

National Trails Coalition Pre-Budget Submission to the Commons Standing Committee on Finance

Executive Summary

This brief to the Commons Standing Committee on Finance is both an update on the success of our previous partnership with the Government of Canada and a look at what is possible in the future with a continued investment of taxpayer dollars and partner dollars to strengthen rural & northern economies.

The injection of \$25 million into Canada's trails sector by the Government of Canada in the 2009-2010 Economic Action Plan (EAP) was a resounding success triggering over \$56.5 million invested to create, upgrade and sustain trail infrastructure in all parts of the country. Of particular significance is the speed at which the trail sector from the community to the provincial to the national level, mobilized to meet the challenge issued to it by the government – create jobs, build infrastructure and complete projects within one fiscal year.

Regardless of what comes next in the life of this partnership the government deserves credit for the direct and indirect benefits that its faith in the National Trails Coalition (NTC) has generated and the legacy that it will leave. Post-partnership audits and program reviews have confirmed that the funds were used for the intended purpose and that 474 projects were completed according to the program criteria. Employment for over 4,701 people was created and over 20,128 kilometres of trail were built, upgraded or rehabilitated.

The success of this public-private partnership demonstrates what is possible when the Government of Canada chooses to target relatively small amounts of financial resources to rural and northern communities – a modest investment provides a stimulus for continued economic growth for many years to come. An investment in trails is an investment in healthy living; safer recreation; better environmental management and education; community development; economic activity; and employment.

The dollars committed during the election campaign can build on the progress to date by keeping the primary focus of the partnership on pure infrastructure development while permitting the partnership with the NTC to make advances in other areas, namely designing a capital program to ensure that trail managers have the equipment they need to properly sustain existing and new trails; and operating expenditures to permit the promotion of Canada's trails both within Canada and around the world.

Trails: A Vehicle for Long Term Job Creation in Rural and Northern Canada

When the NTC told the Government of Canada that it could build infrastructure, create jobs and provide a long term platform from which ongoing economic activity can occur it delivered in the following ways:

By the Numbers

- 474 projects were funded out of over 500 applications from across Canada.
- The program created employment for over 4,701 people.
- 85% of these program dollars were spent in rural Canada. The majority of projects were in primarily rural and northern communities, areas that are often overlooked by larger scale infrastructure programs.

Unprecedented Benefits

- Building critical organizational capacity at the provincial and community level by having small organizations deliver important projects in their communities, thus making them stronger and better able to contribute to the communities in which they operate.
- The concept of “multi-use” was embraced by previously adversarial trail disciplines – working together pays higher dividends than working at cross purposes. Additional public benefits are realized when trails are built for shared-use in terms of an investment of public funds.
- A national program proved that coordinated trail development works on a nationwide basis.
- Small community trail groups met their 50% matching dollar obligation either on their own or with the assistance, in some cases, of municipalities, provinces & territories, First Nations, rural governments and economic development agencies, fundraising activities and personal donations.

When the NTC was formed four years ago it took a long term view of both the commitment required by the coalition partners and the degree of coordinated investment needed to improve community-based trail networks to ensure that multiple benefits are derived from them. Specifically, the NTC strives to achieve lasting benefits in these key areas:

Economic

- Diversify and expand economies across Canada, particularly those in rural and northern areas;

UNITED FOR A STRONGER TRAIL SYSTEM • UNIS POUR LE RENFORCEMENT DU RÉSEAU DE SENTIERS

201 Walter Havill Drive, Suite 309, Halifax, NS B3N 3J4 | Tel: 902-429-8810 | Fax: 902-429-0287 | Email: tnorman@ntc-canada.ca

English | www.ntc-canada.ca

French | www.cns-canada.ca

- Create and preserve tens of thousands of employment positions in the tourism, recreation and trail management sectors; and
- Take Canada's trail infrastructure to the next level by bringing sector participants together in partnership to establish a new national recreational product that can be promoted in Canada and abroad.

Tourism

- Expand and grow Canada's four-season tourism industry;
- Provide an exciting new tourism product that builds on existing tourism offerings; and
- Attract many new and diverse tourists and their spending to Canada.

