

# GOLD RUSH TRAIL DESTINATION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

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## HIGHLIGHTS



DESTINATION  
BRITISH COLUMBIA



# THANK YOU

The Gold Rush Trail Destination Development Strategy is the outcome of a year-long iterative process of gathering, synthesizing, and validating information with stakeholders about the current status and future direction of tourism in the Gold Rush Trail planning area.

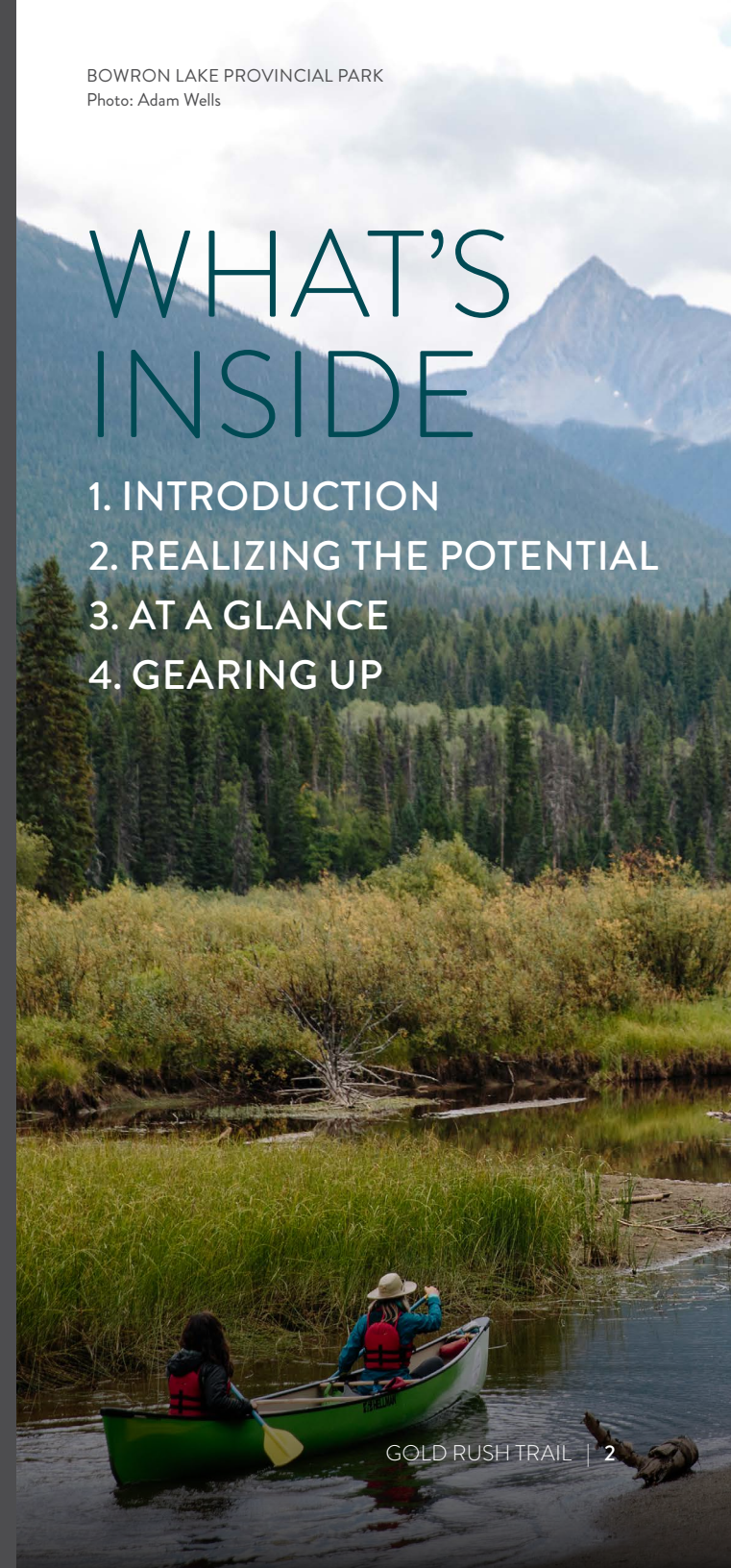
We thank the Indigenous peoples on whose traditional territories we gathered for our community meetings: Quesnel — home of the Southern Dekal Nations Alliance, 100 Mile House and Williams Lake — home of the Secwepemc, Ashcroft

— home of the Nlaka’pamux, Hope — home of the Sto:lo people and Lillooet — home of the St’at’imc.

