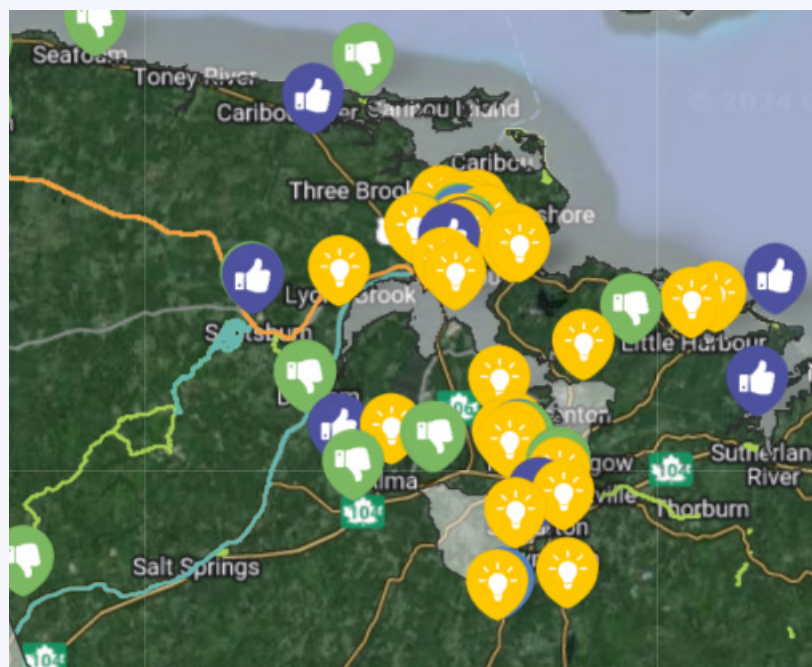
Geographic and local contexts are required to understand active transportation needs, barriers, and opportunities. We employed an online mapping tool, Social Pinpoint, to enable community members to annotate things they like, don't like, and would like to see changed, and to provide space for ideas and comments to be placed on the map. This method provides a plethora of specific and insightful data.

65

comments &
annotations

33

unique respondents



An image showing a portion of the interactive map. The map and all public comments can be viewed at <https://upland.mysocialpinpoint.ca/active-steps-pictou-county/map#/>

Online Survey

An online survey, connected to the map, was also used to ask questions around desires, barriers, and main interests in active transportation. The survey collected some demographic information and had **7 respondents**.

Public Information Centres

The in-person component of public engagement involved three public information centres: May 21 at 6:30 pm in Eureka, May 22 at 6:30 pm in Little Harbour, and May 23 at 6:30 pm in Scotsburn. These sessions served to provide an overview of the project, and allowed for questions and discussion with community members.

Stakeholder & Key Group Engagement

To ensure specific voices were heard and consulted, including under-represented groups and those with significant knowledge on the topic area, stakeholder interviews and one inclusion workshop were hosted.

Stakeholder Interviews

Stakeholder interviews were held with **3 community members**: one involved in recreation and trail development advocacy, one involved with supporting youth and youth-at-risk, and one involved with community development and partnerships. These interviews, conducted in May 2024 online over Zoom, provided insights on community needs, social considerations, and existing initiatives.

Youth Inclusion Workshop

Active transportation has particular importance to youth as a means of independence, as a means to get to school, and as a source of recreation and leisure. One in-person workshop session was held with students at Pictou Academy to capture responses to the question: **“what is your vision for active transportation in your community?”** These responses help us consider active transportation needs and desires from the perspective of different age groups.

