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Sent: May 20, 2021 8:01 AM

Subject: Trails Strategy for BC- report on what we heard from local governments

Hello,

In the summer of 2020, a survey was sent to local government staff and elected officials seeking input on a comprehensive review of the Trails Strategy for BC. The survey was live between late May and early July 2020. In total, 233 individuals representing 145 different municipalities and regional districts completed the survey. Please find attached a summary of what we heard from that engagement process.

In addition to local governments, numerous other engagements were undertaken in support of the review of the Strategy. The engagement was completed in a partnership between Recreation Sites and Trails BC (RSTBC) and the Provincial Trails Advisory Body (PTAB). The engagements have been completed as a means of informing a comprehensive review of the Trails Strategy for British Columbia to ensure the continued relevance of the strategy to recreationalists, communities, First Nations, the tourism sector, and the Province. The review included:

- background research,
- a literature review of the benefits of trails,
- over 40 interviews with representatives from provincial ministries, non-profits, and recreation clubs and associations,
- a survey of over 200 local government representatives,
- focus group webinars with recreation sector interests,
- a public survey of over 5,900 British Columbians, and
- a separate government-to-government engagement process with all First Nation governments in BC.

The province continues to review the results of the review of the Strategy. Recommendations will be made to update the strategy based on findings from the research and engagements. Recommendations will provide direction for formally updating the strategy to reflect the broad viewpoints of the First Nations and various stakeholders involved in the engagement processes. Once RSTBC receives the mandate to proceed with the recommended changes, the Trails Strategy will be updated and implemented to improve trail development, management and maintenance across the province. A new draft version of the strategy is expected to be complete by the end of 2021.

It is important to note that the Trails Strategy engagement process was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. During that time, a significant increase in trail-based recreation was noted likely due to outdoor trail use being an acceptable, healthy, and popular activity to engage in while adhering to social distancing protocols. This trend of increasing recreation trail use is expected to continue even after the pandemic is over owing to the large number of people that have been introduced to the benefits of British Columbia's extensive trail network.

Thank you to all those who participated in the Trails Strategy review process. Your contributions will result in a significant improvement to the management of BC's world-class natural amenities and trails networks.

Related Links:

- Trails Strategy for BC <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/sports-recreation-arts-and-culture/outdoor-recreation/camping-and-hiking/rec-sites-and-trails/trail-strategy.pdf>
- Trails Strategy Public engagement 'what we heard' report <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/sports-culture/recreation/camping-hiking/sites-trails/program/policies-strategies/prov-trail-strategy>
- The Provincial Trails Advisory Body <https://www.orcbc.ca/provincial-trails-advisory-body/>

Thank you,

Recreation Sites and Trails BC





MARCH 31st, 2021

TRAILS STRATEGY REVIEW

WHAT WE HEARD REPORT: LOCAL GOVERNMENTS

PREPARED FOR: B.C. MINISTRY OF FORESTS, LANDS, NATURAL
RESOURCE OPERATIONS AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT

PREPARED BY: MNP LLP



Contents

Introduction	2
Whom Did We Hear From?	4
Involvement in the Trails Strategy	5
Vision, Guiding Principles, and Actions.....	6
Vision.....	6
Guiding Principles	7
Actions	7
Opportunities for the Trail System in B.C.	8
Improving Consultation and Collaboration	9
First Nation Collaboration.....	10
The Integration of Trails into the Transportation Network.....	11
Private Landownership and the Trail Network.....	12
Increasing the Financial Sustainability of Trails.....	13
Guidelines, Standards, and Education.....	14
Standards and Guidelines	14
Education Programs	14
Environmental Awareness and Tools.....	15
Enforcement.....	16
Communication and Marketing	17
Conclusion and Next Steps	18

Introduction

British Columbia offers an unparalleled diversity of landscapes and endless outdoor recreation opportunities. Trails are a fundamental means to explore and enjoy these spectacular unique natural amenities. Trails are also integral to the landscape and enable meaningful connections between people and nature.

Adopted in 2013, the Trails Strategy for B.C. is a call to action that invites all British Columbians to join in supporting and developing a sustainable network of trails throughout the Province.

The Provincial Trails Advisory Body (PTAB) advises the government on implementation and updates to the Trails Strategy for B.C. and is a partnership between:

- The Recreation, Sites and Trails BC (RSTBC) branch of the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development (FLNRORD).
- Ministry of Environment and Climate Change Strategy (B.C. Parks).
- Ministry of Tourism, Arts and Culture.
- Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure.
- Outdoor Recreation Council of B.C.
- B.C. Wildlife Federation.
- Wilderness Tourism Association.
- B.C. Recreation and Parks Association.
- Six public representatives from the Outdoor Recreation Council's membership.

The following principles guide this collaborative undertaking:

- Sound Environmental Stewardship and Management.
- Respect and Recognition for First Nations' Interests.
- Mutual Respect between Trail Interests and Other Resource Users.
- Respect and Understanding among Diverse Trail Interests.
- Partnerships and Collaboration.
- Secure Recreation Opportunities for All Trail Users.
- Benefits for Individuals, Communities and the Province.

In 2019, the PTAB, together with Recreation Sites and Trails B.C., began a formal review of the Trails Strategy to ensure its continued relevance and importance to recreationists, communities, First Nations, tourism proponents and the Province as a whole.

The formal review began with a detailed look at available academic literature and publications documenting the importance of trails to reconciliation, health, mental health, tourism and economic development. Following this, key stakeholders from the outdoor recreation sector and

Trails Strategy Review

What We Heard Report: Local Governments

the Provincial government were engaged through interviews and webinar focus groups. The resulting insights and learnings were used to develop a public engagement survey.

