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Acknowledgements

Our successes over the past 20 years have been built on collaboration and partnerships. And so too was this plan. We wish to extend our greatest appreciation and thanks to the Trans Canada Trail and Alberta Snowmobile Association for the gracious funding and support to develop this plan. We would also like to thank everyone who took part in the planning process and shared their ideas and opinions including:

Trail visitors,

Residents of the region,

North East Muni-Corr Ltd.,

Alberta TrailNet,

Government of Alberta,

Travel Alberta,

Travel Lakeland,

Conseil de développement économique de l'Alberta, and of course our

Board members from the Riverland Recreational Trail Society.

Sincerely,

Riverland Recreational Trail Society

Riverland Recreational Trail Society

The Riverland Recreational Trail Society (RRTS) is a not-for-profit organization that champions the development, maintenance, management, and operation of Alberta's Iron Horse Trail through a long-term lease with Northeast Muni-Corr. The society represents the diversity of trail users, recreation groups and community organizations who are dedicated to ensuring the recreation and tourism potential of the trail is realized. For over 20 years, the dedicated volunteers of the society have been the stewards of the trail and, through the development of this plan, will continue to steward the trail for decades to come.

Northeast Muni-Corr Ltd.

Established in 1999, Northeast Muni-Corr Ltd. is a Part 9 registered not-for-profit company that was created to negotiate with, take ownership of, and govern the management of the 99-foot-wide right of way and associated lands from Canadian National (CN) Rail. The organization's board of directors, whose members are appointed from each of the 10 municipalities along the Iron Horse Trail corridor, provide governance and decision making about land use, approvals and development within the trail corridor.

The Riverland Recreational
Trail Society has undertaken a
12-month collaborative strategic
planning process. Emerging
from that planning process is
a clear vision and an ambitious
framework of priorities and
actions that will be taken to
unlock the full potential of
Alberta's Iron Horse Trail



Executive Summary

Introduction

At 278 km in length, Alberta's Iron Horse Trail (IHT) is the longest developed rail-to-trail conversion, and the province's longest contiguous segment of Canada's The Great Trail (TGT) and the Great Canadian Snowmobile Trail (GCST). Opened to the public in 2003, the IHT has become one of the most well-known trail experiences in Northeastern Alberta and a national illustration of exemplary inter-municipal and stakeholder collaboration for the development and operation of long distance trails. The trail supports the quality of life and recreational opportunities for residents in the region and delivers year-round tourism experiences for motorized and non-motorized visitors alike.

Since opening, we have been focused on the fundamentals - developing essential visitor infrastructure, trail operations, marketing and managing the corridor and land uses within it. These efforts have yielded considerable success at growing visitation on the trail.

However, 20 years has passed and much of our original infrastructure investments have aged. Trail tread conditions have degraded, do not always meet the needs of our target visitors, and require increased investments and maintenance attention from the municipalities along the trail. Visitor expectations and patterns have shifted, new demands on the corridor have emerged, key champions of the trail have aged and volunteerism has declined. The economic situation in the region and the province has also changed, resulting in even greater expectations and need for the trail to play a more significant role in economic development and diversification.

The COVID-19 global pandemic, has created unprecedented challenges for Albertans generally and the tourism industry specifically. Never have the local businesses in our visitor economy been more reliant on domestic travel than they are now. And, similarly, never have local outdoor recreation demands been higher than they are now.

Purpose

Though our efforts over the past 20 years have established an excellent foundation for our future, we recognize that there is much work to do to ensure the trail remains a desirable recreation asset for regional residents and becomes even more relevant and inviting to our target markets. Through the development of this plan, we are signalling where we, and our partner municipalities, will focus our attention and resourcing over the coming decade. Through this plan, we are outlining the priorities and actions that will be taken to:

- Grow visitation to the trail and the economic benefits the trail brings to host communities,
- Enhance and diversify the visitor experiences offered on and along the trail,
- Improve the trail tread in keeping with the needs of residents and target markets,
- Enhance existing and develop new visitor amenities, accommodations, attractions, and access,
- Manage the trail effectively, and
- Entice residents and out of town visitors to choose the Iron Horse Trail for their next outing.



ENGAGEMENT BY THE NUMBERS

336 Public surveys

20 Special interest surveys

26 Ideas expressed on Vertisee

21 Stakeholder group interviews

Engagement

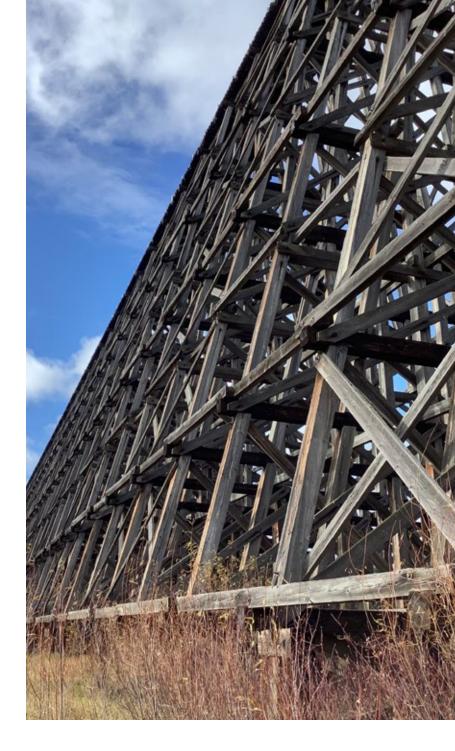
Our roots are steeped in, and the trail was born from, a process of extensive stakeholder and public engagement. As we knew when we created the trail, achieving the true potential of the trail and addressing the priorities we have set in this plan will be a team effort. As such, we implemented a robust engagement process that was designed to allow anyone with an interest in the trail the opportunity to help shape its future.

Hundreds of residents, trail visitors, elected officials, tourism industry operators, directors from the RRTS and many other stakeholders shared their vision, ideas and concerns through interviews, surveys, workshops, and our online interactive crowdsource tool. All of these ideas helped to shape the priorities and actions that will become our focus into the future.

Please see the What We Heard Report compendium for details on the input received through the engagement process.

Reigniting Municipal Support & Cooperation

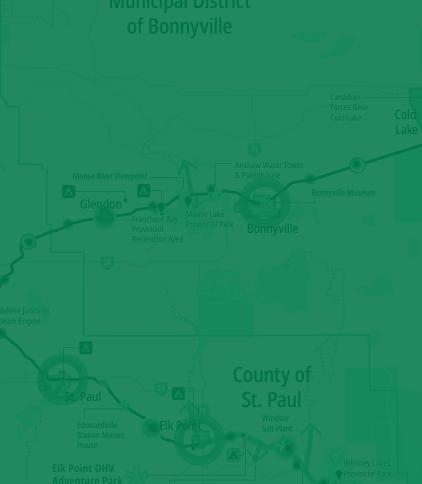
Exceptional local and political support was fundamental to the acquisition and designation of the trail. Since that time, many of the elected officials who were once the visionary champions of of the Iron Horse Trail have moved on. The political interest in, understanding of the value of the trail and the commitment to realizing its economic and social potential is not as prominent or strong as it once was. Rebuilding this local understanding of the value, importance and potential of trail and reigniting political support, cooperation and funding from the 10 municipalities along the trail is critical to the trail's future and will be fundamental focus during the implementation of this plan. Through regular reporting on the benefits and positive impacts the trail makes to the region and communities along the trail, we will ensure that the Iron Horse Trail becomes front and centre and regains the focus and prominence it deserves.



Our Path Forward

This plan is a bold new direction that leverages the excellent work we have done to date and sets forth the path we will take to maximize the benefits the trail can bring to our region. At the core of the plan is a renewed vision for the trail. To bring the vision to life, RRTS and our partners will remain focused on implementing 15 priorities and associated actions. If the plan is successfully implemented over the next 10 years, we will:

- Establish the Trail as one of Alberta's "must-experience" OHV trails,
- Increase local and non-local visitation,
- Grow direct spending by visitors,
- Stimulate the creation of new businesses and employment,
- Retain existing and attract new residents to the region,
- Effectively manage visitation,
- Grow new and strengthen existing partnerships, and
- Reignite local support, passion and commitment to the trail.



Plan at a Glance

DESIRED OUTCOMES

- ► Establish the Trail as one of Alberta's "mustexperience" OHV trails
- ► Increase local and nonlocal visitation
- Grow direct spending by visitors
- Stimulate the creation of new businesses and employment
- Retain existing and attract new residents
- ► Effectively manage visitation
- ► Grow new and strengthen existing partnerships
- Reignite local support, passion and commitment to the trail

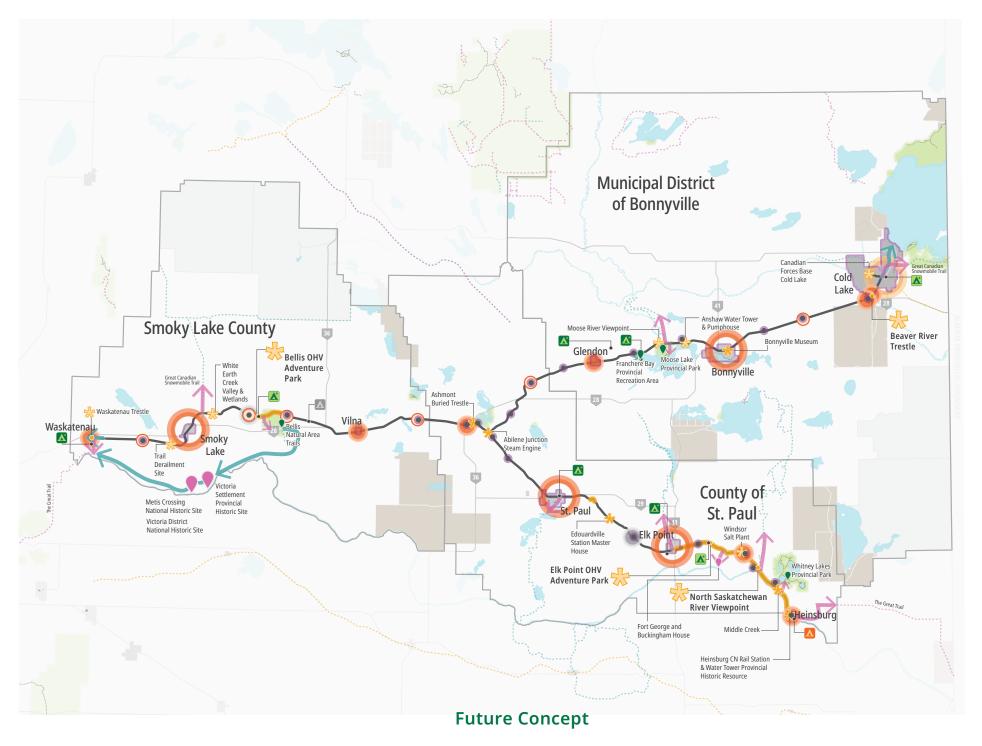
VISION

The Iron Horse Trail has become Alberta's, and one of western Canada's, signature all season long-distance motorized recreation destinations and a regional corridor that provides connectivity for local recreational trail systems in ways that maintain the integrity and quality of our long-distance signature trail experience. Whether in the peak season or shoulder season, the trail delivers an outstanding experience to every resident and visitor from near and far who travels it. Our residents and visitors are seamlessly connected to our unique communities and enjoy engaging and authentic opportunities to experience, learn about and celebrate our modern way of life, our history, Indigenous peoples and our environment. With strong community support, host communities are active champions for the trail, support and celebrate the trail and create a welcoming and inviting atmosphere for all trail visitors. With significantly increased visitation, the trail is a catalyst on which new businesses are being created and existing businesses are being strengthened. And the Trail has become a model of cooperation and sustainable trail management in Canada, is well resourced and municipalities and landowners along the trail continue to coordinate and collaborate to bring our vision for the trail to life.

PRIORITIES

- Improve the Trail Tread & Maintenance
- Optimize & Enhance Trail Access Points
- Improve Signage & Wayfinding
- Optimize & Enhance Comfort & Convenience Amenities
- Animate the Trail
- Develop New & Enhance Existing Visitor Attractions
- Enhance & Diversify the Supply of Accommodations
- Connect the Trail

- Create Trail Friendly Communities
- Motivate Visitors to Choose the IHT & the Region to Support It
- Manage Non-Recreation Use of the Trail & Minimize Impact on Adjacent Landowners
- Understand our Visitors & Visitation
- Actively Manage Visitation & Visitor Impacts
- Understand & Celebrate Our Success
- Ensure Long-Term Sustainable Resourcing & Capacity







IRON HORSE

The trail's name originates from the name given to modern steam locomotives - known as Iron Horses - which were capable of pulling many heavy rail cars.

1. Introduction

1.1 Purpose

At 278 km in length, Alberta's Iron Horse Trail (IHT) is the longest developed rail-to-trail conversion, and the province's longest contiguous segment of Canada's The Great Trail (TGT) and the Great Canadian Snowmobile Trail (GCST). Opened to the public in 2003, the IHT has become one of the most well-known trail experiences in Northeastern Alberta and a national example of inter-municipal and stakeholder collaboration. The trail supports the quality of life and recreational opportunities for our local residents and delivers quality year-round outdoor recreation tourism experiences for motorized and non-motorized visitors alike.





Since opening, we have been focused on the fundamentals - developing essential visitor infrastructure, trail operations, marketing and managing the corridor and land uses within it. These efforts have yielded considerable success at growing visitation on the trail.

However, 20 years has passed and much of our original infrastructure investments have aged. Trail tread conditions have degraded, do not always meet the needs of our target visitors, and require increased investments and maintenance attention from the municipalities along the trail. Visitor expectations and patterns have shifted, new demands on the corridor have emerged, key champions of the trail have aged and volunteerism has declined. In addition, many of the elected officials who were once champions of the trail have moved on and the political interest in, understanding of the value of, and the commitment to realizing the trail's economic potential is not as prominent as it once was.

The economic situation in the region and the province has also changed, resulting in even greater expectations and need for the trail to play a more significant role in economic development and diversification.

The COVID-19 global pandemic, has created unprecedented challenges for Albertans generally and the tourism industry specifically. Never have our local businesses in our visitor economy been more reliant on domestic travel than they are now. And, similarly, never have local outdoor recreation demands been higher than they are now.

Though our efforts over the past 20 years have established an excellent foundation for our future, we recognize that there is much work to do to ensure the trail remains a desirable recreation asset for regional residents and becomes even more relevant and inviting to our target markets. Though it is true that the trail is enjoyed locally, we know that the trail's true recreation and tourism potential has yet to be realized. Through the development of this plan, we are signalling where we will focus our attention and resourcing over the coming decade. And, by doing so, we will ensure the trail delivers the invaluable benefits that are needed to foster thriving host communities along the trail.

THE IRON HORSE TRAIL BY THE NUMBERS

278 km in length

64% (177km) designated as The Great Trail

62% (172km) designated as The Great Canadian Snowmobile Trail

VISITOR...

refers to both local residents as well as people who travel from outside the region to experience the trail.

OFF-HIGHWAY VEHICLE (OHV)...

Includes snowmobiles, ATVs, Side by Sides and off-road motorcycles (ORM).

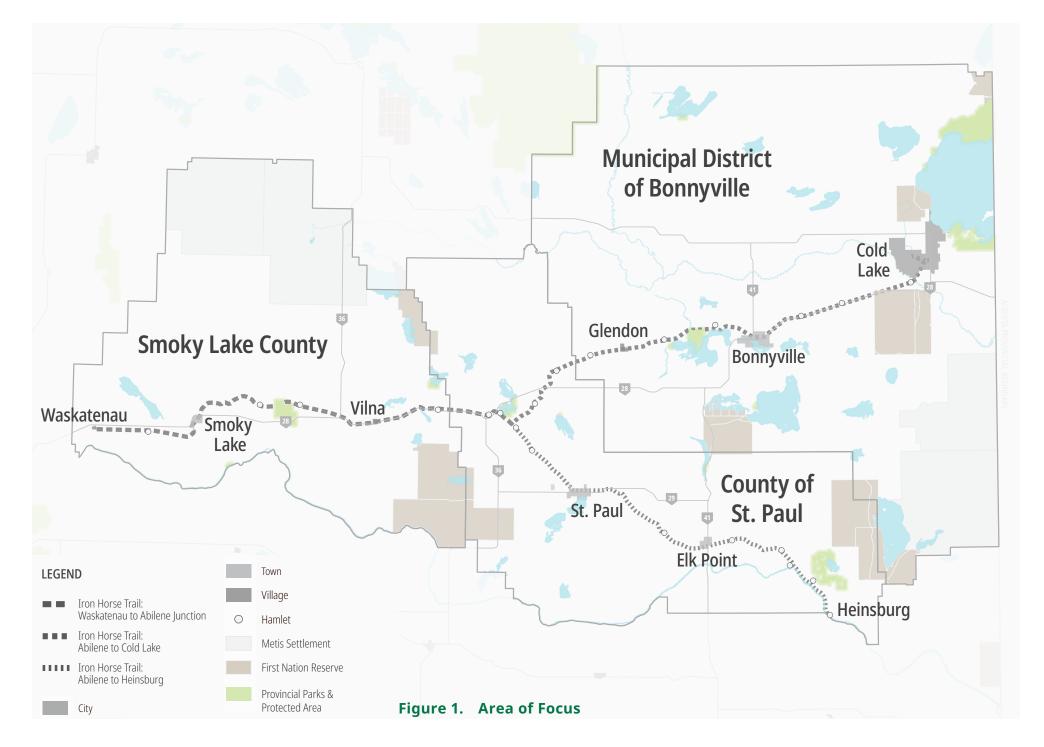
More specifically, this plan details the priorities and actions that will be taken to:

- Grow visitation to the trail and encourage the economic benefits the trail brings to host communities,
- Enhance and diversify the visitor experiences offered on and along the trail,
- Improve the trail tread in keeping with the needs of local residents and target markets,
- Enhance existing or develop new visitor amenities, accommodations, attractions, and access,
- Manage the trail effectively, and
- Entice local residents and out of town visitors to choose this trail for their next outing.

1.2 Area of Focus

In preparing this plan, we have focused carefully on the entire length of the Iron Horse Trail. As illustrated in Figure 1, the IHT can be divided into three segments:

- Western Leg Waskatenau to Abilene Junction (93.2 km)
- Northern Leg Abilene Junction to City of Cold Lake (101.4 km)
- Southern Leg Abilene Junction to Heinsburg (83.7 km)



1.3 Planning Process

Initiated in the summer of 2020, the planning process moved through three distinct phases (Figure 2).

During the **DISCOVER** phase, we developed a robust understanding of the history of the trail and undertook a detailed inventory and assessment of the existing trail and trail conditions. We reviewed relevant planning and policy influences, the relevant trends and promising practices, and determined the target markets for the trail.

In the **CO-CREATE** phase, we focused on engaging residents from the region, trail visitors and our key stakeholders to understand the most pressing issues that need to be resolved and to generate ideas about how the trail can be improved. A draft plan was prepared.

In the **FINALIZE** phase, the draft plan was revised and finalized.



Figure 2. Planning Process

1.1 Engagement Process

Our roots are steeped in, and the trail was born from, a process of extensive stakeholder and public engagement. Whether it be non-motorized recreation, motorized recreation, tourism, grazing, permit holders, adjacent landowners, municipalities or economic development, the corridor is used by a diverse, and at times, complex array of interests. There are many perspectives and opinions about the corridor and the lands associated with it. As we knew when we created the trail, achieving the true potential of the trail and addressing the priorities we have set in this plan will be a team effort. In keeping with our roots and our commitment to meaningful engagement, we implemented a robust engagement process that was designed to allow anyone with an interest in the trail the opportunity to help shape its future.

The purpose of the engagement process was to:

- Understand the current use of the trail (including experiences and benefits),
- Gather insights on preferred trail activities,
- Identify management concerns, and
- Identify opportunities to improve the trail.

ENGAGEMENT BY THE NUMBERS

336 Public surveys

20 Special interest surveys

26 Ideas expressed on Vertisee

21 Stakeholder group interviews

HOW DID WE COMMUNICATE?



