

strait FORWARD»»»

Feedback from the Strait Forward Conference

Strait Forward was a one-day conference to discuss further diversification of the Strait area economy hosted by the Strait Area Chamber of Commerce, Cape Breton Partnership and Enterprise Cape Breton Corporation.

As a part of the conference wrap-up, participants were invited to outline three priorities for the Strait Region, as well as identify three challenges to be addressed immediately. What follows is a summary of this feedback. The most repeated priorities center on Port Development and the Oceans Sector:

- Grow the Oceans Sector through NSCC, ports and related businesses, including aquaculture;
- Develop consensus on the Strait Superport by engaging stakeholders; and,
- Re-invest “harbor bottom” fees to support port’s leadership role, locally.

A second significant group of suggested priorities relate to entrepreneurship and support of its development:

- Improve productivity through innovation and teaching entrepreneurship;
- Map regional assets and strengths, then plan strategically;
- Align strategic plans with regional, Atlantic, Canadian and global priorities;
- Adopt a “Can Do” attitude;
- Investment Readiness on all levels, playing to strengths, developing brand;
- Create one portal for economic development;
- Create the “Strait Area Regional Municipality;”
- Create an Economic Development Authority or industrial commission;
- Assist graduates with technical expertise to find local employment;
- Diversify the economy;
- Maximize “bio-economy/biomass” opportunities;
- SACOC should lead development and implementation of agenda;
- More collaboration between businesses and educational institutions like NSCC;
- Develop and maintain innovative, cutting-edge services; and,
- Develop new products for the export market.

The remaining suggested priorities include:

- Increase the region’s energy security (renewables);



strait FORWARD»»»

- Market what we have to attract quality investment;
- Invest in the next generation through education and workforce readiness;
- Labour attraction and retention through innovative compensation;
- Participate in Prosperity Framework committees;
- Improve connectivity;
- Report on progress; and,
- Create housing options for professionals.

Conference participants also listed three challenges to be addressed immediately in the Strait Region. The greatest of which was related to improving investment readiness:

- Improve infrastructure, especially internet access;
- Create a brand to highlight strengths, not focus on limitations;
- Enhance access to capital;
- Achieve consensus on Strait Superport;
- Build a coherent port management system;
- Identify sector leaders and form committees;
- Attract skilled trades people;
- Solve energy source/pricing issues; and,
- Determine health care capacity.

The next group of challenges to be met has to do with mobilizing people in the Strait region to work together:

- Integrate stakeholders; work together and on the same page;
- Engage the private sector as it's more efficient and innovative;
- Circulate relevant and current information;
- Build awareness of need to reach global markets;
- Determine goals and aspirations of youth/students;
- Create an "inbound" trade mission;
- Define the Strait region;
- Amalgamate the "Quad Counties;"
- Need an "open for business" mindset at municipal levels;
- Build ten houses in Inverness/Richmond counties;

strait FORWARD»»»

While the lists of priorities and challenges are diverse, they do reflect a desire by participants to work together, communicating more efficiently. The lists also reflect a general agreement by participants that, while challenges exist, efforts to meet them hold the promise of prosperity in the Strait Region.

Ian McNeil, Manager, www.prosperityframework.com.