

Celtic Shores Coastal Trail

Are you ready for trail visitors?

Assessing Trail Connections: Port Hood to Inverness



Prepared by the Nova Scotia Tourism Agency in partnership with the Municipality of the County of Inverness and Inverness County Trails Federation

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Destination Trails – An Overview

What is a destination trail?

The Atlantic Canada Trails Association defines destination trails as “distinctive (outdoor) landscapes that reflect a region’s most distinguishing characteristics, such as views, natural features, culture, or heritage. A destination trail is often themed and elicits a WOW factor.” They are also “major regional tourism attractions... offering a variety of experiences, such as walking, hiking, and cycling.”

Destination trails are travel motivators. They’re not something people stumble upon while visiting your area, but a reason why they’ve come in the first place. According to Atlantic Canada Trails Association, 69% of visitors to Prince Edward Island plan to visit the Confederation Trail, a province-wide destination trail prior to travelling to the Island.

Why do destination trails matter to your community?

Destination trails that feature high quality outdoor experiences – and offer the services travellers expect while on vacation – can attract visitors to your region. This creates an opportunity for businesses to earn revenue and grow the local economy. Studies show visiting cyclists tend to spend more on food and services than a traveller passing through in a car. After hours of pedaling, cyclists are in need of a good meal—and feel more inclined to pamper themselves.

Atlantic Canada Trails Association found that trail visitors to Prince Edward Island account for over \$2.7 million annually in tourism spending. Of that total, \$2 million is spent by cyclists. This spending trend is also seen among visitors to Nova Scotia. Based on Nova Scotia’s 2010 Visitor Exit Survey, 39% (1.04 million) of the visitors to Nova Scotia took part in outdoor activities. Therefore, if every outdoor enthusiast spent an



Celtic Shores Coastal Trail – Mabou Rivers Trail section



Celtic Shores Coastal Trail – Judique Flyer Trail section

additional \$5 during their stay—the price of a great coffee and muffin—tourism revenues would increase by a minimum of \$2.03 million. Wow, what a great reason to attract trail visitors!

Why is the Celtic Shores Coastal Trail important?

The Celtic Shores Coastal Trail is Nova Scotia’s first destination trail targeting cyclists. As a first for our province, it has the potential to motivate travel to Cape Breton Island, bringing visitors – and their buying power – to local communities. The trail also aligns with Nova Scotia’s tourism strategy to attract outdoor enthusiasts, a pleasure visitor segment that the 2010 Visitor Exit Survey found is among the top four high-yield segments. Outdoor enthusiasts are more likely to stay for a longer vacation and spend more while here. On average, outdoor enthusiasts spend \$1,960 and stay 10.5 nights, compared to all pleasure visitors who stay 5.8 nights and spend \$1,280.

What does a destination trail offer visitors?

In addition to offering a superb outdoor experience, destination trails must offer services that meet visitor expectations for quality. Destination trails make it easy for people to get around, find what they’re looking for, and stay well-hydrated and nourished. They also provide ample opportunity for visitors to spend money and extend their stay in the area, which in turn drives economic growth for the destination area. Some examples of these services, amenities, and goods include:

- Healthy menu items that can be easily taken to-go or are sold as a ‘boxed’ meal
- Easy access to water bottle fill-ups
- Bike and bike-related equipment rentals
- Bike shuttle services (for travellers who only want to cycle part of the trail)
- Secure, overnight bike storage and parking
- Bike repair services and supplies



Celtic Shores Coastal Trail – Mabou Rivers Trail section



Celtic Shores Coastal Trail – Chestico Trail section

- Bike and/or trail-related packages and experiences, which increase the promotion of the trail and partnering businesses, while helping the visitor maximize and extend their stay in the community and area
- Shuttle service between communities or accommodations (for visitors who want to see the whole area but don't want to bike or walk the entire way)
- Parking facilities where visitors can leave their vehicles for an extended period of time (e.g. 2-5 days)
- Public washroom facilities near the trail
- Maps that indicate distances between communities, and the location of amenities like bike storage, washrooms and Wi-Fi access
- Merchandise branded with the trail's logo

About this assessment

This trail assessment models the Trail Town Program® model, developed to identify the economic potential of the Great Allegheny Passage in Pennsylvania, and related learnings from best practice missions and partnerships including the Atlantic Canada Trails Association. The results outlined in this report identify strengths and opportunities for how the Port Hood to Inverness section of the Celtic Shores Coastal Trail meets the needs of trail tourists. The Celtic Shores Coastal Trail would not have been possible without the hard work and collaboration of the trail builders, all of whom are volunteers with a love of the outdoors and their communities. Through their determination and partnership with local municipal leaders and businesses, the Celtic Shores Coastal Trail can now be used by tourism businesses and attractions in the region to better promote themselves to the trail visitor.



Celtic Shores Coastal Trail – Inverness Shean Trail section



Celtic Shores Coastal Trail – Ceilidh Coastal Trail section

Key Opportunities across the Celtic Shores Coastal Trail

The opportunities outlined below apply overall to the section of the Celtic Shores Coastal Trail connecting Port Hood, Mabou and Inverness. Additional observations and suggestions for each community are discussed in individual sections of this report.

Highlight Trail Crossings



Trail crossing off Route 19 near Mabou



Trail entrance off Route 19 in Inverness

The Celtic Shores Coastal Trail crosses Route 19 and Shore Road many times, but crossings are not identified on the road. You can see in the photos above there are no street markings or signs to alert vehicles that they are approaching a trail crossing. However, there are coloured posts on the trail to indicate to cyclists and other trail users when they are approaching a road crossing. Trails groups have indicated that approach signage for all trail crossings needs to be consistent, as indicating the location of trail crossings communicates that there is a trail, while making the crossing safer for both trail users and road traffic.

