

CART Launch Panel Analysis

Event

Friday, February 9, 2024 – Halifax, NS

Climate Action Research for Transportation (CART) Network's Inaugural Research Showcase

Panel: Moving People as We Grow in the Wake of the Climate Crisis

Participants

- ❖ Moderator: Dr. Ahsan Habib (Scientific Director, CART Network and Director of DalTRAC)
- ❖ Speakers:
 - Tanya Davis (Vice President of the Nova Scotia Joint Regional Transportation Agency)
 - Shannon Miedema (Director of Environment and Climate Change, Halifax Regional Municipality)
 - Paul MacKinnon (Chief Executive Officer, Downtown Halifax Business Commission)
 - Leslie Taylor (Provincial Coordinator, Nova Scotia Community Transportation Network)
- ❖ Audience Members

Focus

Local leading industry experts, regulatory leaders, and prominent community members examined the importance of, and the strategies involved in amalgamating climate change and transportation to support sustainable communities. The discussion addressed key issues in, and the future of transit, growth, and environmental considerations for Nova Scotia.

Analysis

The panel reflected upon their expertise to discuss the significant role transportation plays in addressing climate change and fostering resilient communities across Nova Scotia. They emphasized the significance of climate action plans, regional collaboration, as well as public consultation by highlighting key strategies, challenges, and opportunities for sustainable transit and growth.

Opportunities for Public Engagement and Consultation

Panelists emphasized public engagement and consultation as the most integral part of supporting sustainable communities. Public engagement efforts include actions that ensure residents are informed, included, and listened to throughout the planning process.

Shannon Miedema articulated the importance of proper engagement for keeping communities safe during severe weather events or natural disasters. This discussion highlighted the need for strategies to overcome language barriers with newcomers to ensure their safety and understanding during these events.

Leslie Taylor advocated for proper and clear communication with communities and illustrated how residents can be vital to the planning process; communities can provide homegrown solutions to local issues, and these solutions can directly address their respective needs. Leslie also encouraged those with disabilities and mobility limitations to sit on council to help advocate for and push public transportation accessibility legislation forward.

Tanya Davis spoke on the psychology behind proper communication and engagement tactics. She noted the usefulness of a communications specialist when talking to a variety of target audiences.

Strengths in Climate Change Action and Clean Transportation

Current strengths regarding climate change and transportation include:

- 1) electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure implementation,
- 2) strong relationships between planning and supporting organizations, and
- 3) Halifax's central core design.

Shannon Miedema describes changes in the transportation sector of the Halifax Regional Municipality. The Municipality is increasing the number of public charging infrastructure, and the Halifax Regional Council is currently approving EV-related policies. Shannon also mentioned that the Halifax Regional Municipality has seen a rise in micromobility efforts in the last five years, mainly due to third-party e-scooter initiatives.

Tanya Davis described how large-scale changes can occur when cities communicate and work with non-governmental organizations. She noted the mutually beneficial relationships Halifax currently harbors with the airport, CN Rail, and the Port Authority.

Paul Mackinnon described how the dense layout of Halifax's downtown core of Halifax is a catalyst for transportation innovation. Halifax's iconic attractions (such as its waterfront, Central Library, and Citadel Hill) draw people to the city and act as a hub for tourists exploring Atlantic Canada. Paul noted that the success of Halifax's center is not in conjunction with an increase in parking spaces. To make this space attractive and easy to navigate, transit upgrades (rather than upgrades to personal car infrastructure) are needed in the Halifax core to move people and goods. Halifax has the correct mindset around mobility by attempting to limit GHG emissions from personal vehicle travel.

Challenges with Creating Climate Action and Innovative Transportation Systems

Climate action and transportation changes are negatively affected by:

- 1) resource and asset shortages,
- 2) the increase of the home-delivery transportation sector, and
- 3) the lack proper public transit services in rural communities.

Insufficient funding, the supply chain, and labour shortages prevent the region's climate action plan "HalifACT" from reaching its goals of decarbonizing Halifax. Labour shortages are heavily affecting the public transit sector as there is a need for more bus drivers to meet current demand and future transit aspirations. Concerning the supply chain, Shannon Miedema mentioned that due to a lack of available product, electric vehicles are being denied by automobile providers; this is especially frustrating as Halifax Regional Municipality has all the necessary plans and approvals to support these vehicles.

Leslie Taylor demonstrates that supply disparity also affects rural communities who do not have the same level of access to affordable transit, despite having the demand for it. She states that while traditional public transit services would not be feasible for isolated or rural communities, a flexible door-to-door service would be appropriate for the region. Door-to-door services can be too expensive and unsustainable for some communities. These services are not always accessible, which means that some door-to-door services do not address gaps in accessible rural transportation.

The increase in e-shopping post-pandemic has also challenged transportation and climate action. The demand for e-shopping has created a greater demand for delivery drivers. Paul Mackinnon explained how this trend has led to a higher frequency of delivery trucks providing direct deliveries to patrons. As larger vehicles strain road infrastructure, more road maintenance will be needed. Paul informed the audience that conversations have begun around taxing companies that drive delivery trucks in the city's urban core.

Future of Sustainable Transportation and Climate Change in Nova Scotia

Four main topics were highlighted regarding the future of sustainable transportation and climate change in Nova Scotia:

- 1) A higher-order transit system for Halifax,
- 2) An affordable rural Nova Scotia transit system,
- 3) Proper strategic development to avoid urban sprawl, and
- 4) More climate adaptation strategies.

Tanya Davis implored the vital need for an upgraded transit network that properly connects rural communities to the urban core (Halifax). Along with other panelists, Tanya implored how an equitable system would need to be both affordable and accessible.

Leslie Taylor also mentioned how adequate rural transit, an affordable door-to-door transit service between communities, is also a future solution. This transit system needs to be accessible to everyone, as mobility barriers are more detrimental in rural or remote areas. Additionally, mediator Ahsan Habib supported pooling resources, such as utilizing school buses during off-peak hours, to create a practicable system.



Paul Mackinnon noted for residential development, a strategic technique is currently needed to support a system that prevents urban sprawl; housing solutions should involve policies that prioritize the infill and intensification of the downtown core.

Shannon Miedema emphasized how essential climate adaptation strategies are needed today, especially due to the increase in extreme weather events. Critical infrastructure protection plans, including collaboration with private owners to ensure that strategies encompass all sectors, will be crucial in determining the most vulnerable assets. While there has been more community engagement regarding climate change, Shannon advocates for continuing community education and preparation.

Conclusion

The panel described the importance of public consultation, collaboration, creative thinking, accessibility, and social justice regarding sustainable transportation and climate change in Nova Scotia. All panelists contributed by offering insight into how their respective positions support environmental action. They also engaged with the audience, answering pressing questions and noting potential solutions that should be considered.