Facebook

6,412 people reached

572 engagements

12 likes

28 shares



Newspaper Advertisements

6 releases in the Cold Lake Sun, Lakeland Today, and Smoky Lake Signal



Direct Email

56 stakeholder organizations

1,281 trail users



To ensure a broad range of perspectives and ideas, we purposefully designed the engagement process to reach:

- Recreational visitors to the trail,
- Organized recreation groups who represent specific recreation activities on the trail,
- · General public who may or may not visit the trail,
- Tourism operators whose guests and clients utilize the trail or could utilize the trail,
- Travel Alberta,
- Adjacent land managers (e.g. Alberta Parks),
- Municipalities along the trail, and
- Internal members of Riverland Recreational Trail Society and Northeast Muni-Corr.

In keeping with COVID-19 protocols, a variety of digital and in-person engagement tactics were used to allow the public and stakeholders to take part in the process, including:

- In-person meetings
- Web-based interviews
- Public online survey
- Special interest online survey
- Online interactive crowdsource mapping (Vertisee)

To promote the engagement opportunities, we distributed multiple notices through our social media accounts, initiated a notice on the IHT website, direct emailed all members of the IHT listserve and all stakeholder groups, distributed newspaper ads and delivered multiple local media interviews.

Please see the What We Heard Report compendium for details on the input received through the engagement process.



2. The History of the **Iron Horse Trail**

Our region is steeped in history, heritage, and culture. The region has been travelled since time immemorial by local Indigenous peoples. In 1790, the fur trade arrived in the region. Missionary settlements began in the 1860's and in 1874 the march west of by the North West Mounted Police began, culminating with the Northwest Rebellion occurring in 1885. Our region's rich history has led to the establishment of important historic sites such as Fort George, Victoria Settlement, and Buckingham House, and more recently Metis Crossing.

The Iron Horse Trail we know today got its start in 1927. With completion of the Canadian Pacific Railway in 1815, new immigrants from eastern Canada began migrating to the west, including Alberta. Many of these new settlers initiated the agricultural industry and established the agricultural communities in northeastern Alberta including many of the small communities through which the trail now runs.

Figure 3. Grand Opening Event Poster

Come, spend the weekend on the

June $6^{\rm th}$ 7^{th} 8th



FRIDAY NIGHT, "Opry" at Mallaig, 8 p.m.

June



SATURDAY, June

- Mallaig Parade honouring Mallaig's 75th Anniversary. Assemble by 10 a.m. Parade at 10:30 a.m.
- Trek Hike, bike, quad or ride your horse along the trail
- Wagon trek Join the trek with wagons and saddle horses from St. Paul to Boscombe hall. Leaves St. Paul at 9 a.m. from near Feedrite. Bring your own bag lunch. Everyone welcome!

Hardier trekkers can join a group of wagons leaving Heinsburg on June 5th to trek all the way to Boscombe. Call Roy at 943-2700.

- Quad Rally from Waskatenau to Smoky Lake, followed by BBQ and enter at the Smoky Lake CN station. Call Ernie at 656-2091.
- Trail Mixer at Boscombe Hall in the evening. Everyone welcome! Lots of room for camping. Buffalo supper starts at 5:30. Adults \$10. Kids \$5. Come early, relax and visit, or challenge your friends to a game of horse shoes Country Music Jamboree 7:30 p.m. No admission charge. Call Marjorie 943-2700

SUNDAY, June the

Trail Users coordinate their arrivals to the Abilene and Ashmont Festivities.

- All-you-can-eat Pancake Breakfast at Boscombe Hall. 8:30 - 10:00 a.m.
- Abilene Junction at 11:30a.m. Ribbon-tying ceremony by dignitaries uniting the three legs of the Iron Horse Trail, symbolic of the multi-municipal, multi-seasonal, and multi-use elements of our Public Trail.
- Grand Opening of the Iron Horse Trail-Follow the trail to the Ashmont Agriplex for the Grand Opening Festivities.
- Entertainment Starts at 1 p.m. Displays, Wagon rides, and games.
- Official Ceremonies at 2 p.m., followed by more entertainment.

No admission charge. Food concessions available.

Trail Users Notice: as the trail is still under development, trail users are advised to check for the conditions on the section that they are considering using at www.ironhorsetrail.ca or the IronHorse Trail Call phone @ 1-877-645-4521 As the agricultural communities and industry swelled in the region, many new railroad lines were developed to move goods, livestock, supplies and people. In 1927, the Canadian National Railway (CN Rail) opened the rail line between Waskatenau and Cold Lake and Ashmont to Heinsburg. This rail line continued operation until 1980. Portions of the rail corridor closely followed the Carlton Trail, which was the original Hudson Bay Trail used to access the region during the fur trade.

Segments of the rail line began being abandoned in 1980 (Elk Point to Heinsburg). Abandoned segments quickly became informal recreational corridors and many local trails advocates began to see the opportunity for the corridor to become a major connection in Canada's TGT. By 2000, CN had abandoned the entire corridor from Elk Point to Waskatenau to Cold Lake and the tracks were removed.

In 2001, a non-binding referendum question was added to the municipal election ballot in each of the 10 municipalities along the rail line, asking residents if they supported the development of a recreation trail. With the ballot indicating clear local support, the 10 municipalities along the corridor created Northeast Muni-Corr Ltd, a part 9 not-for-profit company that would take ownership of the rail corridor and associated lands. The corridor and associated lands were transferred to Northeast Muni-Corr in return for an \$8.4 million tax receipt. The Riverland Recreational Trail Society (RRTS) was formed by trail stakeholders and Northeast Muni-Corr provided the Society with a long-term lease to operate the trail.

On June 8, 2003, the Iron Horse Trail was officially opened to the public. Northeast Muni-Corr and the RRTS advanced the development of staging areas, installation of signage and gates, establishment of trail management and maintenance procedures, trail steward trainings, developed a website and hired the trail's first employee. The trail received TGT designation in December of 2004 and Trans Canadian Snowmobile Trail designation in February of 2005. The RRTS, together with Northeast Muni-Corr, have continued the development and operation of the trail.

From 1927 – 2000, this **great trail in Alberta** was the vital rail link that fostered the growth of settler populations and rural economic growth as these settlers fed the nation from this fertile land.



3. Benefits of Trails & Trails Tourism

Trails can generate many economic, community, quality of life, cultural and environmental benefits. However, we know that these benefits do not simply happen solely because a trail is built or exists. It is clear that the benefits from trails are maximized when trail operators, and the destination in which they occur, deliberately plan, develop and actively manage the trails with a clear focus on their target markets and needs of their local residents.



Benefits of Trails & Trails Tourism

If done right, we know that trails can ...



Economic - -

- Stimulate increased spending in the local economy – especially in rural areas.
- Diversify rural economies

 especially communities
 that may be overly reliant
 on natural resource
 development.
- Generate greater municipal and provincial revenues.
- Create new direct and indirect jobs and entrepreneurial opportunities as new businesses are developed to support visitors.



Community, Social, Cultural

- Attract new, retain existing, or even help re-populate communities with residents and skilled workers as new employment becomes available and amenity development attracts "would be" residents.
- Stimulate investment in community infrastructure, amenities and facilities that benefit both residents and out of region visitors alike.
- Elevate resident awareness and community pride by sharing the community with visitors.



Quality of Life 🖍

- Improve physical and mental health and reduce health care costs.
- Build positive self-esteem and confidence.
- Increase social interaction and support.
- Enhance individuals' sense of achievement.
- Provide opportunities for skill development, challenge and competition, achievement, and leadership.



Cultural

- Help to preserve community cultural heritage as these become the assets on which experiences are developed.
- Deepen local residents and visitors' understanding and appreciation of the unique indigenous and nonindigenous history, culture, and heritage along the trail.



Environmental

- Raise the profile of natural assets and issues surrounding them while helping visitors to learn about the assets.
- Enhance the rationale for conservation and preservation of natural assets based on their economic impact and importance to local economies.
- Build a strong culture of conservation and appreciation of nature as visitors learn about and appreciate the wildlife, ecosystems, and ecosystem processes along the trail.
- Provide appropriate and sustainable infrastructure for recreation that attracts visitors to the trail and keeps visitors out of, off, or away from sensitive areas.

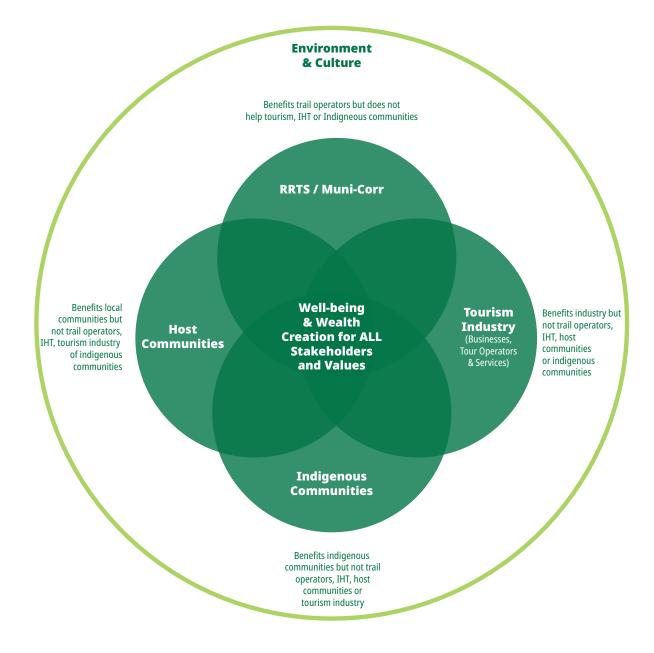
To maximize these benefits, learnings from the most successful trail destinations tell us that we must ensure:

- A critical mass of exceptional and market driven visitor experiences are developed and maintained to deliver on visitor expectations (supply),
- **Effective marketing and promotion** strategies need to be implemented to generate demand by the right markets at the right times of year (demand),
- A strong, supportive and enabling environment (e.g., supporting policy, regulation / bylaws, political support and prioritization, Indigenous and stakeholder support, customer service training, access to land, investment attraction) needs to be established and maintained to support the activities of our target markets.
- The right mix of quality supporting infrastructure and services (e.g., public and private transportation options, accommodations, roads, air access, internet, WiFi, universal accessibility, tourist information and trip planning, etc.) need to be developed and integrated, and
- **Collaborative, visionary, and integrated leadership** within trails ecosystem must be in place.



Figure 4. Drivers of Destination Success (adopted from Twenty31)

During our engagements, we heard clearly from local elected officials, municipal staff, tourism industry businesses, and residents throughout the region that there was a desire and need to further elevate the benefits the trail brings to the region. Though we have made good progress to date, we are committed to ensuring that we maximize the benefits the trail brings to the quality of life and wellbeing in host communities, to the tourism industry, and to us as the trail operator. This plan sets out the steps that we, and our partners, will take to do so.



3.1 The Iron Horse Trail's Tourism Ecosystem

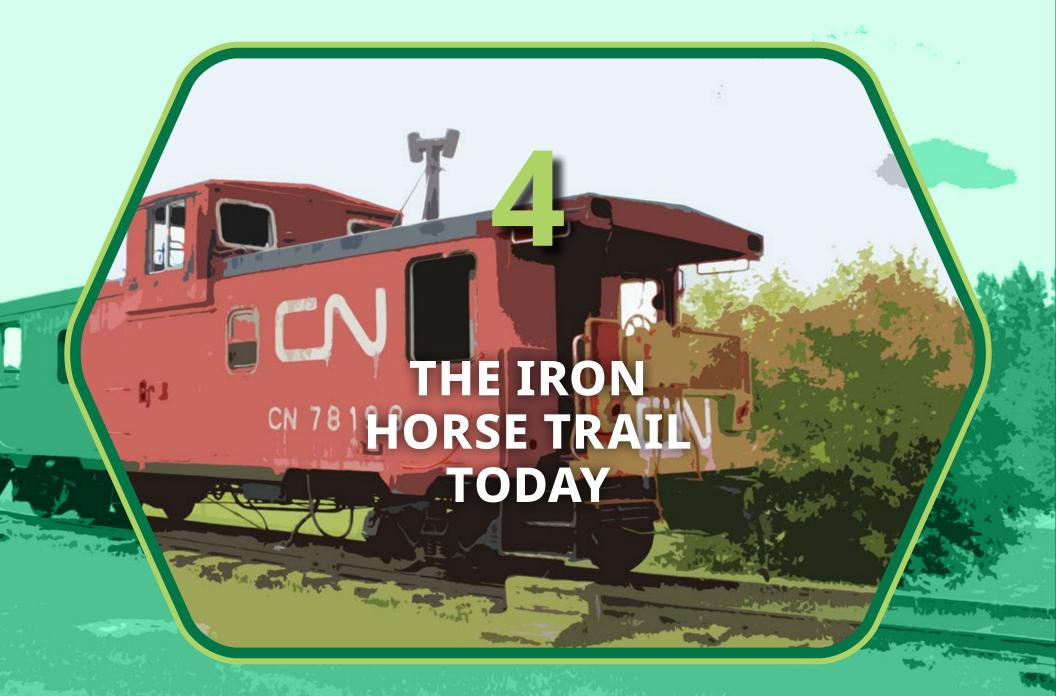
Unlocking the true potential of the Iron Horse Trail is reliant on more than just the physical condition of the trail itself or visitor amenities along the trail. The world's most successful trails destinations understand that to maximize the benefits from their trail, the destination must focus on ensuring effective integration and quality across their entire "trails ecosystem". Rather than thinking of the trail in a vacuum, the most successful trails think of their destinations as a complex, interwoven, and dynamic trails ecosystem. As illustrated in Figure 5, the trails tourism ecosystem is comprised of on and near trail:

- Public & private attractions,
- Public & private accommodations,
- · Amenities & services,
- Provincial land managers (e.g. Alberta Environment & Parks),
- Transportation providers, and
- Destination marketing & management organizations.

Like all ecosystems, the trails ecosystem is strongest when each of its individual parts are coordinated, collaborating, stable, successful, and resilient. In keeping, our plan has mapped the Iron Horse Trail's trail ecosystem and the priorities and actions we have outlined in this plan are deliberately designed to strengthen this ecosystem and provide a vision and guidance for the municipalities, businesses and tourism operators that are part of it.



Figure 5. Trails Tourism Ecosystem



4. The Iron Horse Trail Today

4.1 Trail Activities

The Iron Horse Trail is enjoyed in all seasons. A wide range of motorized and non-motorized activities occur on the trail with the greatest volumes of non-motorized use occurring within and near the communities through which the trail passes. Uniquely, the trail's location and length provide both residents and visitors from outside the region with the opportunity to engage in short part-day trips, full-day outings and longer overnight or multi-night excursions.

Though no visitation data exists, anecdotally we know that summer visitation is significantly higher than winter visitation. In the summer, the most common trail activities include ATV's, side by sides, hiking / walking, cycling, equestrian and horse drawn wagon. In the winter, the most common trail activities include snowmobiling, walking / hiking and limited horse drawn sleigh.

MOST COMMON TRAIL ACTIVITIES





ATV's, side by sides



hiking / walking



cycling



horse drawn wagon





snowmobiling



hiking / walking



horse drawn sleigh

A Trail Experience...

At its most fundamental level, a trails experience can be defined as the ability for the visitor to undertake their preferred activity, at their preferred difficulty level within their preferred recreation setting in their preferred natural region.

We know that both the recreation setting and natural region through which our trail passes can influence which visitors are interested in the Iron Horse Trail. Some markets prefer remote backcountry areas while others prefer urban settings that provide all the comfort and convenience of home.

We analysed the Government of Alberta's Recreation and Tourism Opportunity Spectrum inventory and found that over 93% of the trail runs through a front-country setting which is dominated by modified and agricultural landscapes. The remaining 7% occurs in a developed recreation setting where the trail passes through or near our population centres. Like the recreation setting, the natural region also influences what markets may be interested in our trail. We analysed the Government of Alberta Natural Regions data and found that 99% trail provides visitors with an opportunity to experience the Boreal Forest Natural Region with the remaining 1% exposing visitors to Alberta's Parkland Natural Region near Heinsburg.



BENEFITS Community Financial Health + Wellness

Figure 6. Elements of a Trail Experience

4.2 The Iron Horse Communities

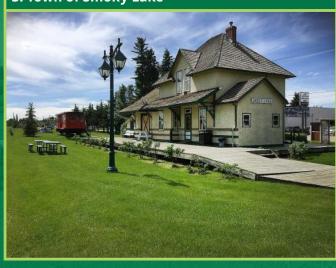
Our trail is a seamless thread that connects and travels through 3 Counties and Municipal Districts (Smoky Lake County, M.D. of Bonnyville, County of St. Paul) and 17 historical and multi-cultural cities, towns, villages, and hamlets (Figure 7). Though the visitor experiences, amenities, and services available in our communities are highly varied, each of our communities offers visitors a unique history and way of life and the opportunity to meet and get to know our residents and businesses.

Western Reach	Northeastern Reach	Southeastern Reach
 Village of Waskatenau Hamlet of Warspite Town of Smoky Lake Hamlet of Bellis Village of Vilna Hamlet of Spedden Hamlet of Ashmont Smoky Lake County 	 Hamlet of Mallaig Village of Glendon Town of Bonnyville Hamlet of Fort Kent Hamlet of Ardmore City of Cold Lake M.D. of Bonnyville 	 Town of St. Paul Town of Elk Point Hamlet of Linbergh Hamlet of Heinsburg County of St. Paul

4.3 Trail Access

Over 1.8 million Albertans, or 45% of the Province's population, lives within a short 3-hour drive of the trail. As shown in Figure 7, the trail is accessed through a network of 20 access points which have been referred to as staging areas. Staging areas are typically located in the cities, towns, and villages along the trail. To date, the most significant and developed staging areas include:

3. Town of Smoky Lake



16. Town of St. Paul

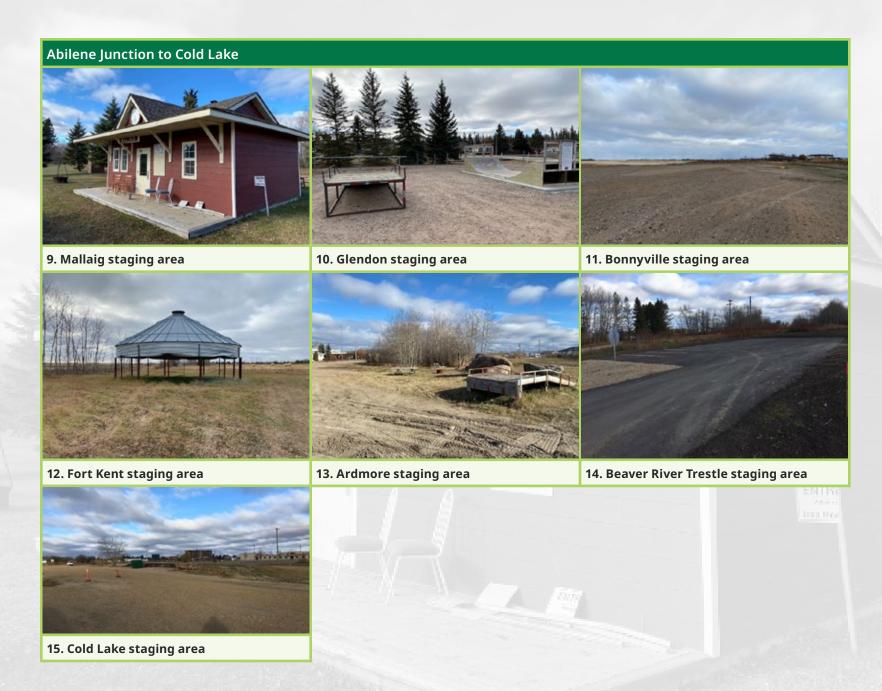


18. Town of Elk Point



Other staging areas along the trail as shown on pages 23-25.