Suggestion

- 1) Explore opportunities for trail crossing signage with the municipality and the Nova Scotia Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal (TIR).



old.simcoetrails.ca



trafficsignstore.com



mathpropress.com

Increase Trail Awareness Locally

It is crucial for locals and employees working in customer-facing (frontline) roles to know details about the Celtic Shores Coastal Trail so they can answer visitor questions. While frontline staff in Inverness, Mabou and Port Hood were friendly, many didn't seem to know about the trail. Others knew it existed, but didn't know it was called the Celtic Shores Coastal Trail and weren't sure where it could be accessed. From the local accommodations and restaurants to the grocery stores and service stations, create trail ambassadors who will help to promote the area and welcome trail visitors.

Suggestions

- 1) Create a Celtic Shores Coastal Trail brochure or rack card and distribute them to local businesses that highlight the trail.
- 2) Invite business operators and local residents to a trail tour/ trail ride event, led by trail ambassadors.
- 3) Create a trail-based event that garners attention and raises awareness of the trail among local residents.

- 4) Work with the Visitor Information Centres to ensure staff know key information about the trail, including access points, what visitors will see in the different sections and where services are located (ie. overnight bike storage, boxed lunches, bike rentals, bike repair supplies, etc.).
- 5) Explore a trail friendly program to certify businesses that successfully meet trail tourists' needs (based on Trail Town Program®).

Install Bike Racks

Where will visitors park their bikes while visiting your restaurants and attractions? Currently, there are no bike racks in Port Hood, Mabou or Inverness. Bike racks are essential for welcoming cyclists since visitors are not familiar with the area and don't know where bikes can be secured. Many cyclists also won't be comfortable leaving bikes (or their valuables) unattended.

Bike racks also show visitors that the community is bike friendly. For example, installing a bike rack by an outdoor patio or restaurant window lets cyclists watch their belongings while they eat instead of having to unload everything. This is a great way to welcome cyclists and show you want their business.

Suggestions

- 1) Install bike racks or simple posts at natural rest stops along the trail.
- 2) Install bike racks near attractions and local businesses, from restaurants to grocery stores—everywhere the visitor accesses facilities and services in your community. Bike racks should also be installed in locations easily seen as cyclists approach and easily monitored while they shop/dine (ie. in front of businesses, not behind).
- 3) Install bike racks with a design unique to the Celtic Shores Coastal Trail. This gives a consistent look throughout the trail and shows visitors they are in a trail town. For example, the Town of Berwick has apple-shaped bike racks which complement their brand as the Apple Capital of Canada.



Berwick's Apple Shaped
Bike Racks



Unique bike racks

Explore Opportunities for Cross Promotion and Maximize Your Online Presence

Port Hood, Mabou, Judique and Inverness are all located on the trail—what an opportunity to welcome the trail tourist!

However, the majority of local businesses don't currently promote themselves or their area as cyclist-friendly. How will a visitor learn about your services and amenities if you don't tell them?

For instance, the Fiddle and the Sea Bed and Breakfast in Port Hood offers free, secure bike storage for guests and promotes their business on the trail. This is a great service for cyclists! However, neither these services nor the Celtic Shores Coastal Trail are mentioned on their website.

Since most travellers use the internet for pre-trip planning, these and other bike-friendly services need to be placed prominently on businesses' websites and NovaScotia.com listings, as they are important details which could help close the sale and extend visitors' stay in the area. After all, in 2014 (from January 1 to October 31), NovaScotia.com received 2.5 million visitors.

Leaving trail-friendly details out of your online presence is a missed opportunity and makes it hard for the region to live up to its potential as a premiere cycling destination.

Suggestions

- 1) Businesses should mention they are steps away from Nova Scotia's first cycling destination trail both on their website and on NovaScotia.com and cbisland.com listings.
- 2) The Celtic Shores Coastal Trail management group should decide how operators can promote their businesses on the trail. For example, some sections, such as the Chestico section allow operators to pay a fee to promote their business on the trail,

Best Practice Tips

Maximize your FREE NovaScotia.com listing by:

- Maintaining a complete, up-to-date list of the services you offer
- Ensuring your opening and closing dates and times are kept current
- Uploading photos that make it easy for visitors to see what they can expect at your attraction, restaurant or accommodation

Make it easy for potential visitors to choose you for their vacation by:

- Sharing possible itineraries that show what they can see and do, such as the trail
- Partnering with other tourism operators to create packages for outdoor enthusiasts

For more information on developing and promoting your tourism business, visit:
www.novascotiaturismagency.ca

while other sections only permit a tourism business icon to be added to the wayfinding signage. There should be consistency across the trail.

- 3) Businesses located near the trail need to work together and offer packages and unique experiences for the trail tourist. These packages and experiences should then be promoted on NovaScotia.com. The Celtic Shores Coastal Trail website (celticshores.ca) could also provide a link to businesses along the trail who offer packages and experiences for the trail visitor/ outdoor enthusiast.
- 4) Businesses located near the trail should consider opportunities that connect them to the trail visitor. For example, a nearby restaurant or café could create menu items like the Biker Burger or Peddle Power Panini.
- 5) Consider trail merchandise opportunities, such as branded tee shirts and water bottles, etc., which can be purchased in local businesses and possibly online.
- 6) Provide direct website links to all businesses listed on celticshores.ca that offer attractions and amenities for trail users.

Great Job!

