

Atlantic Provinces Transportation Forum

Summary of Break-Out Group Responses

During the transportation forum, participants got the chance to discuss relevant issues in a small group setting. They were asked to consider three questions on the synopsis forms. The responses to these group break-out sessions are valuable, diverse and constructive. Participants were asked to answer three questions, the first of which was “What do you consider the most pressing transportation issue facing the Province?” A prevalent answer to this question was a need for improvements in infrastructure. Almost half of the responses to this question were regarding the quality, or lack thereof in some cases, of infrastructure in Newfoundland and Labrador. While there is some concern for servicing and replacing vessels and the marine fleet, the majority of these responses focused on roads. Not only are there suggestions for repairs, upgrades and maintenance of roads and highways but also using roads to connect the province. This includes not only connectivity between the island portion of Newfoundland and Labrador and a fixed link, but also road access to isolated communities. Several groups mentioned that completion of the Trans Canada Highway would be a step towards connectivity, suggesting more federal commitment and the possibility of cost sharing.

Another pressing issue that is frequently mentioned is the need for a Provincial transportation strategy. The absence of a general port strategy throughout the province is a concern and there is a need for coordination and leadership. One group calls for a study or vision on improving the transportation network. Many others say there is a need for more government involvement in the Atlantic Gateway strategy. Through interdepartmental communication and consultation, one group suggests creating a transportation strategy and initiatives that would aggregate all of the issues for Newfoundland and Labrador.

This issue of cost is also a recurring response to this question. Many participants are concerned about gas pricing and fuel costs and the effect this has on travel. The high cost of travel within the Province is brought up numerous times with specific mention of the cost of a plane ticket from Labrador to Newfoundland. The cost of travelling outside the Province is also mentioned both by air and water. There are also some responses about the transportation costs for exports to international markets and the cost of getting our goods to the market in a timely manner.

Of course, these are only a few of the concerns mentioned in the break-out session synopsis forms. Some other responses mentioned the impact on industry development, Newfoundland and Labrador’s ability to compete with bigger US ports, and the possibility of a super port. However, the three above issues came up over and over and therefore it is clear that infrastructure, strategy, and cost are matters of importance.

The second question discussed is “What are the opportunities for this Province from the Atlantic Gateway?” There are several reoccurring opportunities listed in response to this question, ranging from short sea shipping to other gateways to what this means for tourism. Several groups simply jotted down short sea shipping as a major potential opportunity for the Province. Just as important is the access to other markets a gateway would bring. Several answers mention access to global, international, European, and US markets. One group even suggests a transshipment port based out of Argentia to serve the US East Coast. Along with this access comes the opportunity to find international partners for economic development. There were also many other suggestions for additional gateways including a port in Smart Bay, Labrador as an Atlantic gateway, and a gateway to Nunavut. The idea for an energy port in Argentia is also suggested. Two groups mentioned that Newfoundland and Labrador has the land and warehouse space to store products for a short time ,while Halifax and ports in British Columbia. must keep their freight moving, as they have no space to hold it. Halifax has limited capacity, which opens up an opportunity for Newfoundland.

One of the most popular answers to this question was what the Atlantic Gateway would mean for Newfoundland and Labrador locally. These responses mentioned opportunities in for business, education, and tourism. Opportunities for spill-over business and specialized services such as maintenance, recruiting, staffing, and ship building were addressed. On group mentions that there is potential for shared economic benefits and/or spin-off if everyone works together rather than against one another. This spin-off opportunity is brought up again in terms of increased employment and keeping our expertise at home. These opportunities for Newfoundland and Labrador would allow for potential to service the marine fleet and to increase the Province’s manufacturing sector. A Gateway would also create jobs at the new port facilities. These are business opportunities pointed out by the groups. There was also mention of the tourism opportunities this would bring along the Labrador coast and also what this would mean for the Marine Institute. Additional courses, students, and educational opportunities were all cited.

Again, infrastructure frequented the list of opportunities. Similar to the previous question, the Atlantic Gateway would allow Newfoundland and Labrador to invest more into the improvement of infrastructure, creating value-added infrastructure, and building new multi-model facilities. There was more mention of improving the shipping infrastructure with a couple of comments about repair and servicing ships.

While many ideas for opportunities were proposed, there was also an underlying concern as to how to turn these opportunities into realities, there is a need to be forward thinking. A need to be future proofing and to be prepared and have things in place, as one group puts it.

The third question asked to the groups is “What transportation solutions will improve the Province’s competitive position in participating in the Atlantic Gateway? What action needs to be taken, including policy research? Who should take the action?” Once again, infrastructure improvement is a frequent answer. Air, sea, land and both rural and urban infrastructure were all mentioned. Suggestions included spending more money on roads, several groups listed the

completion of the Trans Canada Highway, and five groups listed a fixed link to Labrador. Another suggestion is the provision of infrastructure for trans-shipping ports and groups feel that overall infrastructure investment should be done by the government.

The most popular answer to this question was the need to develop a strategy. Some ideas include a progressive fiscal regime, two groups mentioned changes to cabotage policies, and reviewing the existing frameworks and gateways. Another thought brought up is to conduct a review of the tax structure as it relates to all aspects of transportation with the objective of making Atlantic Provinces competitive with US jurisdictions. To work towards a developed strategy, many groups agree that all levels of government and industry must work together with stakeholders and think tanks. Following from this idea of co-operation and consultation, there were also several responses suggesting the involvement of manufacturing industries. To do this, two groups suggest that the provincial government needs input on manufacturing/road transportation, and transportation in general, from manufacturers in Newfoundland and their transportation challenges. Another idea is to create tax incentives/advantages for manufacturing firms. Again, this would require a joint planning committee composed of government, industry, carriers, and shippers.

Not only is there an urge to involve manufacturers but there were also several items regarding partnership opportunities. Maximizing existing partnerships and creating new partnerships, especially globally, was mentioned. In addition, there are a couple of groups who believe that there is a need for a big private sector partner, citing Oceanex as an example. One group even wrote that the private sector should take the lead.

Within the answers to these three questions, there are several reoccurring themes. The need for infrastructure improvements, with a focus on roads, and a developed strategy are clearly priorities for the participants. Comments, suggestions, and criticisms regarding these issues appear in the answers to all three questions. It is important to consider all responses and work towards turning ideas into actions and results. Many groups agree that co-operation between all levels of government and all stakeholders is needed to make this happen.