Following the public engagement, MNP embarked on a second phase to consult local governments. Building on previous findings, a survey was developed.

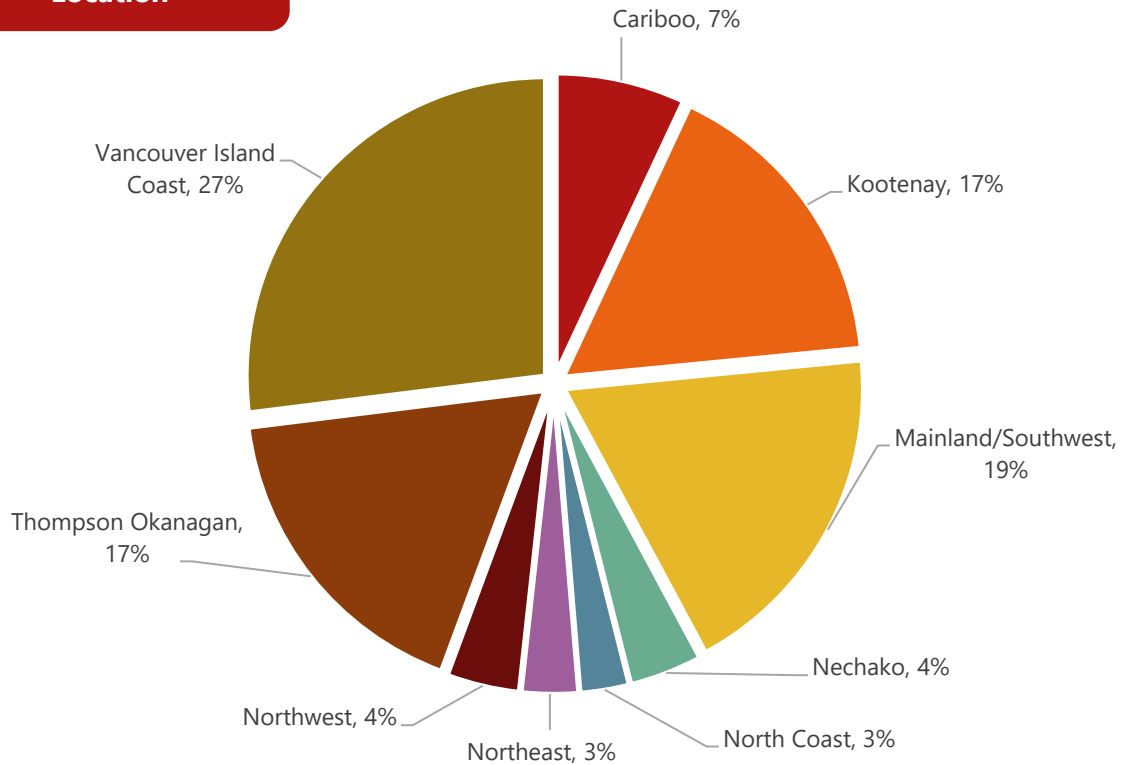
The survey launched on May 22, 2020, and closed on July 4, 2020.

Concurrent to these phases, staff from the Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations and Rural Development have been engaging directly with First Nations to discuss the Trails Strategy.

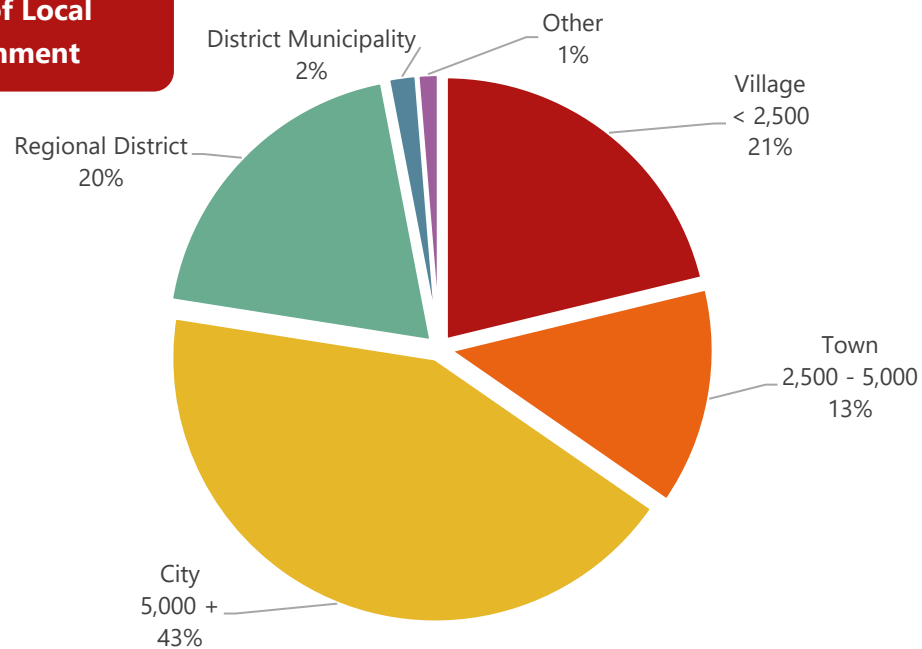
The following report outlines the findings of the local government survey.

Whom Did We Hear From?