Some businesses already offer attractions and services popular with cyclists and trail users:

Food & Drink: Operators such as Clove Hitch Bar & Bistro, Glenora Distillery and Cabot Links Resort offer high quality menu items that showcase local products. Consider naming menu options after the trail or cycling experience.

Cultural Experiences: The Red Shoe Pub is a Celtic music hotspot and must-visit stop in Mabou. Glenora Pub offers ceilidhs in both the afternoon and evening from May to October.

Outdoor Attractions: A variety of outdoor activities are available for visitors to enjoy off the trail, including whale watching and kayaking tours in Inverness, tuna fishing charters and lobster tours in Port Hood and Inverness, sailing charters in the nearby Bras d'Or Lake, and golfing at Cabot Links in Inverness—the only authentic links golf course in Canada.

Bike-Friendly Accommodations: The Fiddle and the Sea Bed and Breakfast offers secure, overnight bike storage and bike shuttle service for their guests.

Bike Rentals: Bike rentals are available from Eagle Eye Outfitters in Inverness.

- 7) Include the number of kilometres and estimated travel time between communities on maps, celticshores.ca, information panels in each community, and on the trail brochure. This is information visitors need to plan their trip.
- 8) Provide suggested itineraries on celticshores.ca to help visitors pre-plan their trip. According to Roger Brooks, destination development expert, “94% (of Americans) use the internet to decide where to travel...” What are some recommended itineraries for visitors planning a one day, weekend, or weeklong trip on and around the trail? The goal is to turn a short cycle or walk into an overnight stay...and more! Itineraries help visitors extend their stay in the area. These itineraries can also be added to the Celtic Shores Coastal Trail listing on NovaScotia.com.
- 9) Increase the number of businesses who are targeting cyclists, such as offering bike shuttle service or bike rentals, and encourage local businesses to become bike friendly. This will enhance exposure to cyclists and help businesses tap into this high value market.
- 10) Engage partners such as Bicycle Nova Scotia or Nova Scotia Trails Federation to implement a Trail or Bike Friendly Business Program. Participating businesses could display a sign in their business indicating they welcome cyclists (see examples below). Existing Bike Friendly programs, such as the Trail Town Program®, could be used as a best practice model.



Clearly Identify Trails & Cycling Services



Port Hood Trailhead Parking Lot



Mabou Trailhead Parking Lot



Inverness Trailhead Parking Lot

Good parking and signage exist at the trailheads in Port Hood and Mabou. However, in Inverness it is unclear where trail users should park their vehicles because there is no trail signage in the parking lot (by the Miners' Museum) and the trailhead is across the street. Signage is also needed at trailhead parking lots to let visitors know they can park vehicles for an extended period (2-5 days). This information should also be included on celticshores.ca to help visitors with pre-trip planning.

Washrooms, potable water or bike racks at trailheads in Port Hood, Mabou and Inverness were lacking. It is unnecessary to install washrooms at every trailhead, but it is important that visitors know where to find the nearest washroom and drinking water source.

Finally, none of the three trailheads have security lighting. Although most visitors wouldn't be using the trail at night, security lighting may help to make them feel safe when parking and leaving their vehicles for extended periods. Is it possible to add lighting to trailheads?

Suggestions

- 1) Install signage that lets visitors know they've arrived at the designated parking area for the trail.
- 2) Position trail signage so that it is easy to access, easy to see and easy to follow when travelling along the trail. For example, signage should not be located behind a fence or too close to a rock barrier, as it can make it hard to get close to read the text. Also, directional signage should not be parallel to the trail, as it is easily missed by cyclists. Furthermore, be aware of the direction of arrows on signage, as the sign position could create confusion if the arrow is pointing up, but there is no road straight ahead.
- 3) Consistency is important for both the design of trail signs, as well as how they are installed. While travelling along the trail, visitors should be able to expect where directional signage will be located. For example, the three-sided trailhead signs are placed differently at several key trailheads. They need to be consistently positioned to best meet visitor needs and provide clear direction along the trail. Include placement and installation guidelines in trail signage standards for Celtic Shores Coastal Trail.
- 4) Offer more washroom facilities at or near the trailheads and provide more information on wayfinding signage along the trail to better direct visitors to the nearest washroom.
- 5) Provide enhanced trip planning information on celticshores.ca and in promotional materials, including where visitors can safely park their vehicles for extended periods (2-5 days) and highlighting the distance between communities.
- 6) Include a note on the trailhead signage indicating that visitors can leave their vehicles for extended periods (2-5 days). The trailhead signage should also include directions to the nearest washroom facility and water source.
- 7) Consider adding security lighting at trailhead parking lots so visitors feel safe leaving their vehicles overnight.
- 8) If visitors need to purchase and display a permit to park for extended periods, include purchasing details on trailhead parking lot signage and on celticshores.ca.
- 9) Explore opportunities with municipalities and the Nova Scotia Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal (TIR) to enhance cycling-related safety and trail crossing signage.

Port Hood

Although the trailhead entrance is only 200 metres from the entrance to the town, the Celtic Shores Coastal Trail doesn't pass directly through Port Hood. This means it is important to have clear wayfinding signage directing cyclists from the trail into town. Otherwise, cyclists may not realize there are restaurants, washrooms, attractions and accommodations in the area, bypass it and continue along the trail. This is a missed opportunity to take full advantage of the trail's economic potential, by creating awareness of services and shops.

Studies show visiting cyclists tend to spend more on food and services than travellers passing through by car. After hours of pedaling, cyclists need a good meal and feel more inclined to pamper themselves. This presents opportunities for local businesses to feature trail-related goods and services—like high quality lunches available to eat in or boxed to go.