Thank you to our tourism partners who participated in the process by attending community meetings, participating in surveys and interviews, engaging in follow-up conversations and forwarding relevant documents and insights. Special thanks to the members of the Working Group, the members of the Gold Rush Trail Management Committee, as well as the facilitators of the destination development process.

# WHAT'S INSIDE

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# 1 INTRODUCTION

## WHY A STRATEGY?

The Gold Rush Trail Destination Development Strategy was developed to enhance the competitiveness of the Gold Rush Trail tourism destination over the next 10 years and beyond. The strategy was developed as part of Destination BC's Destination Development Program to support and guide the long-term growth of tourism in British Columbia. This document presents the key highlights of the Gold Rush Trail strategy.

## WHO IS IT FOR?

The Gold Rush Trail (GRT) Destination Development Strategy is a guide for tourism partners as they work collaboratively to grow the visitor economy. The strategy will be reviewed and updated to reflect changing tourism objectives, priorities, and market conditions. Results will be tracked and learning outcomes will inform future implementation activities thereby optimizing their effectiveness in increasing economic, social, and cultural benefits for the entire Gold Rush Trail area.

## WHERE IS IT FOR?

The Gold Rush Trail planning area encompasses a 750 km corridor stretching from New Westminster to Barkerville and north to Stone Creek, following the traditional Indigenous peoples' trading routes utilized during the fur trade and expanded during the gold rushes of 1858-1862. The northern boundary includes West Twin, Bowron Lake, and Fraser River Provincial

Parks and stretches to the town of Stoner on Highway 97. The western portion of the planning area is bounded primarily by, and includes, the Fraser River, but stretches west of the Fraser River to include Nazko and Blackwater in the north, Riske Creek and Churn Creek Protected Area in the central area and Gold Bridge, Seton Portage, Stein Valley Nlaka'pamux Heritage Park, and Harrison Lake in the southern area of the corridor. The southern portion of the planning area extends along Highway 1 from Hope to New Westminster. The eastern border is bounded by Highway 1 to Cache Creek and includes Logan Lake, Ashcroft and Walhachin. It also includes Highway 97 from Cache Creek to 150 Mile house, at which point the border moves east to include Crooked Lake, Quesnel Lake, and West Twin.

## WHERE DOES IT FIT?

The Gold Rush Trail is one of 20 planning areas across BC for which destination development strategies are being developed. Each planning area represents a logical destination for visitors in and around the province. As planning areas span across multiple jurisdictions, the importance of adopting an integrated approach with a shared vision and coordinated investment is critical. The Gold Rush Trail Destination Development Strategy is one of three planning area strategies being prepared for the Cariboo Chilcotin Coast tourism region; one of six similar strategies being prepared for the Vancouver, Coast and Mountains tourism region and one of seven for the Thompson Okanagan tourism

region. In time, informed by the outcomes of all relevant planning area destination development strategies, regional strategies will be developed. These will, in turn, inform the creation of a provincial strategy thereby ensuring a truly integrated and cohesive combination of bottom-up and top-down destination planning.

## A KEY IMPERATIVE

The recommendations contained within the Gold Rush Trail Destination Development Strategy form the foundation for additional, focused and aligned discussions regarding implementation. It will be important to ensure that the strategy becomes embedded in local, regional, provincial and federal decision making processes. It is only by working collaboratively in an integrated way with a shared agenda that the full potential of the Gold Rush Trail planning area will be realized.

