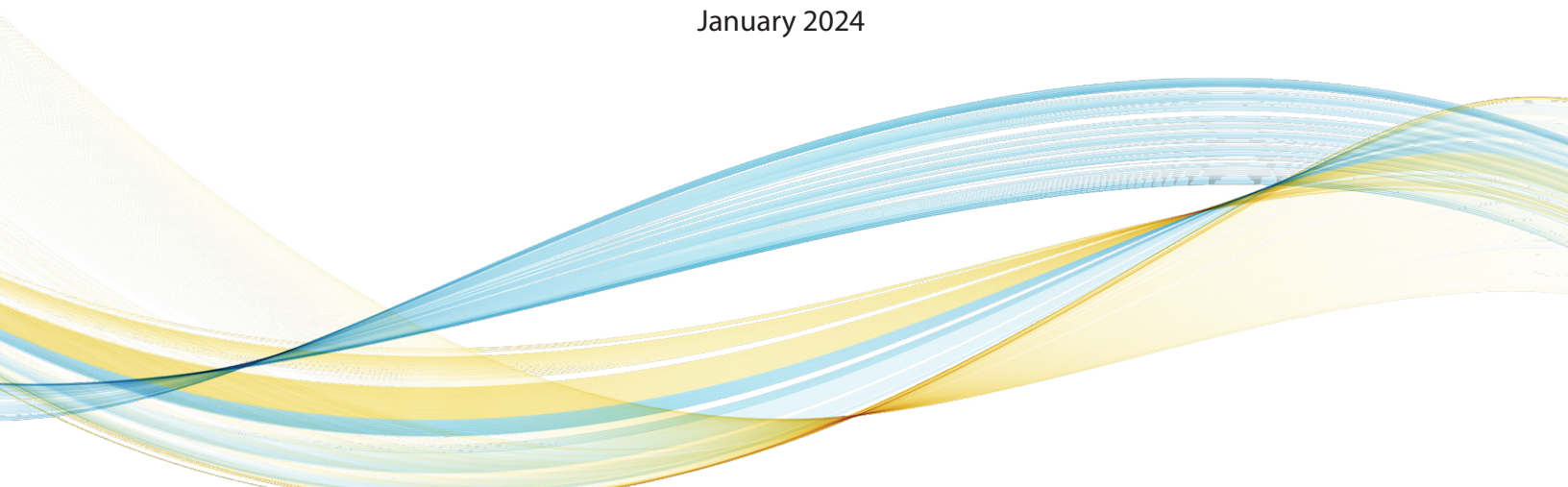




# **Confederation Trail User Group Review** **What We Heard Report**

January 2024







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# Executive Summary

The Department of Transportation and Infrastructure's Confederation Trail User Group Review conducted by VOLUME18 sought to capture the perspectives of Islanders and stakeholders on the current and future usage of the Confederation Trail. Employing a consultation methodology that involved an online survey, community engagement workshops, and written submissions, the review gathered invaluable input on the aspects of trail use, safety, and potential improvements. These various engagement efforts resulted in 5,744 completed surveys, 174 written email submissions, and 753 participants across four community workshops.

The online survey, with 5,744 completed responses, served as the primary tool for reaching a wide audience. The in-person community engagement sessions provided direct interaction, and the open call for written submissions allowed stakeholders to contribute in-depth perspectives. This diverse combination of methods ensured a thorough approach to gathering feedback, fostering transparency and driving community involvement.

Feedback on the benefits of the Confederation Trail emphasized its well-maintained infrastructure, community connectivity, and its role as a peaceful escape into Prince Edward Island's (PEI) picturesque landscape from tip-to-tip. The review yielded a wealth of insights into opinions on various guiding principles, with agreement on prioritizing environmental stewardship, sustainable development, inclusivity, safety, and cultural preservation.

Participants suggested several areas for improvements such as: including facilities like garbage/recycling bins and washrooms, enhancing signage (both way-finding and historical), providing hydration stations, and accommodating horseback riding. There was a broad range of views about allowing broader access of ATVs and horses to the Confederation Trail or having independent tip-to-tip trails.

The next phase will include additional research and best practices of other jurisdictions. Plus, the feedback will assist in shaping the recommendations for the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure to consider for the Confederation Trail. All comments included in this report are used to help shape the narrative around the conversation and demonstrate the broad range of feedback received.



**5,744**  
**SURVEYS  
COMPLETED**



**174**  
**WRITTEN  
SUBMISSIONS  
RECEIVED**



# Methodology

## Online Survey

In an effort to gather feedback in an inclusive and accessible manner, the Confederation Trail User Group Review created three outlets for data collection. The primary tool used was an online survey designed to efficiently reach a wide audience. The survey was crafted to cover various aspects of trail usage, values, preferences, and potential areas for improvement. This approach allowed for broad participation, ensuring that the opinions of a range of trail users, residents and other stakeholders were taken into account.