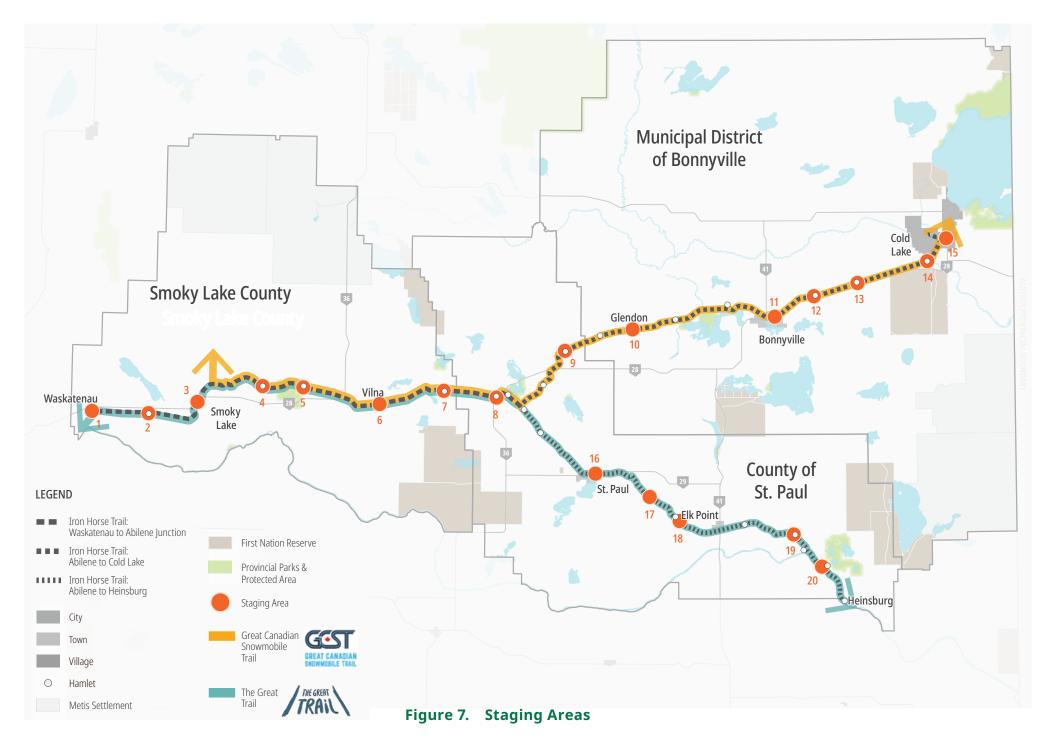








20. Heinsburg staging area



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On average, there is a staging area every 10 km (see Table.1) along the trail with the furthest on-trail distance between staging areas being 29.7 km between Glendon and Bonnyville. Visitor services at staging areas typically include parking, a loading / off-loading ramp, signage and, in some cases, comfort and convenience amenities such as pit or vault toilets, picnic tables, fire pits, warming shelters and gateway features.

Though we have many staging areas, their condition and quality vary greatly. We know that these sites are the starting point for many trips on the trail and set the stage for the visitor experience. However, the volume of staging areas makes it difficult to ensure a consistent level of service and ongoing maintenance. Nearly 48% (n=10) of our staging areas are in poor condition and require significant maintenance and upgrades. 15% (n=3) of staging areas are functional but require investment to enhance the visitor experience and the remaining 33% (n=7) staging areas are in good condition and require routine maintenance.

Typical challenges associated with our staging areas include:

- vegetation management (e.g. overgrown),
- siting in low lying areas with standing water issues,
- sloped terrain that is not ideal for use,
- the sites are not universally accessible, and
- the supply, type and condition of comfort and convenience amenities is inconsistent.



Table.1 Distribution & Condition of Staging Areas

Segment	Name	Condition	Distance from Previous Staging Area (west to east)	Improvements Required
	1. Waskatenau	Poor	0.0 km	Overgrown, wet, visitor experience, amenity condition, signage
	2. Warspite	Poor	10.5 km	Wet, amenities condition, signage
	3. Smoky Lake	Good	12.2 km	Parking
Waskatenau – Abilene	4. Edwand	Poor	6.0 km	Parking, vegetation management, amenity condition, signage
Junction	5. Bellis	Poor	8.4 km	Visitor experience, amenity condition, signage
	6. Vilna	Good	15.9 km	Amenity condition, signage
	7. Spedden	Poor	13.4 km	Sloped terrain, parking, amenity condition, signage
	8. Ashmont	Functional	10.5 km	Amenity condition, signage
	9. Mallaig	Good	15.8 km	
	10. Glendon	Poor	14.1 km	Size, visitor experience, amenity condition, signage skate park utilizing parking area
Abilene	11. Bonnyville	Poor	29.7 km	Visitor experience, amenity condition, signage
Junction to	12. Fort Kent	Poor	9.0 km	Visitor experience, amenity condition, signage
Cold Lake	13. Ardmore	Poor	9.0 km	Visitor experience, amenity condition, signage
	14. Beaver River Trestle	Functional	14.4 km	Visitor experience, amenity condition, signage, parking size & circulation
	15. Cold Lake	Functional	6.2 km	Visitor experience, amenity condition, signage
	16. St. Paul	Good	21 km	
	17. Armistice	Poor	20.9 km	Overgrown, visitor experience, amenity condition, signage
Abilene to Heinsburg	18. Elk Point	Good	8.4 km	
. rembbarg	19. Lindberg	Good	15.9 km	Visitor experience, amenity condition, signage
	20. Heinsburg	Good	8.6 km	Visitor experience, amenity condition, signage

4.4 Visitor Amenities & Services

Though not the motivation for a visitor's trip, amenities and services are essential to enhancing the comfort, convenience, and safety of the visitor experience. As we do not have an amenity standard or brand for the trail, the type, supply, quality and condition of comfort and convenience amenities vary widely along the trail. The variability in type and design of amenities fragments the contiguous trail experience for the visitor. In general, our amenities are showing their age with many needing to be replaced or nearing replacement. The condition of our amenities can reduce the quality of the visitor experience and put the reputation of the trail at risk. Furthermore, none of the visitor amenities on our trail meet universal accessibility best practices, which is an important consideration for our target markets. Many amenities and the approaches to them serves as barriers to visitors with mobility and other accessibility constraints.

Most amenities on the trail are focused to our staging areas or attractions. However, our inventory shows that the distribution of amenities is inconsistent and can lead to uncertainty for visitors. In some cases, some amenities have been provided where they are unneeded or unexpected and are not being used. Given the low volume of use at some staging areas, amenities may be oversupplied for the number of visitors. The current supply of amenities together with the maintenance demands and asset replacement needs are out pacing our capacity.

As illustrated in the images on the following pages, on-trail comfort and convenience amenities include:

- Toilets (pit, vault)
- Gazebos & warming cabins
- Picnic tables
- Waste receptacles
- Benches
- Bicycle parking racks
- Horse hitching rails
- OHV loading ramps
- Fire pits

In addition to on-trail comfort and convenience amenities, visitors who are taking part in overnight and multi-night trips on the trail require access to a variety of visitor services. Visitor services such as visitor information centres, grocery stores, fuel, restaurants, supplies, equipment, and repairs are available in most larger communities through which the trail travels. However, operating hours and season vary and are not necessarily aligned with peak visitation periods (e.g., time of day or seasons) for the trail. Reliable information as to which services are available and their operating times are not readily available to visitors.













4.5 Attractions

Attractions are places of interest that visitors visit for their inherent or exhibited cultural value, historical significance, natural beauty, architecture, or adventure and amusement. There are numerous natural, cultural and heritage attractions along the trail. Some, such as the Heinsburg water tower, have had some level of development to help visitors learn about the site, while many others have not, leaving most visitors unaware of the significance of the site. There are also numerous near trail attractions that could be of interest to visitors and to which they could experience via wayfinding signage and / or a physical trail connection. In addition to physical sites, the region is rich in history and, although the site may not be located directly on the trail, the stories can certainly be shared along it such as:

- Indigenous Peoples & Culture
- Fur Trade
- Carlton Trail
- Frog Lake Rebellion
- Missionaries
- Agriculture, Settlement and Settlers

As illustrated in Table.2, the most significant on-trail and near-trail attractions include:

Visitor Information

Table.2 Most Significant On-Trail and Near-Trail Attractions

	Attraction Theme	Attraction	
On-Trail Attractions	Railway Heritage	 Large wooden trestles (Waskatenau, Beaver River, Moose Lake) Buried Trestles (Ashmont, various others) Train Derailment Site Abilene Junction Railway Buildings & Infrastructure Water pumping infrastructure at gravel pit west of Bellis Abilene Junction Steam Engine Anshaw Water Tower & Pumphouse Edouardville Station Master's House Heinsburg CN Rail Station & Water Tower Provincial Historic Site 	
	Small Town Heritage	Small Town Downtown ArchitectureVilna Pool Hall Provincial Historic ResourceWarspite Replica	Heinsburg water tower - oldest in AB
	Homesteads & Families	 Various current and abandoned homesteads and barns Stories of long-term landowners and ranchers along the trail 	
	Agriculture & Industry	Agricultural OperationsElk Point Grain ElevatorWindsor Salt Plant	Train derailment site

Attraction Theme	Attraction
Museums	Bonnyville MuseumSt. Paul MuseumMallaig MuseumSmoky Lake Museum
Public Art Display Attractions	 Pumpkin Park – Smoky Lake Glendon Perogy Vilna Mushrooms Peter Fidler Statue – Elk Point St. Paul UFO Landing Pad Cold Lake Totem Poles Cold Lake Fighter Jets Bonnyville Angus Shaw Statue Elk Point 100 ft Mural
Natural	 White Earth Creek Valley & Wetlands Moose River Crossing North Saskatchewan River & Viewpoint, Beaver River Provincial Parks & Protected Areas Bellis Natural Area Moose Lake Provincial Park Cold Lake Provincial Park Environmentally Significant Areas (provincial maps) Small lakes & wetlands
Sports	Golf CoursesGeochaches
Airforce	4 Wing Cold LakeBeaver River Trestle Flight Path Viewpoint



Smoky Lake Pumpkins



Vilna Mushrooms

	Attraction Theme	Attraction
ns	Trail Connections	 The Great Canadian Snowmobile Trail Bellis Natural Area Trails 4 Wing Cold Lake Base Trails Connections to all 5 snowmobile club trails (ASA trails)
Off-Trail Attractions	National & Provincial Historic Sites	 Metis Crossing National Historic Site Victoria District National Historic Site Victoria Settlement Provincial Historic Site Fort George Buckingham House
-HO	Natural	 Provincial Parks & Protected Areas » Whitney Lakes Provincial Park » Francehere Bay Provincial Recreation Area • Municipal Parks



Glendon Perogy Park



Peter Filder - Elk Point



Edouardville Stationmaster's house remnant



St. Paul UFO Landing Pad



4.6 Events

Dozens of events have been hosted on the trail since it was opened. Some events occur annually while others have been one-off events. Currently, the following events occur annually:

- 2nd Chance Trail Ride May
- Iron Horse Mini May
- Iron Horse Ultra 100 September
- Heinsburg Trail Ride Day September
- Dewberry Chuckwagon Racing Heritage Society Wagon Rally September
- Run for Ronald May

The trail has played host to 23 other events since 2003.

4.7 Signage & Wayfinding

There are approximately 1,982 signs on the trail. As illustrated in Table.3, a diversity of sign types have been installed on the trail including wayfinding, caution/advisory, visitor education, interpretive, regulatory, stop, warning signs and TGT / TCT way markers. Since establishment of the trail, the RRTS and each municipality has installed signs independently. To date, no signage standard has been developed for the trail. As can be seen in the images on the following pages, in the absence of a consistent signage standard, the visual identity and appeal, quality, size, height, siting and messaging of the signage varies, as does the effectiveness of the signage. Most signs rely on and contain significant wording with few to no pictograms to articulate permitted uses and desired behaviours.

Through the field review, it was determined that approximately 26% of signage on the trail is in good condition, 45% requires minor maintenance and 29% of the signage is damaged and should be replaced. Many of the damaged signs are beginning to crack and delaminate due to their age, others have been shot while some have been bent or vandalized. In addition to signage style and condition, the visibility and reflectivity of signage varies. Some gates contain warning signage that is highly visible and reflective while others contain signage this is not visible or missing, causing safety concerns.

In general, the trail contains a lot of signage, resulting in signage clutter and an over-saturation of information which likely reduces its effectiveness. The volume of signs is likely more than is needed to support safe and informed visitation. As illustrated in Figure 8, the density of signage varies by segment with some containing an exceptionally high number of signs. Efforts to rationalize the number and frequency of signage should be taken to improve the visitor experience and the effectiveness of the most essential signage.



Figure 33. Very High Density of Signage Following Road Crossing

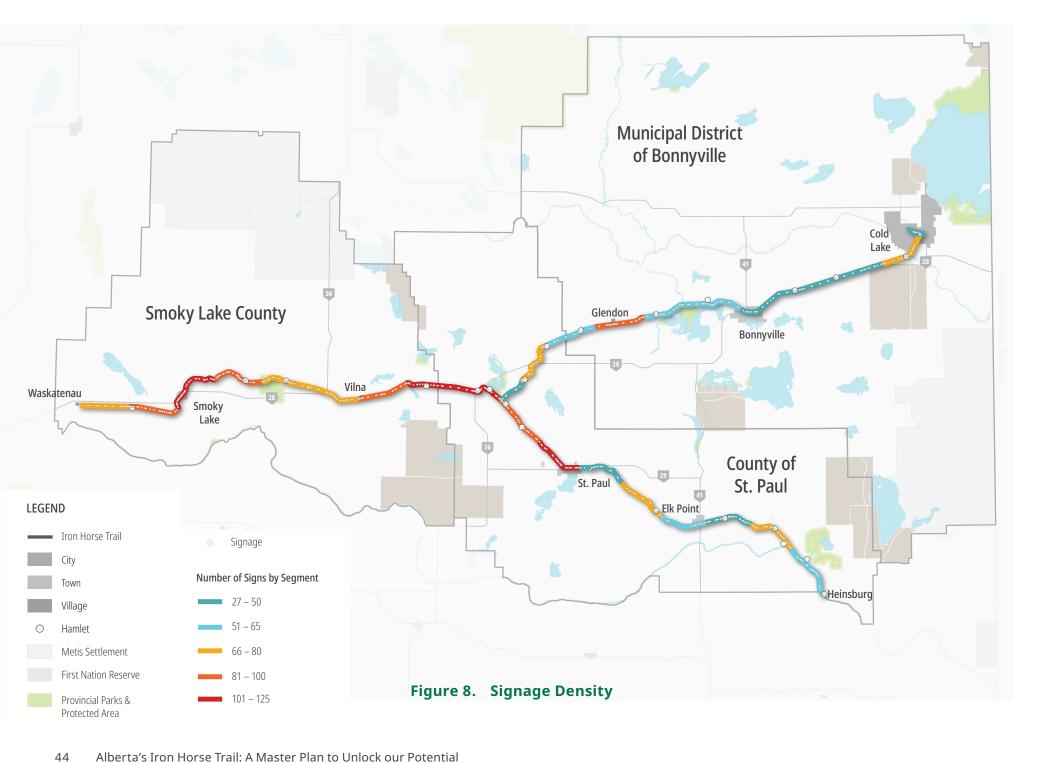
Table.3 Signage Counts by Sign Type

Sign Type	Count	Percent of Total Sign Count
Kiosk	17	0.86%
Basic Wayfinding (Direction)	204	10.29%
Caution	597	30.1%
Education	132	6.6%
Interpretive	14	0.71%
Regulatory	359	18.1%
Stop	297	14.89%
Warning (e.g. Stop Ahead, Curves)	261	13.17%
TCT	101	5.1%
TOTAL	1,982	100%









4.8 Accommodations

Though most popular as a day use experience, many of our current visitors and our potential markets are seeking an on or near-trail overnight experience with legal OHV access between the trail and the accommodation. As a long-distance trail, we know that having access to quality accommodations on-trail or near trail is essential to supporting these visitors and to growing the economic contribution of the IHT. Currently, visitors have access to a variety of public and private sector serviced and unserviced camping accommodations and fixed roof accommodations within some of our cities, towns, and villages.

As illustrated in Figure 10, our current supply of camping accommodations includes:

- 3 on-trail designated campgrounds
 - » Belvil– Unserviced campground (8 non-powered sites)
 - » St. Paul Iron Horse Trail Campground (82 powered sites)
 - » Heinsburg Campground (8 sites approximately)
- 4 near-trail campgrounds
 - » Pine Creek Campground (5 powered sites, 3 non-powered sites)
 - » Smoky Lake Golf Resort (14 powered sites)
 - » Smoky Lake RV Park (12 powered sites)
 - » Bellis Beach Campground (25 non-powered sites)
 - » Bonnie Lake Vilna Recreation Area (17 powered site, 27 non-powered sites)
 - » Minnie Lake Municipal Campground (11 powered sites, 5 non-powered sites) -OHV's not permitted on site
 - » Franchere Bay Provincial Recreation Area (58 powered sites, 41 powered & water sites, 99 unserviced site) OHV's not permitted on site
 - » Elk Point Recreation Park Campground (17 powered sites)



Belvil campground



St. Paul campground



Heinsburg campground

Campgrounds and campsites along the trail are modest and provide a basic camping experience. Opportunities exist to elevate the visitor experience and ensure the provision of amenities that support the visitors to the trail. There may also be opportunity to explore the provision of comfort camping options for visitors. The distribution of campgrounds and the number of campsites varies significantly across the trail (Figure 9) which, as the popularity of the trail grows, may pose challenges with being able to accommodate visitors each night along the trail.

Currently, fixed roof near- and on-trail accommodations include hotels, motels and some bed and breakfasts. Fixed roof accommodations are available in:

- Waskatenau (motel)
- Smoky Lake (inn, bed & breakfast, motel)
- Bonnyville (multiple hotels)
- Muriel Creek Ranch House
- Cold Lake (multiple hotels, bed & breakfast)
- St. Paul (multiple hotels)
- Elk Point (motel)

Though fixed-roof accommodations are available, it is important to recognize that none of these accommodations provide secure OHV lock ups which is a concern for many motorized visitors. Though many community bylaws provide for an access corridor, it is essential that motorized visitors are permitted to access the nearest fixed roof accommodation providers who are looking to serve trail visitors.

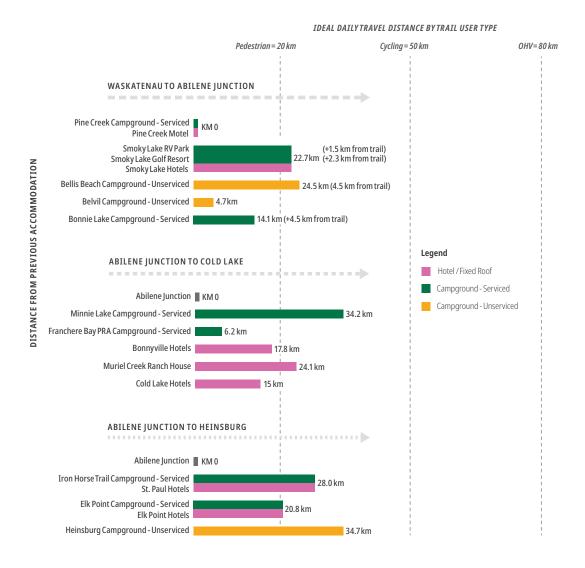


Figure 9. Distance Between Accommodations

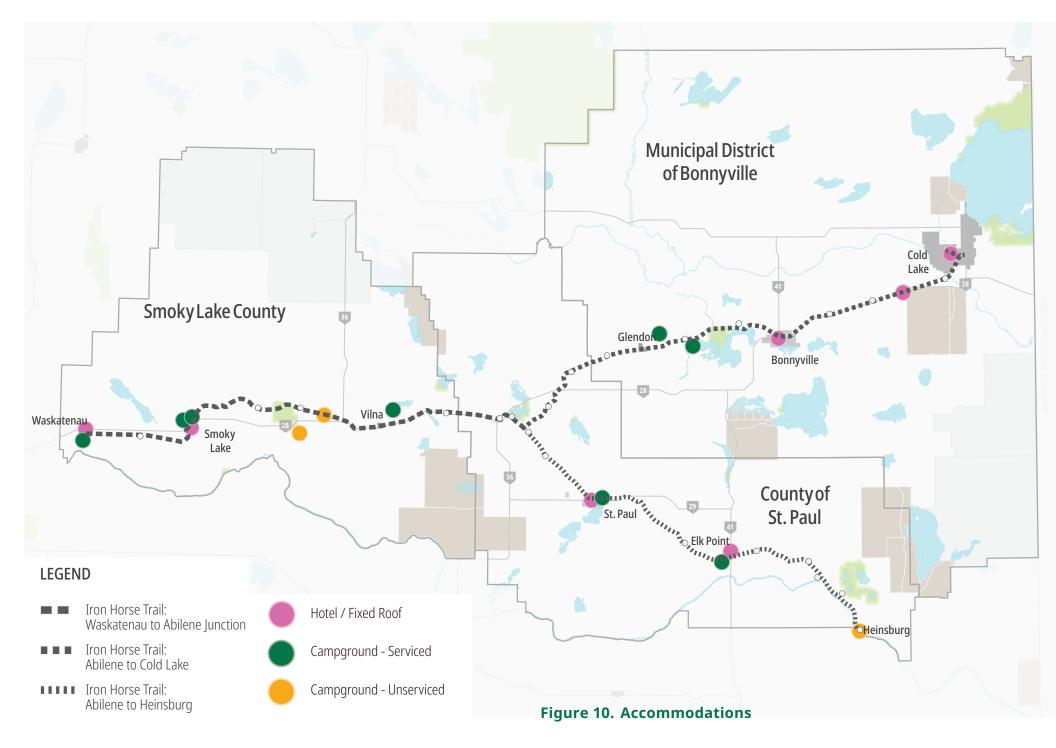
Analysis of our supply of accommodations by segment of the trail suggests that:

Waskatenau to Abilene Junction – the supply of camping accommodations is inadequate to meet the needs of both motorized and non-motorized visitors. Many of the camping opportunities in this segment are informal, small, and unsustainable and are not effectively distributed for long-distance non-motorized visitors. Fixed roof-accommodations are adequately distributed on this segment of the trail for motorized visitors but not for non-motorized visitors.