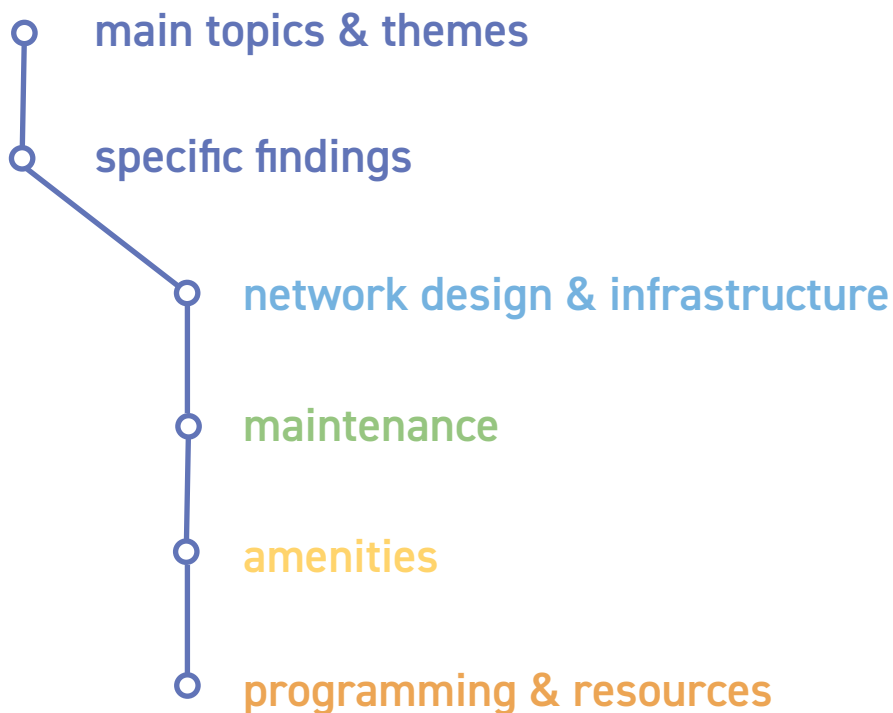
CHAPTER 3

WHAT WE HEARD



3.1. PRESENTATION OF ENGAGEMENT FINDINGS

All of the findings from Phase 1 engagement methods have been compiled and sorted. In this report, a synthesis of main topics is presented, followed by a more thorough overview of specific findings sorted into four categories: network design & infrastructure; maintenance; amenities; and programming & resources. For brevity, this report aims to present an overall reflection of findings, including common themes and suggestions. However, all engagement will inform the project.



3.2. MAIN TOPICS FROM PHASE 1 OF ENGAGEMENT

1

safety is the top priority

Safety was the most prominent topic of discussion and feedback. Residents of the Town of Pictou and the Municipality of Pictou County that we heard from largely do not feel safe walking, biking, rolling, or getting around in other active ways. A lack of safety is a key barrier to active transportation.

2

addressing key infrastructure gaps

There is limited active transportation infrastructure in the project area. The most desired infrastructure to support safer active transportation, especially cycling, are **paved shoulders or wider shoulders** along many main roads. The other most desired infrastructure are **more sidewalks** in the Town of Pictou, along highway underpasses, and in other communities.

3

planning for connectivity

Connectivity was a key theme of engagement findings. Community members desire safe active transportation connectivity between municipalities and in key junctions, most notably under Highway 104 at Westville Road and East Side East River Road. Safe access to trails and between communities is desired. Connections to high-density areas are also important. Being able to walk, bike, or otherwise access key amenities and services, like shopping areas, health services, and the Pictou County Wellness Centre, are priorities.

4

ensuring access for all ages

Specific demographics require particular attention, according to engagement discussion, particularly the senior population and school-aged children and youth. Maintaining mobility in older ages is desired for health and socialization. A top priority is ensuring kids and youth can get to school safely and have active recreation opportunities.



supporting diverse active transportation

While walking and cycling were the most referenced forms of active transportation, we also heard about kayaking, skateboarding, horesback-riding, scootering, snowshoeing, canoeing, and paddleboarding. Taking active routes to get to other forms of recreation was also discussed.

normalizing active transportation & supporting all-season mobility broadly

Engagement participants spoke of the need to normalize active transportation in the region and to make it more accessible and everyday.

This aligns with commentary on maintenance, infrastructure and programming to support daily mobility in all seasons and to encourage movement and recreation as a broader goal.

taking an integrated approach

The need to take a holistic, integrated approach that aligns this Active Transportation Plan with existing recreation and wellness aims was raised.