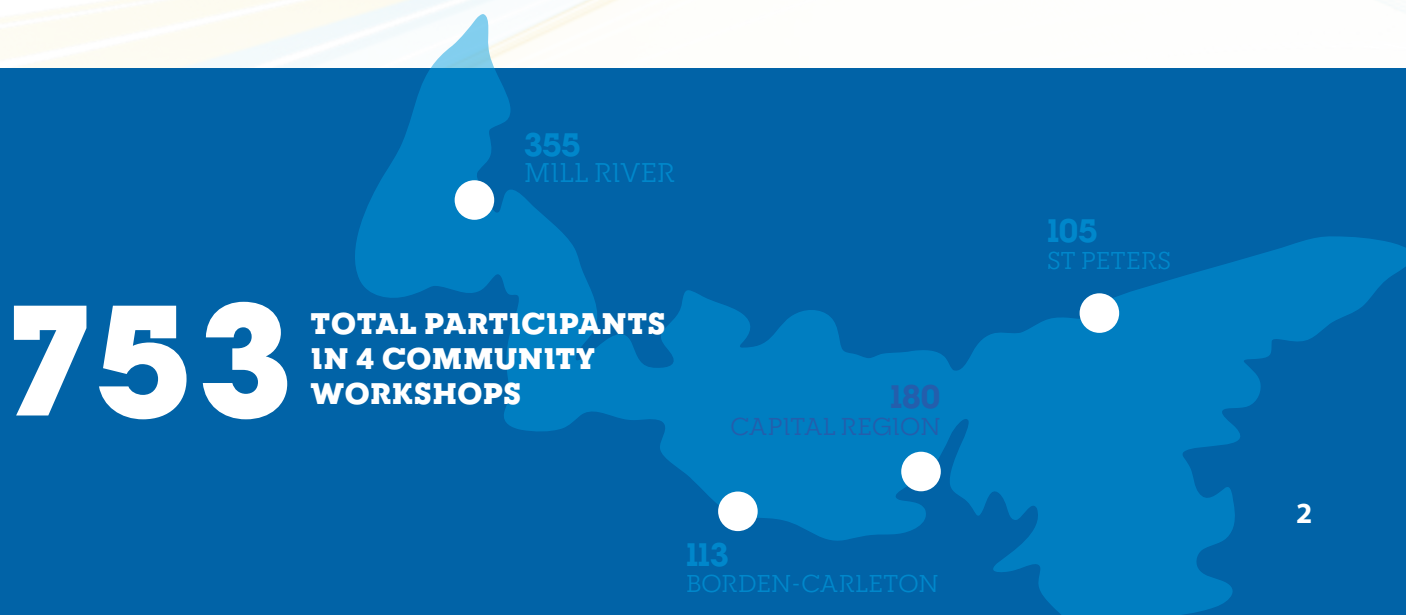
## Community Engagement Workshops

In addition to the online survey, the review process included four community engagement workshops hosted in strategic locations based on user group overlap and allowed Islanders across the province to participate in the process: Mill River, Borden, the Capital Region, and St. Peters. These face-to-face sessions provided an opportunity for direct interaction with the local community. Participants were encouraged to sit with other user groups to engage in conversations about common and divergent interests by expressing their views, sharing personal experiences, and engaging in constructive discussions about the Confederation Trail. This proved to be instrumental in capturing nuanced perspectives by fostering a sense of community and empowering people to feel included in the decision-making process for the future of the trail system.

## Submissions

Individuals and organizations across PEI were also invited to write submissions speaking to their views and experiences around the use of the Confederation Trail. This open call for written input allowed for more detailed and in-depth contributions. People were able to articulate their opinions more comprehensively and speak to a range of topics, from proposed new access for user groups to specific trail features. Additionally, they identified broader suggestions or concerns for overall improvement and safety measures.

The volume of feedback collected through the three modes highlights the connection Islanders have to this historical trail system. The insights gathered will be vital in informing the review's recommendations and ultimately contributing to the development of a user-focused trail management strategy.