Abilene Junction to Cold Lake – the supply of camping accommodations is inadequate for both motorized and non-motorized visitors. However, if Franchere Bay Provincial Recreation Area and Minnie Lake Municipal Campground were to become accessible for OHV's, the supply could be adequate for motorized visitors but would remain inadequate for non-motorized visitors. Fixed roof-accommodations are adequately distributed on this segment of the trail for motorized visitors but not for non-motorized visitors.

Abilene Junction to Heinsburg – the supply of camping accommodations is adequate for motorized visitors but inadequate for non-motorized visitors. Fixed roof-accommodations are adequately distributed on this segment of the trail for motorized visitors but not for non-motorized visitors.

Providing an adequately distributed network of ontrail camping opportunities to meet the needs of non-motorized visitors is potentially an unsurmountable challenge given the low volume of non-motorized multinight users and the costs associated with developing and maintaining campgrounds. However, staging areas are well distributed across the trail and this distribution is suited to meet the single day trip distances of non-motorized visitors. Enabling these few through travellers to camp in designated zones within the staging areas is a more reasonable approach to providing authorized on trail accommodation for non-motorized visitors.



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4.9 Trail Tread & Corridor Conditions

Ensuring the right trail tread and corridor conditions are essential to a positive visitor experience. Simply put, every visitor expects that the tread and the corridor will be appropriately designed to support their intended activity and experience. At the same time, we know that not all visitors are impacted by the tread and corridor conditions in the same way. For example, motorized visitors can travel much more easily through sandy tread conditions than cyclists while walkers and hikers require a much smaller corridor clearance than equestrian users or for groomed snowmobiling. It is essential that the trail be deliberately designed and maintained to meet the needs of permitted user groups, intended levels of use, and degree of challenge. It is also essential that the trail tread conditions be accurately communicated to visitors. When trail user objectives are not met, negative visitor experiences and management issues occur which result in decreased tourism potential and threats to the trail brand.

Planning the future of the trail needed to be based on a sound understanding of the current trail tread and corridor conditions. A rapid ATV based trail inventory and condition assessment was completed in the summer and fall of 2020 to review and document the current conditions. The trail condition assessment documented the existing physical characteristics of the trail (typical tread width, tread type, corridor clearance) as well as problem areas such as drainage issues and damaged areas. The basis for the assessment was a comparison of the current trail conditions against the design criteria stated on the Trail Management Objective form (TMO) (see Appendix A). Appendix B separates the trail into segments with similar characteristics and conditions and presents an overview of those characteristics and the most significant condition issues that exist in each segment.

"Quality is never an accident; it is always the result of high intention, sincere effort, intelligent direction and skillful execution; it represents the wise choice of many alternatives."

- William A. Foster

Cycling Experiences from the Trail:

The following input from cycling visitors illustrate the challenges with the trail tread for nonmotorized and non-equestrian visitors:

"...at some parts I could ride 25 kmh and then it slowed me down until I had to dismount and push because the trail became a sand pit. You can't imagine the frustration a cyclist with full gear has on such a trail. Either you want to get more cyclists on the trail or you declare it an exclusive ATV route. But both are hardly combinable.

International Cycle Tourist

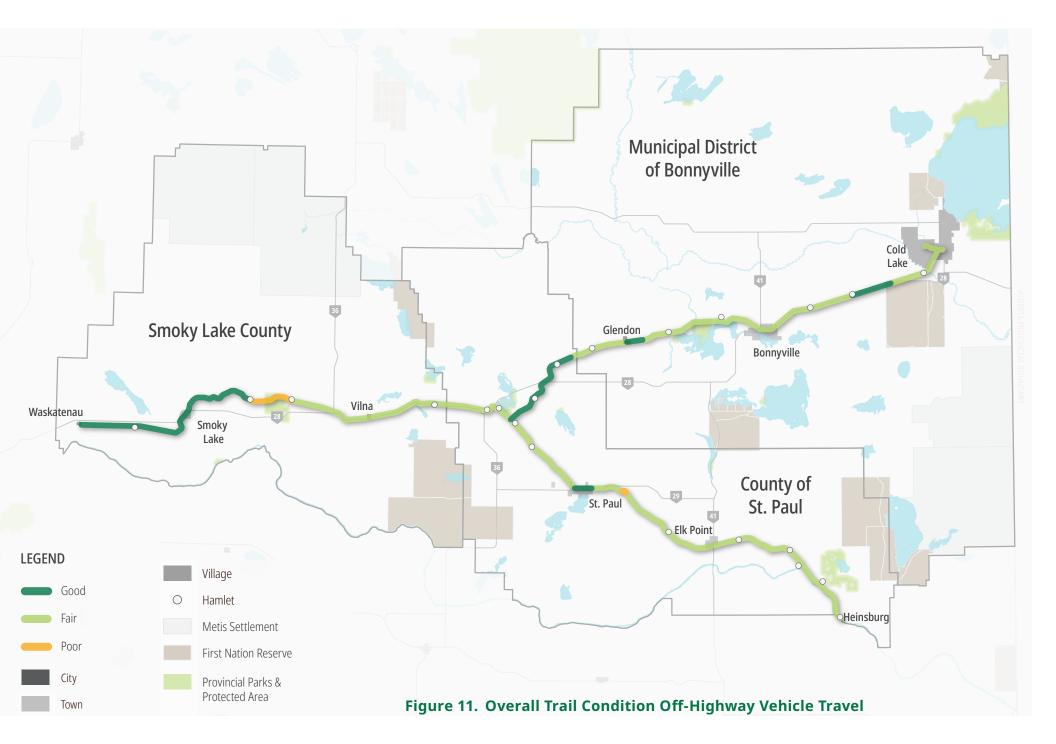
"The slog through the Bellis Natural Area – Bellis Beach – should be avoided at all costs."

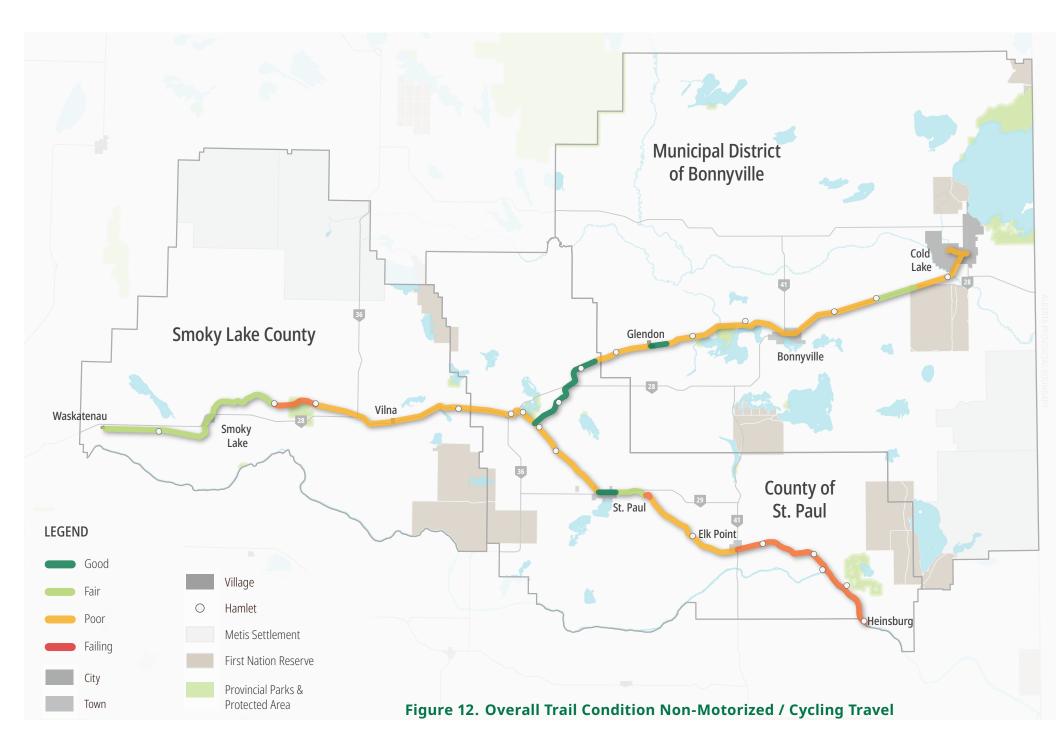
- Cycle Tourist

The trail tread is generally comprised of either loose sand and/or gravel, compact native fine-grained soils, or well-graded compact imported aggregates. Tread condition was assessed according to its suitability to support off-highway vehicle travel or non-motorized / cycling travel. As illustrated in Figure 11 and Figure 12, and summarized in Table.4, the trail tread condition, though it requires improved maintenance, is generally suitable and in fair to good condition for off-highway vehicle users. However, the trail tread would require significant upgrades to support cycling, small wheeled (e.g. mobility scooters, long-boards etc.) and pedestrian visitation, especially outside of urban centers.

Table.4 Trail Tread Condition

	VISITOR TYPE		
Tread Condition Rating	OHV Visitors (% of trail)	Non-Motorized (cycling, small wheeled) Visitors (% of trail)	
Good (ongoing basic maintenance required)	25.8% (72km)	9.04% (25.1km)	
Fair (improved maintenance required)	70.7 (196km)	18.97% (52.6km)	
Poor (significant maintenance & upgrades required)	3.5% (9.7km)	56.59% (157km)	
Failing (replacement required)	0%	15.4% (43km)	





Several common tread and corridor issues were observed along the trail and are described below.

4.9.1 Loose & Deep Sand

A loose sand trail tread surface was encountered on approximately 12km of the trail. This tread condition is one of the primary challenges affecting the suitability of the trail for non-motorized use and impacting the experience for motorized visitors. The loose sand areas generally comprise poorly graded sand and appeared to generally be constructed from nearby native soils. The loose sand ruts easily with tire traffic and typically forms washboards or "whoops" following relatively low levels of motorized use.

From a motorized perspective, these sandy tread areas can be maintained to avoid significant impact to the visitor experience if regular routine maintenance (grading) is performed. Routine grading can adequately mitigate the ruts and washboards; however, this maintenance is required frequently (several times per year in some areas) which is not currently occurring. During the field assessment, heavy wash boarding was experienced which considerably detracted from the visitor experience and increased safety risks.

Recognizing that cycling and pedestrian activities are permitted and currently encouraged on the trail, these sandy areas are often overly difficult to travel, if not impassable, due to the loose, rutting nature of the tread. In some locations, the loose sand is up to 15 cm deep, making the trail unpassable and certainly unenjoyable for all cyclists, including fat bikes, and most pedestrian visitors. We have heard clearly from cyclists that they often either dismount and walk or bypass sandy areas, such as those through Bellis, on the nearby roads. Equestrian and wagon users have also noted concerns about the sandy conditions on some sections of the trail.



8m wide section of loose sand with washboard near Bellis

4.9.2 Loose Sand and Gravel

Approximately 96km of the trail is composed of a loose sandy gravel surface, which is the remnants of the eroded rail ballast. In most cases, these areas were less prone to rutting than the loose sand areas noted above. However, loose gravel or cobble can become overly dusty when dry. Washboard conditions form less frequently in these areas, but still occur, especially during significant periods between routine maintenance (grading).

This tread material is generally considered to be acceptable and in alignment with the desired TMO for motorized users but must be maintained more frequently than is currently occurring. Greater maintenance attention is required to manage the frequency and size of the "whoops" that form in these areas. However, for cyclists, these areas can be undesirable as the loose surface and larger cobble moves as the cyclist passes making steering and accelerating challenging and the frequent washboard that forms following motorized use provides an unappealing experience.

4.9.3 Fine-Grained Soil Trail Tread

Extended sections of the trail near Heinsburg have a high clay and/or silt (fines) content. These sections are less durable and drain poorly compared to the sand and gravel tread sections of our trail. In general, these areas retain water and soften during wet conditions especially where positive drainage does not exist. Though these areas can be muddy, they are passable, add an element of variety for the rider and are generally considered to be in alignment with the TMO for summer motorized users. Regular grading and maintenance are required to manage the rutting on the trail and promote drainage. However, surfacing enhancement would improve tread durability and reduce maintenance requirements.



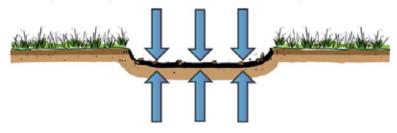
Loose sand and gravel leading to ruts, washboard, and whoops.



Near Heinsburg excessive fines trap and retain water leading to standing water.

For non-motorized use such as cyclists, pedestrian traffic, or horse and wagon visitors, these areas become very unappealing or impassable when saturated. These visitors create deep ruts due to the narrow nature of their wheels; mud then builds up on contact points, and tires can become very challenging to turn if not prevented from turning. These conditions exist over much of the trail from Heinsburg to Elk Point and is not recommended for non-motorized travel during wet periods.

Eventually, structurally useful tread materials resist further compaction...



...but have no resistance to grinding displacement except their own hardness/surface bonding. So displacement can potentially continue forever.

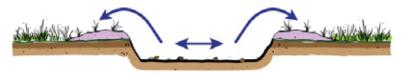
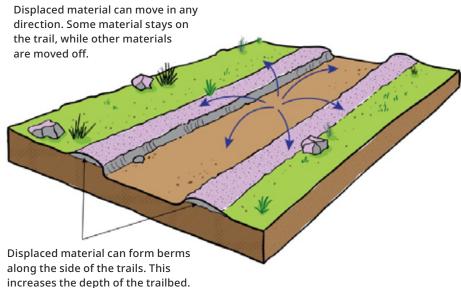


Figure 13. Evolution of a Trail Tread



4.9.4 Poorly Drained Areas & Cupping

Poor drainage resulting in large mud holes is an increasing problem on approximately 49km of the trail. Though the corridor was once a narrow and well defined railbed with deep ditching on the edges, it has evolved into a much wider corridor. The trail is currently maintained by road-width grading equipment which is widening the trail tread and filling in the ditches. The trail has lost its "trail prism" which means the tread is cupping and now retains much of the surface water that falls on it.

The trail tread prism needs to be re-established to promote positive drainage, the "curb" of organics or excess grading spill over needs to be removed from the margins of the trail tread to allow the water to shed to the ditches, and the ditches need to be re-installed. These ditches need to be of proper dimensions to create enough vertical separation to prevent wicking of moisture back up into the trail tread. During grading, on a scheduled rotation such as every 3-5 years, the grader should re-establish these ditches.



An area west of Lindbergh where the trail prism/crowned trail tread with adjacent ditches has not been maintained. Here the trail is cupped and the ditches are filled in and too far away from the ride surface.

4.9.5 Flooding

Though not a dominant issue across most of the trail, flooding is posing a considerable challenge approximately 6.5km east of St. Paul where the outflow drainage from an adjacent waterbody has changed since the initial railway construction. This section of the former railway bed is flooded each year approximately 40cm deep for 70m. The waterbody itself is approximately 1.5km long, (top left image), and, according to local sources, the waterbody used to drain to the west and was blocked when Range Road 85 was installed without a culvert. Recently, attempts have been made to establish a ditch to drain the water to the south (top right image). However, grades are challenging to achieve a sufficient flow of water and the trail continues to flood and is a considerable detractor for nonmotorized visitors and safety concern for motorized visitors. Efforts are underway to install a new culvert under Range Road 85 to re-establish drainage.







Top left: Flooded trail east of St. Paul

Top right: Ditch attempting to drain waterbodies to historical levels to the south east. Ditch is slumping and blocking waterflow occurring in the narrow ditch with steep banks

Bottom left: Aerial imagery of flooded trail segment

4.9.6 Excessive Tread & Corridor Width

The width of our trail tread varies significantly from 2 m to 7 m with the sandy area near Bellis reaching upwards of 18 m as the ditches are now being ridden for entertainment and to bypass the washboard. Approximately 96 km (34.5%) of the trail is of an excessive width (>5m) and these widths significantly detract from the visitor experience.

The most appealing tread width and "trail feel" occurs in areas where the grass has been allowed to grow near the edges of the trail and the width is closer to 2.5 m, such as near Waskatenau. Moving forward, it is essential that we work to re-establish an appealing trail width that supports a properly crowned or out sloped trail tread. This will require the re-establishment of native vegetation which will need to balance the trail experience within an acceptable fire management regime. Once appropriate crown or out slope and ditches are established, then annual or bi-annual grading maintenance should be conducted with narrower equipment to allow vegetation to re-establish close to the trail edge.



Given the railway history, the trail corridor is also typically much wider than the trail tread. In some areas, trees and brush surrounding the trail corridor have been brushed wider than the specified trail corridor clearance established in the TMO. In other areas, the edges of the trail tread are vegetated with grass and/or small brush. In no cases were vegetation along the trail found to be impeding use of the trail in a substantive way for any permitted trail activity. However, some sections of our trail are characterized by an overly wide trail corridor. When combined with the straightness of the trail and the wide trail tread, this overly large corridor clearance detracts from the intended trail experience and can make the trail feel much more like a road than a trail.

4.9.7 Parallel Trails & Off-Trail Play Areas

In many instances, visitors have created informal parallel trails and play features adjacent to the trail. These parallel trails and play areas widen the corridor, can impact water flow and damage trail side vegetation. However, these parallel trails and play areas are a clear signal that visitors are seeking interest and play features along the trail to enhance their experience.



Example segment of user created parallel trail



Play area in the trail corridor near Bellis Natural Area



Play area near Elk Point

4.9.8 Exposed Waterline Infrastructure within the Trail Corridor

In places, the trail corridor is an important multi-use corridor supporting important linear infrastructure including several major regional water lines. Work to upgrade and service the infrastructure has the potential to alter the design characteristics of the trail (e.g. clearing width, vegetation, tread width and surfacing) and visual character which can impact the visitor experience while infrastructure in the trail clearance zones can increase visitor safety risks.



Waterline infrastructure in clearance zone near Smoky Lake



Waterline infrastructure in clearance zone near Elk Point

4.9.9 Trestles

The trail contains 19 trestles which are critical to the trail's function, connectivity, and some serve as unique trail features. The structural integrity and review of the trestles have not been undertaken since the corridor was acquired. Though structural reviews were not undertaken for this plan, the overall function and condition of the trestles in the context of the TMO were considered.

All trestles encountered on the trail were functional for the intended users in terms of width, grade of approaches, and surfacing. Most had adequate fencing and signage for user safety; however, there was generally minor rutting and or potholes observed on the bridge approaches. Some trestles were surfaced with gravel or other soils like the surrounding trail tread, and some were wood decked. In some instances, the trestle decking is rotting and in need of replacement and minor damage to the fencing was observed. Chain link fencing, though functional, can detract from the natural setting and the visitor experience.



Fort Kent Trestle - an example of gravelsurface trestle



Moose Lake Trestle - an example of a wood decked trestle



Uncovered bollard hole at Moose Lake trestle

4.9.10 Gates, Texas Gates & Texas Gate Ramps

Many segments of the trail are adjacent to active cattle operations and support grazing. In some locations, grazing is permitted within the trail corridor. 73 gates have been installed along the trail to help contain the cattle. Though gates will be encountered on each reach of the trail, they are most frequent on the Abilene Junction to Heinsburg segment and between Smoky Lake and Bellis (Figure 14).