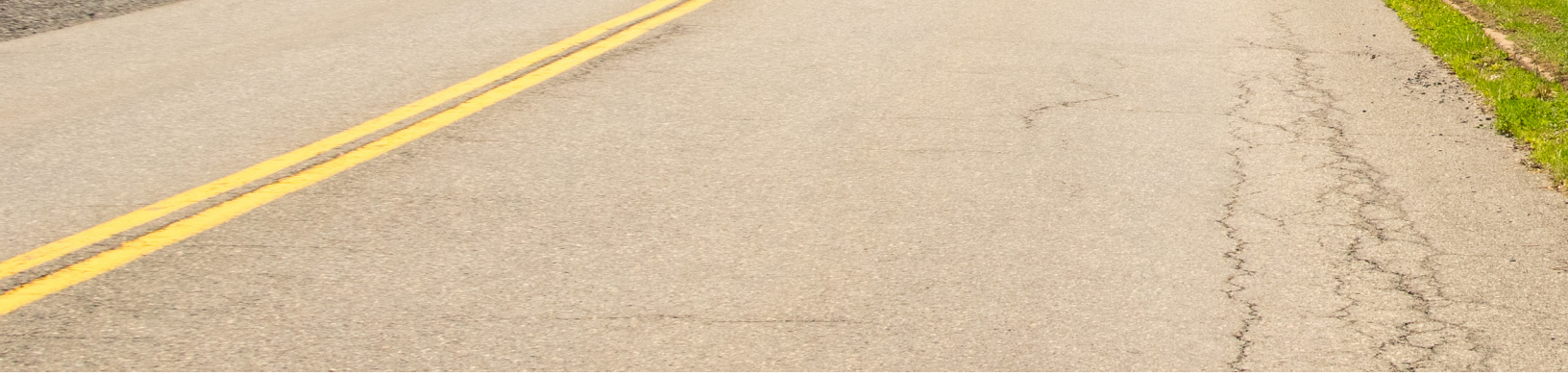
Some participants also spoke about aligning the plan with accessible built environment standards and with work being done to improve the safe and sustainable mobility of Indigenous peoples.

key barriers to active transportation, according to engagement findings, are safety, the lack of wide or paved shoulders and/or sidewalks on roads, the traffic speed, the patchiness of infrastructure, the lack of connectivity in and in between key areas, & the distance between locations.

5

6

7



3.3. NETWORK DESIGN & INFRASTRUCTURE

We received comments on areas across this project's study area, with desires for more walking trails, sidewalks, crosswalks, safer routes for school-children, paved shoulders on highways, and traffic calming measures. Our full database of engagement notes and place-specific information will inform the network design and draft Plan. Maintenance concerns also arose frequently in engagement findings, and are addressed in the following section.

Main Active Transportation Gaps in the Network

- Access to Pictou County Wellness Centre and Westville Road
- Highway 104 underpasses (Westville Road; East Side East River Road)
- Pedestrian infrastructure to the Pictou Rotary & across the Harbour
- Access by sidewalks, bike paths, or trails to schools across the regions
- Paved shoulders along highways
- General traffic calming and pedestrian infrastructure through towns
- Access points and connections to Jitney Trail and other trail networks

Trail Development

While a lot of the engagement focused on walking and cycling, and especially the safety of roads, highways, and towns, the trail system through the region was said to be an asset and one worth further developing, including further trails near schools and loops for recreation. Participants enjoy the hiking and multi-sport trail systems and think they are a very important part of the active transportation network. There is a desire for better linkage between the trail & active transportation network. Also, bus routes to trailheads was suggested.



Priority areas & suggested infrastructure according to engagement findings



The map excerpt on the following page enumerates the priority areas within the region for active transportation infrastructure, according to initial engagement findings. While other areas were raised and will be considered during the Plan development, these areas received the most comments and often provide important connections or access points.

1) Town of Pictou & Area

Within Town

- Expand the Jitney Trail through Pictou to the Yacht Club
- **Safer walking routes for children going to school came up frequently**
- Improved traffic control for safer pedestrian downtown
- More sidewalks and flashing crosswalks (including Church Street and Prince Street)