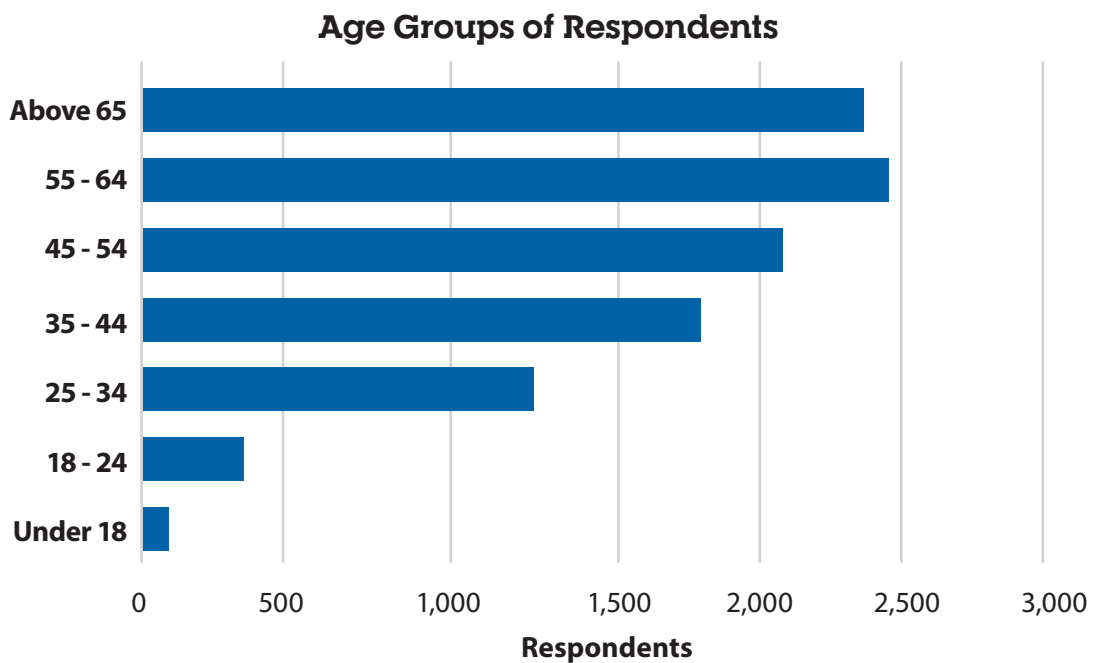
# Online Survey

## Survey Responses

Complete	5,744
Incomplete*	5,806
<b>Total Response</b>	<b>11,550</b>

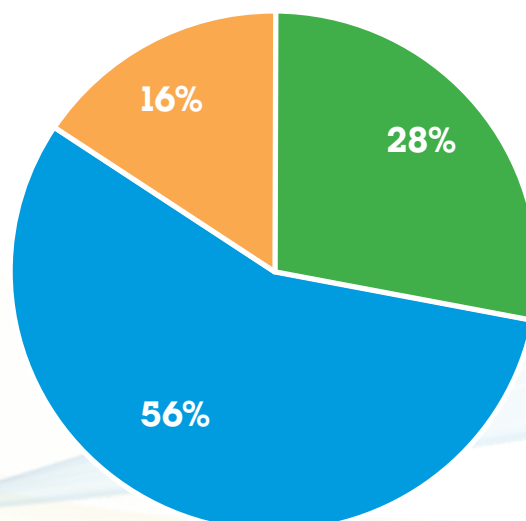
*\*Incomplete responses were not accounted for in the following report as they could not be verified to ensure it was not a duplicate survey response*

## Overview of Respondents of Completed Survey Results



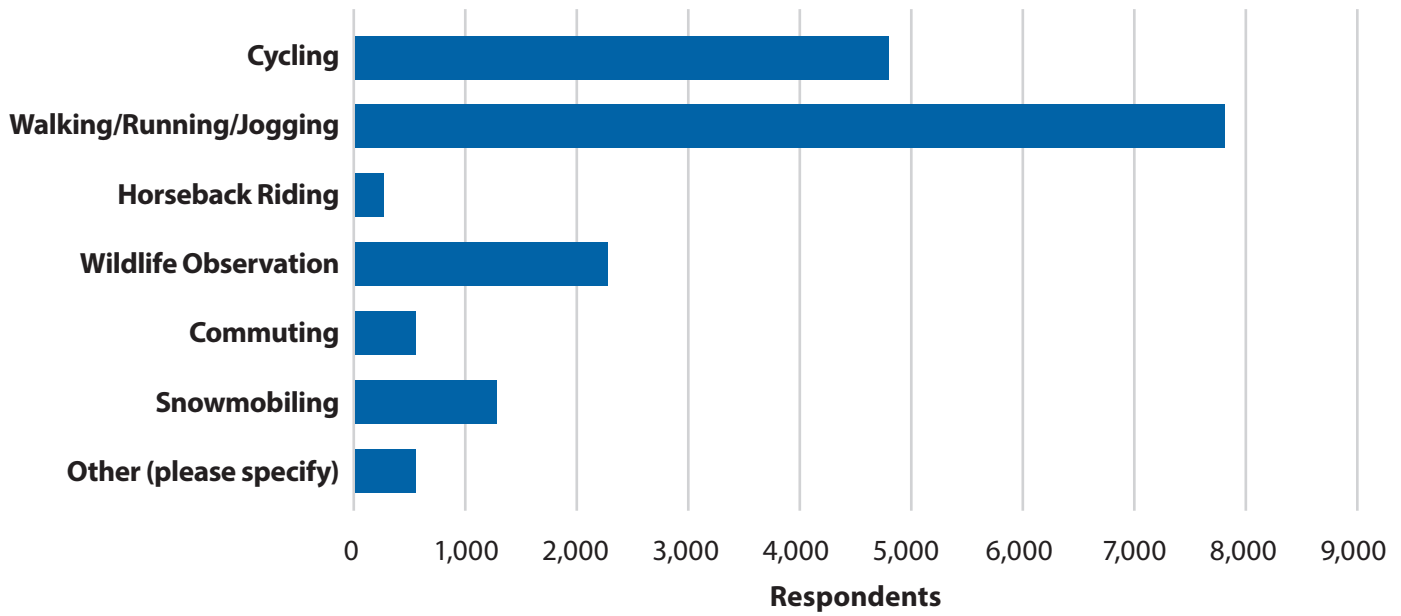
## Regional Representation of Respondents

Prince County    Queens County    Kings County



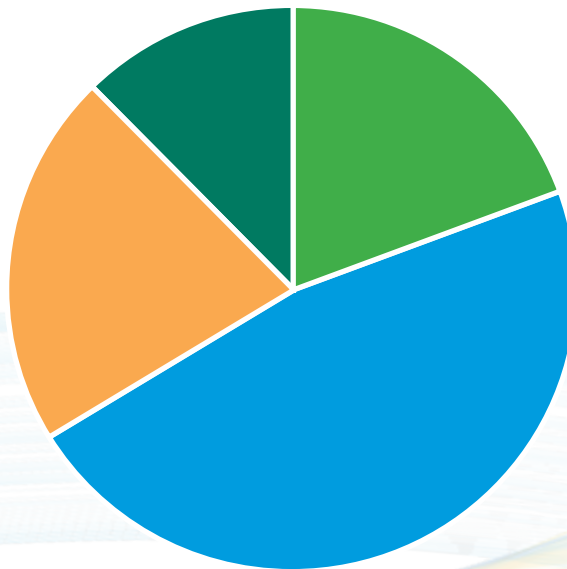


### Primary Use of the Confederation Trail



### How Often Respondents use the Confederation Trail

■ Daily ■ Weekly ■ Monthly ■ Rarely



## Confederation Trail Guiding Principles Feedback

Participants were asked to agree or disagree with the proposed Guiding Principles to assist in the development of values for the current and future use of the Confederation Trail. Guiding Principles provide a framework for future decisions regarding user groups and determine the values for the Confederation Trail.