To enable convenient passage by motorized users, cyclists and pedestrians, Texas gates or Texas gate ramps have been installed beside each gate. The ramps allow OHV's, cyclists, and other visitors to bypass the gates without stopping. However, equestrian and horse and wagon visitors are required to stop, dismount, and open each gate which is a significant disruption to the visitor experience. Our Texas gate ramps were designed to support OHV's with a wheelbase less than 182.8 cm (72"). However, OHV's continue to evolve, and we are seeing wider machines on the trail today than we did over the past 20 years. The current design of the Texas gate ramps is becoming restrictive to some machines and forcing those riders to have to open the gates which disrupts their experience especially in areas where there is a high density of gates. In addition to being a challenge to visitors, the Texas gates also need to be maintained regularly to ensure effective containment of cattle. Some Texas gate ramps are becoming a visitor safety risk, as the approaches are being eroded and steepening as users accelerate to climb the ramp, which increases the risk of visitors rolling their machine backwards.



Gate with Texas gate ramp

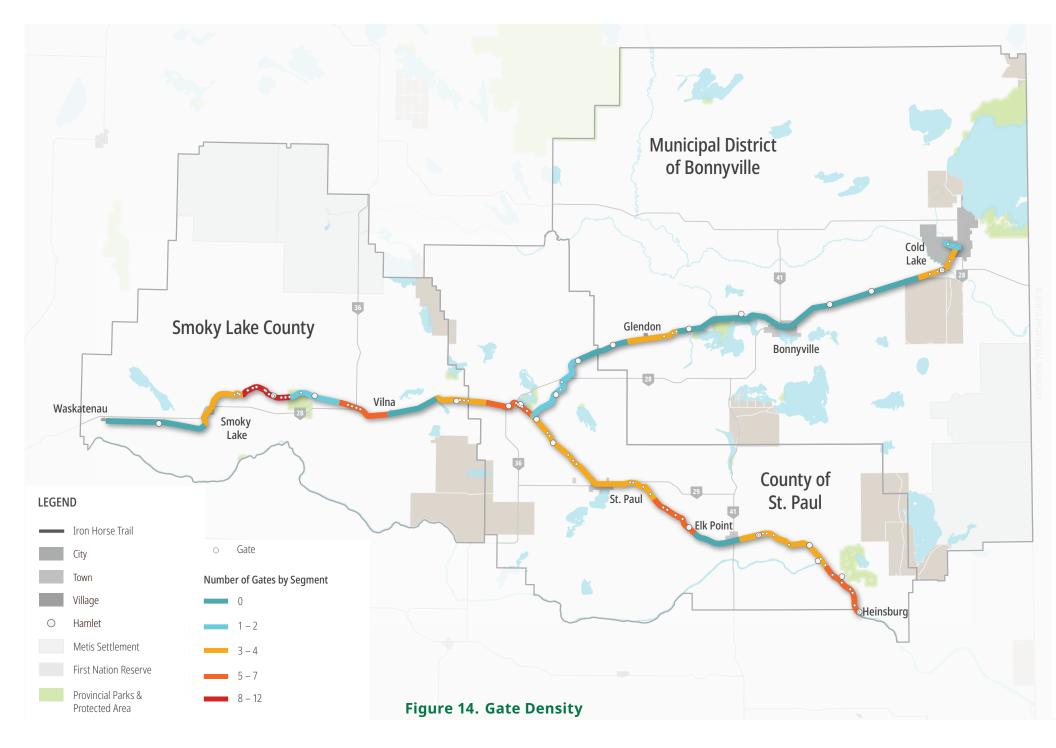


Gate with Texas gate requiring maintenance to contain cattle



Difficult angle and steep gate crossing creating a roll over risk

73 number of gates on the trail



4.9.11 Unseparated Adjacent Tread Types

In an attempt to better support non-motorized and small wheeled visitors, half of the trail tread through Glendon has been paved while the remaining portion of the tread remains a loose sand cobble mix. The resulting unpaved trail tread is now approximately 2m wide which is narrower than the tread width set in the TMO, and makes it difficult for two side-by-sides or ATV's to pass each other without having to mount the paved segment of the tread or depart into the trail corridor which will result in vegetation damage and widening over time. The narrower tread widths also increase the potential for motorized users to contact trail signage which is sited just on the margin the trail tread. This multi-tread approach may increase visitor safety risks. Manufacturers recommend that ATV's are not operated on pavement as their handling and control can be greatly impacted.

The mixing of tread surfacing elevates the risk of loss of control which is particularly more concerning with non-motorized users being present. There is notable elevation difference at the transition point between the gravel and asphalt which, if not maintained, will increase overtime. This elevation difference poses risk to motorized users who may attempt to mount the paved portion at speed to pass other trail users. In addition, this transition area is likely to begin to hold and channel water over time as a ditch will form if regular maintenance does not occur. Finally, given the motorized focus of this trail, it is likely that gravel will continue to be displaced onto the asphalt. This will pose challenges for non-motorized users, especially small-wheeled users, become a source of management complaints and require frequent sweeping and maintenance investment.



Paved and gravel tread with signage now posing a safety risk for two way traffic



Paved and narrow gravel tread increase safety risks and maintenance



Preferred paved and gravel separated paths near St.
Paul

4.9.12 Gravel Trail to Paved Trail Transitions

Throughout the study area, numerous intersections occur between the gravelled trail and paved pathways or roads. In many instances, gravel from the trail tread is being spread out over the pavement due to regular use. While typically not an issue for vehicle traffic or motorized trail users, this does cause a challenge for non-motorized users using the paved pathways that the trail intersects (e.g., strollers and other small-wheeled users can crash on the gravel particles on the asphalt). In areas closer to communities where non-motorized use on asphalt surfaces is common, or in any other areas where dispersal of trail tread materials onto asphalt roadways is not desirable, these areas could be solved with a paved apron extending onto the IHT on both sides of the intersection.

4.10 Winter Grooming

On average, the trail is groomed approximately 3 times each winter. Grooming is undertaken by the Iron Horse Trail Groomer Foundation, a registered not-for-profit organization. The foundation was started by the five snowmobile clubs in the area. The foundation owns and maintains the groomer and trailer and volunteers donate their time to trail grooming. All municipalities in the region provide annual funding to support trail grooming. Issues regarding wheeled OHV use damaging the groomed trail have been increasing in the past years.

4.11 Non-Recreational Use & Adjacent Land Use

Our trail influences and is influenced by nonrecreational use of the trail corridor and adjacent land uses. In addition to waterline infrastructure. sections of the trail corridor are also used for cattle grazing and movement between pastures. We recognize the need to be good neighbours and that the trail can have implications on adjacent landowners and farming operations. At the same time, non-recreational use by adjacent landowners and other land uses have implications, positive and negative, on the trail corridor and the visitor experience. Though not common, instances arise with adjacent landowners trespassing in the trail corridor and some individuals have erected infrastructure within the corridor (top left image). In other instances, adjacent landowners are creating serious public safety concerns by erecting chains across gate ramps (top right image) or placing obstacles such as hay bales directly in the trail corridor. We are committed to being good neighbours, we will continue to work with adjacent landowners and land users to mitigate the impacts of the trail on their interests while mitigating the impacts of adjacent land uses on the trail and seeking opportunities for collaboration.



Electric fence and steel fence encroachment into trail clearance zone



Chain welded across gate crossing adjacent to cattle operation



Cattle grazing in the trail corridor



Horses grazing near the trail



Adjacent land vegetation management forcing off trail travel with no warning signage



5. Our Markets of Greatest Potential

Target markets are the visitor segments that are more likely to choose our trail over others because the trail and the experiences it provides are more likely to meet their expectations. The most successful trails destinations are those that truly know their visitors. Knowing our visitors means identifying and understanding their activity interests, demographics, psychographics, social values, travel behaviours, motivations, desired recreation settings, accommodation and amenity preferences, and communication desires. With this understanding, we are able to craft tailored trail experiences, provide the amenities and services they expect where they need them, and communicate with our visitors in ways that are most likely to compel them to visit the trail. The more aligned our trail experiences are with the needs, interests and passions of our target markets, the more likely it is that they will be motivated to choose the Iron Horse Trail for their next outing. Once that choice is made, and the user enjoys their experience, we know that they will be more likely to share their experience and promote our trail within their circles.

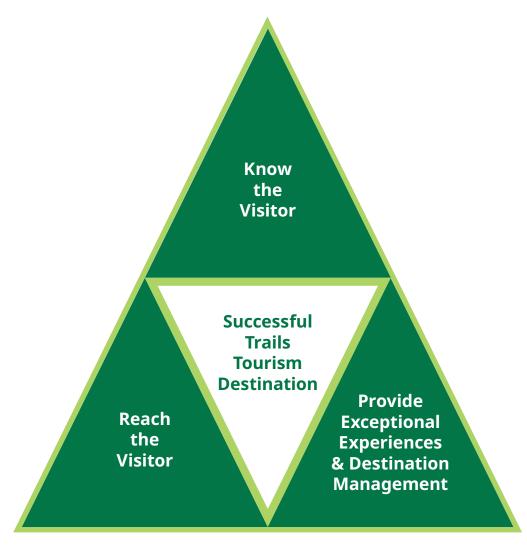


Figure 15. Elements of a Successful Trails Tourism Destination

5.1 Market Origins

The most basic element in identifying our target markets is to understand where they are most likely to come from.

5.1.1 Primary Market Origins

Research on travel to Northern Alberta shows clearly that Albertans from Edmonton, central and northern Alberta are our primary short-haul markets. Of the 749,000 overnight visits to Alberta North in 2017, 28% were from Edmonton and area, 22% from Northern Alberta and 19% from Central Alberta. 1.8 million Albertan's, or 45% of the population, live within a 3-hour drive from one of the major gateways to the trail (Smoky Lake, St. Paul, Bonnyville and Cold Lake) (Figure 16). Though not included in this assessment, the trail catchment also includes a considerable proportion of Saskatchewan's population including the major population centers of North Battleford (18,625 residents) and Lloydminster (31,377 residents). Saskatchewan residents often access the trail via Heinsburg.

Target Markets

the visitor segments that are more likely to choose our trail over others because the trail and the experiences it provides meet these visitors' expectations. These are our best visitors.





Travel to Alberta North in 2017

Visits

1.89 million total person visits

84% of visits were Albertans

36% visits were July – Sept.

27% visits were Oct. – Dec.

23% visits were Apr. – Jun.

14% visits were Jan. – Mar.

Origins

28% from Edmonton Area

22% from Northern AB

19% from Central AB

Length of Stay

2.9 nights – Albertans

3.4 nights – Canada

5.4 nights – other Canada

Spending

\$209 / person / visit – Albertan

\$363 / person / visit – Other Canada

\$74 / person / night – Albertan

\$67 / person / night – Other Canada

GOA, Domestic Tourism in Alberta North Tourism Region 2017

To date, we have not undertaken any empirical visitor research studies to generate a robust understanding of our current visitation and our target markets. But we can extrapolate from the Alberta Recreation Survey to understand our potential local and short-haul Alberta market further.

Last completed in 2017, the survey found that household and individual participation rates in trails-based activities that are permitted on the IHT vary considerably:

- Walking for pleasure
 82.8% of households and 80.3% of individuals
- Day Hiking
 53.1 % of households and 49.9% of individuals
- ATV / off-road vehicles
 14.7% of households and 13% of individuals
- Mountain biking (off-road)
 12% of households and 9% of individuals
- Snowshoeing
 10.4% of households and 8.9% of individuals
- **Cross-country skiing** 10.3% of households and 8.7% of individuals
- Horseback riding / trail riding
 7% of households and 5% of individuals
- Overnight backpacking 6% of households and 5% of individuals
- **Snowmobiling** 6% of households and 4.4% of individuals
- **Motorized Trail Biking** 3% of households and 2% of individuals
- Camping
 40.6% of households and 36.9%

In addition to trails-based activities, 40.6% of households and 36.9% of individuals overnight camp.

Participation in land based and snow-based activities were relatively consistent across the sub-regions of Alberta (Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge, North, Central, South). Though still strong participation, Edmonton was identified as participating in land and snow-based activities significantly less than other regions in the province.

To estimate the potential size of the Alberta market by activity type, the provincial activity participation rates for individuals were applied to the estimated number of adult decision-making Albertans and the market size was estimated. The primary activities that occur on, and are most relevant to, the trail include:

- ATV / Off-road vehicles
- Hiking
- Horseback riding / trail riding
- Mountain Biking (off-road riding)
- Snowmobiling
- Off-road motorcycles
- Camping
- Comfort Camping

48% of Albertans want to try Comfort Camping



Table.5 presents the estimated Alberta market size (adults over 19 yrs) for the primary activities that occur on the trail.

Table.5 Number of Decision-Making Adults by Activity

Activity	Potential Alberta Market Size in AB (Decision Making Adults)
Day Hiking	1,520,942
ATV / Off-road vehicles	396,237
Mountain biking (off-road)	274,318
Horseback riding / trail riding	152,399
Snowmobiling	134,111
Motorized trail biking	60,960
Camping	1,124,705

It should be noted that 48% of respondents to the Alberta Recreation Survey (2017) indicated they are interested in participating in comfort camping in the future. With little comfort camping supply in North Eastern Alberta, this represents and opportunity for the trail.

5.1.2 Secondary Market Origins

The short-haul market will remain our primary market. However, visitors from the "rest of Canada", particularly British Columbia and Saskatchewan, are our secondary markets. Anecdotally, we know that Canadians from outside Alberta do not represent a significant proportion of our visitors currently. But, by implementing this plan, we are working to create the conditions and experiences that will make the trail more attractive for mid-haul domestic travellers from nearby provinces and the rest of Canada. And there is good reason to work to attract this market. We know that the mid-haul travellers tend to spend more per visit than short-haul. In 2017, Albertans who travelled to Alberta North spent, on average, \$209 per person per visit compared to \$363 per person per trip by visitors by other Canadians.

In the absence of robust research into trails visitors and trails tourism from Canadian markets, Statistics Canada's Travel Survey of Residents of Canada (2011-2016) provides the best insights. The survey assesses what activities Canadian residents took part in while on a trip to Alberta (note, sample sizes were too small to allow analysis specific to Alberta North). Relevant to trails, the survey found that in 2016 (Figure 17):

- 1,696,000 Canadians hiked or backpacked,
- 344,000 Canadians engaged in cycling (assumed to also include mountain biking),
- 73,000 Canadians rode an ATV (quad, 4x4), and
- 135,000 Canadians went cross-country skiing or snowshoeing.

From this research, it's clear that motorized recreation is not a major activity undertaken by Canadians visiting Alberta when compared to hiking and cycling. Considering the characteristics of the trail and other destinations in Alberta that offer excellent hiking, cycling, cross-country skiing, or snowshoeing opportunities, we expect a relatively small proportion of the "rest of Canada" market to select the Iron Horse Trail because of its motorized recreation offering. We know that we will need to elevate the other experiences on the trail (e.g. cultural, Indigenous) to create a greater market appeal.

Of Canadians that visited Alberta...

1.6 million hiked or backpacked

344,000 bicycled

73,000 rode ATV / Off-road vehicle

135,000 went snowshoeing or cross-country skiing

Statistics Canada – Travel Survey of Residents of Canada Currently, long-haul international markets represent a very small, and inconsistent, market for the Iron Horse Trail. Though the trail does host some international through hikers or cyclists who are travelling The Great Trail, we do not anticipate much penetration into the international market and do not intend to focus on this market into the future. Furthering our decision, A Global Tourism Watch 2018 study identified what activities international markets who expressed interest in visiting Alberta would like to take part in (note: data specific to Alberta's North was not available). In terms of trails-based activities, the results suggest that hiking (56%) and casual biking (51%) were the top desired activities followed by mountain biking (30%), snowshoeing or cross-country skiing (27%) and road cycling (15%). Motorized based activities (e.g., ATV, 4x4) did not appeal in any significant way to long-haul markets. There are many other well-developed destinations in Alberta that stand to compete for international markets more strongly than the Iron Horse Trail can.

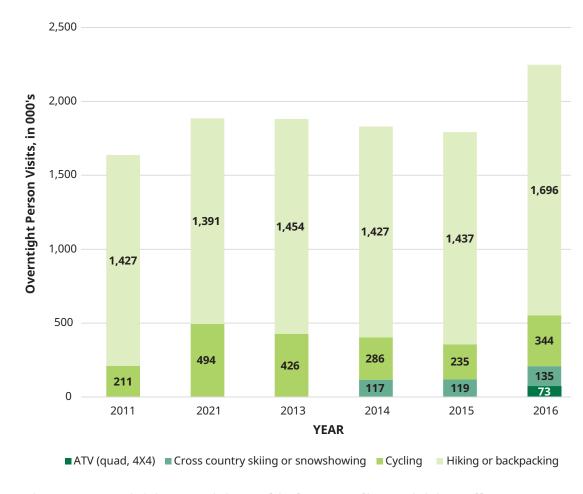


Figure 17. Activities Participated in by Canadians Visiting Alberta (Statistics Canada)

What Does this Mean for the Iron Horse Trail?

- Short-haul markets within a 3-hour drive of the major trail gateways will be our primary target market.
- There is considerable demand by Albertan's and rest of Canada for ATV
 / Off-road vehicles, horseback riding and snowmobiling especially if
 combined with camping and comfort camping and other cultural and
 Indigenous experiences.
- Though Albertans, mid-haul domestic and international markets have a significant demand for walking for pleasure, day hiking, and cycling, there are significant opportunities for these experiences elsewhere Alberta and those destinations are better positioned to attract those travelers than the Iron Horse Trail.
- Though there is considerable demand for mountain biking (off-road cycling) by Albertans, mid-haul markets in rest of Canada and long-haul international markets, the trail does not offer a trail tread that delivers a quality cycling or fat-biking experience. The tread conditions are a major barrier to mountain biking / cycle touring and there are more appealing mountain biking and cycle touring destinations in the province which are better positioned to compete for this market.
- With the exception of hiking, trails are unlikely to be a significant travel motivator (trip anchor) for long-haul international markets. If longhaul markets are to be attracted to the trail, the trail will need to be packaged with other travel motivating experiences (e.g. indigenous experiences) or leverage The Great Trail or Trans Canadian Snowmobile Trail through-travel experience.



5.2 Market Segmentation

Destination Canada through their Explorer Quotient, have developed visitor segmentation tools that provide deeper insights into our existing and potential visitors. Through these insights, we are able to understand what motivates our current and potential visitors and:

- Design market driven experiences along the trail,
- Develop a compelling brand that speaks to our target markets, and
- Tailor our marketing and communications effort in a more precise and effective way.

Our Priority Market Segments are:

Explorer Quotient

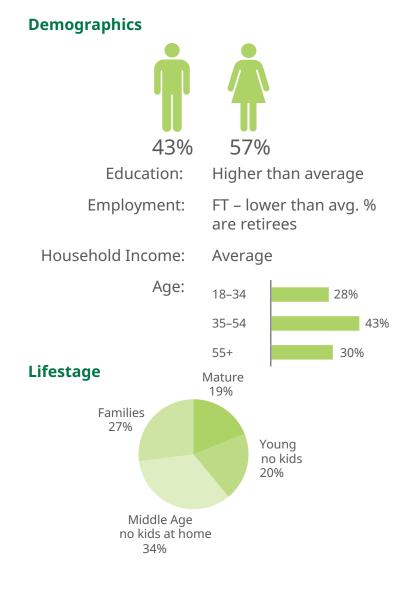
- Authentic Experiencers
- Cultural Explorers

EXPLORER QUOTIENT

5.2.1 Cultural Explorers

The Cultural Explorer tends to value spontaneity, cultural sampling, and is open to trying and accepting new experiences. They are defined by their desire for constant travel and continuous opportunities to discover and immerse themselves in the culture, people, and settings of the places they visit. They enjoy pursuing values such as novelty and tend to value personal control and personal escape. They are known for being positive, creative, energetic, open-minded, flexible, risk-taking, globally, and environmentally conscious and tend to be interested in the following attractions: heritage sites, cultural events, museums, festivals, B&B's, and hostels.

The Cultural Explorer makes up approximately 7% of the Alberta market and 12% of the global market. There are more females than there are males (57% compared to 43%) and they have higher than average levels of education and income. About 28% of this group is 18-34 years of age, compared to 43% in the 35-54 age group and 30% being 55 years of age and older. With respect to life stage, about 34% are middle aged with no kids at home, compared to 27% living with their families and 19% being mature.



