

Valley Regional Enterprise Network
35 Webster St, Suite 102,
Kentville NS, B4N 1H4

August 30, 2016

Thank you to our guests and partners

We would like to share our heartfelt thanks for your presence and contribution at the “Smart Annapolis Valley” event on August 25 at the Berwick Fire Hall, with guest speaker Dan Mathieson, Mayor of Stratford, Ontario. Like you, we are inspired to action by his story.

We also want to affirm and report back to you what we heard during the afternoon forum led by Kelly Ells, CEO of the Valley Regional Enterprise Network. Our key question was: **“What can citizens, businesses, and municipalities do together – and *now* – to accelerate broadband-enabled growth in the Annapolis Valley?”**

We invited you to frame your comments in the context of our own specific challenges (geographic and political) and the potential use of existing broadband infrastructure.

We gathered your ideas and opinions during our open-microphone forum, the round-table discussion groups, and from your written comments on the feedback sheets.

We have summarised your ideas (below) and we invite you to share your thoughts about the event and the next steps we can take together.

- **What did you learn or hear?**
- **What insight did you gain into the opportunities for broadband-enabled growth?**
- **How can we derive greater benefits from the VCFN (Valley Community Fibre Network)?**
- **What strategies could lead us farther down the road?**
- **What could organizers of this event do better next time?**

We invite your responses to these five questions, or any other comments.

Please email Emily Konrath (EDO) at ekonrath@valleyren.ca,

or post your comments under our blog entry

(<http://www.valleyren.ca/blog/want-better-rural-internet-now/>).

Thank you!

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WHAT WE HEARD

We heard a clear message that businesses, citizens, and municipal leaders must work together to make the most of our existing broadband infrastructure, especially the Valley Community Fibre Network running alongside Highway 1, from Middleton to Halifax. We also heard that people want a champion to speak with one voice on the urgent and critical need for better and wider access to broadband services.

CHALLENGES/NEEDS

- We need better broadband infrastructure across the region
- The geographic and political challenges are huge:
 - we have so many municipal boundaries serving a wide area with a dispersed population
- Other barriers to effective use of broadband include:
 - lack of access, the quality of service, cost, regulatory hurdles
- Another barrier: municipalities are “risk-averse”
- The capital need for return on investment is also a barrier – we need a different model
- Communities may lack the will to organize their own solutions independent of government
- Marginal areas lack (adequate) high-speed service
- Municipal leaders need to look at this issue through the lens of equality (i.e., who lacks access and how can they be served fairly?)
- To reach the “last mile” we need to make innovative use of technology (and alternative capital/ownership models)
- People don’t know how to access the VCFN (Valley Community Fibre Network)
- We need to raise awareness about the VCFN
- The need is greater than just residential/private access to broadband services
- We need to make the case for investing in broadband as an economic development tool
- We need leadership – don’t wait for community-wide buy-in

OPPORTUNITIES/SOLUTIONS/STRATEGIES

- Businesses, citizens, and municipal leaders in the Annapolis Valley should work together
- Broadband connectivity should be regarded as an economic development tool
- We need an awareness campaign to show the potential to grow the regional economy through investments in, and deployment of, broadband infrastructure
- We need to explore innovative and unconventional solutions to problems posed by delivering broadband connectivity
- The challenges and opportunities should be clearly articulated and understood

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- We should begin now and take small steps, celebrating successes as we go
- We should use existing hubs and infrastructure: start now with what we have
- The region should speak with one voice to lobby higher levels of government for investment and resources to support broadband development
- Municipal government should be leaders
- We should shape political thinking on access to broadband – as an individual “right”
- Regulation and delivery of broadband service should follow the model of a power utility
- Government subsidies could support the business case for investment/development
- We should consider non-financial definitions and measurements of the “ROI”
- We should promote the need and promote the value
- We should start with a test area to demonstrate capability and benefits
- The federal government has funds for investing in broadband
- Regional leaders need a plan
- We need a champion to drive this campaign/pursue the objectives

In the coming months, our team at the Valley REN will be continuing this conversation on social media, so please stay engaged in this discussion. We’re also forming a Sector Table on ICT (Information and Communications Technologies), to inform our next steps as we address current challenges and search for solutions through innovation and collaboration.

This Smart Annapolis Valley event was hosted by *i-Valley* (*i-Valley* Intelligent Community Association) and the Valley REN, with support from the Annapolis Valley Chamber of Commerce and the Municipality of East Hants, and with the gracious hospitality of the Mayor of Berwick, Don Clarke. We are especially grateful for the use of the Berwick Fire Hall (what an excellent venue and community asset!) and for the service, food and refreshments provided by the Berwick and District Fire Department Auxiliary.

Once more, we’d like to thank our partners, for making this event possible, and we’d like to thank you for your time, your opinions, and your vision.

With best regards

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