



Report on the State of Triathlon in Atlantic Canada – prepared on 08 July 2024

Introduction: The triathlon scene in Atlantic Canada is experiencing a notable decline in registrations and event cancellations, prompting discussions within the community about the reasons behind this shift. This report compiles insights and comments from members of a Facebook group dedicated to triathlon enthusiasts in the region.

Since my initial FB post on the topic of triathlon we have had Harvey Triathlon cancel for this year due to low registrations and Gravelman Triathlon dramatically alter their race inclusions to reduce cost while at the same time reducing the race registration fees to generate new registrations so that a successful race can be held at what will hopefully be a break even situation for the race director. I think its important to note that both race directors have the desire to host races but are probably not prepared to take a financial hit for low numbers of participants.

Thank you to everyone who contributed to the content of this report.

Key Themes and Insights:

Shift in Outdoor Activities:

There is a trend towards gravel riding and trail running, noting the increasing popularity of these activities over traditional road-based triathlons.

Gravel biking and mountain biking events are drawing more participants according to Millennium Cycles road bike sales are way down with gravel being up significantly.

Demographic Changes:

The aging of the baby boomer generation, which constituted a significant portion of past participants, is leading to a decline in triathlon engagement as they start to have families and priorities change.

There is also a personal shift away from structured triathlon training towards more varied and less competitive activities as lifestyles change while still training in swimming, cycling & running, just not in a competitive environment.

Safety Concerns:

People expressed concerns about safety while road biking, attributing this to increased distractions and harassment from and among drivers, which has made road cycling less appealing and more dangerous.

Financial Considerations:

The high costs associated with triathlon, including registration fees and equipment expenses, have become more burdensome post-pandemic due to economic pressures. This added to a general increase in the cost of living has contributed to reduced participation.

Many races do not offer refunds or deferrals so athletes wait to the last minute to register, and they will also wait to see what the weekend weather forecast is before registering.

Impact of COVID-19:

The disruptive effects of the COVID-19 pandemic on organized sports in general, which may have accelerated existing trends away from triathlon participation. Covid caused a lack of drive to compete

Alternative Events and Activities:

Ironman sucked the life out of local events as it became the sole motivation of triathletes to do a full Ironman which came at the expense of grass roots races due to the expense of an Ironman weekend and the time commitment needed.

The rise of alternative endurance sports formats like gravel biking and trail running, which offer different experiences and may be more appealing to current participants. Similarly, Ellens Tour and other Fondo style (non-competitive) group rides seem to be on the rise.

People start out racing locally, then set their sights on Ironman and then leave the sport.

From 11-25 August there are 4 events on the TriNB calendar – events should be more spread out of the summer.

Too many events and too few weekends

Community

Many comments focused on the lack of community & a lack of a support network within the sport. This is where clubs could bridge that gap.

Many rural locations do not have pool availability thus making it hard to train.

Lake swimming is hard if you are not located in a community with a Tri Club that hosts open water swim sessions. This makes preparation in terms of training much more difficult.

Other Items

Poor development system for youth to be introduced to triathlon.

Not being allowed to wear a wetsuit in an open water triathlon is very intimidating especially if the water is deemed too warm.

Triathlon community seemed inaccessible and mysterious

Fear of coming in last – intimidation factor.

Question - If we could create your ideal triathlon to help develop the sport - what would that triathlon look and feel like? What format would it take, what inclusions would be needed, what venue, distances etc? Anything that you think would create a sustainable, popular race.

Ideas and Suggestions

- 1) Encourage people to join their local triathlon club.
- 2) Try to introduce Swim Clubs to triathlon – not all swim club members are elite swimmers and could be good candidates for triathlon.
- 3) Clubs to develop a sense of community and to help people adapt to Open Water Swim training by offering club coached sessions in a safe environment with kayaks & paddleboarders.
- 4) Offer more generous time limits for Open Water Swims to increase participation.
- 5) Have a beginner wave for Open Water Swim Races – different color swim caps or separate wave.
- 6) More swims in the 400m range as 750m can be daunting.
- 7) Tri with a pool swim later in the summer.
- 8) More Pool Swim Triathlons even for longer distance triathlons.
- 9) For those Open Water Swim races offer a Time Trial start rather than a mass start which can be scary.
- 10) More stand alone Super Sprint or Tri-A-tri events.
- 11) Offer Team Relay Options.
- 12) More Kids of Steel races.
- 13) Allow 13-15 year olds to take part in Sprint Tri as we lose these people to other sports.
- 14) Launch races over the Christmas – New Year holidays so that athletes can plan their season alongside the larger events such as Ironman or Challenge.
- 15) Have a triathlon every 2 weeks in the summer so that races are spread out. Hampton Ladies Tri will be 08 June in 2025 with Rockwood possibly 2 weeks later.
- 16) Every Tri that has an Open Water Swim element should allow floaties or Tow Floats to help those triathletes with a fear of being slow, nervous or a little apprehensive of OWS. These are currently banned by TriCanada and the ITU but we are trying to make triathlon inclusive, so I

think this is worth being put on the table for discussion. These are essentially a safety device and are permitted by many stand alone swim events such as the Thames Swim Marathon in England and the Scilly Swim Challenge.



- 17) Allow E-bikes in their own category in the same way there are E-bike Mountain Bike and Fondo Rides.
- 18) Have an Atlantic Canada Championship over the 3 provinces by Age Group or 3-5 race Provincial Series.
- 19) Winter Triathlon – pool swim, Spin bike, Track or Treadmill.
- 20) Changes in our infrastructure, enforcement, and overall culture to make our roads safer for everyone- walkers, runners, cyclists, mobility challenged folks – everyone.
- 21) Mirror the T100 series with 3 disciplines equaling 100k – 2k swim – 80k bike – 18k run.
- 22) Triathlon with equal distance time for each event – 30 mins for swim, 30 mins for Bike – 30 mins for run.
- 23) With a Triathlon course of 750m swim – 20k bike – 5k run also offer swimming, cycling & running events over the same distances at the same time as the Triathlon (or immediately after the discipline concludes).
- 24) Non-technical gravel races.

- 25) Develop sponsorship package to attract new sponsors to Triathlon.
- 26) Improve upon Marketing and Social Media to promote races.
- 27) Manage expenses – no frills events with no splits – just a start and finish time – overall time taken.
- 28) Gap needs to be bridged between KOS & adult races – this is where Super Sprints could work.
- 29) Races need to promote that any style bike is fine to race as there is a fear that a high end TT bike is required to take part.

Conclusion: The decline in triathlon participation in Atlantic Canada appears to stem from a combination of factors including demographic shifts, safety concerns related to road biking, economic constraints post-COVID-19, and the growing popularity of alternative outdoor activities. These insights suggest a need for adaptation within the triathlon community to attract and retain participants, potentially through safer cycling routes, more affordable race options, and diversification of races offered.

Most concerns surrounding triathlon racing seem to center around the swim, with a certain intimidation with Open Water Swimming and a desire to have more pool based swims later in the summer as not everyone trains all winter.

A strong network of clubs seems critical to the long term future of the sport to provide a sense of community and a support network to develop skills needed to compete in triathlon.

Any thoughts, opinions, suggestions or next moves would be very welcome.