## AT A GLANCE

In what follows, the distinctiveness of the destination is summarized and its vision for tourism introduced. While acknowledging the challenges the sector faces, its potential for growth is set out in terms of key opportunities and experience development potential. A consideration of each development priority and associated actions then follows. While further detail on each of these elements is available in the full strategy, they are brought together "At a Glance" to demonstrate the scope of the integrated nature of the approach being taken.

# 2

# REALIZING THE POTENTIAL

## A DISTINCTIVE DESTINATION

Central to the significance and appeal of the Gold Rush Trail planning area is the Fraser River. Designated a Canadian Heritage River in 1989, it was a transportation route and source of food for the Indigenous people of the region long before Simon Fraser charted its waters. The discovery of gold on sandbars south of Yale in 1858, triggered a “Gold Rush” which was to have far-reaching consequences for the development of the region’s communities, cultural landscapes, and collective memory. It is a place where echoes of the past speak to visitors today and a truly stunning natural landscape offers the prospect of year-round exploration, exhilaration and enjoyment. It is a peopled place — home to the original custodians of this land, the First Nations, as well as more recent arrivals.

From thrilling white water rafting adventures to year-round outdoor activities in a vast wilderness, the Gold Rush Trail is one of only two major heritage touring corridors in BC. Up-close encounters with the story keepers of this place, reveal a focus on a resilient future and a deep commitment to safeguarding its integrity for future generations to enjoy.

## A SHARED VISION

The vision for tourism development in the next 10 years reflects the distinctiveness of the destination and the ambition of its communities:



“THE GOLD RUSH TRAIL IS A HIGHLY RECOGNIZED, ICONIC TOURING ROUTE THAT IS RENOWNED FOR ITS VIBRANT, CONNECTED COMMUNITIES, HERITAGE PRESERVATION, CULTURAL AND INDIGENOUS EXPERIENCES, NATURAL LANDSCAPES AND OUTDOOR ADVENTURES. THE DIVERSITY OF EXPERIENCES ATTRACTS VISITORS YEAR-ROUND AND GENERATES ON-GOING, SUSTAINABLE BENEFITS FOR RESIDENTS, BUSINESSES, AND VISITORS ALIKE.”

## KEY OPPORTUNITIES

While the destination faces a number of distinct challenges in terms of the impact of recent wildfire and flooding events; the lack of specific infrastructure to support the touring experience; seasonality; ecosystem carrying capacity; uncertainty around First Nations treaty negotiations; the market readiness / availability of purchasable experiences, nevertheless key opportunities include:

- McAbee Fossil beds — one of the richest beds in the world.
- Awareness of the GRT amongst stakeholders and visitors
- Scope to develop best practice in multi-modal touring corridor development
- Capacity for Indigenous tourism development
- The development and maintenance of GRT’s heritage assets.

# 2

# REALIZING THE POTENTIAL

## EXPERIENCE POTENTIAL

The current and future experiences that will motivate travel and differentiate the destination with a compelling, sustainable visitor experience include:

- **INDEPENDENT TOURING BY CAR/RV**

As a stand-alone touring corridor encompassing 750km of stunning natural scenery, combined with heritage that is tied to First Nations, the confederation of British Columbia and the Cariboo Gold Rush, this route offers a diversity of nature, culture, and heritage opportunities for the independent touring visitor. The GRT's connection as part of the Discovery Coast Circle Tour and the 2018 commencement of the direct ferry service from Port Hardy to Bella Coola will re-establish the opportunity for visitors to experience some of BC's most distinct natural landscapes and history.

- **THE GOLD RUSH STORY WITH ANCHOR HISTORIC SITES OF FORT LANGLEY NATIONAL HISTORIC SITE (NHS) AND BARKERVILLE HISTORIC TOWN & PARK**

This corridor is intimately tied to the story of the development that followed the Cariboo Gold Rush along the Fraser River, delivering a heritage experience not offered elsewhere in Canada. It is bookended by two of BC's most significant national historic sites. Fort Langley NHS is the Birthplace of BC

and the starting point for the historic journey north. Barkerville Historic Town & Park is considered the "El Dorado" of the Gold Rush Trail and is the largest historic site in western North America where visitors can experience life as it was when Billy Barker struck gold in 1862.