Respondent Location



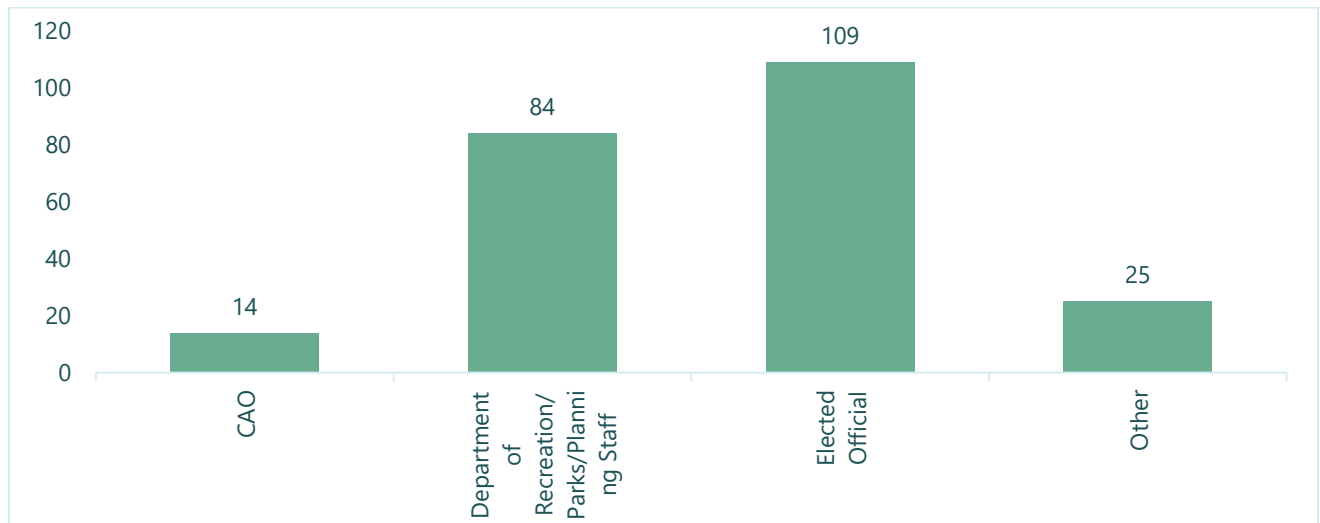
Types of Local Government



Trails Strategy Review

What We Heard Report: Local Governments

In total, we heard from **233 respondents** from **145 different municipalities and Regional Districts**. Out of this, **57%** of them were aware of the Trails Strategy. **Their roles were:**



Respondents who indicated "other" primarily referenced roles related to economic development.

Involvement in the Trails Strategy

We heard that these governments were involved in trail **planning, building, maintenance, promotion, and management.**

78% are actively involved in the development and maintenance of local trails.

54% participate in trail planning engagements between landowners, trail stewards, and First Nations.

64% map local trails.

68% manage and operate parks with trails in them.

However, these respondents stated that they struggle to properly support trails due to:



A lack of funding.



Limited human resource capacity.



The absence of a coordinated approach to trail management across jurisdictions.



Proximity to private lands.

Vision, Guiding Principles, and Actions

Vision

Overall, we found that most of those surveyed agree with the existing vision of the Trails Strategy:

Vision: a world-renowned, sustainable network of trails, with opportunities for all, which provides benefits for trail users, communities and the province.

However, respondents made the following suggestions to strengthen the vision statement:

Access

- Respondents believe that the vision should mention **access** and **accessibility**. The related reasoning varied:
 - Guaranteeing long-term access and stopping the industry from blocking entry.
 - Focusing on trails for users of different skills and diverse physical and cognitive abilities.
 - Increasing the number of trails that are accessible from home.
- There was a belief that “**opportunities for all**” should be better qualified. For example, one respondent suggested making it “**opportunities for all ages and abilities.**”

Collaboration and Partnerships

- Some respondents would like the vision to include **partnerships** and **collaborations**, as they believe that **more cooperation** is needed.

Environment

- Some respondents would like the strategy's vision to place a greater emphasis on the **protection of the natural environment**.
- Respondents also echoed comments from earlier engagement, stating that the word “**sustainable**” **does not provide enough environmental consideration**.

Funding

- Some respondents stated that they would like a mention of **sustainable funding** in the Trails Strategy vision. They believe that more sustainable funding sources are needed to **develop** and **maintain** trails in British Columbia effectively.

Trails Strategy Review

What We Heard Report: Local Governments

Guiding Principles

While there was **general support** for all guiding principles, those surveyed raised that the wording is **too vague** and **overlaps**. Additionally, respondents wanted to include guiding principles around:

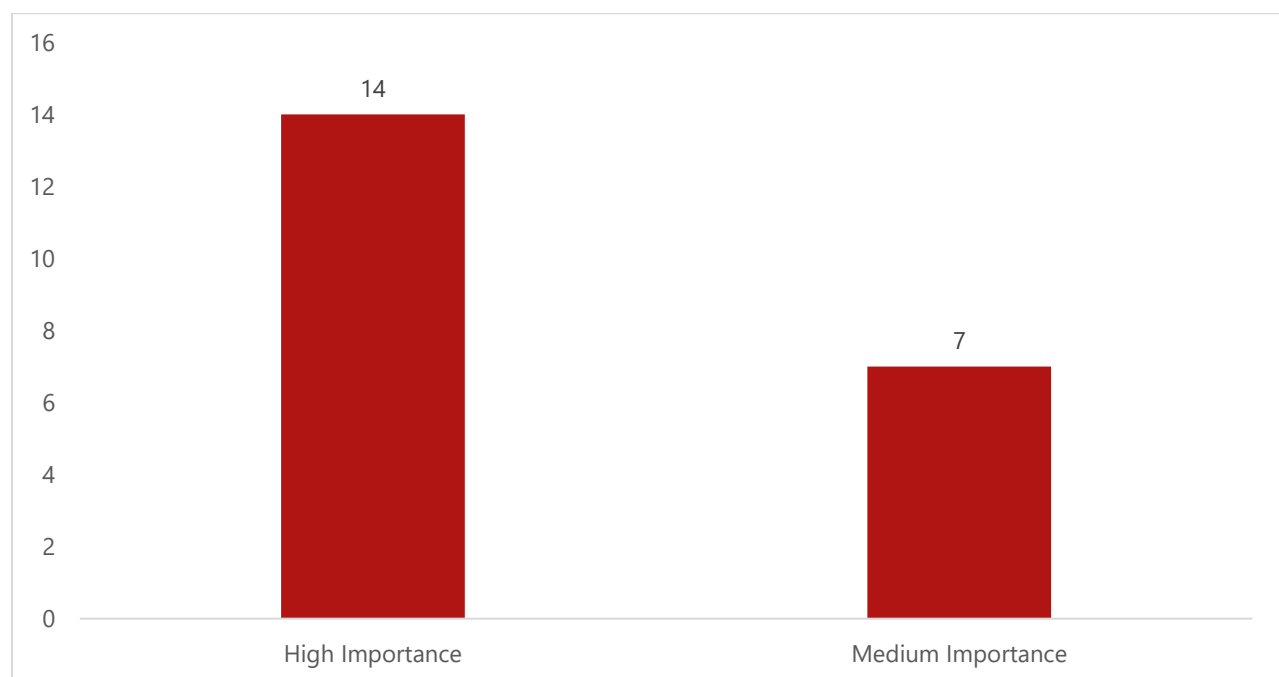
1. The environment and sustainability.
2. Financial sustainability.

Guiding Principles:

- **Benefits for individuals, communities and the province.**
- **Secure recreation opportunities for all trail users.**
- **Partnerships and collaborations.**
- **Respect and understanding among diverse trail interests.**
- **Mutual respect between trail interests and other resource users.**
- **Respect and recognition for First Nations' interests.**
- **Sound environmental stewardship and management.**

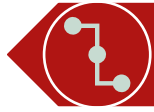
Actions

We heard that respondents generally found most actions of the strategy **to be of high importance**.



Opportunities for the Trail System in B.C.

We heard from local government representatives that the **best opportunities to improve** the trail system are to:



Focus additional efforts toward connecting trails to a wider network



Increase funding for the maintenance of trails



Increase funding for the development of trails

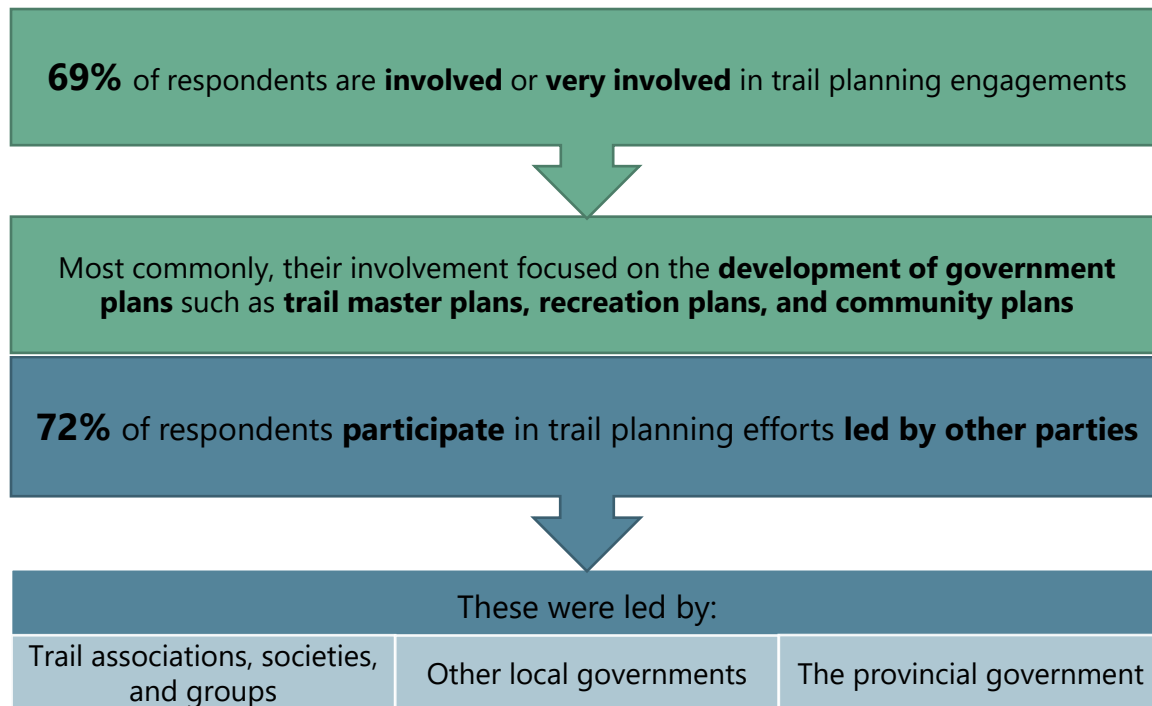


Broaden the accessibility of trails

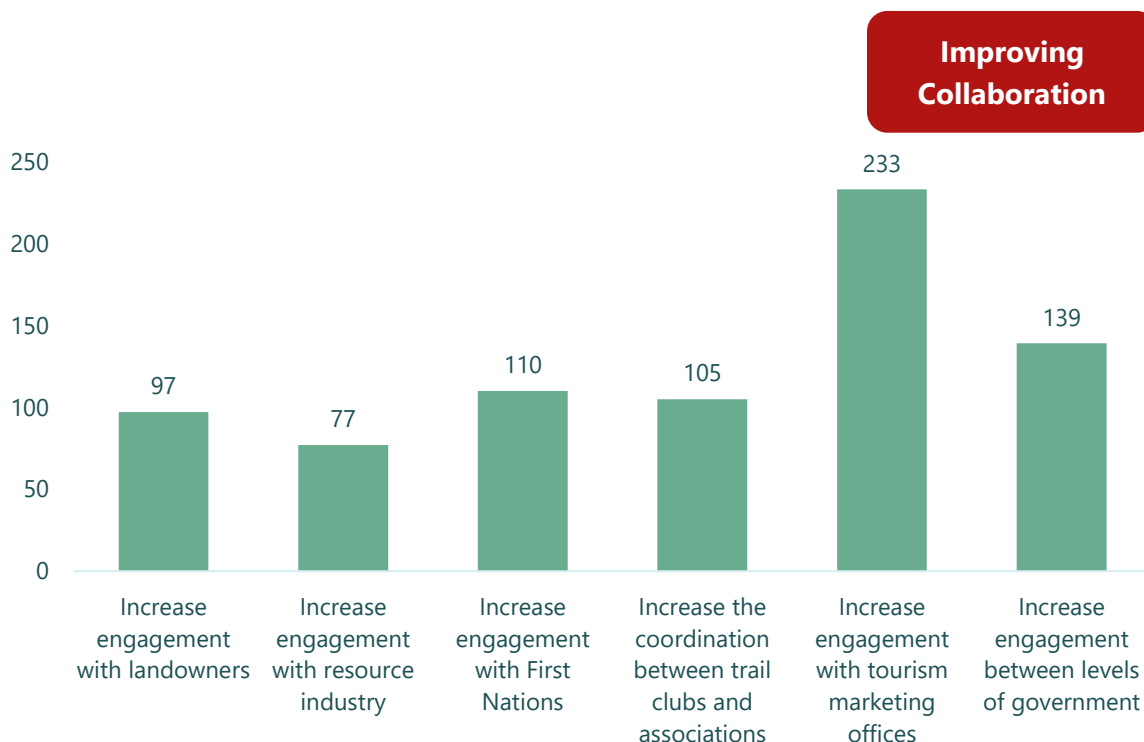


Put additional effort into developing an active transportation network

Improving Consultation and Collaboration



We heard from respondents that collaboration could be improved by **increasing engagement with tourism marketing offices, between levels of government, and with First Nation groups.**



Trails Strategy Review

What We Heard Report: Local Governments

When prompted to provide more detail on increasing engagement between levels of government, respondents stated that they would like to see the **provincial government**, **regional districts**, and **the federal government** playing a more prominent role in **trail planning activities**. When it came to the provincial government, respondents also suggested that the following groups be involved:

1. Recreation Sites and Trails B.C.
2. B.C. Parks.
3. The Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure.
4. The Agricultural Land Commission.
5. The Ministry of Forests, Lands, Natural Resource Operations, and Rural Development.

First Nation Collaboration

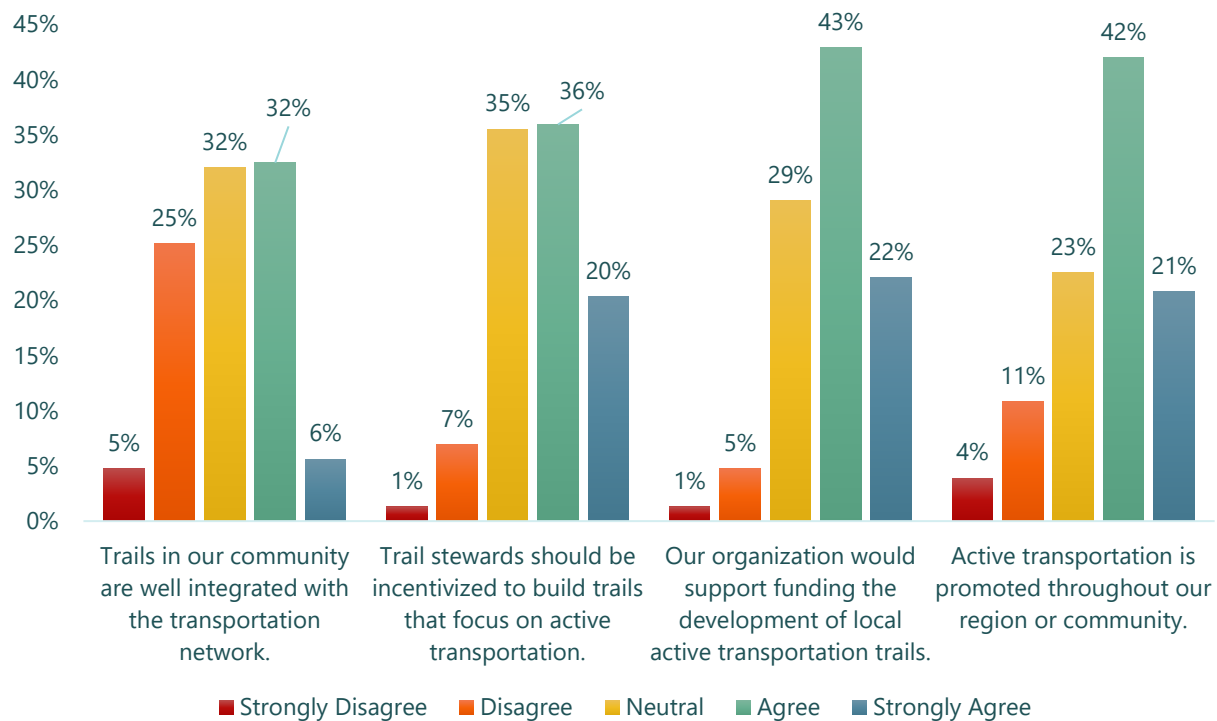
We heard that First Nation collaboration is important to local government, with **59% of respondents** expressing that there were **relationship-building opportunities** between **local government**, **trail associations**, and **First Nation groups** within their regions.