We understand that Port Hood is planning to participate in a Façade and Streetscape Improvement program. Through this project, the town could create a greater sense of arrival by adding gateway signage at the North end of town on Route 19. This would complement the attractive sign on the South end of town before Main Street. An information kiosk would also help visitors find information on local businesses and services.

Trail & Directional Signage

1. The Port Hood trailhead was easy to find when travelling north and south on Route 19. The signage (featuring the new brand elements) was effective – great job! There is also a sign at the bottom of the trailhead driveway that shows the way to Port Hood and lists available amenities (see photo from Google Maps below).



Bottom of the trailhead driveway at Route 19

- At the trailhead parking lot, the three-sided sign was missing two panels (see photos below) and was too close to the rock barrier. The sign design should allow visitors to easily walk around it to read all the panels.



Complete signage: this sign at the trailhead is missing two panels



It is challenging to access sign with the rock barrier

Port Hood Trailhead - Great Job!

The Port Hood trailhead parking lot was in good condition and offered a smooth and level entrance onto the trail. The trailhead had good seating and shelter, was well treed, and featured a beautiful view of both the ocean and the Port Hood Beach Provincial Park. There were also two picnic tables (one covered) and two benches.



3. The directional signage used on the trail was inconsistent. The new directional signage for the trail is shown in the photo below on the right. However, the trail crossing signage on Dunmore Road, heading northeast towards the Port Hood trailhead, uses the font and colour scheme for the old Chestico Trail (see photo below on left). Consistent trail signage increases visitor confidence in the quality of the experience.

Businesses also bought advertising signs from the individual trail section committees and put them on the old directional signage (see photo below on left). To maintain consistency, the trail management group should create a plan to address how they will respond to and post advertising signage for specific businesses.



Old Directional Signage, with signs for individual businesses



New Directional Signage

4. There are two entrances into Port Hood from Route 19, as shown in the photos below from Google Maps. The gateway sign at the South entrance (photo below on left) is attractive, but doesn't indicate what type of businesses and services are available in the town. The directional highway sign at the North entrance (photo below on right) doesn't provide a sense of arrival for visitors and doesn't include attraction or amenity signage.



South entrance to Port Hood: Nice sign, but where I can find businesses or services?



North entrance to Port Hood: Where is the sense of arrival?

Suggestions

- 1) Install a directional sign on the trailhead driveway showing the direction and distance to nearby towns. This sign should be visible from the trail.
 - a. These signs are very important because the trail does not pass through Port Hood, but rather heads to Glencoe Station. If Port Hood is to take advantage of the trail, it needs to be clear from the trail that there is a town and facilities nearby.
- 2) Move the rock barrier at the trailhead so visitors can walk all the way around the three-sided sign.
- 3) Update old signage with the new brand and font. This provided consistency and tells visitors they are on the Celtic Shores Coastal Trail.

- 4) Use attraction icons to show the direction and distance to **top** attractions and services. This prevents sign clutter and ensures the focus is on Best-Of and Must-Visit attractions. It also helps reduce ongoing maintenance, as individual signs won't need to be removed if/when a business closes.
- 5) Feature individual businesses on a trail brochure and on celticshores.ca where changes can be made easily and updates are cost effective.
- 6) Create an information kiosk at the South entrance to Port Hood with a town map showing where services, facilities and attractions, such as the trailhead for Celtic Shores Coastal Trail are found.

Services & Infrastructure

It's important that visitors can easily find services in your community, like parking, washrooms, restaurants/ grocery stores, etc. Additional services are also important for trail users, including potable water to fill their water bottles, bike racks, and secure, overnight bike storage.

1. There were no toilets or potable water available at the Port Hood trailhead. Nearby locations including Port Hood Beach Provincial Park, the Co-op, Clove Hitch Bar & Bistro, Home Hardware and the Court House did offer washroom facilities and potable water, but there were no signs indicating this.
2. During a visit to Port Hood Beach Provincial Park in mid-August, the washrooms were dirty, with webs and overflowing garbage cans. This gives the wrong impression to visitors of the beautiful and otherwise clean beach park.
3. Once visitors make their way into Port Hood, the town is clean and easy to walk around. The continuous sidewalks along Main Street, which run in front of many of the downtown businesses are in great, like-new condition. However, sections of the road had potholes, cracks and loose gravel, which is challenging and dangerous for cyclists (see photo to the right).



Main Street: Potholes and loose gravel – bad for cyclists!

Suggestions

- 1) Use the three-sided trailhead sign to show the businesses and services available in Port Hood. Services are currently indicated on the sign at the base of the trailhead driveway, but you can't see that sign from the trail.
- 2) Clean public washroom facilities at the Port Hood Beach Provincial Park on a regular schedule, particularly at busy times of the day.
- 3) Promote the Port Hood Beach Provincial Park as the main site for washrooms and potable water, since washroom facilities near the Port Hood trailhead are limited.
- 4) Explore possibility of enhancing cycling friendliness, through well maintained roads and signage, such as "Share the Road" or "Bike Route".
- 5) Consider offering bike route information on trail maps or online.

How Port Hood Meets Visitor Needs and Motivates Travel

According to Roger Brooks, Destination Development expert, **"70% of all consumer retail spending take place after 6:00pm (and) visitors spend the night where there are things to do after 6:00 pm."**

1. For the most part, businesses in Port Hood meet visitor needs by opening on evenings and weekends. For example:
 - There is a restaurant open at 7:30am (Sandeannie's Bakery & Tea Room) and another open until 8:00pm or 10:00pm depending on the day of the week (Clove Hitch Bar & Bistro).
 - There is one gift shop in town (Four Mermaids Gifts from the Sea), open until 6:00pm every day except Sunday (when it closes at 5:00pm).