### GUIDING PRINCIPLE

## Safety and Well-being

- a. Prioritize the safety and well-being of all trail users by regularly assessing and maintaining trail conditions, signage, and facilities.
- b. Promote responsible trail behaviour and provide educational materials on safety measures and user encounters.



### FEEDBACK

*"I think it's important that the trail is safe for all users. I'd like to see it remain free of motorized vehicles to ensure the safety of walkers, runners, cyclists, and horseback riders. The tranquillity and peacefulness of the trail would also be seriously negatively impacted if ATVs and dirt bikes were allowed access to the trail. I'd also be strongly in favour of snowmobile use of the trail to be ended, so it can be utilized by walkers, cross-country skiers, and snowshoers in the winter months."*

*"If you do not police the trails and maintain all areas of the trail, it would just create chaos."*

*"Safety is an issue and users don't stay to the right and pass on the left. Some bikers use the trail as a racetrack. They are at top speed when passing walkers. They should have a bell to ring as a warning. A friend was seriously injured as a result of speed and lack of a bell. When biking, I ring nearing walkers. Thank yous are mostly given."*



## GUIDING PRINCIPLE

### Environmental Stewardship and Conservation

- a. Prioritize protecting and conserving natural habitats, flora, and fauna along the Confederation Trail.
- b. Promote practices that minimize the ecological footprint of trail construction, maintenance, and use.
- c. Collaborate with environmental organizations to conduct regular assessments and adopt measures to mitigate any negative impact on the environment.



## FEEDBACK

*"The stewardship principles outlined will help to maintain the trail in its current, pristine state for people to enjoy into the future. This is an incredibly valuable resource for people but also as a corridor of nature for conservation purposes."*

*"Maintaining the ecological integrity of the trail is an essential expression of our civil society. The quiet and peaceful walk or cycle trips are an energizing relief from the noise and busyness of life all around it. Few jurisdictions have an asset that provides such solace and tranquility that stretches from one end of the province to the other. I believe it is one of most valuable public assets in Prince Edward Island. The park like tranquility of the trail system needs to remain and enforced against what appears to be growing disrespect and abuse."*

## GUIDING PRINCIPLE

### Sustainable Development and Planning

- a. Encourage sustainable development alongside the trail that aligns with local community needs and enhances economic vitality.
- b. Involve local stakeholders in planning to ensure community input, considering long-term sustainability and cultural preservation.
- c. Implement and adhere to zoning and land use policies that safeguard the trail and its surroundings from incompatible development.



## FEEDBACK

*"Communities should be involved in the long-term use of the trail in their area as long as the trail is protected from commercialization. Communities would be better able to identify areas for improvement for the local riders and can also provide great input for tourism opportunities within their boundaries that would benefit from an offshoot from the trail within their limits."*

*"More should be done to encourage ATVing development alongside the trail so communities can benefit from economic revenue they bring in."*

## GUIDING PRINCIPLE

### Community Engagement and Collaboration

- a. Actively involve local communities, Indigenous communities, and stakeholders in decision-making processes related to the trail's development, upkeep, and events.
- b. Establish partnerships with community organizations to plan events, maintenance, and educational programs that foster a sense of ownership and pride among local residents.
- c. Facilitate opportunities for cultural events, interpretive signage, and educational workshops to promote understanding and appreciation of the trail's historical and cultural significance.



## FEEDBACK

*"There is so much potential for partnerships with Parks Canada, Canadian Heritage, provincial and municipal organizations and groups to enliven the trail through interpretation and cultural offerings."*

*"I think the ATV clubs on PEI proved over the years how to create and maintain trails so I think they would do a great job helping out with Confederation Trail."*

## GUIDING PRINCIPLE

### Preservation of Cultural Heritage

- a. Recognize and respect the historical, cultural, and spiritual significance of the Confederation Trail to indigenous peoples and local communities.
- b. Collaborate with Indigenous groups and local communities to interpret and preserve cultural heritage, incorporating appropriate signage, artwork, and educational programs.



## FEEDBACK

*"I think it is a stretch to fit it in everywhere. I think the nature aspects of the trail should be emphasized with the cultural aspects strengthened within the communities along the trail."*

*"We can all learn more about each other if there were signage and markers on the trail to note significant information about each community or culture."*



## GUIDING PRINCIPLE

### Inclusivity and Accessibility

- a. Ensure the Confederation Trail is accessible to all individuals, including those with diverse abilities and needs.
- b. Design and maintain the trail to accommodate various forms of recreation, transportation, and cultural experiences for a wide range of users.
- c. Promote inclusivity through educational initiatives and outreach programs that raise awareness of accessibility requirements and encourage respectful usage.