We heard that some initiatives are occurring to involve First Nation groups in trail planning, with **42% of respondents agreeing or strongly agreeing** that ongoing initiatives related to trails **positively impact the communities**. According to these respondents, these initiatives are successful because:

1. The First Nation group sits on the trail planning leadership team.
2. There is active and continuous engagement.
3. They co-manage the trail network.
4. There is strong collaboration.
5. Communication and trust are robust.

The Integration of Trails into the Transportation Network

Local government representatives indicated that they **promote active transportation throughout their region and community**. That said, communities varied when it came to integrating trails with the active transportation network. With this in mind, there was some level of support (**56%**) for **incentivizing trail stewards to build trails that focus on active transportation**; representatives believe their organization would support funding the development of local active transportation trails.



Private Landownership and the Trail Network

We heard that local governments had developed partnership agreements with landowners or trail associations to **reduce liability risk for landowners**. Additionally, local governments provide help and expertise to landowners to **identify** and **mitigate hazards**.

The survey asked respondents to identify the most significant **challenges** and **opportunities** the region faces with private landownership. These included:

Challenges

- Formal access to trails on private lands.

Opportunities

- Incentivize private landowners to allow public access.
- Create more formalized access to trails on private lands.
- Increase cooperation and communication with private landowners.

Increasing the Financial Sustainability of Trails

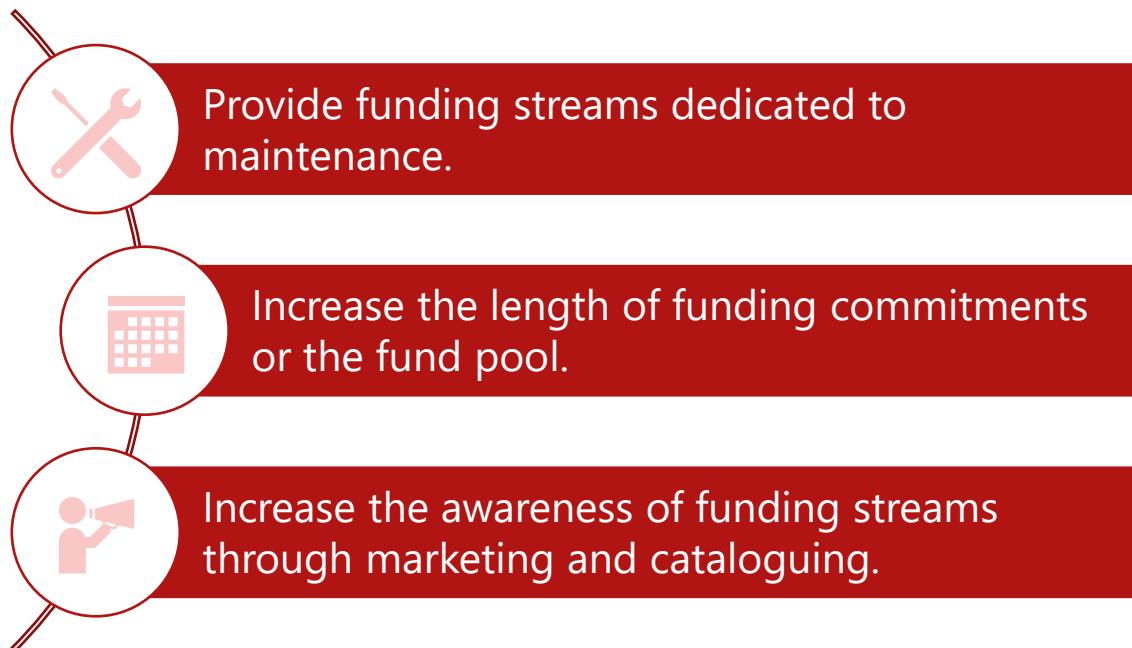
We heard that local governments would like a reliable and diverse funding model to support B.C.'s trail system, with **74% of respondents** indicating that their local government provides funding to develop and maintain trails through:

1. Operational and capital budgets.
2. Grants.

Additionally, **70%** apply for funding from outside sources. The most common sources were:

1. The Rural Dividend Fund.
2. Bike BC funding.
3. Northern Development Initiative Trust.
4. Unspecified federal funding sources.
5. Infrastructure funding—Active Transportation, General, and Capital.

