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Fundy Regional Service Commission
Commission de Services Régionaux de Fundy

June 2, 2025

Hon. Susan Holt
Premier
President of the Executive Council
Minister responsible for Official Languages

Hon. Minister Aaron Kennedy
Minister of Local Government
Minister responsible for Service New Brunswick

Marysville Place
P.O. Box 6000
Fredericton, NB
E3B 5H1

Good afternoon, Premier Holt and Minister Kennedy,

On behalf of the network of regional service commission ("RSC") chairs and chief executive officers ("CEO") assembled for the three-day conference in the Fundy Region from April 30th to May 2nd, 2025, we would like to thank you for your insightful and honest participation during our time together. It is important to underscore the importance of the Government of New Brunswick's vision to establish a new standard of engagement and partnership with the RSCs and the local government sector. This level of interaction and accessibility advances the importance of collaboration and alignment in our collective pursuit to respond to the critical opportunities and challenges we face as a province.

A central objective of the recent RSC conference was to undertake a self-reflection on the status of regional collaboration, and to generate trends found across the twelve commissions. This letter intends to offer a summary of those findings, assembled by the RSC chairs and CEOs ("RSC network"), to help inform the Government of New Brunswick's development of the upcoming independent review of RSCs. The input was assembled into four categories, including: (A) General Observations; (B) Valuable Impact of RSCs; (C) Areas Requiring Improvement within RSCs; (D) How to Further Advance Local Interests through RSCs.

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General Observations

It was clear from the feedback collected from the RSC network that there is a deep appreciation of the principle of "nothing about us without us" highlighted by Premier Holt, which should be applied to the upcoming RSC review exercise. It is the view of the RSC network that GNB invite RSC partners in the formulation and scoping of the independent review, which should ensure that it is informed by those most involved in the oversight and execution of the RSC mandates. In turn, once the work of the review begins, it will be paramount that the independent consultant engages directly with RSC partners, including Boards, CEOs, RSC staff, local government partners, and all GNB departments. The RSC network agrees there needs to be flexibility in the implementation of the RSC mandate, as "no one size fits all." There is also a limitation to a flexible approach, as altering existing RSC mandates and inviting an ununified approach to regional collaboration may also introduce new challenges within and across regions.

The pursuit of an independent review of RSCs is an excellent opportunity to advance a new standard of regional collaboration, standardize best practice, and identify needed improvements to respond to ongoing challenges and advance critical opportunities. In the lead-up to the RSC review, we encourage the Government of New Brunswick to share a clear message of the importance of regional collaboration in our province, and the roles RSCs play in facilitating collective outcomes for local member communities.

Valuable Impact of RSCs

Each RSC is actively pursuing projects and programming to generate new value for its members, which is occurring across the existing legislative responsibilities of RSCs. The common trends across RSCs include:

- RSCs are supporting capacity building for the smaller communities within their region, who benefit from a regional forum to build economies of scale and partnership with other communities.
- There is a return on investment when communities come together as a region, pool resources, and pursue initiatives together.
- The depth of collaboration is impressive, as it is not only with each RSC Board, but new forums of collaboration are being generated across local councils, local CAOs, local administrative teams, and community partners.
- Accessing talent and expertise through RSCs that are efficiently and effectively shared across local governments.

- We observe that ownership over the region is accelerated when local communities take on leadership roles within the RSC network and are more directly involved in the development of regional partnership and objectives.
- Progress on executing on the new mandated services of the RSCs has been facilitated by "start-up" funding partnerships with the Government of New Brunswick, which has translated in the ability to demonstrate impact and tangibility, often resulting in establishing longer-term regional value and commitment.
- Building respect, trust, and collective vision within each RSC Board has been critical to moving mandates forward.
- Ensuring there is a high level of communication, respect, and trust between RSC CEOs and Board chairs has been key to developing traction.
- Leadership and collective vision from RSC Boards being shared with and by local government is key to RSC success.