However the Co-op, which sells bike repair supplies, closes at 5:00pm on weekends. The Home Hardware is only open until 4:00pm on Saturday and closed on Sunday. This is too early to meet the needs of trail tourists. If a cyclist needs to make an after-hours bike repair, what are they going to do?

2. Research also shows that 70% of first time sales at restaurants, retail shops, accommodations and golf courses are because of curb appeal (ie. attractive building and window displays, planters, outdoor seating, etc.). Curb appeal is a way to tell visitors you are open and welcome their business. It also gives visitors a hint of the quality to expect from your business' products and services.
3. Though many of the businesses along Main Street in Port Hood lacked curb appeal (see two photos below on the left and center), others like Bikinis and Trunks Ice Cream Bar and Clove Hitch Bar & Bistro (near Main Street) looked very inviting to visitors. It was noted during the assessment that many businesses are waiting for the proposed Façade and Streetscape program to begin before they start their beautification efforts. However, what about the potential customers who are visiting Port Hood now?



Do these businesses look inviting?

Photo from Google Maps: Clove Hitch Bar & Bistro looks welcoming with colourful umbrellas and lush planters.

4. Many of the businesses along Main Street also had clear signage which stated what they sold and included hours of operation and whether they were open or closed. This is great information for letting visitors know when they can come back.
5. We mystery shopped the D & M Burgers stand and the Credit Union asking for information on a trail in the area. The employees were friendly and knew there was a trail. They were able to direct us to the trail and knew it was nice; however, they weren't sure of its name. The locals in the group mentioned that visitor information is provided by the Court House. However, there were no signs indicating this.

Suggestions

- 1) Approach D. F. Beaton Ultramar Service Station located in Port Hood or the nearby Freshmart or Archie's Esso in Mabou about carrying bike repair supplies, such as spare tubes, etc. The current hours of the Co-op and Home Hardware in Port Hood could make it challenging for visitors to stock up on needed groceries and bike repair supplies.
 - a. D. F. Beaton Ultramar Service Station is open from 8:00am to 8:00pm on weekends and 6:00am to 8:00pm on weekdays.
 - b. After 5:00pm, visitors need to travel 2.8 km to the Mabou Freshmart for groceries, which is open until 10:00pm on Saturday and 9:00pm on Sunday.
 - c. After 5:00pm on the weekends, the nearest store for bike repair supplies is the Canadian Tire in Port Hawkesbury, which is 50.6 km away, and is open until 6:00pm on Saturday (5:00pm on Sunday).
- 2) Add bike racks throughout the community, in front of businesses and attractions.
- 3) Donna MacDonald, Municipality of the County of Inverness, mentioned that the Façade and Streetscape program for Port Hood is at the proposal stage and funding is not yet confirmed. Though it is recommended that businesses take part in any future façade and streetscaping program, in the meantime, beautification efforts should not be delayed. Consider what first impression is being given to visitors now. They may not be able to return to the town after a Façade and Streetscape program has been completed. The goal is to make visitors feel welcomed and can easily find the businesses and services that they need. Are they staying longer, spending more and leaving with a positive impression?
- 4) Information about the trail should be shared with all nearby businesses to ensure they can respond to questions from visitors. A fun, engaging, and FREE way to do this is by holding a community familiarization tour to bike or walk the trail, so customer-facing/frontline staff can learn more about the trail, area attractions, and the goods and services local businesses are offering for trail users.
- 5) Offer new items at restaurants which speak to the trail visitor, such as High Gear Burger or Celtic Shores Clubhouse.
- 6) Consider creating a tent card that promotes the trail and offers itinerary recommendations for what trail visitors should do over 2-3 hours or half day per community. Tent cards can be placed on restaurant tables, in guestrooms, on front desk counters, etc.
- 7) Offer packages with local businesses, such as overnight in a bed and breakfast with bike shuttle service and/or bike rental.

Mabou

Assessed by both foot and bike

From the West Mabou trailhead, the Celtic Shores Coastal Trail leads north to Mabou (at the entrance to the downtown area) before crossing Route 19 and heading inland.

The Village of Mabou recently completed branding and downtown beautification activities—and it shows! Signage (gateway, interpretive and wayfinding) throughout the town is very well done – clear and easy to find. Local businesses have good curb appeal, with many offering attractive windows displays and lighting at night.

Mabou has also a variety of accommodations, shops, and services – from dining and evening entertainment to artisan shops and galleries. Within a few kilometers of town visitors can enjoy coastal hiking on the Cape Mabou Highlands trail, swimming or sunbathing on the soft sands of West Mabou Beach Provincial Park, or a single malt whisky tasting and tour at the Glenora Inn and Distillery.

There are many positive parts of the tourism experience in Mabou, but room for improvement, too:

- Services in Mabou could be better promoted along the trail. Their location in town also needs to be clearly indicated.
 - Since Mabou’s community signage and information kiosk were completed before the Celtic Shores Coastal Trail, the trail is not identified on the community map.
- The Village and businesses of Mabou could better meet the cyclist needs by:
 - Providing bike racks for securing bikes while dining and experiencing Mabou
 - Clearly identifying where washrooms are located
 - Installing blade signs on businesses
 - Moving garbage/recycling bins nearby rest areas for pedestrians and cyclists, like near the information kiosk.
- Customer-facing (frontline) employees should know more about the trail so they can better answer questions and direct inquiries from visitors. They could also provide community and trail maps to visitors.