## FEEDBACK

*"The statement 'Ensure the Confederation Trail is accessible to all individuals ..' needs to include access to everyone all year around including during the winter months. It is ridiculous that the trail is restricted to all but snowmobilers during the winter months. It's like an open invitation to anyone who wants to drag race their machines through a dark path and have no limits or rules placed on them. There is no reason that skiers and snowshoers shouldn't be allowed on the trail in the winter, it just means snowmobilers would need to adhere to some speed limits and respect other people that are on the trail. And listening to snowmobiles all through the night as they race back and forth on the trails and through people's fields takes away from other people's enjoyment of the environment."*

*"People with disabilities and challenges have just as much right to enjoy the scenery and outdoor experiences as everyone else."*



## What People Love About the Confederation Trail

The feedback regarding the Confederation Trail overwhelmingly highlighted its well-maintained infrastructure, contributing to an enjoyable experience across many user groups. Many praised the trail for providing a peaceful escape, allowing individuals to unwind and enjoy the beauty of nature in an easily accessible space.

"I like the portions of the trails that are deeper in the woods, where there are streams and the bridges are wonderful. The picnic tables placed along the trail are great for stopping for a break."

"Mainly that they are safe from motorized vehicles. Of course, I also enjoy the views and aesthetics they provide with trees, farmland and other flora and fauna."

"The fact that it is an extensive trail system connecting to various communities. I also very much appreciate the interpretative panels that are currently set up and would encourage more of this. I also appreciate how clean it is."

## Suggestions for the Confederation Trail

Through the online survey, the most common responses came when asking what improvements could be made to the Confederation Trail.

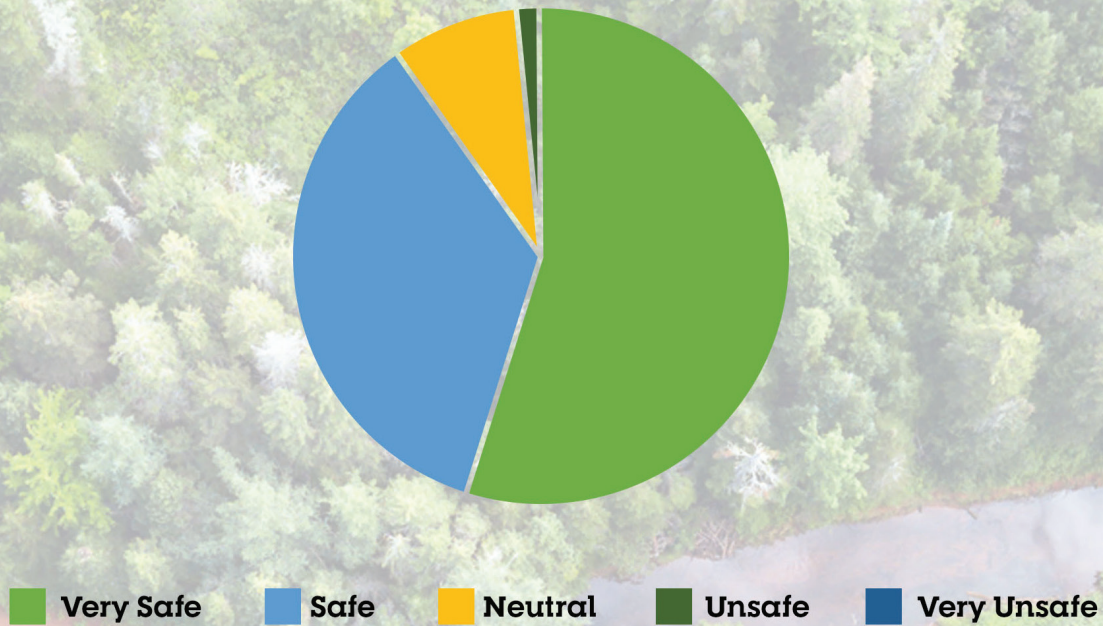
These suggestions included:

- Provide garbage/recycling/compost cans and poop-bag dispensers
- Develop more access to washrooms
- Install more hydration stations
- Allocate more segments of the trail for horseback riding
- Additional seating
- Improve signage and mile markers
- Maps showing the distance to communities
- Improve parking
- Improve or change the entrance and crossing gates
- Increased solar lighting
- Enhance access for Islanders to the trail year-round
- Develop additional accommodations or campsites close to the trail
- Enforce trail etiquette education and develop speed limits
- Groom trails and provide winter access for snowshoeing and cross-country skiing
- Increase access and visibility of police and trail patrol