Expectations & Travel Characteristics of Cultural Explorers

Vacation Trend?

Take the most vacations of any EQ type, trips of all durations but focused more often on weekend escapes.

Travel Motivations?

- Constant Travellers: Always excited about the next trip.
- Living History/Culture: Fascinated by the ancient history as well as the modern cultures of the places they visit.
- Fun, Shared Experiences: Travel is a journey, not the destination, and is best experienced with like-minded companions who like to have fun while learning.
- Feeling relaxed and free while traveling.
- New Destinations

Most Interested in?

- Learning, exploring something new, sampling local flavours, local lifestyles, Aboriginal culture, beautiful landscapes, rivers/waterfalls, hiking/trekking, cultural attractions, festivals, relaxing, self-touring.
- Aside from walking and hiking, have little interest in outdoor activities.

Most Avoid?

- Luxury/Comfort Seekers: This segment seeks an authentic experience and does not want to stay in sterile, commercial hotels.
- Check-list/Security: While cautious, these travellers are not afraid to venture into the unknown in pursuit of discovery. They will not be constrained to "tourist" schedules or destinations but will chart their own courses.

Most Desired Accommodations?

 Small inns, B&B's, camping, hostels and other accommodations that allows them to connect to other people.

Most Desired Natural Region(s)?

- Rocky Mountains
- Foothills

Desired Tourism Settings?

Mid-Country

Seek Travel Information From?

• Internet (website, regional tourism sites)

Source: CTC Explorer Quotient Worksheets and Government of Alberta 2015

5.2.2 Authentic Experiencers

The Authentic Experiencer is rational, spontaneous, ethical, ecoconscious, and curious. This person desires personal control, self-direction and is confident. They are looking for authentic, tangible engagement with the destinations they seek, and are interested in understanding the history of the places they visit. Similar to the Cultural Explorer, the Authentic Experiencer values cultural sampling and tend to devalue the joy of consumption, living virtually, and the importance of brands. Valuing nature, cultural immersion and personal development, the Authentic Experiencer is interested in the following attractions: nature reserves, world heritage sites, hiking trails, museums, homestays, and campsites.

The Authentic Experiencer is about 13% of the Alberta market and 9% of the global market with a greater number of males than females (54% compared to 46%). They have higher than average education, average income, and just over half (55%) are 55 years of age or older. About 42% are mature, while 28% are empty nesters and close to 20% live with their families. Unlike the Cultural Explorer who is less inclined to participate in more rustic outdoors experiences, the Authentic Experiencer is interested in adventure and is seeking less comfort amenities and more immersive experiences.

Demographics



Education: Higher than average

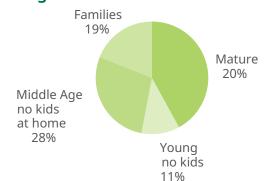
Employment: FT – more likely than

avg. to be retired

Household Income: Average



Lifestage



Expectations & Travel Characteristics of Authentic Experiencers

Vacation Trend?

• Long vacations—prefer a week or more.

Travel Motivations?

- Nature: Wants to see vast natural settings and wonders around the globe, but also takes in local park scenery.
- Cultural Immersion: These travellers like to integrate themselves into the local culture, eating authentic foods, learning the language to converse with locals, and exploring areas ignored by tourists.
- Historic Travel: This segment seeks to learn all that it can about the cultures they visit in advance of their trips.

Most Interested in?

 Outdoor adventures, local lifestyles and flavours, quality cuisine, beautiful landscapes, wildlife, historical/ cultural attractions & landmarks, learning/exploring, self-touring, performing arts. Willing to fly to distant destinations. Less interest in strenuous outdoor activities.

Most Avoid?

• Commercial comforts of western hotels as they are seeking to live as authentically as the locals do.

Desired Accommodations?

 Authentic accommodations tied to their interests resorts, camping

Desired Natural Region(s)?

- Foothills
- Rocky Mountains

Desired Tourism Settings?

Mid-Country

Seek Travel Information From?

 Internet (website, regional tourism sites), travel guides, magazines & books

Source: CTC Explorer Quotient Worksheets and Government of Alberta 2015

Data available through the Government Alberta was analysed spatially to identify which Census Subdivisions (CSD) within our 3-hour catchment from the trail's major gateways contains higher proportions of Authentic Experiencers and Cultural Explorers – our target traveller segments. As illustrated in Figure 18 and Figure 19, the following CSD's are the top 5 with the highest proportions of Authentic Experiencers and Cultural Explorer households within the 3-hour catchment:

Cultural Explorers
• Edmonton
Wood Buffalo
Red Deer
• Leduc
 Camrose

This data and maps can be used to help focus short-haul marketing and promotion efforts in areas that contain higher proportions of people who are more likely to be interested in our trail.

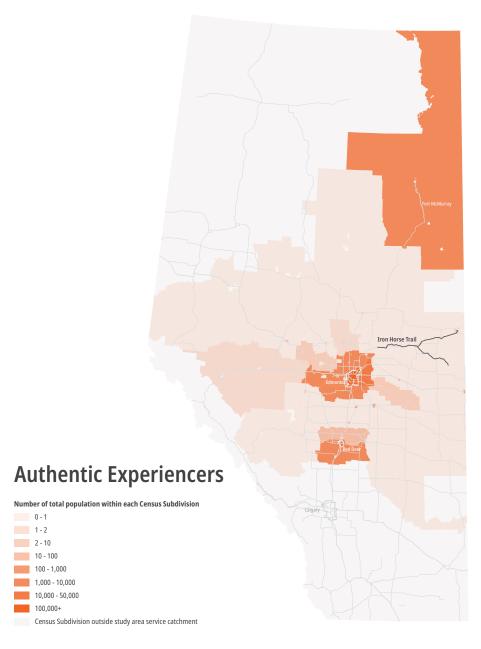


Figure 18. Density of Households by Authentic Experiencers



Figure 19. Density of Households by Cultural Explorers

What Does this Mean for the Iron Horse Trail?

- The Explorer Quotient market segments best suited to our trail are authentic experiencers and cultural explorers.
- · These markets require:
 - » Natural settings and scenery
 - » Cultural immersion and attractions
 - » Historical learning and attractions
 - » Experiential learning
 - » Festivals & events
 - » Local cuisine
 - » Low to moderate levels of adventure
 - » Authentic and nature-oriented accommodations (e.g., camping, comfort camping, B&B, hostels)
 - » Independent travel and guided opportunities
 - » Good online & mobile trip planning and information
- Our marketing efforts should target the CSD's with the highest proportion of Authentic Experiencers and Cultural Explorers.



6. Tourism Readiness & Product Market Match

6.1 Tourism Readiness

Trails tourism experiences can be categorized into one of three levels of tourism readiness (see Appendix C for criteria):

- Visitor Ready,
- Market Ready, or
- Export Ready.

Visitor Ready—Refers to a legally operated trail that is ready to support local visitors. These trails provide a relatively undeveloped trail experience, are likely known primarily by locals and potentially short-haul domestic travelers and are not actively promoted beyond local markets.

Market Ready—Refers to a trail experience that exceeds the visitor ready criteria, provides a refined trail experience and visitor amenities, the trail has a brand, is known regionally and provincially, and is being actively marketed to potential visitors in domestic short- and long-haul markets.

Export Ready — Exceeding the criteria for both visitor and market ready, these trails are the best of what Canada has to offer and are uniquely positioned amongst the best trail destinations in the world. These trails contain a critical mass of on and off trail related experiences that can provide multi-day experiences. As primary travel motivators, these trails provide a refined and fully integrated experience providing exceptional quality infrastructure and amenities, dependable supporting services, excellent trip planning information and access to knowledgeable staff. Tools are in place and ready to meet the needs and expectations of the more experienced and sophisticated trail tourist. The tourism industry in this region are ambassadors for the trail and highly knowledgeable about the available trail experiences. The trail is regularly maintained, and visitation is actively managed to ensure the desired trail experience can be achieved.

Visitor Ready...

The IHT's current state of tourism readiness is Visitor Ready but approaching Market-Ready.

Using the trails tourism readiness criteria (Appendix C), we evaluated the status of the Iron Horse Trail. At this point, we consider the trail to be "Visitor Ready" but is approaching the "Market Ready" status. It is clear that the trail is still within "Development" stage of its trails tourism development cycle (Figure 20). The strategies and actions we have outlined in this plan will take the trail from visitor ready into the high end of market ready which will elevate the tourism benefits the trail brings to the region and further advance the trail along its tourism development cycle (Figure 21).

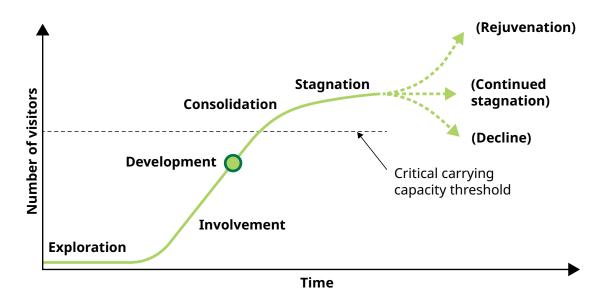


Figure 20. IHT's Current Position in Butler's Tourism Development Cycle

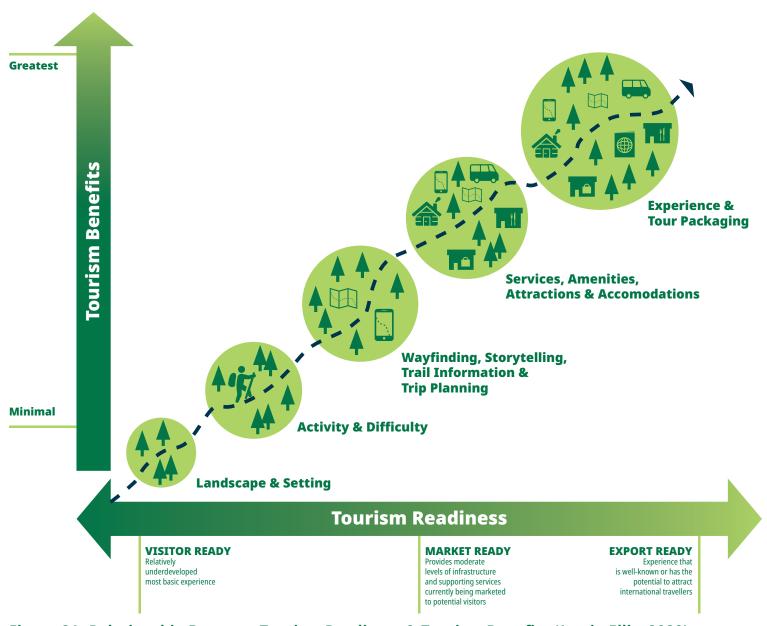


Figure 21. Relationship Between Tourism Readiness & Tourism Benefits (Justin Ellis, 2020)

6.2 Product Market Match

To enhance the benefits the trail can bring to our residents and host communities, we know that we now need to focus greater attention on developing and delivering exceptional visitor experiences. This means that our decisions need to be informed and driven by the needs and expectations of our target markets. Using our understanding of our target markets and their expectations, and the current conditions and visitor experiences provided along the trail, we compared our current offering with the experiences expected by our target markets.

Through that comparison, we were able to identify gaps in the experiences, accommodations, attractions, and amenities along the trail. These include the need to:

- Provide appealing attractions and play spaces that serve as a destination and create opportunities for fun and excitement along the trail,
- Supply "wow factor" opportunities for visitors to stop, relax and enjoy and absorb beautiful scenery or reflect on the history of the region,
- Provide deeper, more meaningful, and authentic opportunities for visitors to learn about and immerse themselves in region's unique natural environment, local cultures, local peoples and history– beyond the railway,
- Create connections and opportunities for trail visitors to experience local flavours (food, breweries etc.)
- Provide a more diversified supply of simple, yet quality and appealing, overnight accommodations (e.g., comfort camping, B&Bs) on or near trail where visitors can connect with other visitors,
- Create opportunities for visitors to meaningfully experience the trail independently, somewhat supported, or fully guided,
- Support and stimulate more events and competitions featuring or situated on the trail, and
- Enhance the universal accessibility of amenities and services on and along the trail.



Figure 22. Experience Market Match



7. Opportunities & Challenges

We see many opportunities on which to build and advance the trail over the next 10 years, but there are also some important challenges that we have been facing, and will continue to face, as well as new challenges that are likely to emerge. The following have been identified as our most significant opportunities and challenges.

Opportunities	Challenges
 Trail Longest contiguous OHV and snowmobile corridor in Alberta Longest contiguous segment of The Great Trail in Alberta. Trail passes directly through the cores of small communities with easy and legal access to accommodations, amenities, and services. Additionally the trail is a key active transportation and recreation amenity for residents in many of these communities. Trail can be easily accessed by 1.8 million Albertans and close to major airports. Family friendly OHV trail - easy to ride for all ages and ability levels. Numerous places to embark / disembark from the trail enables a high level of localized use. 	 Trail Maintaining consistent management approach across the entire trail. Variable levels of service, designs and maintenance creating inconsistent experience. Use of the trail as a utility corridor presents some maintenance and rehabilitation challenges. Addressing vandalism of trail amenities.

Opportunities Challenges Visitor Experiences & Attractions Visitor Experiences & Attractions • Extensive historical significance • Meeting the expectations of non-motorized markets and manage brand / reputation risk for unmet expectations. » Railway Heritage & visible structures • Transitioning the trail experience and trip planning into online » Agricultural Heritage & modern times and mobile devices. » Carlton Trail & Fur Trade History • Stimulating businesses to invest to enhance the appeal of the » Red River Cart brigades trail and improve visitor services. » Indigenous Heritage including Metis Crossing – Alberta's Providing consistent support amenities that can foster and first Metis Interpretive centre encourage both daytrip and overnight stays. • Appealing natural environment. • Connection to regional lakes and rivers. • Beaver River Trestle and viewing points to CFB Cold Lake provide unique experiences. Visitation • COVID-19 limiting outbound travel meaning more Albertan's are staying in Alberta and seeking quality outdoor experiences where physical distancing is easy. • Rapid increase in visitation to other more known recreation destinations in southern AB is displacing visitors from traditional destination (e.g., eastern slopes) and encouraging visitors to look elsewhere for new and less

busy experiences.

Opportunities

Community

- Strong grass roots support for acquisition and establishment of the trail.
- Residents and businesses generally recognize the value of the trail to quality of life and the attraction of non-local spending.

Governance & Management

- Trail corridor is fully owned by NE Muni-Corr Ltd.
- Dedicated staff.
- Clear governance structure with land ownings & financial security

Sustainability

• Economic climate may result a greater focus on and impetus for investment in new tourism product to diversify the regional and provincial economies.

Challenges

Community

- Maintaining public support for the trail and re-investment in the trail
- Quantifying and articulating the benefits of the trail (and why reinvestment is justified).

Governance & Management

- Recognition by elected officials of the true economic potential of the trail and willingness to invest in the trail.
- Succession planning for staff and RRTS volunteers.
- Maintaining political commitment and interest in the trail as a long-distance contiguous trail experience.
- Inconsistent maintenance schedules and investment among the NE Muni-Corr Ltd. partners.
- Differing approaches and perspectives on trail surfacing and targeted uses in and surrounding communities along the trail.

Sustainability

- Economic climate may result in lower municipal tax revenues available for the trail (but greater impetus for investment in new tourism product to diversify the economy).
- Capital funding to enable re-investment in aging infrastructure including trestles.
- NE Muni-Corr Ltd. resources.



8. Our Path Forward

8.1 Our Renewed Vision

This plan is a bold new direction that leverages the excellent work we have done to date and sets forth the path that we, and our partners, will take to maximize the benefits the trail can bring to our region. At the core of the plan is our renewed vision for the trail.

Imagine this, by 2031....

The Iron Horse Trail has become Alberta's, and one of western Canada's, signature all season long-distance motorized recreation destinations and a regional corridor that provides connectivity for local recreational trail systems in ways that maintain the integrity and quality of our long-distance signature trail experience. Whether in the peak season or shoulder season, the trail delivers an outstanding experience to every resident and visitor from near and far who travels it. Our residents and visitors are seamlessly connected to our unique communities and enjoy engaging and authentic opportunities to experience, learn about and celebrate our modern way of life, our history, Indigenous peoples and our environment. With strong community support, host communities are active champions for the trail, support and celebrate the trail and create a welcoming and inviting atmosphere for all trail visitors. With significantly increased visitation, the trail is a catalyst on which new businesses are being created and existing businesses are being strengthened. And the Trail has become a model of cooperation and sustainable trail management in Canada, is well resourced and municipalities and landowners along the trail continue to coordinate and collaborate to bring our vision for the trail to life.

This vision is our touchstone. It is our desired future state on which this plan was developed and all future decisions about the trail will be made.

8.2 Desired Outcomes

As we move forward with implementing this plan, our focus will be on achieving the following outcomes:

- Establishing the Iron Horse Trail as one of Alberta's "must experience" OHV trails.
- Significantly increasing both local and non-local visitation to and enjoyment of the trail in all-seasons.
- Significantly growing direct spending by trail visitors within our host communities and the region.
- Stimulating the development of new and / or expanding and strengthening existing businesses that support trail visitors, creating new employment in the region.
- Retaining existing and attracting new residents as a result of the outdoor recreation lifestyle and quality of life.
- Effectively managing visitation to avoid undesirable impacts to environmental and cultural values and to host communities.
- Growing new and strengthening existing partnerships between the trail, tourism operators, adjacent landowners and host municipalities.
- Reigniting local support, passion, and commitment to ensuring the trail remains an essential regional quality of life and economic asset and that it is sustainably invested in and resourced.



The Tourism Reality of Mixed-use Trails

Though mixed-use (combining motorized and non-motorized activities) trails can be successful in the recreational context, mixedused trails can and will only bring tourism success for one core user group. Typically, mixed use trails have the potential to be a successful trails tourism destination for visitors seeking a motorized destination. Unfortunately, due to goal interference and unmet expectations, mixed use trails often aren't capable of being a trails tourism destination for those seeking a non-motorized experience.

8.3 Trail Classification

Since opening the trail, we have managed the trail as an all-season, mixed-use trail. We have welcomed many different motorized and non-motorized activities to our trail but have not deliberately optimized the trail experience for any particular activity type.

Though the trail is theoretically available for many different activity types, overtime this approach has created several management challenges and risks to our brand including:

- Unmet visitor expectations and poor visitor experiences as result of trail tread conditions,
- Considerable difficulty in rationalizing the cost / benefit of investing in enhancing trail tread conditions,
- · Visitor conflicts resulting from goal interference,
- Challenges in determining the right mix of visitor amenities, accommodations and their distribution throughout the trail,
- Growing potential for over or under spending on capital and operations, and
- Moderate to low tourism activity and benefits.

By looking at successful trail destinations, we know that a single trail cannot be all things to all people. And, when it comes to maximizing the tourism benefits from our trail, we now know that mixed-use (combining motorized and non-motorized activities) trails can be successful in the recreational context but are unlikely to succeed in maximizing the tourism benefits from both motorized and non-motorized visitors. Typically, mixed use trails have the potential to be a successful trails tourism destination for visitors seeking a motorized experience. But, due to goal interference and unmet expectations, mixed use trails often are not capable of being a trails tourism destination for those seeking a non-motorized experience. This reality does not mean that the trail should be designated as a motorized only trail, it simply means that our efforts to attract and maximize tourism benefits from the trail will be focused where we have the best opportunity to do so and that investments will be made to uplift the experience and needs of those target visitors while still accommodating other activities.

Through this plan, we are renewing and modernizing the classification of the trail and have established a clear Trail Management Objective (TMO) that will guide all decisions about the trail (Appendix A). Using the Government of Alberta's Trail Classification System (Figure 23), the classification of the trail can be described as follows.

The Iron Horse Trail is an...

All season, mixed-use trail that is optimized for off-highway vehicles including ATV's, Side by Sides, off-road motorcycles and snowmobiles in the winter. The trail does not permit wheeled off-highway vehicle use once the trail is snow covered. The trail provides visitors with a moderately developed trail setting and an easy level of challenge for motorized users and a moderate challenge for non-motorized users due to the trail's length and remote nature.