Pictou Rotary

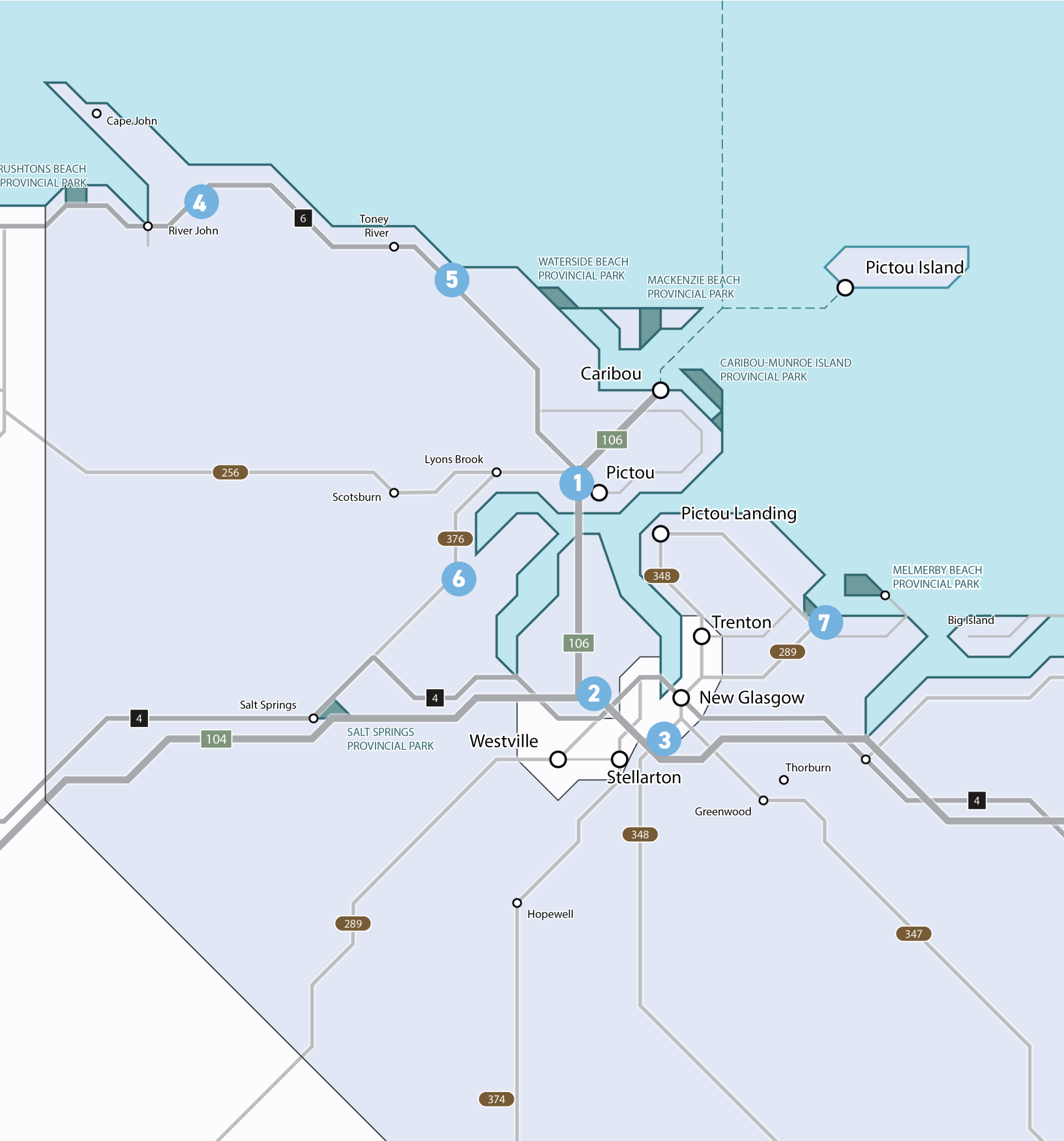
- **Access through the Pictou Rotary without a car is a large barrier** cited by residents of diverse ages
- Sidewalk and crosswalk access to the Pictou West Clinic

The Causeway & Harbour

- **The causeway and access across the Harbour was a key area of attention**
- Suggestions to limit speeds on the causeway for cyclists' safety
- The need for a pedestrian link of sorts across the harbour was a major desire among engagement participants

West Pictou

- Better access for children to West Pictou Consolidated School, including a connection to the Jitney Trail was a popular suggestion



stylized map showing community-identified priority areas for active transportation infrastructure, within the Active Steps project area (the Town of Pictou and the Municipality of Pictou County, denoted in pale purple)

2) Westville Road (Trunk 4)

The Westville Road portion of Trunk 4, to the east of Westville, was the most discussed area during engagement. In general, community members spoke about the danger and hostility of this road for active transportation users, due to a lack of infrastructure, road conditions, and traffic speeds.