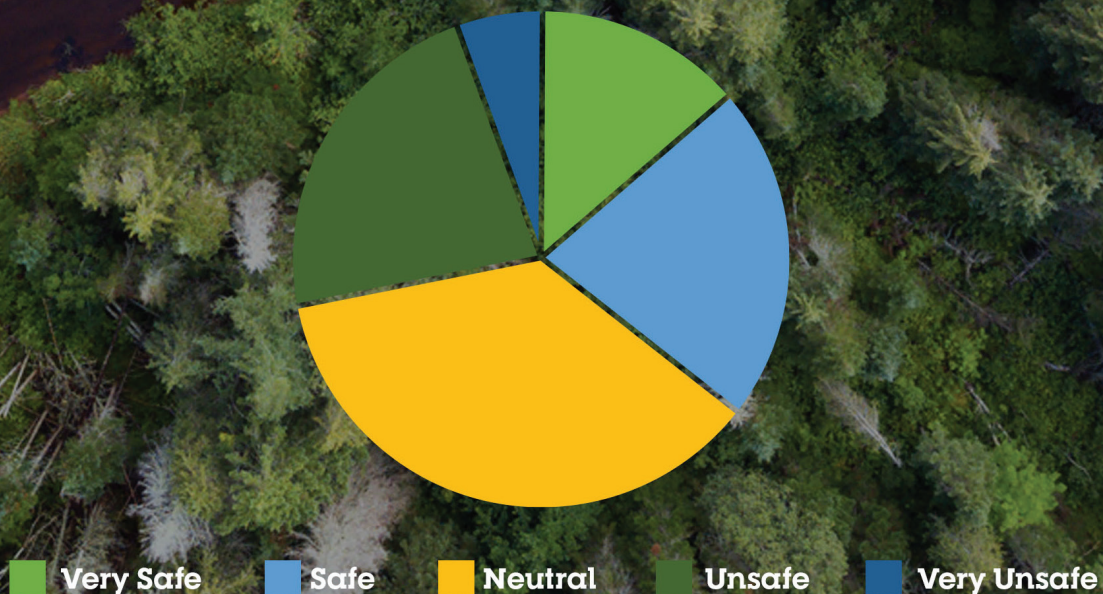
During the four workshops, participants provided feedback on how allowing ATVs on all or certain parts of the Confederation Trail would allow riders to access more of the province. Alternatively, other participants highlighted their concerns about safety and the environment if ATVs were allowed access to the Confederation Trail.



## How safe do you feel using the Confederation Trail during the day?



## How safe do you feel using the Confederation Trail during the night?





"I hope that more segments will become accessible to equestrians. I would love to see designated parking for horse trailers, which require a fair amount of space and a safe place to unload. I would also love to see, at designated equestrian parking, a mounting block."

"You should also invest in making the trail safer by installing emergency phone systems as well as some lights and lamps in key places to extend the number of hours in a day that people can use it. This is also a question of accessibility. I would also encourage you to add some garbage, recycling and composting bins along the trail as I have not seen any yet. There may be some, but certainly not enough from what I can see."

"Safety is very important in terms of conditions on the trail and for a sense of security for users. Sometimes when using the trail, there are few people there and may be in a dead zone in terms of cell coverage if one were to have an accident - bike goes off-trail, etc."

### **Discussion on New Users**

"Seems the Snowmobile Association has a good understanding of how to maintain the trail, perhaps if others follow suit - the Horse Association example to engage and share costs associated with using and managing the trail could be a good fit. Perhaps some of the other running and biking event coordinators could also pay in this overall goal of ensuring the trail is safe, accessible, and free of use by all."

"The Confederation Trail is currently underutilized, with limited foot traffic. Opening it to equestrian use can revitalize this valuable resource, offering not only a place for horseback riding but also an avenue for healthy, outdoor activities."

"A large collection of signage that tells people on horseback or on ATVs to stay off of the trail. No one wants to share it with these groups. They've shown time and time again that they do not respect nature to the extent that they express they do. They consistently tear up the ground, leave droppings or garbage, and scare the hell out of everyone else trying to use the trails or other nature pathways (for ATVs). People with these lavish toys can surely afford to go elsewhere that is strictly designated for their recreational activities."

"Yes ...access to the trail in winter for use by everyone..not just snowmobiles... Would love to be able to use it for fat tire biking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing etc."

"Should be open to all ... horses, walkers, runners, ATVs, snowmobiles. We teach our kids to share.... Yet as adults, we think certain things should be dedicated to certain groups."

# Community Engagement Workshops

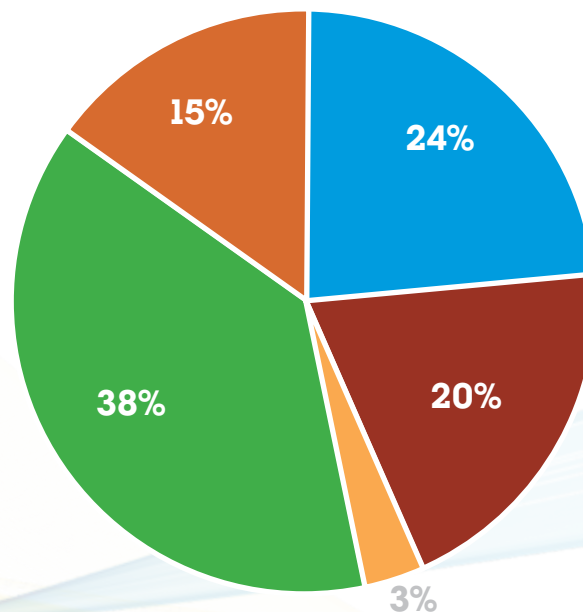
The four locations chosen for community engagement sessions were carefully selected areas that currently showcase a high overlap across different user groups. The sessions encouraged participants to openly express their perspectives, facilitating the exchange of concerns and areas for improvement related to the Confederation Trail among various user groups.

The workshops were structured to provide table seating for participants. Discussions focused on learning from each other, safety precautions, observed trail etiquette during group interactions, and future opportunities to improve the Confederation Trail. Feedback from participants was gathered through notes and a worksheet.