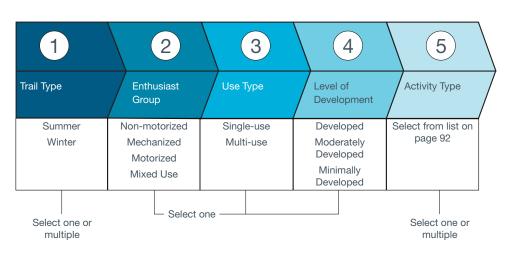


Figure 23. Government of Alberta's Trail Classification System

Figure 24. In keeping with our greatest potential and target markets, the trail will permit the following activity types but will be deliberately optimized for summer and winter off-highway vehicle including snowmobile activities:

Trail Season	Motorized Activities	Non-Motorized Activities	
Non-Snow	 Off-highway vehicle with width 1.83m (72") or less Two-wheeled motorized vehicle (off-highway & dual-sport) 	 Pedestrian (walking, running, hiking, backpacking) Equestrian Equestrian – Horse Drawn Wagon Off-road cycling Off-road cycling for class 1, 2 & 3 electric bicycles Adaptive cycles 	
Snow Covered	• Snow vehicle with width 1.83m (72") or less OHV's and two wheeled motorized (including electric) vehicles NOT permitted unless adapted with tracks.	 Pedestrian (walking, running, hiking, backpacking) Equestrian Equestrian – Horse Drawn Sleigh Cross-country skiing – not track set Snowshoeing Dog-sledding & skijoring Off-road cycling – fat biking Off-road cycling e-assist fat biking Adaptive cycles fat biking 	
Note, snow grooming equipment and maintenance vehicles are permitted. Other motorized vehicles may be given permits to access the trail.			

Through this classification, we are signalling that the trail tread over most of the trail will be managed to remain suitable for motorized (OHV, Off-road and dual sport motorcycle, snowmobile) summer and winter activities. Though we will undertake regular annual maintenance on the entire trail tread, there will undoubtedly be segments of the trail where the tread material is, and will remain, less suitable for certain non-motorized activities (e.g., off-road cyclists). In these cases, we will develop information and wayfinding strategies to help these users find alternatives around these segments of the trail, but we will not be investing in extensive trail tread upgrades to optimize the experience of these visitors.

Through this classification, we also recognize the connectivity role the trail plays where it bisects some of our more urban communities or rural residential neighbourhoods. On a case-by-case approach, we will work with specific municipalities who would

like to use the trail to create a connection to their municipal trail networks to determine if the trail tread materials in those specific instances should be upgraded to enable essential connections to the municipal trail system. Under no circumstance will these segments of the current trail tread be considered for non-motorized trail designation. Where essential connections are required for the municipal trail system, any upgrades to the trail tread materials must retain the integrity of the long-distance trail for motorized users and must not create conditions that increase safety risks, create additional unnecessary capital expenses (e.g., sign relocations, gate relocations) or degrade the experience of the visitors that the trail is being optimized for. As an example, the Northeast Muni-Corr Ltd. will not entertain further paving of segments of the current trail tread unless the full trail tread width required in accordance with the trail management objective can be maintained unpaved.

Plan at a Glance

DESIRED OUTCOMES

- Establish the Trail as one of Alberta's "mustexperience" OHV trails
- ► Increase local and nonlocal visitation
- Grow direct spending by visitors
- Stimulate the creation of new businesses and employment
- ► Retain existing and attract new residents
- ► Effectively manage visitation
- Grow new and strengthen existing partnerships
- Reignite local support, passion and commitment to the trail

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VISION

The Iron Horse Trail has become Alberta's, and one of western Canada's, signature all season long-distance motorized recreation destinations and a regional corridor that provides connectivity for local recreational trail systems in ways that maintain the integrity and quality of our long-distance signature trail experience. Whether in the peak season or shoulder season, the trail delivers an outstanding experience to every resident and visitor from near and far who travels it. Our residents and visitors are seamlessly connected to our unique communities and enjoy engaging and authentic opportunities to experience, learn about and celebrate our modern way of life, our history, Indigenous peoples and our environment. With strong community support, host communities are active champions for the trail, support and celebrate the trail and create a welcoming and inviting atmosphere for all trail visitors. With significantly increased visitation, the trail is a catalyst on which new businesses are being created and existing businesses are being strengthened. And the Trail has become a model of cooperation and sustainable trail management in Canada, is well resourced and municipalities and landowners along the trail continue to coordinate and collaborate to bring our vision for the trail to life.

PRIORITIES

- Improve the Trail Tread & Maintenance
- Optimize & Enhance Trail Access Points
- Improve Signage & Wayfinding
- Optimize & Enhance Comfort & Convenience Amenities
- Animate the Trail
- Develop New & Enhance Existing Visitor Attractions
- Enhance & Diversify the Supply of Accommodations
- Connect the Trail

- Create Trail Friendly Communities
- Motivate Visitors to Choose the IHT & the Region to Support It
- Manage Non-Recreation Use of the Trail & Minimize Impact on Adjacent Landowners
- Understand our Visitors & Visitation
- Actively Manage Visitation & Visitor Impacts
- Understand & Celebrate Our Success
- Ensure Long-Term Sustainable Resourcing & Capacity

Figure 25. Iron Horse Trail Master Plan at a Glance

8.4 Priorities & Actions

The actions and investments that are made over the next decade must be deliberate. Achieving the full potential of the trail requires clear priorities and concrete action. We have identified 15 priorities on which we, and our partners, will focus (Figure 25). Each priority and associated actions are detailed below.

IMPROVE THE TRAIL TREAD & MAINTENANCE

TRAIL TREAD & CORRIDOR MAINTENANCE

Simply put, the trail tread must meet the needs of the activities and visitors it is intended to serve. If it fails to do so, the trail will not provide the desired experience, will discourage visitation, and threaten the trail's brand.

The trail needs to be maintained to a common maintenance standard and Trail Management Objective. At this point, we do not have a set maintenance standard, inspection procedure or documentation protocols. The trail tread is not being regularly maintained and some sections are becoming difficult and or unenjoyable to travel.

In general, the overall trail corridor conditions are aligned with the design criteria outlined on the TMO for motorized users. Despite the loose and soft tread in some areas, the trail tread can remain functional for the intended motorized visitors so long as greater investments are made in grading (e.g. at least once, up to several times or more per year near urban centers) to address washboarding and rutting. In some sections, additional investments in augmenting the tread materials (e.g. sandy areas, high clay content areas) would help to control maintenance costs and improve the visitor experience. The trail tread along much of the trail is very difficult for non-motorized visitors – especially cyclists to travel and improving and maintaining the entire trail tread to a higher grade suitable for cycling and non-motorized use

outside of the urban centers is unfeasible given the low volume of non-motorized use and market competition. Efforts will be made to ensure segments of the trail tread within and near urban centers provide for a quality non-motorized experience. To improve the trail tread and corridor maintenance, the following actions will be taken:

Actions:

- **1.** Work with municipalities to develop and apply a common maintenance standard. The standard should address grading frequency and timing, trestle inspection and maintenance, culvert inspection and maintenance, brushing and vegetation management, servicing comfort and convenience amenities and signage replacement. Ensure trail maintenance volunteers, contractors and equipment operators are trained in and use proper equipment and will follow the maintenance standard.
- **2.** Enter into a council approved maintenance agreement with each municipality along the trail to ensure the annual maintenance standard is incorporating into municipal staff work plans and municipal budgeting.
- **3.** Work with municipalities to actively narrow the summer trail tread width to approximately 3m. In some segments where the tread is excessively wide, active reclamation, plantings, and vegetation establishment is required to restore an appropriate tread and trail corridor width and the "trail feel".
- **4.** Work with municipalities to actively restore the trail prism and remove tread cupping in order to restore / continue positive water drainage from the trail tread.
- **5.** Review the grading equipment being used for maintenance with the respective municipalities and ensure the equipment is appropriate to maintaining a 3m tread width and to enabling the restoration of the trail prism.

See Appendix B for a summary of required trail tread and corridor improvements by segment.

- **6.** Work with municipalities to ensure trail maintenance crews and equipment operators are trained on appropriate techniques to remove the tread cupping, restore the trail prism and the importance of maintaining the tread width in accordance with the TMO.
- 7. Trail-side vegetation plays an important role in maintaining an appealing visual character and "trail-feel". Trail-side vegetation creates shade and wind breaks in exposed areas, provides habitat and habitat connectivity for various wildlife, and helps to stabilize soils along the trail. However, trail-side vegetation can also be a fire risk during the dry season and the trail can be a vector for transport and movement of invasive species. Recognizing the many benefits of trail-side vegetation, we will work with municipalities along the trail to prepare a trail-side vegetation management plan that:
 - » Inventories vegetation communities to identify areas of ecological importance and protection, invasive species and invasive species risk and ranks potential wildfire risk and consequence,
 - » Establishes vegetation management zones (e.g. natural environment, agricultural, rural, urban) and prescriptions that work to maintain or enhance the visual character of the trail and improve wildlife habitat values while reasonably managing wildfire risk,
 - » Identifies the intervals for invasive species survey and scaled approach to invasive species control measures by vegetation management zone and invasive species risk level,
 - » Identifies opportunities for the restoration of native vegetation to improve both habitat and visual character values, and
 - » Identifies strategies and approaches to resolve unauthorized adjacent landowner treatments of trail-side vegetation.



TRAIL TREAD & CORRIDOR IMPROVEMENTS Actions:

- **1.** Trail tread upgrades should be considered in some areas to improve the experience for visitors and to reduce maintenance. There are several trail tread treatments that have been utilized on portions of the trail with varying levels of success, including "clay capping", imported surfacing materials (e.g. "crusher fines" or aggregates), recycled asphalt placement, and chemical stabilization treatments. A detailed study of the poor tread segments should be undertaken to determine the most technically and economically feasible solution. This should include an evaluation of the treatments previously used on the IHT - material type/thickness, subgrade conditions, construction techniques, and performance of the various treatments to determine which will best provide the desired outcome. Additional field trials, test pits, laboratory testing, review of project records, and engineering analysis of results are should be undertaken. It is likely that hardening the tread surface in the deep sand areas and wet areas with imported aggregate materials would be the most feasible solution in most situations considering the technical feasibility, constructability, long term maintenance requirements, desired outcomes, and cost. A wide variety of surfacing materials are available, and each have pros and cons for durability, constructability, cost, and user experience.
- 2. The IHT is a multi-use trail that is intentionally being optimized to provide a unique long-distance OHV trail experience while enabling and supporting other trail users. As such, proposed changes to the trail tread surfacing within communities will be carefully reviewed and assessed to ensure the integrity and appeal of the IHT as a long-distance OHV trail is not compromised. Compacted stone crush is typically consistent with the trail management objective but asphalt and other similar surfacing is not desirable. Any changes in trail tread must be approved by NE Muni-Corr Ltd. and will be diligently reviewed based on the potential for the proposed tread change to:
 - » Impact the visitor experience of OHV and snowmobile visitors,
 - » Create greater visitor conflicts,
 - » Create greater and unmanageable visitor safety risks,
 - » Increase operational demands and costs of the municipality, Muni-Corr or RRTS, and the
 - » Anticipated demand and volume of use the proposed change will support.



Narrow ditch is slumping and restrict water flow and volume

- **3.** Trail flooding near St. Paul will continue to be an issue until a permanent solution is determined. Engage a Civil Engineer to undertake a detailed drainage review to assess grades and determine the most cost-effective method to prevent trail flooding. Likely options include:
 - » Raising the trail tread by approximately 0.7m for 100 lineal m for the section of trail that is flooded.
 - » Relocating the trail to the hillside to the south west of the excavated ditch. The current ditch is too narrow and too steep causing the ditch banks to slump. Relocation of the trail would allow for the development of a wider and deeper ditch that can accommodate greater volumes of water. Additionally, the ditch walls could be stabilized with vegetation plantings.
 - » Installing a culvert under Range Road 85 to return water levels to levels that pre-date construction of the range road.
- **4.** Engage a Qualified Professional (e.g., Structural Engineer) to undertake a safety and conditions review of all trestles on the trail to confirm their ability to support the TMO, determine any required structural repairs and maintenance, their remaining useful life, and capital replacement timing.
- **5.** Over time, remove the soils / aggregates from surfaces of the wood-decked trestles. This material buildup increases moisture retention, encourages rotting of the decking, and increases maintenance and capital costs.
- **6.** To enhance the visitor experience and the visual appeal of trestles, undertake a review of alternate fencing / barrier materials that are capable of meeting safety requirements while improving the visitor experience and visual character. As the current fencing reaches the end of its lifecycle replace with the enhanced and visually appealing fencing / barrier material.
- **7.** Create curved turns around Abilene junction to improve traffic flow and safety.



Chain link fencing is functional but detracts from the visual appeal of the trestles



Abilene junction and the need for improved turning radius





OPTIMIZE & ENHANCE TRAIL ACCESS POINTS

First impressions matter. When a visitor arrives at our trail, what they see and what they experience sets the tone for their entire trip. These places must provide an inspiring first impression while ensuring visitors feel welcomed, safe, and encouraged to explore the trail and the adjacent community. Visitors should have access to essential services and trail information.

Our efforts to date have been on providing trail access at each of the historic rail siding locations along and establishing a consistent base level of service at all access points. This approach has greatly increased operational demands and infrastructure costs. As indicated earlier, it is evident that utilization of the access points varies considerably as does the condition, visitor experience, level of service and amenities. Our current access points do not provide visitors with a consistent and dependable level of service.

As we move forward, we will work with communities along the trail to apply a typology-based approach to planning and developing trail accesses. This approach will allow us to be strategic in where we provide our access points, the type of access point each will be and the level of service available at each. Doing so will ensure limited and valuable resources can be invested in infrastructure that will benefit our visitors the most while helping to ensure that we are not over developing other areas that receive little use. These access points will continue to be, or become, a source of community pride and connection to the trail.

We will work with our municipal partners to develop and maintain three types of trails accesses, as well as rest stops:



GATEWAYS

Building on work already completed, we will work with municipalities along the trail to establish and enhance a network of gateways. A "gateway" is intended to be a memorable visitor focused entry point and end point for an IHT experience. Gateways provide and make it easy for visitors to access a full range of amenities as well as visitor experiences, services (e.g., food, beverage, equipment, repair), accommodations, and will be the primary places where visitors are encouraged to begin and finish their experience. Gateways will also serve as major service centers along the trail where "throughtravellers" will re-supply. These gateways will also become ideal locations for hosting the start or finish of special events and will cross-promote on and near trail experiences and businesses.



STAGING AREAS

We know that many local visitors expect opportunities to access the trail close to home. Many of these residents drive to access the trail. As such, we will continue to provide a network of staging areas that provide residents with access to the trail. These access points will not be promoted to non-local visitors and will intentionally provide a basic level of service and amenities when compared to gateways. Staging areas may also serve as an informal overnight area for non-motorized through travellers.



TRAILHEADS

Recognizing that the trail travels through many different communities and neighbourhoods, we will also provide trailhead access points which are intended to serve the residents and neighbourhoods immediately adjacent to the trail and who do not need to drive to access the trail.



REST STOPS

Rest stops are intended to provide visitors with an appealing place to stop, take a break and rest before continuing their journey. They are usually located where the distance between gateways, staging areas or major destinations is long enough to warrant a rest or where there is a unique feature along the trail to share with visitors.



Alberta's Iron Horse Trail: A Master Plan to Unlock our Potential

To optimize and enhance trail access, the following actions will be implemented:

Actions:

1. Work with respective municipalities to establish, or enhance, gateways, staging areas and trailheads in accordance with the future typology designations in Table.6. Existing access sites will be reviewed and, where necessary, redeveloped to ensure that sites provide a quality visitor experience, a logical site organization and circulation, and adhere to the design direction prescribed in Table.7 below. Municipalities along the trail will be encouraged to locate community outdoor recreation infrastructure within the gateways and staging areas (e.g. playgrounds, spray parks, day use / picnic areas etc.).

Table.6 Gateways, Staging Areas and Trailheads in Accordance with Future Typology Designations

Segment	Site Name	Future Trail Access Typology Designation	Improvements Required	
	Waskatenau	Staging Area	Overgrown, wet, visitor experience, amenity condition, signage, disconnected from trail	
	Warspite	Trailhead	Wet, amenities condition, signage	
	Smoky Lake	Gateway	Parking	
	Edwand	Trailhead	Signage, vegetation management	
Waskatenau – Abilene	Bellis	Trailhead	Visitor experience, amenity condition, signage	
Junction Vil Spo	Vilna	Staging Area	Amenity condition, signage	
	Spedden	Trailhead	Sloped terrain, parking, amenity condition, signage	
	Ashmont	Staging Area	Amenity condition, signage	
	Abilene Junction	Major Attraction (not a staging area)	Visitor experience, amenity condition, signage	

Segment	Site Name	Future Trail Access Typology Designation	Improvements Required
	Mallaig	Trailhead	
	Glendon	Staging Area	Size, visitor experience, amenity condition, signage skate park utilizing parking area
	Bonnyville	Gateway	Visitor experience, amenity condition, signage
Abilene	Fort Kent	Remove – If Muni-Corr land to the east is to be developed, it should be developed as a trailhead.	N/A
Junction to	Ardmore	Trailhead	Visitor experience, amenity condition, signage
Cold Lake	Beaver River Trestle	Staging Area	Visitor experience, amenity condition, signage, parking size & circulation
	TWP Rd 624	Staging Area (new access site which will be secondary to the main Beaver River Trestle Staging Area and address illegal access to the trail)	Parking, signage
	Cold Lake	Gateway (a new location closer to downtown / waterfront is more desirable)	Gateway feature, Visitor experience, amenity condition, signage
	St. Paul	Gateway	Signage, amenity condition
	Edouardville	Rest stop	Overgrown, wet, visitor experience, amenity condition, signage
Abilene Junction to Heinsburg	Armistice	Remove	Overgrown, visitor experience, amenity condition, signage
	Elk Point	Gateway	Gateway feature, circulation
	Linbergh	Staging Area	Visitor experience, amenity condition, signage
	Heinsburg	Staging Area	Visitor experience, amenity condition, signage

Table.7 Trail Access Design Guidance

GATEWAY	STAGING AREA	TRAILHEAD	REST STOP
Amenities & Services			
 Themed gateway feature (on-trail and from road) Surfaced (paved preferred) and delineated parking lots of significant size to accommodate passenger vehicles, truck & trailer and recreational vehicles with appropriate circulation Toilets (vault pump-out or fully serviced) Potable water Picnic & day use area with fire pits / BBQ's, picnic tables Shade structure / Pavilion Public power / charging stations WiFi Hot Spot (optional) Lighting Waste & recycling receptacles Plantings & beautification (on-trail & throughout site) OHV lock-ups Bicycle parking (optional) Equestrian hitching rails or corrals (optional) Concessions (optional, seasonal) Accommodations (optional, site dependent) Shower building (optional) 	 Surfaced (gravel or paved) and delineated parking lots for passenger vehicles and truck & trailers. Picnic & day use area with fire pits / BBQ's, picnic tables Shade structure / Pavilion (optional) Waste & recycling receptacles (optional) Plantings & beautification (ontrail & throughout site) Bicycle parking (optional) Equestrian hitching rails or corrals (optional) 	Small parking lot - visitor determined parking orientation (optional) Toilet (pit) (optional)	 Defined parking area for on-trail OHVs Picnic tables Charcoal BBQ & firepits (optional) Equestrian hitching rails or corrals (optional)

GATEWAY	STAGING AREA	TRAILHEAD	REST STOP
Signage			
 Themed / memorable welcome sign Kiosk including: Wayfinding / Map Responsible use / educational Regulatory Warning (safety, risks) Interpretive signage / displays 	 Kiosk including: Wayfinding / Map Responsible use / educational Regulatory Warning (safety, risks) Interpretive signage / displays (optional) 	 Wayfinding / Map Responsible use / educational Regulatory Warning (safety, risks) 	 Wayfinding / Map Responsible use / educational Regulatory Warning (safety, risks) Interpretive signage / displays (optional)
Visitor Experiences			
 Overnight accommodations (site dependent) Self-guided interpretation (e.g., Augmented Reality, Interpretive Signage etc.) Seasonal interpretive programming Public art Event hosting 	 Self-guided interpretation (e.g., Augmented Reality, Interpretive Signage etc.) (optional) Seasonal interpretive programming (optional) Public art (optional) 	• None	Self-guided interpretation (e.g., Augmented Reality, Interpretive Signage etc.) (optional)