- **THE FRASER RIVER AND FRASER CANYON**

Stretching over 1,375km, the Fraser River is the longest river in BC. Designated a Canadian Heritage River for its natural and human heritage values, much of BC's provincial history is bound to this river. Its stunning natural landscapes make a beautiful backdrop for touring visitors travelling north and south along Highways 1 and 97.

- **BACK AND FRONT COUNTRY ADVENTURE**

The extensive waterways and wilderness make the GRT an ideal location for adventure. Outdoor recreation opportunities are plentiful and visitors are drawn to enjoy some of BC's most thrilling river rafting, paddling, hiking, mountain biking, ATV/off-roading, horseback riding, and winter adventure. The northern portion of the corridor is home to a multitude of guest ranches which provide visitors with an opportunity

to learn about western culture and ranching life, and also home to the long-distance Gold Rush Snowmobile Trail, drawing snowmobilers.

- **SALMON, STURGEON AND FRESHWATER FISHING**

BC is an anglers' paradise. The planning area is home to numerous freshwater lakes. The Fraser River hosts all six species of Pacific salmon and is one of only three rivers in BC where the prehistoric sturgeon thrive and spawn.

- **VISITING WELL KNOWN PARKS**

The GRT is home to three of BC's highly popular parks including Bowron Lake, Stein Valley Nlaka'pamux Heritage Park, and the South Chilcotin Mountains. Bowron Lake is a renowned canoe circuit encompassing 116km of lakes, waterways, and connecting portages. Stein Valley has been an extremely important location for the Nlaka'pamux people for thousands of years. Visitors come to experience the spectacular scenery and outstanding historical, cultural and spiritual values of the park. The South Chilcotin Mountains are famous for stunning scenery, remote wilderness, and a network of backcountry

trails for mountain biking, hiking, and horseback riding.

- **MCABEE FOSSIL BEDS**

The McAbee Fossil Beds are part of an old lake bed that was deposited 50 million years ago. There is an incredible abundance, diversity, and high quality of fossils at the site, and it is known in BC for its plants and insects from the Eocene Epoch.

- **INDIGENOUS TOURISM**

With 58 First Nations in the planning area, visitors have the opportunity to learn about Canada's First People at a variety of sites including Xwisten, Tuckkwiowhum and Xat'sull Heritage Sites and Villages. While there are currently 17 market-ready, Indigenous tourism experiences offered, the interest in Indigenous tourism will serve to grow the availability of offers in the future.

- **FESTIVALS AND EVENTS**

The planning area is home to an assortment of festivals and events that draw visitors including the Abbotsford Air Show, ArtsWells, Chilliwack Air Show, Fraser River Gold Panning Days, Hope Brigade Days, Williams Lake Stampede, Indigenous music festivals, First Nations Powwows, Billy Barker Days, and more.



# 3 AT A GLANCE

**VISION STATEMENT** The Gold Rush Trail is a highly recognized, iconic touring route that is renowned for its vibrant, connected communities, heritage preservation, cultural and indigenous experiences, natural landscapes and outdoor adventures. The diversity of experiences attracts visitors year-round and generates on-going, sustainable benefits for residents, businesses, and visitors alike.