Health, Well-being and Recreation

- Promote healthy and physically active outdoor lifestyle choices;
- Expand recreational opportunities where they do not currently exist or can be improved;
- Re-invigorate thousands of volunteers from coast-to-coast-to-coast; and
- Build recreational trails that are open to people of all ages, abilities, accessible, open year round;

Environmental Stewardship

- Trail development, use and maintenance must serve to protect the environment and natural heritage while facilitating human use and enjoyment;
- Trail building respects cultural and environmental sensitivities; and
- Contribute to an awareness and understanding of nature

Best Practices in Planning and Development

- Capitalize on the potential benefits of trails through good planning, development and maintenance; and
- Contribute to and share a knowledge base of best practices

Safety

- Promote effective trail design and maintenance that contribute to trail safety; and
- Promote appropriate training and use of safety equipment

UNITED FOR A STRONGER TRAIL SYSTEM • UNIS POUR LE RENFORCEMENT DU RÉSEAU DE SENTIERS

Patriotic

- Promote Canadian heritage through trail-based sports and recreational pursuits;
- Capitalize on the opportunity to elevate trails to the level of a national icon, such as the 2010 Olympic Torch run which used existing trails in many places, including the Trans Canada Trail, and the annual celebration of International Trails Day on the first Saturday in June;
- Promote a positive vision of Canada in the world community with respect to environmentally sound trail practices and outdoor tourism; and
- Involve Canadians in all provinces & territories in a unifying and unique project that instils pride in nation, region and community;

Partner Profile

- Enhance the profile of the federal government in the eyes of trail users;
- Improve organizational capacity of National Trails Coalition partners; and
- Provide an opportunity for the private sector to contribute to a national trails network and its associated benefits.

What the Future Holds

During the recent federal election only one party specifically mentioned trails in its platform:

IMPROVE AND EXPAND CANADA'S SNOWMOBILE AND RECREATIONAL TRAILS

The snowmobile was invented in Canada and, ever since, snowmobiling has been a hugely popular Canadian recreational activity.

Our Government has provided support to the National Trails Coalition for a national initiative to create and improve snowmobile and all-terrain-vehicle trails. To date our support has helped improve 500 trails across the country.

We will build on this accomplishment, through **additional funding for upgrades and new trails.**¹

It further committed to \$2.5 million per year over a four year period to improve and expand Canada's Snowmobile, all-terrain vehicle and non-motorized recreational Trails².

¹ *Stephen Harper's Low-Tax Plan for Jobs and Economic Growth, page 57*

² *Stephen Harper's Low-Tax Plan for Jobs and Economic Growth, page 65*

Three Recommendations

The NTC looks forward to working with the Minister of Finance and the Minister of State (Sport) on the details of how those funds can be used. The NTC recognizes the fiscal challenges faced by the Government of Canada and is grateful to have trails given such profile and prestige by being included in an election platform.

At this preliminary stage, the NTC wishes to enter into a discussion with the Government of Canada based on the following recommendations:

1. That the bulk of the program dollars committed by the government in its election platform be used for a subsequent round of infrastructure investment for trails that have national or regional significance.
2. That an operating component of the partnership be permitted to: (a) assist with regional, national and global promotion of Canada's trails and trail management practices; (b) facilitate annual conferences of Canada's trail managers to better coordinate their activities; and (c) commission an economic impact study to quantify the impact of the broader trail sector on the economy and well-being of Canadians. The NTC wishes to work with the federal government to design a cost-shared plan that permits the promotion of Canada's trails both within Canada and around the world.
3. That the core business of the partnership shall remain building, upgrading and sustaining trail infrastructure but flexibility should be added to accommodate important capital equipment investments necessary for the building and maintenance of trail infrastructure. The NTC believes more emphasis will be needed in the future to put the operative word "sustaining" into action – just as with road infrastructure, trail infrastructure requires a certain amount of labour and equipment applied to it to ensure that the investments made in the construction phase are maintained.