We also heard that local government representatives generally believe that **trails' funding should be the Province's responsibility**. Respondents suggested the following improvements to **increase the financial sustainability** of the trail system in British Columbia:



Guidelines, Standards, and Education

Standards and Guidelines

We heard from respondents that **their governments use tools, standards, and guidelines** to help them **build and maintain** trails in their region.

In terms of standards and guidelines, **respondents most commonly use** the following:

1. Internal trail standards and adaptations of other standards.
2. International Mountain Bike Association.
3. Whistler Trail Standards.

Education Programs

When prompted to state whether their local government **promoted** or **used** education programs around **proper trail etiquette**, we heard that only **38%** did so. This group also raised that they use **signage** and **social media** as their primary tool to deliver this education. Further, these respondents promoted other external education sources, such as the Adventure Smart program.

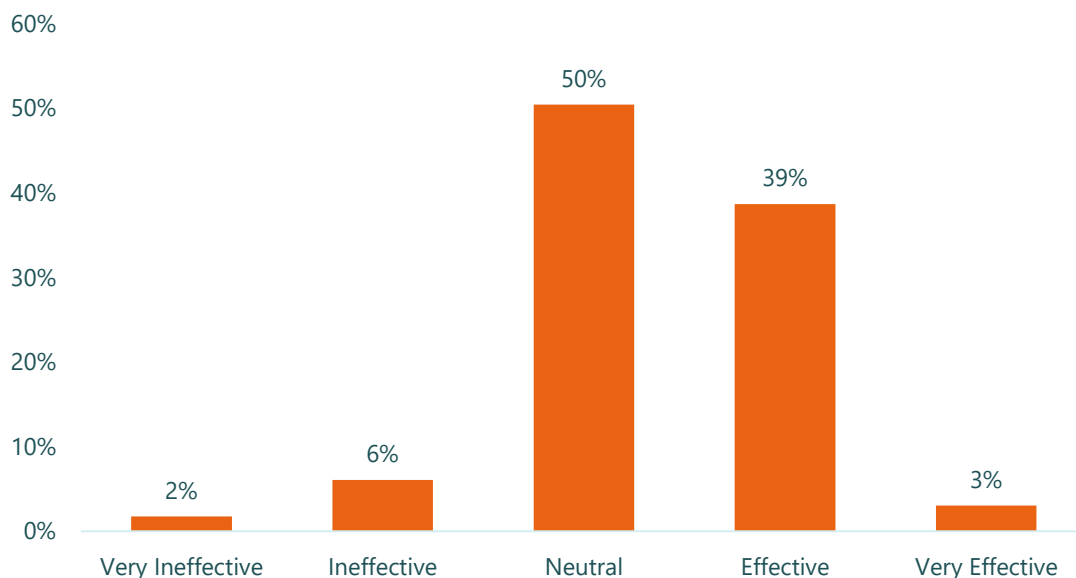
Environmental Awareness and Tools

When prompted on environmental stewardship tools, we heard that:

43% of respondents stated that environmental stewardship tools were used in the region when building trails.

51% of respondents were unsure if environmental stewardship tools were used in the region when building trails.

Local governments partner with associations to build trails, using the associations' internal expertise or tools. In some cases, respondents hired professional consultants, environmental experts, engineers, and biologists to design trails. When prompted to provide details on the effectiveness of existing tools used to address environmental concerns, we heard from respondents that these were either neutral or effective.

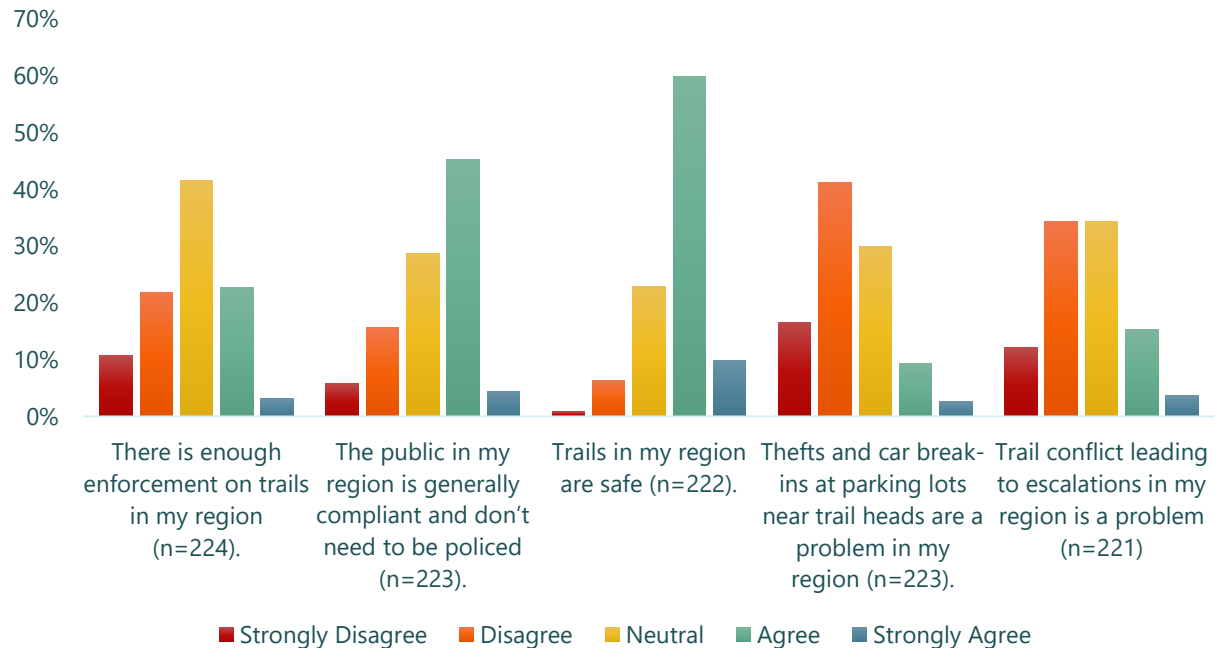


In previous engagements, we found that trail associations **effectively enhance the environmental awareness and appreciation of their members**. However, more could be done to **educate tourists and the general public**.