THEME 1	<b>ON THE MOVE: STRATEGICALLY INVEST IN TARGETED INFRASTRUCTURE UPGRADES THAT SUPPORT THIS UNIQUE TOURING CORRIDOR</b>				
<p><b>REVIEW, REFRESH AND RESTORE</b></p> <p>Within the context of establishing a prioritized inventory of available amenities, enhance existing and develop new rest stops with washrooms and e-charging stations along highways 1 and 97. Build public washroom facilities in Lillooet to service buses during peak season.</p>	<p><b>SAFE AND SOUND</b></p> <p>Informed by the experience of dealing with recent wildfires, work collaboratively with the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (TRAN) to improve emergency services and safety for visitors and citizens travelling along the Gold Rush Trail (GRT).</p>	<p><b>SIGNED AND SECURE</b></p> <p>Work with tourism and community stakeholders to provide TRAN with clear local guidance on regional directional and interpretive signage opportunities. Ensure that roads which are important for visitor access are retained and maintained.</p>	<p><b>CONFIDENTLY CONNECTED</b></p> <p>Identify key locations for cell coverage and Wi-Fi hotspots along Highways 1, 97, and north of Hope. Ensure businesses are aware of and promote these locations to travellers. Increase the accuracy of Google mapping along the GRT.</p>	<p><b>ENHANCE ACCESS</b></p> <p>Establish a taskforce to advocate for the return of passenger rail service to the GRT. In seeking to improve air access, target a major internationally connected carrier to service the GRT destination and work with existing carriers to enhance scheduled services and capacity into Williams Lake.</p>	
THEME 2	<b>COMMON CAUSE: LEAD STRATEGIC GROWTH THROUGH CONTINUED COLLABORATION TO STRENGTHEN THE CORRIDOR'S END-TO-END VISITOR EXPERIENCE</b>				
<p><b>ON MESSAGE</b></p> <p>Promote a deeper understanding of the tourism ecosystem amongst citizens and businesses. Communicate the value of tourism and the importance of working collaboratively and cohesively in line with the GRT Destination BC approved brand.</p>	<p><b>RECOGNIZE &amp; SUPPORT</b></p> <p>Nurture support for the development of tourism amongst key players — policy makers, decision makers and influencers — to ensure that the needs of tourism are reflected in relevant policies, plans and programmes.</p>	<p><b>ENGAGE &amp; ADVOCATE</b></p> <p>Actively, and continually, invite new players into local, regional, and provincial tourism conversations to garner diverse input and create advocates who can speak on behalf of the industry. Optimize the benefits of the Municipal Regional District Tax status to promote tourism growth</p>	<p><b>ENABLE &amp; EQUIP</b></p> <p>Consider the creation of a Tourism Ambassador program that fits the needs of this travel corridor. Increase visitor referrals between businesses and communities and enhance training for visitor info centre staff on GRT along the entire corridor.</p>		
THEME 3	<b>COMPELLING OFFER: DIVERSIFY AND EXPAND THE VISITOR EXPERIENCE</b>				
<p><b>KEY MAGNETS</b></p> <p>Afford priority to the primary heritage demand generators of the McAbee Fossil Beds and the Alexandra Bridge projects currently underway. Diversify the visitor offer at Barkerville Historic Town &amp; Park, invest in support services for Kilby Heritage Site and curate technology enabled, self-guided driving tours.</p>	<p><b>DEEPER TRACTION</b></p> <p>Capture the full richness of the heritage and history of the corridor area through product development initiatives which amplify and support Indigenous tourism development opportunities. Create more travel packages; expand the Kaoham Shuttle; add historic tours on the Fraser River; advance the Stein Valley and develop new agri-tourism experiences.</p>	<p><b>ON TRACK</b></p> <p>Working collaboratively with provincial government and First Nations, create a local area trail strategy to guide strategic investment. Ensure supporting amenities are addressed, user conflicts are mediated and maintenance and safety considerations are factored in.</p>			