Trail & Directional Signage

1. The signage at the West Mabou trailhead is a bit confusing because the information kiosk doesn't show where you're located in relation to surrounding communities (see photos on the right). There were also posts for a three panel sign that has not yet been installed.



West Mabou trailhead signage and information kiosk

2. There is sign clutter on the east side of Mabou Crossing and Route 19 (see photo on right).
3. The interpretive panel on the information kiosk is very informative about the history of the area. However, it does not allow space for information about the current landscape and community projects, as well as practical information for trip planning, such as itinerary suggestions.



Lots of signs – hard to know where to look!

4. The interpretive panels along the trail are also very history-focused with a lot of text (see photos below). What about the landscape the visitor is currently seeing around them, such as the mussel farming buoys in Mabou Harbour?



Interpretive Signage along the Mabou section of the trail

5. The 4x8 amenity and wayfinding signs are wonderful (see photos below). They indicate nearby amenities and towns, including distances. Great job!



Amenity Sign



Wayfinding Sign

Suggestions

- 1) Add a 'You are Here' indicator to the information kiosk map at the West Mabou trailhead.
- 2) When installed, the three panel sign should make it easier for visitors to locate nearby services and amenities. However, it should be moved to a location east of trail. It should also clearly indicate the number of kilometres between communities, rather than being organized by trail length, as visitors travel from community to community.
- 3) Move the 4x8 amenity sign closer to the trailhead so it's easier for trail users to see what amenities are nearby.
- 4) The interpretive signage along the trail is nice, but too detailed and text heavy. Update the signage and change long descriptions into shorter 'Did You Know' type facts and better showcase the photographs. The signage should also include information on the surrounding natural and cultural landscape. For instance: What is the visitor seeing? Are there mussel forms in Mabou Harbour?
- 5) Consider including a take-away for visitors on the interpretive panel overlooking Southwest Mabou River. For example, the panel could include information about The Rankin Family's Mull River Shuffle with a link to download the song. This would offer visitors a locally-inspired and memorable take-away.
- 6) Work with the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure Renewal (TIR) to have a directional sign installed on Route 19 to indicate when you're 200m away from the trailhead.

Services & Infrastructure

1. The trailhead parking lot located at West Mabou Crossing is attractive and has a large parking lot. However, because the lot is freeform (parking spaces are not identified), it could be difficult to maneuver a larger vehicle or vehicle with a trailer when the lot is full.

2. Along the trail, there was a rest area overlooking the Southwest Mabou River with two interpretive panels and a bench. The area had been vandalized—the bench anchor was pulled from the ground (see photos below) and the bench was a little wobbly.



Southwest Mabou River Rest Area

3. The Mabou River Inn has advertising signage on the trail (see photos below) at the base of an access point from the trail to their property. While it's great the Mabou River Inn recognizes the opportunity to reach trail tourists, the access point is very steep and rough, and would be difficult for cyclists.



Trail access point to Mabou River Inn

Suggestions

- 1) Put signage posts into cement and install bench anchors to curb vandalism and ensure stability. The wobbly bench should be fixed.
- 2) Make signage posts out of metal so they last longer.
- 3) Mabou River Inn should move their trail signage to just before the trail crosses Route 19, as the access point on the trail is too steep for cyclists. Since this crossing is only 76 metres from the Inn, trail users could easily continue on the road to their property.
- 4) All access points to businesses and attractions along the trail should be well maintained with appropriate surfacing and grade. Trees and bushes should also be maintained so access points are clear—easy to see on the approach and easy to follow. If stairs are used to access the trail, a pathway for cyclists should be included.
- 5) The Village of Mabou could add a sign on the trail that promotes community events happening in the region.

How Mabou Meets Visitor Needs and Motivates Travel

1. The Village of Mabou has strong branding and the current wayfinding signage creates a welcoming first impression. The “Mabou: Where Culture Lives” information kiosk in downtown Mabou is easy to find. It provides clear direction to the businesses and services in the town; however, it doesn’t include the trail and could better feature distances and scale (see photos below).



Downtown Information Kiosk

2. There aren't any signs in town showing where the trail is located (although a directional sign is planned to be installed soon). There was also no clear signage on the trail directing users to the downtown.
3. Mabou has a few seating areas throughout the downtown, such as the one shown in the photo below. It was hard to tell whether the structure beside the bench was a planter or trash can. Also, it is inconvenient that the recycling/waste bin is located across the street from the Mabou information kiosk, which is an obvious gathering and rest spot for visitors.



Bench beside the Mabou information kiosk, as well as recycling bin across the street

4. There are a number of trail-friendly businesses and services in Mabou including picnic areas on the trail and waterfront, and a variety of shops and restaurants on Main Street. These are clustered in a compact area and have attractive, clean and well-lit window displays. However, there was nowhere in town to rent a bike or purchase bike repair supplies. The closest location for repair supplies is Port Hood Co-op Pro Hardware (14.7km away) and the closest place to rent a bike is Eagle Eye Outfitters in Inverness (22.1km away).
5. Accommodations in Mabou currently do not promote an offering of secure, overnight bike storage, which could influence where a visitor chooses to stay.
6. For the most part, businesses meet traveller needs by opening early in the day and staying open into the evening. For instance, The Red Shoe Pub is open until 11:00pm and features live music as an evening attraction. Shining Waters, Red Shoe Pub and The Mull Café & Deli, were clearly visible and well-designed, and it was easy to see what goods and services were available.
7. Though there are no public washroom facilities in the community, the garage and restaurants let visitors use their washrooms.