Highway 104 Underpass, at Exit 23

- One of the most pressing areas raised for active transportation infrastructure was where Westville Road goes under the Trans Canada Highway 104. Pedestrians and cyclists, including youth, cite a lack of sidewalks or any active transportation infrastructure as a huge barrier and danger when trying to go through this underpass.
- Developing sidewalks and active transportation facilities in this area, as desired by many engagement participants, would support a regional network, as there is concurrent active transportation work happening in Westville and New Glasgow

Pictou County Wellness Centre

- Accessing the Wellness Centre without a car is very hard, as raised by many engagement participants
- Community members would like to see options to walk or bike here

Other Suggestions

- Traffic calming measures along Westville Road suggested for safety
- Adding paved shoulders along Munroe Ave Extension (as alternative route to Westville Road)

3) East River East Side Road (Route 348)

Highway 104 Underpass, at Exit 25

- Along with the Westville Road underpass, the underpass where East River Side Road goes under the Trans Canada Highway just east of Stellarton was a highly cited area for improvements
- Many participants spoke of **the desperate need for a sidewalk** and active transportation infrastructure to safely travel under the highway, from Blue Acres to North Novie Drive, and to link to key population centres

4) River John & Area

- River John was a highly cited area for improved safety, especially due to traffic speed coming along the Trunk 6 into town
- Suggestions include: traffic speed warnings and flashing lights coming eastwards into town; traffic calming and street retrofits through the town to make it safer for children, seniors, and those with disabilities; bike lanes; paved shoulders for cyclists along the Trunk 6
- One participant also expressed feeling unsafe walking, cycling, or horseback riding on the Trans Canada Trail in the area due to frequent usage by motorized vehicles (ATVs, etc)

5) Trunk 6

- Numerous participants across all engagement types spoke of wanting paved shoulders throughout Trunk 6 to make it safer for cycling. The steep gravel shoulders between Seafoam and River John deter some cyclists.
- Trunk 6 was cited as “dangerous” by many
- Participants spoke of increased dangers along this route during the summer due to traffic volumes from cottagers and tourists

6) Route 376

- Despite being labelled a Blue Route, some participants felt that Route 376 southeast of Lyons Brook is dangerous
- Suggestions for wide, paved shoulders and lower speed limits along this route

7) Little Harbour

- Traffic speeds are dangerous
- Suggestion that paved shoulders would create a nice bike route and loop along Little Harbour Rd (Route 289)
- Paved shoulders desired through the area, which is near other spots that participants like for recreation including Melmerby Beach



Photo: Nova Scotia Tourism

3.4. MAINTENANCE

Along with increasing the network of infrastructure, engagement participants spoke about improving, updating, and maintaining existing infrastructure to make active transportation feasible and safer.

Trail Maintenance

- Suggestion for the Town of Pictou to maintain the trail network behind Patterson Street and Wellington Street, which connects to McCulloch Education Centre and Pictou Academy
- Maintain access to Jitney Trail and other trails throughout the winter

Road & Shoulder Maintenance

- There were numerous comments about road conditions as a barrier to active transportation
- Many engagement participants spoke of steep ditches, crumbling shoulders, or little to no shoulders along Route 376 past Lyons Brook towards Durham
- Worn shoulders on Little Egypt Road make it unsafe for cycling
- R. Grant Road in Waterside also identified as unsafe due to poor road conditions