THEME 3 CONTINUED	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ON THE WATER</b></p> <p>In diversifying the outdoor recreation offer along the GRT, provide opportunities for visitors to experience the rivers – the Fraser and the Quesnel – by providing access points for boats; infrastructure for fishing and support services such as gear retail, rental, storage and repairs.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>FOOD FOR THOUGHT</b></p> <p>In encouraging the growth and diversity of the food and beverage opportunity, particularly north of Hope, establish a forum for business owners to address challenges including staff availability and business hours. Provide support to entrepreneurs to access investment and start-up funds.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ACCOMMODATING VISITORS</b></p> <p>Ensure that accommodation provision is refreshed and upgraded to universally accessible standards. Encourage new niche accommodation options as well as non-traditional opportunities such as Airbnb. Increase the availability of recreational vehicle services and campgrounds/campsites along the route corridor.</p>		
THEME 4	<b>ON THE BALL: ENABLE TOURISM BUSINESS VIABILITY AND SUCCESS</b>				
	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>FRICTION FREE</b></p> <p>Support efforts by the Tourism Industry Association of British Columbia and tourism operators to decrease risk and uncertainty for the sector by improving government processes such as the time/process required to secure tenure, permits and development approvals.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>WELL EQUIPPED</b></p> <p>Create a consolidated list of training programs that are available to Indigenous and non-Indigenous operators (front-line to owner/operator/manager) and the organizations that can support delivery. Support product development through training such as the Remarkable Experiences program.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>FAST TRACKED</b></p> <p>Invest in providing support and training to new foreign investors and their staff to fast-track their understanding of the Canadian tourism ecosystem, laws, opportunities, and limitations. Address the need for business succession planning and foreign ownership policies.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>FIT FOR PURPOSE</b></p> <p>Evolve a long-term labour market/business development and human resource training strategy that can respond to the challenge of supporting a growing visitor economy. Address the need for affordable tourism staff housing and explore co-operative models for securing seasonal insurance cover for small operators.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>FUTURE PROOFED</b></p> <p>Establish a framework for collaborative action by the strategic partners to leverage the long-term destination development opportunities that will optimize business opportunities whilst achieving positive outcomes for the visitor economy. Foster public/private co-investment in addressing research needs, new product/service development and infrastructure enhancements.</p>
THEME 5	<b>NATURE FIRST: PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT WHILE MANAGING TOURISM GROWTH</b>				
	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>RESPONSIBILITY MATTERS</b></p> <p>In reviewing wildlife management plans, effect measures to safeguard and monitor the integrity of the natural environment whilst balancing traditional ways of life with commercial tourism opportunities. Create a sustainability charter for the entire GRT planning area.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>LIMITS TO GROWTH</b></p> <p>In safeguarding the natural environment, manage strategic growth within the capacity of the land and communities to sustain that growth. In pursuit of a sustainable approach to the development of tourism, advance master plans for the Hemlock and Stave Valleys and continue to invest in the “Experience the Fraser” Project.</p>		<p style="text-align: center;"><b>JOINED UP</b></p> <p>Harmonize land use management policy and practice between government departments. Ensure that the need and opportunities across the GRT planning area are reflected in the provincial destination development plan</p>	
THEME 6	<b>BUILD RESILIENCE: SUPPORT NATURAL DISASTER RECOVERY</b>				
	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>RECOVER THE COST</b></p> <p>Secure temporary tax relief and operating permit relief (2018–2021) for tourism businesses impacted by recent wildfire and flood events.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>ADAPT &amp; MITIGATE</b></p> <p>Develop tourism focused natural disaster plans that include climate change mitigation and adaption plans for tourism operators as well as a regional tourism emergency preparedness, response, and recovery plan.</p>		<p style="text-align: center;"><b>COHERENT COMMUNICATION</b></p> <p>Share consistent messages with all businesses in the impacted wildfire areas that can be used in their visitor communications.</p>	

