

## Smoke and mirrors in the Valley – Chronicle Herald November 10, 2011

The good news of the Annapolis Valley Trails Coalition ("Valley trail system finally complete," Nov. 3) is fantasy. The Valley trail "system" is both incomplete and a mess.

It started out well in 2002 when Trans Canada Trail donated 225 kilometres of DAR abandoned rail corridor, worth \$10 million, to the people of Nova Scotia. AVTC chair Bob Suffron states, "It was a dream of a lot of folks when the rail line was abandoned." It was. We dreamed of the TCT running through our communities and near our homes as the train had, an asset to tourism and health, preserving the corridor. That dream died.

The Valley TCT fell victim to a provincial policy of motorized trails, a policy resisted for obvious reasons: Up to 40 per cent of the population live or work within one kilometre of the corridor.

It runs beside homes, through a theme park, a marsh body, historic Annapolis Royal, bed and breakfasts of Smith's Cove, across roads and driveways. It bisects farms. It crosses Highway 1 at angles unsafe and illegal for off-highway vehicles.

The trail groups, one per county, faltered. They lost workers who had volunteered to build the TCT, but declined to build motorized trails. Adjacent homeowners who protested were ignored, stick-handled or pressured by midnight riders, civil servants, and MLAs. Ministers and head bureaucrats from Health Promotion and Protection (HPP) and Natural Resources departments kept their arms around the shoulders of the now-motorized trail groups whose "right to ride" trumped the right of homeowners to sleep. No one said, "Maybe we need to rethink. Maybe there are more appropriate places for OHVs to ride."

Instead, the government propped up the trail groups, providing expertise on how to push through a bad idea. In 2007, Kentville's HPP office created AVTC to "guide" the five groups building motorized trails.

AVTC got money and clout, plus a full-time "trails co-ordinator" to run interference, from HPP's budget, with token sums from local councils so persuaded.

In Nova Scotia, money flowed through ACOA, B-Fit and stimulus funds — all with the fiction of building healthy "shared" trails. Riding through the smoke and mirrors were the machines — noisy and emitting carcinogens, with posted speeds up to 50 km/h within community limits.

Walkers and cyclists persist, but are at risk.

Trails deteriorate where ATVs ride, chewing up the surface, creating ruts and berms. They cost four times as much as walking/ cycling trails to maintain. So we have ruts, berms and puddles. Enforcement officers are gone — little as they could do at 2 a.m. TCT says it will not designate a new trail if ATVs are allowed. And if it did, why would anyone donate?

As for snowmobiles, a Quebec case awarded damages to homeowners beside a TCT trail which allowed them. AVTC does not want a TCT Greenway. It wants motorized trails. With funds drying up, and the TCT garrotted with nary a peep, a stark choice has been made.

What we still could have is an Evangeline Greenway. We could have walkable communities for our health and magnets for cycling tourism. So why can't we?

Because we have the Annapolis Valley Trails Coalition from Health Promotion and Protection.

*Submitted by Bob Connell, John Hawkins, Barbara Bishop, members of the executive, Nova Scotians Promoting Active Transportation on Community Trails ([www.nspacts.ca](http://www.nspacts.ca)).*