Suggestions

- 1) Install a trail sign in Mabou where the trail crosses Route 19. The trail sign should include distances to amenities and the downtown area.
- 2) Include Mabou's website (www.mabouvillage.com) on the information kiosk, and feature Celtic Shores Coastal Trail and the website: www.celticshores.ca.
- 3) Create a take-away map (Must-sees in Inverness County) which can be put in covered brochure racks on all the information kiosks and distributed by local businesses.
- 4) Add bike racks throughout the community, in front of businesses and attractions.
- 5) Move the recycling/waste bin across the street so it's near the information kiosk. Since visitors connect with the downtown by walking or cycling up to the information kiosk, this location is a natural gathering and stopping place—making it a perfect location for a bench, garbage can and bike rack.

- 6) Ensure recycling and waste bins include a compartment for garbage, recycling and compost. Make sure it is clear to visitors where waste goes by including images on recycling/waste bins.
- 7) Business should install more blade signs. Blade signs make it easier for visitors to see what businesses are available as they walk along the Main Street (see photos.)
- 8) Improve the design of the banners along Main Street, as they are a bit hard to read.
- 9) Shining Waters offers a healthy menu and had outdoor seating; however, moving the dumpsters away from the seating to another area would create a more appealing seating area.
- 10) Increase opportunities and make it easy for visitors to buy from you!
 - a. The Freshmart or Archie's Esso Service Station could sell bike repair supplies.
 - b. An accommodation property, such as Mabou River Inn which is very close to the trail, could offer secure bike storage and consider partnering with another business or creating a bike rental opportunity.
 - c. Businesses could fill water bottles for trail users or offer cycling packages.
 - d. Restaurants/cafes could offer trail-inspired menu items, such as the Cyclers' Smoothie.
 - e. Offer shipping for large purchases. Cyclists may want to buy a larger, expensive item (e.g. an art piece or whiskey from Glenora Distillery) but can't as they have nowhere to store it on their bikes. Offering shipping makes it easier for visitors to spend money at your business.



Blade Signs make it easier for both motorists and cyclists to quickly see what your business sells

- 11) Businesses could partner with Velo Cape Breton and Celtic Shores Coastal Trail or Bicycle Nova Scotia to create a directory of local businesses that offer services for cycling tourists.
- 12) Include a community board or website link near the information kiosk to make it easier for visitors to see where and when local events are happening.
- 13) Information about the trail should be shared with all nearby businesses to ensure they can respond to questions from visitors. A fun, engaging, and FREE way to do this is by holding a community familiarization tour to bike or walk the trail, so customer-facing/frontline staff can learn more about the trail, area attractions, and the goods and services local businesses are offering for trail users.
- 14) Have a box of take-away maps at the information kiosk, or suggest that visitors take a picture with their phone or camera, so they can remember all the places in Mabou they want to visit. Take-away maps and an up-to-date, informative website are also good resources for customer-facing/frontline staff at local businesses who are directing visitors to the trail and local attractions.
- 15) Consider creating a tent card that promotes the trail and offers itinerary recommendations for what trail visitors should do over 2-3 hours or half day per community. Tent cards can be placed on restaurant tables, in guestrooms, on front desk counters, etc.

Inverness

The Town of Inverness is located on Route 19 and is a natural start or end point for a Celtic Shores Coastal Trail journey. The Inverness trailhead has interpretive signage, a picnic shelter and public parking, as well as wayfinding signage to help visitors locate amenities and attractions in the town. There is a cluster of local businesses, services and attractions, as well as opportunities to experience Cape Breton culture and cuisine.

Trail & Directional Signage

1. When travelling south on Route 19 through Inverness, there are no directional signs that show how to access the trailhead, which is located on Beach Road (see photo on right). This is the major decision point to direct visitors to the trailhead.
2. From the trailhead on Beach Road it is easy to find the trail, particularly with the wayfinding sign (see photo on right).



Route 19 in Inverness (Main Street) heading south.
How will visitors know this is where to access the trailhead?



Great signage!

Suggestions

1. Install wayfinding signage at the intersection of Route 19 and Beach Road directing visitors to the trailhead (see example on left).
2. Install wayfinding signage at the entrance points to downtown indicating the trail is nearby (see example on right).



Services & Infrastructure

There are opportunities in the downtown area to create a better sense of arrival (gateway signage) and improve visitors' first impressions of Inverness. It is our understanding that the Inverness Façade & Streetscape Improvement program will soon address this gap and help ensure that communities and businesses along the Celtic Shores Coastal Trail benefit from the trail's economic potential.

1. The Inverness trailhead had a covered picnic table, garbage can and interpretive panels. Though it offers a good rest area with a view of Inverness Harbour, the grass and bushes at the trailhead weren't maintained and the garbage can was overflowing with litter around the site (see photos below). Like in Mabou, the interpretive panels were also very text heavy and history-focused.



Inverness trailhead rest area



Interpretive panel at trailhead

2. There were no garbage or recycling containers throughout the town or on the trail. Pet waste was evident on the trail.

3. The trail crosses Route 19 as you head north into downtown Inverness, but is lacking road signs to show you're approaching the trail. However, there is great wayfinding signage on the trail to indicate the businesses and services available in the community (see photos below).



View from the trail crossing heading north into Inverness



Wayfinding signage located at the crossing of the trail and Route 19, indicating the businesses and services available in Inverness.



