# NOVA SCOTIA OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE PILOT PROJECT EVALUATION EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Context

In October 2018, Nova Scotia launched a Pilot Project to test whether four-wheeled off-highway vehicles (OHVs) could safely use the shoulder and paved roadways under specific road and safety conditions. The purpose of the Pilot was to enable OHVs at selected sites, to use provincial roadways to safely travel from one OHV trail to another, or to access amenities such as gas stations and restaurants.

Several established trails were identified that, with designated public roadway access, would provide enhanced trail connectivity or access to services for OHVs. Seven were selected based on safety criteria such as a highway speed of 80 km or less, good sightlines, and low traffic volumes. Rules regarding the safe use of the roadway and shoulder of the roadway were also established for the Pilot.

## Objectives

The OHV Pilot Project provides the opportunity to test and evaluate the integration of four-wheeled OHVs on the province's roadways, for the purpose of connectivity and access to amenities. It will help inform whether a safe, permanent solution is viable and under what conditions, to protect the safety of all road users as much as possible.

This evaluation was undertaken to determine if four-wheeled OHVs:

- Safely integrated with other vehicles.
- Impacted the roadway infrastructure.
- Impacted the local economy; and
- Whether the road safety rules of the Pilot were appropriate.

The evaluation will help inform decision-making regarding the rules and conditions associated with the continued access of public highways by four-wheeled OHVs. It will consider the site selection process along with the primacy of ensuring road safety, while giving due consideration to community concerns.

The OHV Pilot Project Evaluation encompasses significant research and multiple lines of evidence including the engagement of stakeholders and community members. The approach included both secondary data analysis and primary research, including two dedicated surveys (i.e., OHV riders and community members), as well as bilateral interviews with key stakeholders and business operators in the vicinity of the OHV Pilot sites.

 

## Summary of Findings

The Pilot was viewed positively by field staff, businesses, riders, and community members. It was seen to enhance trail connectivity and access to services for four-wheeled OHV riders without significant degradation of the pavement surface in most locations.

The Pilot was viewed by many stakeholders to alleviate major safety concerns. The Pilot sites were used appropriately by most OHV riders. Criteria for site selection, highway signage at the Pilot sites, and road safety rules were seen to contribute to the Pilot's success. Also, there were no charges for road safety violations, or serious injuries or deaths at a Pilot site.

The Pilot was largely endorsed by local businesses. In general, businesses at the sites designed to permit access to amenities, reported benefiting from OHVers visiting their establishments, as did other businesses in the vicinity of all the sites. However, it is challenging to quantify the economic impact on communities through this evaluation, due to respondent difficulty in providing precise estimates of changes in business levels.

Although not immediately in the vicinity of the existing Pilot sites, some tourism businesses in the Province have a strong niche with OHV riders. Further development of OHV activity would enhance tourism business opportunities (e.g., OHV tour companies, accommodations, campgrounds, restaurants, outfitters, etc.). An example of a destination that has more fully developed this niche was noted in the research and provides a reference point for possible outdoor tourism growth.

Overall, the evaluation evidence suggests that, under the conditions of the Pilot Project:

- The criteria for site selection is appropriate for these four-wheeled OHVs.
- There was not significant degradation of the roadway at the Pilot sites.
- Although not economically quantifiable, most businesses interviewed benefitted and were supportive of OHV use of public highways in their area.
- Under the road safety rules of the Pilot OHVs safely integrated with other road users, and
- There is support for creating additional opportunities for road access. Potential options for future sites were raised by stakeholders and survey participants.

## For Future Consideration

The OHV evaluation analysis offers the following for future consideration.

Designate the existing Pilot sites with permanent status.

This option was largely supported by the various evaluation participants. While one stakeholder suggested that OHV driver standards may relax if road access at specific sites

becomes permanent, others countered that the Pilot has provided adequate time for the "bar to be raised" for responsible OHV use. Considerations, however, include the legislative effort and timeline to amend the *Motor Vehicle Act* and the *Off-Highway Vehicle Act*.

Designate additional sites.

Similar to the above, this option was unanimously supported by stakeholders. This approach would scale the benefits – including economic, social, recreational, and quality of life - associated with the initial Pilot sites. Furthermore, expansion would potentially extend the array of businesses in the network to include accommodation and recreation enterprises while increasing the number of fuel and food related businesses. This would enhance the OHV user experience, attract more tourists, and elevate the province's OHV destination status. The outreach and engagement process offered numerous options for expansion consideration. Discontinuance of road access attracted little support through the outreach and engagement discussions.

Support Enhanced Business Measurement.

As noted above, business representatives were unable to attribute quantifiable changes in their business activity to the OHV Pilot. Measuring business impact could be enhanced, if a future study was conducted, by providing businesses with the opportunity to establish a baseline measure of OHV related activity and impacts, along with a tracking tool to capture activity in real time. This would help address feedback where respondents generally found it difficult to quantify their responses, while more precisely connecting business activity with the Pilot. Data collection of this nature could also be configured to enable economic impact measurement of the Pilot specifically, or the OHV sector generally.