Areas Requiring Improvement within RSCs

There remains important roadblocks, challenges and friction points that continue to arise across the RSC network, and the RSC review will be a great opportunity to advance resolutions on these areas. Key areas requiring improvement include:

- There is a need for greater communications to further the understanding of the RSC mandate, function, and governance model for local communities, community partners, and citizens.
- The existing funding formula supporting RSCs needs to be improved, in order to address uncertainty about long term funding.
- There are ongoing challenges with the belief that GNB continues to hold authority over RSCs, and that RSC Boards are not the final decision-maker as it relates to RSC business. For example, the expectations placed on RSCs for reporting and accessing funding from GNB are more comprehensive than the expectations placed on local governments to access GNB's unconditional grant funding.
- Orientation and onboarding of new municipal government representatives needs to be improved.
- Member buy-in across each region needs to be improved, as some regions face continued resistance to regional collaboration and working through the RSC model.
- Rural district governance model is not optimal and needs to be improved.
- Promotion of RSCs (successes, return on investment, and mandate) needs to be improved.

- There is a need for more collective meetings and communication between the CEOs, Chairs, Department of ELG, municipal associations.
- Ensuring information about RSC work trickles down to councils, municipal staff, and regional stakeholders.
- Continued need to review other GNB programs and service offerings that align closely to the mandate of RSCs (i.e. Resiliency Network, GNB inspection services, etc).
- Ongoing financial support from GNB to support the coordination and interaction between RSCs is another critical need.

How to Further Advance Member Interests through RSCs

One of the most central themes across all RSCs when discussing value and impact is the importance of ensuring a connection between the complex and evolving needs of local governments with the work of RSCs. Below are areas where RSCs can offer additional value to local communities:

- Develop an inventory of how RSCs are collecting information about local needs to share these ideas across the network and ensure all RSCs are equipped with feedback tools and processes to strengthen integration of local government needs into the work of RSCs.
- Develop an inventory of shared resources that municipalities and/or RSCs could access based on specific areas of interest and need: ie. engineers, planners, lawyers, HR policies and expertise, bulk purchasing options (ie. asphalt, fuel, brush cutter, interpretation and translation services, etc.) to meet needs identified by local governments.
- Develop an inventory of KPIs that RSCs are tracking and how they are being measured to strengthen the qualification of return on investment.
- Work with GNB to develop a common model for the orientation and on-boarding of new municipal government and rural district representatives (ensuring this is provided in both official languages).
- Identify shared standards for volunteer services like fire departments because many member communities have expressed this as a priority need.
- Develop a common model of how RSCs are sharing information with stakeholders to ensure that that value of RSCs work trickles down to all stakeholders.

The network of RSCs would like to thank you once again for your vision and leadership to support the local government sector and critical importance of regional collaboration. The RSC network is

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poised to continue building partnership and capacity across communities to deliver a brighter and more prosperous New Brunswick.

Sincerely,

Mayor Jim Bedford
Past Chair, Fundy Regional Service Commission

Phil Ouellette
CEO, Fundy Regional Service Commission

CC: Charbel Awad, Deputy Minister, Department of Environment and Local Government
Jennifer Wilkins, Assistant Deputy Minister, Department of Local Government
Nicole Somers, Chair, Northwest Regional Service Commission
Bruno Volpé, CEO, Northwest Regional Service Commission
Brad Mann, Chair, Restigouche Regional Service Commission
Betty-Ann Fortin, CEO, Restigouche Regional Service Commission
Paul Arseneault, Chair, Chaleur Regional Service Commission
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Bonnie Morse, Chair, Southwest New Brunswick Service Commission
Hollis Bartlett, CEO, Southwest New Brunswick Regional Service Commission
Judy Wilson-Shee, Chair, Capital Region Service Commission
John Smith, CEO, Capital Region Service Commission
Trina Jones, Chair, Western Valley Regional Service Commission
Katelyn McGrath, CEO, Western Valley Regional Service Commission