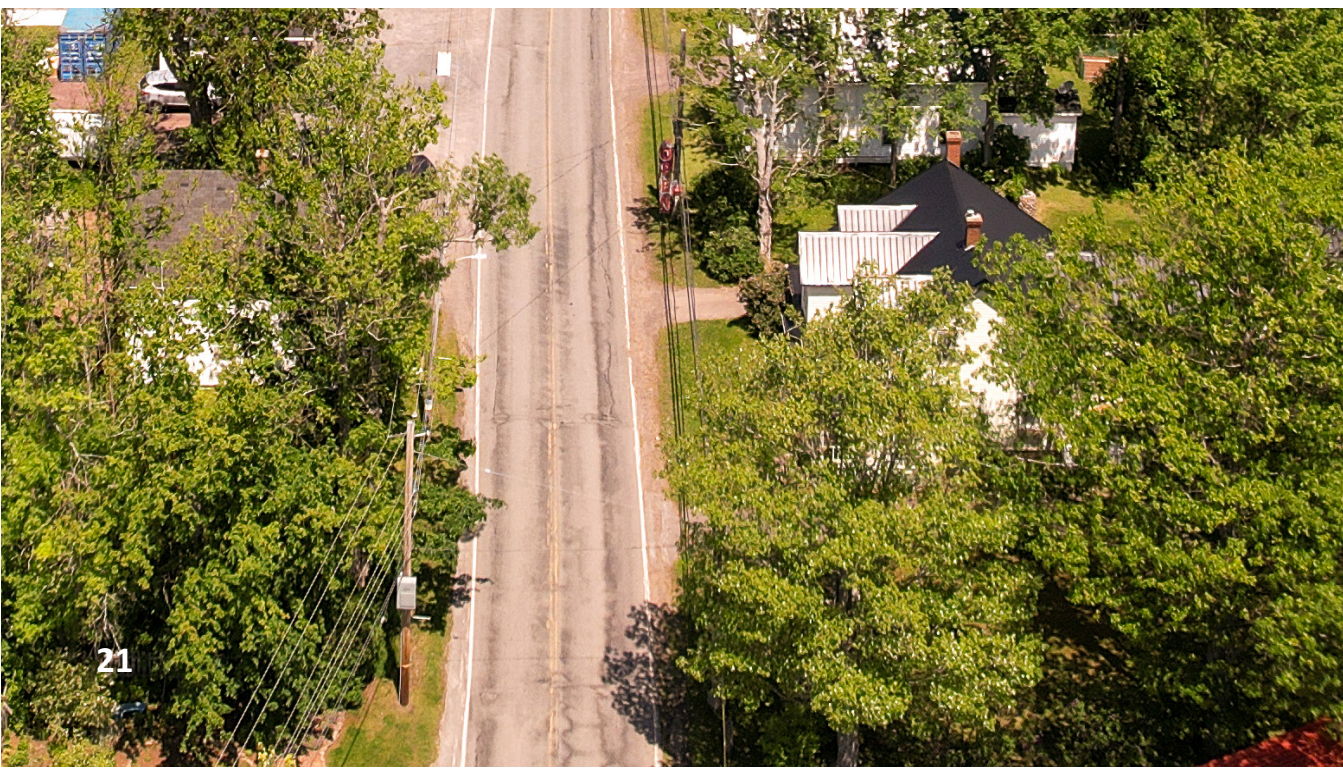




Photo: Town of Pictou

3.5. AMENITIES

Amenities to enhance trails and active transportation networks were also discussed. A few main types of amenities were mostly commonly shared by residents:

Signage

- Suggestions for signage, or enhanced signage, along numerous routes & trails throughout the area
- Suggestion for signage along the Jitney Trail to include historical information, flora and fauna, and other such interpretation

Racks

- Bike racks on buses, and pennyboard racks, were desired features by youth

Art

- Enhancing walking and multi-use trails with sculptures and public art, such as along the Jitney Trail

All-Ages Design

- Ensuring that trails support all-ages use, notably by including rest stops, good light and flat terrain at the start of trails

Other amenities noted include public washrooms and parking at trailheads.

3.6. PROGRAMMING & RESOURCES

Throughout this phase of engagement, a main theme was the need to normalize active transportation, and recreation and mobility more broadly. Educational resources and community programs can help make active transportation more accessible, comfortable, and fun for community members. Some key suggestions are noted below:

Trail Resources

- Suggestions to have a dedicated and detailed website (or webpage) on trails, with maps and trail information (length, grade, difficulty, elevation, path type, access points, etc.)
- Suggestion to provide more information readily available online about access points for using the Jitney Trail

Equipment Loan Programs

- Equipment loan programs were a popular idea among youth in particular, who would enjoy scooters, skateboards, and paddleboards among the options for active transportation & recreation
- Suggestion to have loan programs at libraries or locations that are open during the weekends

Walking & Biking Community Groups

- A common topic of discussion was normalizing active transportation and recreation with programming and group activities (e.g. the successful Scotsburn 55+ Recreation Club)
- Ideas included: a seniors walking group; a neighbourhood walking group that picks people up at their doors; a bike buddy program to inspire cycling confidence; groups for newcomers to get to know the community



Photo: Nova Scotia Tourism

All Seasons Programming

- Winter maintenance of trails and winter recreation programming (snowshoeing cited as popular)
- Youth hiking groups and programs to learn where to hike
- Suggestion for events that involve music and movement

Promoting Active Transportation

- Suggestion for an incentive program with downtown businesses in the Town of Pictou for people who cycle (e.g. discount on coffee)
- Broadly, the need to promote, normalize, and encourage active transportation as a way of life

An aerial photograph of a lakeside neighborhood. A paved road runs vertically on the left side of the image. To the right of the road, there are several houses with various roof colors (blue, grey, black, red) and styles, surrounded by lush green trees. The houses are situated on a peninsula or shoreline that meets a large body of water. The water is dark blue with some green algae or vegetation visible near the shore. The overall scene is a peaceful residential area with a natural setting.

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for any questions about the project please
contact consultation@uplandstudio.ca