# 4 GEARING UP

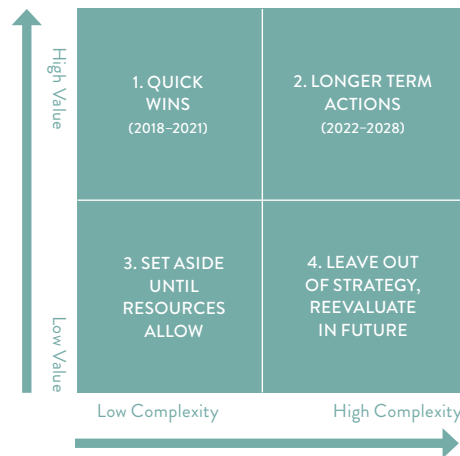
## SUCCESS NETWORKS

This strategy is intended to inform actions for the future, which over time may be embedded in the local, regional, and provincial decision making. The result will be an integrated system of priorities to achieve better development decisions, drive greater tourism revenues, and realize benefits for businesses and communities in the Gold Rush Trail destination area. All this will contribute to a thriving, vibrant and growing economy.

Joint strategy ownership among all planning area tourism partners is a critical component of this program's success. The strategy identifies a suggested success network of tourism partners to champion and move actions within each objective forward.

## FRAMEWORK

The strategy presents the destination development objectives using a consistent framework to determine the prioritization of each objective and the relative timing for implementation. Objectives with a provincial or regional scope are identified as well and will inform the regional and provincial destination development strategies.



BARKERVILLE HISTORIC TOWN & PARK  
Photo: Thomas Drasdauskis



# 4 GEARING UP

## CATALYST PROJECTS

The following sixteen actions were identified as catalyst projects for immediately moving the strategy into implementation.

### **On the Move: Strategically Invest in Targeted Infrastructure Upgrades that Support this Unique Touring Corridor**

- Enhance existing and develop new rest stops with washrooms and e-charging stations along Highways 1 & 97. Starting with an inventory of existing stops from MOTI and the available amenities, then ranking them in order of priority to identify investment needs.
- Build public washrooms in Lillooet to service buses during peak season.
- Improve emergency services and safety for visitors and citizens alike, travelling by road along the Gold Rush Trail.
- Work with tourism and community stakeholders to provide the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure with clear local guidance on regional directional and interpretive signage opportunities.

- Identify key locations for cell coverage and Wi-Fi hotspots along Highways 1, 97, and north of Hope, and ensure all businesses are aware of these and they are promoted to travellers.
- Increase the accuracy of Google mapping along the GRT.

### **Common Cause: Lead Strategic Growth through Continued Collaboration to Strengthen the Corridor's End-to-End Visitor Experience**

- Improve the understanding with local citizens and businesses of the tourism ecosystem, the value of tourism, and work collaboratively under the GRT Destination BC approved brand.

### **Compelling Offer: Diversify and Expand the Visitor Experience.**

- Continue to invest in current and future primary heritage demand generators, with a priority on the McAbee Fossil Beds and the Alexandra Bridge projects currently underway.

- Strike a taskforce with provincial government and First Nations to create a local area trail strategy to guide strategic investment.
- Upgrade existing accommodations that have become tired and/or don't meet modern standards for accessibility and today's visitor expectations.
- Increase the availability of recreational vehicle services along Highways 1 & 97 and more traditional campgrounds/ campsites.

### **On the Ball: Enable Tourism Business Viability and Success**

- Invest in providing support and training to new foreign investors and their staff to fast-track their understanding of the Canadian tourism eco-system, laws, opportunities, and limitations.
- Address the need for affordable tourism staff housing.

- Establish a framework for collaborative action between the Cariboo Chilcotin Coast Tourism Association, the Indigenous Tourism British Columbia and, the Indigenous Tourism Association of Canada to leverage the long-term destination development opportunities for the best interest of business opportunities and visitor outcomes.
- Support product development through training such as Remarkable Experiences.

### **Build Resilience: Support Natural Disaster Recovery**

- Secure temporary tax relief and operating permit relief (2018–2021) for tourism businesses impacted by wildfires and flood tragedies.



# LOOKING FOR MORE INFORMATION?

You can likely find it in the more detailed Gold Rush Trail Destination Development Strategy or you can reach us at:

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FRONT COVER PHOTO: BARKERVILLE HISTORIC TOWN & PARK, Thomas Drasdauskis



FRASER CANYON  
Photo: Chris Harris