We heard that local government representatives most **firmly believe** that the Province should **develop educational tools to raise the environmental awareness and appreciation of users** and should **centralize environmental education efforts**. That said, they were also supportive of having local tourism offices play a role in educating tourists.

Enforcement

We heard that local government representatives **felt that trails in their region are safe (70%)** and that the public is generally compliant and **does not** need to be policed (**49%**). Additionally, respondents generally did not believe that **thefts** and **trail conflicts** were significant issues in their region.

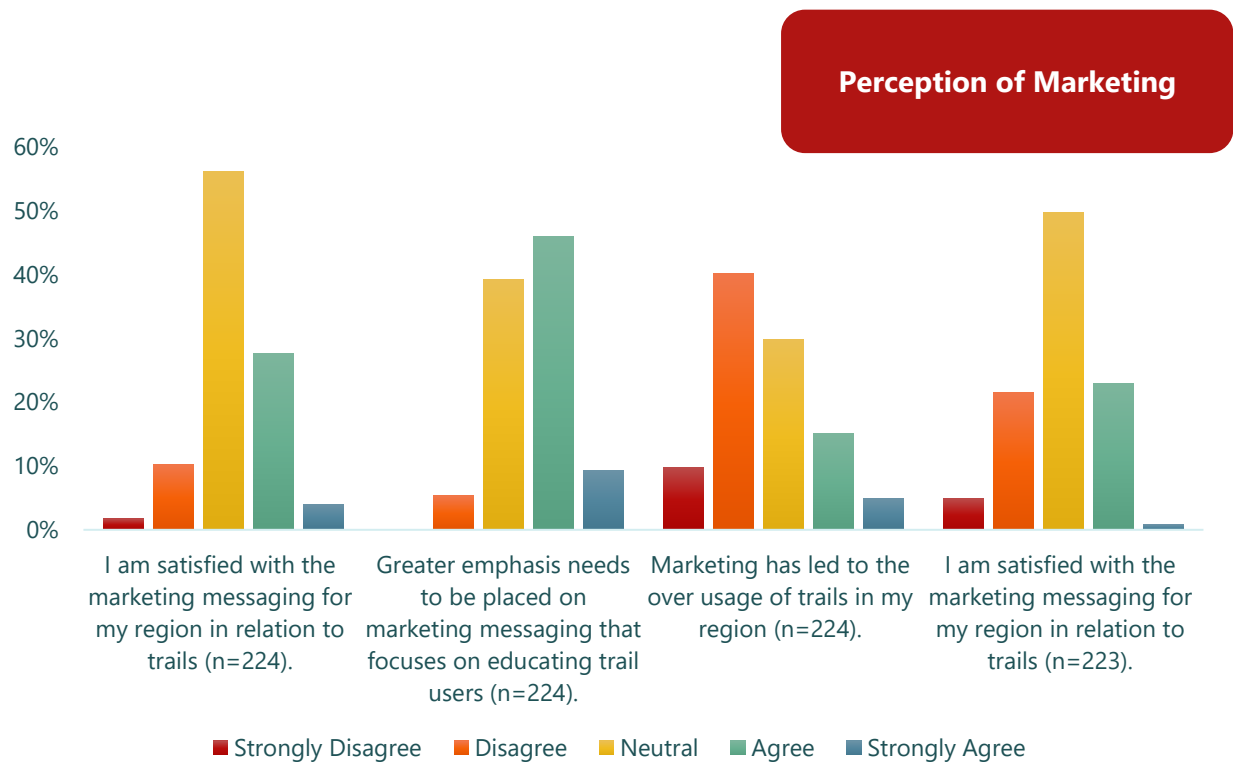


Regarding issues related to enforcement, the most cited areas needing increased attention to ensure compliance were:

-  Off-leash dogs in mandatory on-leash areas
-  Unauthorized trail building
-  Motorized users accessing non-motorized areas
-  Conflict between the various user types
-  Theft in parking lots

Communication and Marketing

Overall, local government representatives were generally **neutral** when it came to questions around their perception of marketing efforts in the Province. Respondents typically did not have a strong opinion on its overall success and whether the marketing messaging adequately represented their region. However, there was a general appetite to shift the focus of marketing efforts to educate trail users.



We heard from **75% of all respondents** that their local government had mapped the local trails in their community, with **95%** of those communities **making this publicly available**.

Conclusion and Next Steps

We appreciate all survey responses provided during this local government engagement period. We have heard that trails are essential to local governments across the Province, but additional support is required on behalf of the provincial government to maintain, fund, and build trails. Additionally, we heard that local governments would like to increase communication and partnerships among stakeholders to better trails in British Columbia, preserve trails and the environment for future generations, and ensure accessibility.

The PTAB will take this report, other engagements, and research into consideration to help them finalize their recommendations to the provincial government to update the Trail Strategy. The Province may then formally update the strategy to reflect the considerable information provided by the various stakeholder groups engaged in this process.