Suggestions

- 1) Explore partnership opportunities with the municipality to set minimum maintenance standards and ensure the trailhead site is regularly maintained with a schedule for garbage pick-up.
- 2) Though the interpretive signage at the trailhead is informative, it is very detailed and text heavy. When updated, suggest more photos, include less text, and add shorter 'Did You Know' type facts. Include information on the landscape around it. What is the visitor seeing? Are there any short, fun facts that it can include? The trailhead kiosk should also include trip planning information, such as suggested itineraries.
- 3) Install adequate waste and recycling receptacles throughout Inverness.

How Inverness Meets Visitor Needs and Motivates Travel

1. Eagle Eye Outfitters, located in the downtown, offers private nature based tours, kayak tours and mountain bike rentals. It is a great asset for the town to have an adventure outfitter that offers bike rentals close to the trailhead, and additional activities that encourage visitors to extend their stay in Inverness. The Coal Miners Café and Lounge also advertised on their sign that they are biker friendly. We were happy to see that!



Eagle Eye Outfitters' shop and bikes and helmets rented for the assessment

Coal Miners Café indicating they are Biker Friendly (we confirmed with the staff that 'Biker' includes both cyclists and motorcyclists)

Suggestions

- 1) Information about the trail should be shared with all nearby businesses to ensure they can respond to questions from visitors. A fun, engaging, and FREE way to do this is by holding a community familiarization tour to bike or walk the trail, so customer-facing/frontline staff can learn more about the trail, area attractions, and the goods and services local businesses are offering for trail users.
- 2) Add bike racks throughout the community, in front of businesses and attractions.

- 3) Restaurants/cafes could offer trail-themed menu items, such as the Trail Trekker Tuna Melt, etc.
- 4) Consider creating a tent card that promotes the trail and offers itinerary recommendations for what trail visitors should do over 2-3 hours or half day per community. Tent cards can be placed on restaurant tables, in guestrooms, on front desk counters, etc.
- 5) Accommodations located near the trail, such as the Dusky Diamond Bed and Breakfast, could offer secure bike storage and consider partnering with another business, such as Eagle Eye Outfitters to create a bike rental opportunity.
- 6) Accommodations, tour operators and attractions could partner to create trail-related packages and experiences to help the trail visitor/ outdoor enthusiast extend their stay and increase spending in the community and area.
- 7) Eagle Eye Outfitter could expand their equipment offering to include hybrid bikes. Due to the variety of surfacing materials used on the trail, a hybrid mountain/road bike would be more appropriate to comfortably travel the trail.
- 8) All rental bikes should be equipped with lights, bells and approved helmets, in order for visitors to practice proper trail etiquette and bike safety. Also, consider including pannier bags and map holders, either as part of the rental or for an additional fee, to allow cyclists to extend their length of stay and more easily pack the items they purchase along the trail.

Conclusion

As Nova Scotia's first destination trail for cycling, the Celtic Shores Coastal Trail has the potential to attract cyclists, hikers and other outdoor enthusiasts to Cape Breton. Trail users will enjoy quality trail infrastructure and stunning visual backdrops for their journey. However, in order for communities to realize the full economic potential of a destination trail, local business owners and operators need to offer visitors more opportunities to spend money, as well as improve both the number and quality of services offered.

In our introduction, we discussed the services, goods, and amenities that help turn a trail into a destination. These include:

- Healthy, to-go boxed-lunches and water bottle fill-ups
- Bike rentals
- Shuttle services between communities, for both travellers who only want to cycle part of the trail, as well as to shuttle guests and their bikes and/or luggage from a part of the trail to another
- Secure, overnight bike storage and parking
- Trail-related packages and experiences, which help to extend the visitor's stay, and increase their spending in the community and area
- Bike repair services and supplies
- Parking facilities where visitors can leave their vehicles for an extended period of time (e.g. 2-5 days)
- Public washroom facilities throughout the trail
- Maps that indicate distances between communities, and the location of amenities like bike storage, washrooms and Wi-Fi access
- Itinerary recommendations, which can be added to tent cards, rack cards and online for what trail visitors should do over 2-3 hours or half day per community
- Merchandise branded with the trail's logo, such as stainless steel water bottles, tee shirts, stickers, bike bells, etc.

For the Celtic Shores Coastal Trail to fulfill its economic potential, it is vital to offer these services. It is also vital for tourism businesses and trail groups to track, measure, and evaluate their success at attracting and meeting the needs the trail visitor. For example, trail groups can install trail counters so they know how many people are using the trail and by what mode (ie. by bicycle, on foot, on ATV, etc.). Also, businesses can keep track of trail inquiries, trail-related package bookings, number of visitors who arrive by bike, etc. Maintaining visitor

statistics helps with many aspects of business development by informing you of what your visitor wants, how you're currently meeting visitors' needs, what opportunities can help you attract more visitors, etc.

There are many partners that businesses can work with to help them identify and implement opportunities to attract the trail visitor. These partners include Destination Cape Breton Association, Municipality of the County of Inverness, Nova Scotia Tourism Agency and local business development organizations and chambers of commerce.

The Celtic Shores Coastal Trail represents a business opportunity for both existing and aspiring tourism operators. With this in mind, we leave a final comment and challenge to the communities of Port Hood, Mabou and Inverness:

What are YOU going to offer trail visitors?

Resources

Below are some resources to help you further develop and market your business to meet the needs of the trail visitor. If you have any further questions, please contact the Nova Scotia Tourism Agency at: 902-798-6610 or tourismdevelopment@novascotia.ca.

A Guide to Marketing Your Nova Scotia Tourism Business (www.novascotiatourismagency.ca/business-development-guides)

Experience Nova Scotia: A Toolkit (www.novascotiatourismagency.ca/experience-nova-scotia-toolkit)