Location	Activities Checked:					Attendees:
	Walk/Run	Bike	Equestrian	ATV	Snowmobile	Total
<b>Borden</b>	30	27	9	84	38	<b>113</b>
<b>Mill River</b>	72	44	16	318	92	<b>355</b>
<b>St Peters</b>	61	51	6	60	38	<b>105</b>
<b>Stratford</b>	152	140	8	46	34	<b>180</b>

**Participants' Activities in Workshops**

■ Walk/Run 
 ■ Bike 
 ■ Equestrian 
 ■ ATV 
 ■ Snowmobile





## THEMES FROM COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT WORKSHOPS

### Safety and Trail Etiquette

- ATVs do not feel safe on the side of roads or highways
- Presence of horse manure on trails and horses being skittish when interacting with other user groups
- There should be no earbuds on the trail to ensure that all users are aware of their surroundings and can hear other users
- ATVs should not be allowed to access the Confederation Trail, but crossings should be permitted but visible, well-maintained and safe to connect current and future ATV trails
- Walkers and cyclists stated that if ATVs were allowed access to the Confederation Trail, they would stop using it to protect their health and safety
- Enforcement of trail etiquette and safety is inadequate for current users and highlighted the need for additional resources if new users groups were added
- If ATVs were allowed, concern about the size and weight of side by sides
- ATV ruts in the winter can cause safety concerns for snowmobiles
- Alcohol and other substance use on the Confederation Trail and crossings should be addressed
- Dogs should be kept on leash at all times to ensure the safety of other users and wildlife
- Larger trailheads and shift gates for safety
- Clarity required on the jurisdiction and resources for monitoring and enforcement of trail rules and crossings

### Why Users Enjoy the Confederation Trail

- Peace and quiet enjoyment
- Nature and wildlife
- Rural views
- Well-maintained trail system
- Accessibility for users with mobility issues
- Safety from ATVs and motorized vehicles
- Ability to travel tip-to-tip
- Minimal signage and visual clutter, tree canopy, visual and physical space
- Reducing fumes and greenhouse gases through non-motorized activity
- Mental health and community
- Safe and peaceful place to ride horses away from motorized vehicles

## Future Development

- Access to washrooms, water and areas for seating/eating
- A shared trail for all users, including ATVs and horses, to access the Confederation Trail
- Safety training and trail etiquette courses for members provided by all recreational organizations
- Licenses should be considered for any user of a motorized recreational vehicle
- Balance the need for trails to connect the network of established trails and protect wetlands and sensitive ecosystems
- Speed limit and guard rails
- Better signage for distance to basic services and further education signage for trail etiquette
- Support the development of a network of trails suited for ATVs and wide enough for side by sides to cross each other safely
- Concern over the increase in cost to maintain the trail if ATVs and horses are allowed access to the Confederation Trail
- Maintain limitation to non-motorized vehicles in the spring, summer and fall
- Different users could have access to the Confederation Trail at different seasons or times of the day. Alternatively, different sections of the Confederation Trail could be segmented for certain types of users
- Use in winter for walking/cross-country/skiing/fat biking
- More lights for nighttime use in more heavily used areas
- Potential for dedicated cross-country skiing areas
- ATV riders would like the ability to travel on the Confederation or a dedicated tip to tip ATV trail
- ATV access to portions of the Confederation Trail to connect the current network of trails



# Written Email Submissions

Residents and organizations were encouraged to send in written submissions as part of the engagement process. The 174 submissions reviewed for this report (received by email and mail to the Department and Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure) do not include emails or calls directly to Members of the Legislature Assembly.

The following organizations provided written submissions:

- PEI Trail Riders
- Rural Municipality of Wellington
- Island Trails
- Belfast Area Watershed Group
- SAFE Summerside
- PEI Active Transportation Working Group
- PEI ATV Federation
- Western Region Sport and Recreation Council
- O'Leary Recreational ATV Club

## Safety Concerns with New User Groups

Residents and organizations highlighted that the Confederation Trail is one of the only places on the Island to ride and walk safely, for health, wellness, and active transportation, without motorized vehicles. Their safety concerns highlighted the increased risks of trail damage caused by ATVs and horses, and cited the potential for injury to cyclists and walkers.

Many said that the trail system is not wide enough to pass other users safely if ATVs or horses are included in all areas. Coinciding with these concerns is that ATV riders and others highlighted their own safety concerns for ATVs without off-road dedicated trails.

Walkers are concerned about the speed of cyclists and their trail etiquette, as some cyclists pass on the right and travel at inappropriate speeds. The need for trail etiquette for walking and cycling was a reoccurring issue.

“Presently, the Confederation Trail is the ONLY safe place on PEI to walk. This is the only place I feel safe walking. It is the only place I feel it is safe for my clients to walk. It is very important for my clients with PTSD from accidents to feel safe while exercising.” - Peter Pierre, Clinical Psychologist.

For winter use, the primary concern is if ATVs are permitted year-round access, there would be a substantial increase in accidents across user groups. Also, if walkers, snowshoers and cross-country skiers are granted winter trail access, there would be additional safety hazards related to snowmobile use.



## Health and Wellness

Submissions highlighted that if new user groups were able to access the Confederation Trail, that could detract use from walkers, runners and cyclists. Using the trail is a low-barrier activity for Islanders as there is no cost, and it is close to many communities tip-to-tip. Many felt that there were opportunities for the government to partner with health and recreation organizations to promote and support the use of the Confederation Trail for further physical activity and mental health benefits.

“In my work as an Emergency Physician at the QEH, I often “prescribe” exercise as a treatment for many mental and physical conditions. The Confederation Trail is free and available for all to use. At a time when major contributors to poor physical and/or mental health in Island residents are obesity, sedentary lifestyle, and excess screen time, it seems particularly important that the Confederation Trail be kept free of motorized vehicles.” Joanne McGinn, Emergency Physician, QEH.

ATV riders highlighted the benefits of getting into nature and community connectedness by increasing access to the Confederation Trails to link established ATV trails tip-to-tip.

## Trail Maintenance and Improvements

Islanders recognize that the Confederation Trail is currently very well maintained. There are concerns about the impact that heavy motorized machines will have on the surface area of the trail.

From the existing trail pilot project with horse riding, users did note hoof marks and droppings being left on or near the trail.

“Our confidence that horseback riders belong on the Confederation Trail has always been based on a foundation of evidence and experience, including trail design specifications, trail manager statements from the Maritimes and across Canada, and documented findings during the 2021 and 2022 pilot projects. The Confederation Trail is exactly the type of trail that has been proven to work well for shared equestrian access.” - PEI Trail Riders Association

The potential of opening the Confederation Trail to all users would increase the maintenance costs. In addition to this, it was noted that not all areas of the trail have surface construction that can be easily graded on a regular basis.

ATV users suggested that if access was expanded, ATV riders could be required to purchase a permit, and the revenue could be used to offset increased maintenance costs.

“Despite claims to the contrary, ATV use would reduce trail accessibility. In addition to the risks of collisions, they cause widespread damage to the trail surface. This would reduce the accessibility of the trail. A quality, smooth trail is key to use by wheelchair users and those with other mobility challenges.”

Submissions recognized the need for ATV crossings but indicated that would require improved signage and policies around quantity and the frequency of signage markers. Other areas for improvement were based on infrastructure and included: better signage for all user groups, washrooms, access to bike rentals, picnic tables and exercise stations.

The idea of a parallel or complementary ATV trail was provided as a solution to increasing the trail system for ATVs without impacting the Confederation Trail's current user groups.

"[H]appy to see a "grade separated" parallel/nearby Dept. of Transportation funded ATV trail to provide connectivity between ATV clubs to allow ATVs to enjoy long-distance riding from tip-to-tip of the province. This ATV-only trail could use a combination of widened roadway shoulders, unpaved roads, renting strips of existing field edges, purpose-built parallel trails through woods, and possibly purpose-built bridges to allow ATVs to have dedicated safe running while keeping their impacts away from the more delicate and fragile Confederation Trail surface."

## **Environmental Considerations**

Islanders highlighted the commitment of the Department of Environment, Energy and Climate Action to reach Net Zero by 2040. Submissions underscored the need to promote decarbonized recreational activities and not increase emissions through the promotion of motorized sports on PEI.

There is a need to look at and promote the ecological health of the trail and take opportunities to encourage more biodiversity. Many highlighted that the Confederation Trail has been identified as a greenway and should be protected from development that is not aligned with nature conservation.

"It is imperative to ensure the long-term plan prioritizes the ecological sustainability of the trail. The governance of this project must collaborate with environmental experts to assess the impact of trail use on local flora and fauna. In this way, you will implement measures to protect and enhance the natural environment."

## **Tourism Development**

There were advantages to the tourism sector from both user groups for various reasons. On one hand, the enhancement of ATV trails could significantly contribute to PEI's tourism potential. The Island's picturesque coastal and countryside landscapes could provide a unique network of trails for visitors to experience, creating opportunities for local businesses to cater to the ATV community, such as rentals, guided tours, and lodging establishments, thus boosting the overall tourism economy.

On the other hand, dedicating resources to further develop walking and cycling trails and ensuring that users of the Confederation Trail would not encounter motorized vehicles could tap into a different segment of the tourism market. Many tourists prefer a more leisurely way to explore the beauty of a destination, as already witnessed with tours of the Confederation Trail and the Island Walk.

"This year, I went to PEI to do the Island Walk with my husband. We are from New York. We spent 5 weeks in PEI, walked over 300 miles, stayed in hotels and B&Bs, and spent a lot of money. It was peaceful and quiet on the Confederation Trail. We enjoyed it so much that we planned to return with our bikes and do the Island Walk route on our bikes. If there were ATVs on the Confederation Trail, we would not come back to PEI." Carol Morley, New York



## Conclusion and Next Steps

The overarching theme from the responses received is that with the potential introduction of new user groups, it is imperative to prioritize and assess the safety of the most vulnerable users first and foremost.

The enthusiasm shared by both Islanders and visitors towards the Confederation Trail was evident through the numerous responses and active participation in workshops. This public infrastructure seamlessly connects the entire Island tip-to-tip, providing a safe space for physical exercise, sports, recreation, and moments of peace and tranquillity.

The design and construction of the Confederation Trail have transformed it into a global gem, offering a delightful experience for walkers, cyclists and snowmobilers.

The upcoming phase of the project will involve research of best practices for trail development and etiquette from other jurisdictions. The final report will provide insights into the current state and offer guidelines and principles for the Confederation Trail. These recommendations will be based on the feedback gathered during the consultations, ensuring a well-informed and inclusive approach to trail usage.