GATEWAY	STAGING AREA	TRAILHEAD	REST STOP
Design Principles			
 Embrace and incorporate IHT brand & uniqueness of each community Site and all amenities will be universally accessible Incorporate low-impact development and stormwater management Incorporate energy and water efficient amenities Incorporate Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design principles Incorporate low-impact development and stormwater management Incorporate native drought tolerant plantings 	 Embrace and incorporate IHT brand Site and all amenities may or may not be universally accessible Incorporate Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design principles Incorporate low-impact development and stormwater management Incorporate native drought tolerant plantings 	Embrace and incorporate IHT brand	 Embrace and incorporate IHT brand Site and all amenities may or may not be universally accessible Incorporate low-impact development and stormwater management



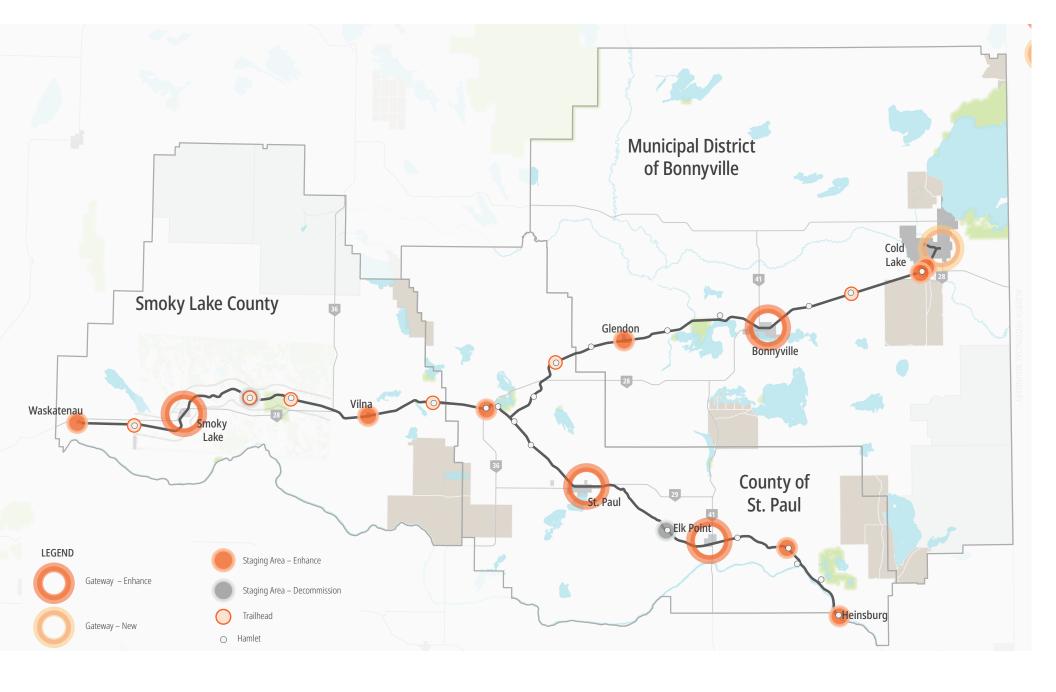


Figure 26. Gateways, Staging Areas, and Trailheads

IMPROVE SIGNAGE & WAYFINDING

Quality, well placed signage provides an inviting welcoming to visitors and can enrich their experience while helping them enjoy the trail responsibly and safely. Over signage and sign clutter can reduce the visitor experience. Considerable efforts have been expended over the past 20 years to develop and install branded signage as well as other information, regulatory and warning signage. Signage on the trail is extensive with some segments being over signed. Many of our signs were installed nearly 15 or more years ago and will need to be replaced. Our signs also rely heavily on words rather than pictograms. Engagement participants told us that the quality and consistency of signage along the trail should be enhanced and should reflect a refreshed brand for the trail. To enhance signage, the following actions will be implemented.



Actions:

- Work with municipalities to develop a signage manual and signage plan with clear sign typology, design, installation and location standards, style, and visual identity built on the revised IHT brand. Ensure the sign designs embrace universally accepted pictograms, are appropriate and visible in both daytime and nighttime (e.g., reflectivity) and can resist vandalism. Ensure the designs enable The Great Trail and Great Canadian Snowmobile Trail brand identifiers to be incorporated. Upon completion, areas identified as having the greatest signage density will be prioritized with the goal of reducing sign clutter and removing unnecessary signage. Implement the signage plan as existing signs reach the end of their useful life.
- **2.** Develop and implement a sign approval process to ensure that signage placed on the trail and within gateways, staging areas, trailheads and destinations remains consistent with the IHT brand, is aligned with the signage strategy and will manage sign clutter.
- **3.** Work with AB Transportation and local road authorities to install highway signage to:
 - » Promote all trail gateway communities (Tourist Oriented Directional Signs),
 - » Help visitors navigate to the trail gateways and
 - » Warn drivers about a trail crossing the highways and roadways.
- **4.** Clearly identify and communicate to cyclists which segments of the trail are unsuitable for cycling at all times of the year and those that are unsuitable during inclement weather. Proactively identify, sign, and communicate alternative routes to bypass unsuitable segments of the IHT.



OPTIMIZE & ENHANCE COMFORT & CONVENIENCE AMENITIES

Though not the main motivation behind a visitor's trip, comfort and convenience amenities are essential to the visitor's experience, and can take it from good to great if done well. We know that visitors expect, and some even require, certain comfort and convenience amenities to enable them to enjoy the trail safely. Participants in the engagement process were clear that although the trail provides many comfort and convenience amenities, there is opportunity and a need to improve their consistency and quality. The trail assessment showed that the trail lacks a common amenity standard, many of the existing amenities are reaching the end of their useful life, the amenities are inconsistently distributed and, in some locations, are provided unnecessarily. The assessment also showed that very few amenities are universally accessible. To optimize and enhance our comfort and convenience amenities, the following actions will be implemented.



Actions:

- 1. Develop a comfort and convenience amenities standard. This standard will detail the exact type, siting and distribution, and maintenance standards for all comfort and convenience amenities on the trail as well as how the IHT brand is to be integrated into the amenities. The standard will be adopted and implemented by all municipalities who provide amenities on the trail, in gateways, at staging areas or trailheads and destinations.
- 2. Work with municipalities to upgrade or replace amenities along the trail to the new standard as existing amenities reach the end of their lifecycle. Ensure all new amenities installed on the trail are universally accessible. Remove amenities (e.g., pit toilets) that have been randomly placed on the trail outside of these areas.
- **3.** Provide, or support the provision, of a network of appropriately spaced, quality warming huts to support snowmobile usership of the trail.
- **4.** Actively work to attract, encourage, and support local food trucks/vendors and other temporary pop-up service enterprises (e.g., rentals) to attend gateways, attractions etc. during peak periods, seasons and during events on the trail. Provide a permit system to permit and manage these businesses' operation on the trail.

ANIMATE THE TRAIL

Improvements to the physical elements of the trail are critical, but by themselves, they are not enough to fully optimize the potential of the trail. We need to animate the trail. That is, we need to bring the trail and all its unique attributes and stories to life in authentic and memorable ways for our visitors. Animating the trail through visitor itineraries, interpretation and programming, events and competitions will elevate the visitor experience, increase trail time and length of stay and ultimately the benefits for our communities. Though the immediate benefits of events and competitions can be short-term and take a great deal of effort to organize, these animation strategies are deliberate. They expose visitors to the trail, give them the knowledge to travel it, and are likely to inspire these visitors to return to the trail on their own or encourage their networks to visit. As an example, the Sails, Rails and Trails geocache event (2016) brought many first time visitors to the trail, many of whom still return to the trail or the region today. In the early days of the trail, we organized numerous fundraisers and events and the trail has become Alberta's first and longest Geocache Power Trail thanks to the Lakeland Geocache Society whose volunteers maintain over 1,400 geocaches.

We still have great opportunity to bring the trail to life by working with our partners to find ways that inspire visitation and elevate the benefits to our communities. To animate the trail, the following actions will be taken.

Actions

- 1. Develop and promote multiple fully independent single and multi-day themed visitor experience itineraries and packages for both summer and winter seasons. These itineraries and packages will be deliberately crafted to cater to the interests (e.g., nature, history, culture, indigenous, food, adventure) of our target markets and their various modes of travel (e.g. OHV, snowmobile, horse & wagon, pedestrian). The itineraries and packages will enable visitors to find and experience the best sections of the trail for the chosen activity, as well as the market ready destinations and attractions near the trail. Service providers who offer immersive visitor experiences and interpretive programs will also be integrated into these itineraries. Itineraries will be promoted in all visitor trip planning resources.
- 2. Develop and promote self-guided and themed itineraries in each community to encourage visitors to "stay longer, play longer and spend more" in the communities along the trail. Make these itineraries available via the mobile trail app (see below for further details on the mobile app), online trip planning tools and promote them at community staging areas.



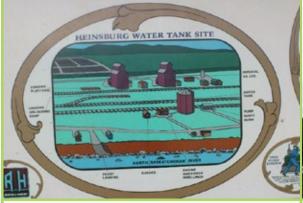
Potential Itinerary & Interpretive Themes

The following themes are aligned with the interests of our target markets and will become the focus of our interpretive strategy and itineraries:

- The Railway
- Fur Trade, Metis Peoples & the Carlton Trail
- Settlers, Homesteads, Ranchers and Landowners of the IHT
- Farm to Trail Agriculture on the IHT
- IHT's Nature Ecoystems & Wildlife
- Progressive OHV Picnics (pick up food from designated business along the trail to form a picnic)
- Art & ATV Tours
- Land of the Big attractions
- Windsor Salt Plant salt making process

- 3. Engage biologists, historians, and indigenous communities to identify sites and help develop self-guided and themed digital interpretive "tours" of the trail. Using the mobile app, visitors will have the ability to select the themes that are of greatest interest to them. As visitors travel the trail, the app geofences will trigger the respective stories and interpretive content as visitors arrive at or near places of interest that are in the theme they selected. Texts, images, videos, narrations, and augmented reality should be integrated into these digital tours to bring the sites and stories to life and enrich the visitor experience. On-site interpretive signage will be installed at the trail's most significant sites but will be limited elsewhere.
- **4.** Work with partners to stimulate the development of and/or attract and promote a coordinated calendar of diverse events, competitions, and celebrations on, or featuring, the trail (e.g., poker runs, IHT TrailFest, Family day rides, Christmas / Easter / Thanksgiving on Trail, Harvest & History events, fundraisers). Integrate the communities along the trail into the events to elevate the positive benefits. Emphasis should be placed on ensuring shoulder season events to help extend the benefits of the trail beyond the peak seasons.
- **5.** Implement an Iron Horse Trail Public Art competition to stimulate the creation of unique public art installations at gateways, staging areas and destinations along the trail.

Historic Sites of the IHT



Heinsburg water tank site



Ashmont buried trestle



Anshaw pumphouse and water tower foundation



Steam engine at Abileme Junction



Bellis gravel pit pump house

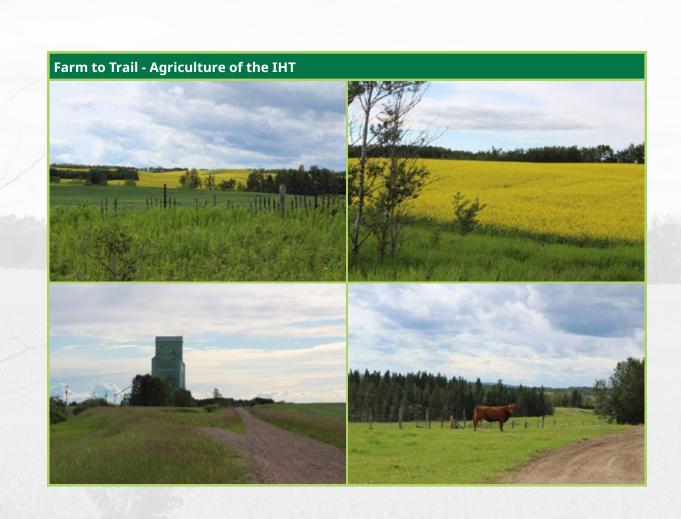


Edouardville station master's house remnants



Derailment site





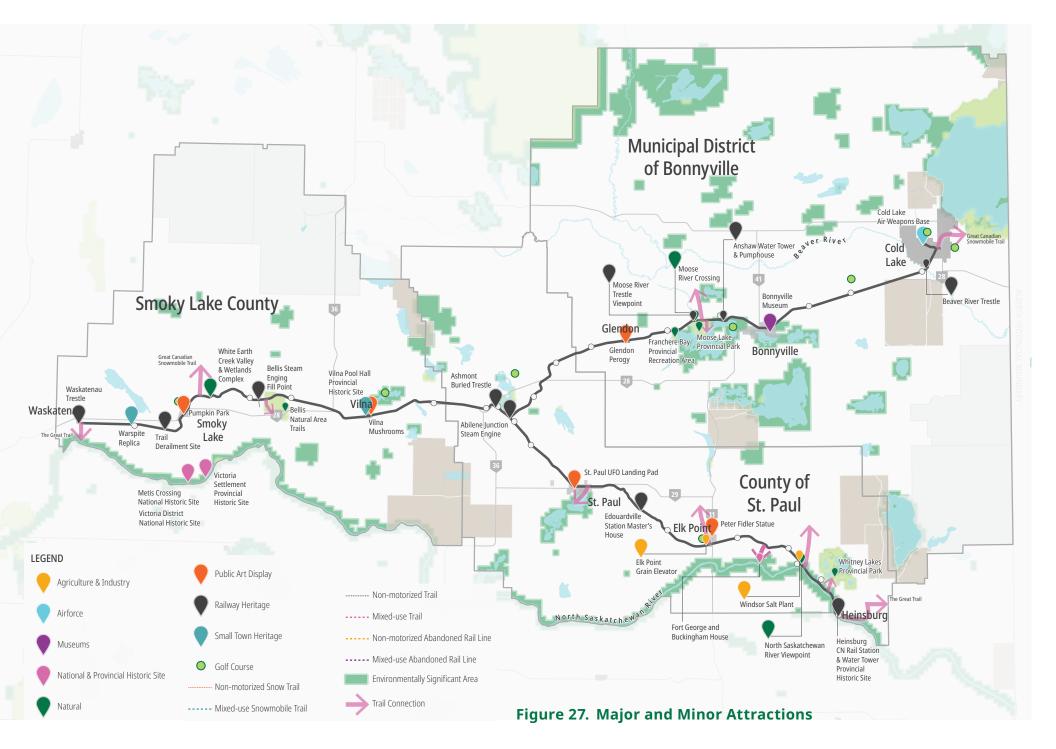




DEVELOP NEW & ENHANCE EXISTING VISITOR ATTRACTIONS

Visitor attractions are places of natural and / or architectural beauty, cultural or historical importance or sites that are purposefully developed and designed to provide excitement and interest for visitors. Creating new ,and enhancing existing, attractions along the trail will greatly elevate the visitor experience. Though the trail contains many interesting natural, historical, and cultural features, we heard clearly that few attractions have been purposefully developed to elevate the visitor experience and are needed. Due in part to the limited supply of attractions, many visitors travel the trail quickly and do not have many opportunities to truly deepen or enrich their journey. Though travelling the trail may be a visitor's main motivation, providing well designed and engaging attractions will take the visitor experience from decent to great, and in turn, make the trail much more appealing and marketable. They will also help to add trail time, slowing the rate of travel and encouraging visitors to spend more time on the trail and in the region, which will increase visitor yield and spending.

Moving forward, we will work with our partners, stakeholders and communities to encourage the development of a series of **major** and **minor** attractions along the trail that feature and leverage the trail's most unique sites and stories (Figure 27). Our **major** attractions will become the "can't miss" elements of the IHT trail experience and contain purpose-built infrastructure that feature the site and enhance the visitor experience. In fact, some may become the primary motivation for visitors' trips to the trail. Meanwhile, our **minor** attractions will contain more modest site designs and visitor infrastructure but still feature unique and important sites that encourage our visitors to slow down and truly learn about and experience the essence of the trail and region.



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To enhance existing and develop new attractions, we will work with our partners to implement the following actions.

Actions:

MAJOR ATTRACTIONS

1. Engage professional recreation and tourism planners, designers and qualified professionals (e.g. biologists, archaeologists, engineers) to undertake feasibility studies and master plans for the development of the following three major attractions. Work with relevant landowners, tenure holders and land managers and authorities to obtain the necessary approvals to develop the attractions.

BEAVER RIVER TRESTLE

At 450 m long (9 spans) and 60m high, the Beaver River Trestle is one of the most defining features and built attractions on the trail. The trestle itself, which was partially burnt in 2012 and reopened in 2016, is an incredible structure and provides excellent views of boreal scenery and the unique experience of standing over the Beaver River. Easily accessible from Cold Lake, the trestle is a popular local recreation attraction and has the potential to become a travel motivating attraction for non-local visitors and residents alike. Located on the flightpath to 4 Wing Cold Lake, the trestle also serves as an exceptional location to view and experience the roar of a wide variety of military aircraft.

To date, the site is undeveloped. Informal trails provide access to the base of the trestle and the Beaver River. A new paved parking lot has been developed at Beaver Station which is intended to be the primary parking area. However, some visitors are undesirably using on-highway vehicles to access the trestle from the northeast via a damaged gate at Township Road 624.

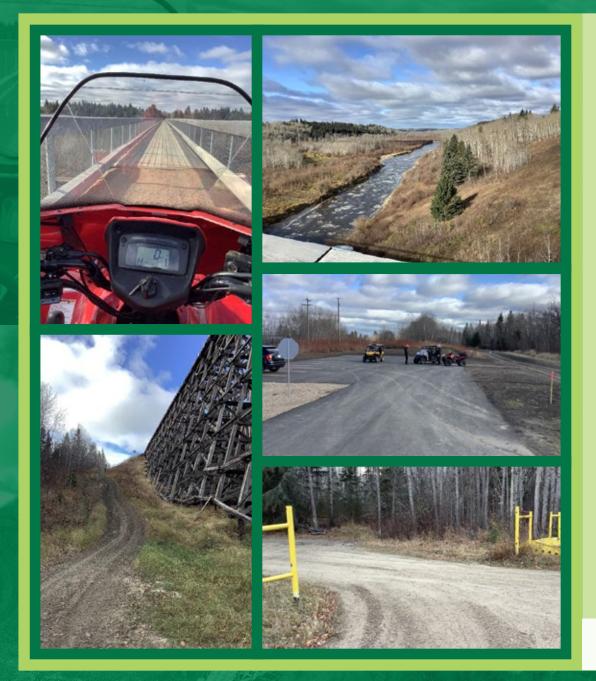
Site Vision:

The Beaver River Trestle site is envisioned to become a major universally accessible attraction for trail-based visitors, day users and local recreationists. The southwest side of the trestle will be enhanced with formalized OHV parking area and pedestrian trails that meander and descend from the trail grade down to the Beaver River while winding their way under the trestle. Rest stops with benches or tables will be installed along the descending trail. A river access will be constructed to provide paddlers and others with access and egress from the Beaver River. The current paved parking lot will be enhanced to increase the size and parking capacity and improve vehicular circulation for passenger

vehicles, RVs and trucks and trailers as well as bicycle parking. In addition, a memorable IHT and Trestle themed gateway feature should be developed, vault toilets installed along with wayfinding signage and day use area and native plantings and storm water management.

On the notheast side of the trestle, a designated OHV parking area will be created and a suspended viewing platform with day use seating will be developed and cantilevered over the river valley. A new minor parking area, targeting residents, will be formalized near the intersection of the trail and Township Road 624 to provide residents with formalized parking options. Vehicle limiters, (e.g. removable bollards with locked or FOB keys to allow emergency services access) will be installed on the trail to prevent on-highway vehicle traffic from driving to the trestle.

Enhanced and appealing interpretive signage will be developed throughout the site to share the stories of the trestle and the railway, commemorate its restoration efforts, interpret the ecology of the Beaver River and the river valley, share the stories of local Indigenous peoples and allow visitors to learn about the 4 Wing Cold Lake and to identify the common aircraft that they may see. Augmented reality will also be used to enrich the site interpretation through the mobile visitor app. The fencing along the trestle will be upgraded to improve its visual character while retaining appropriate safety standards for visitors of all ages and will provide viewing platforms that will allow visitors to stop and enjoy the view while also allowing OHV's and other trails users to pass by safely.





Kinsol Trestle Vancouver Island - Example precedent development for the Beaver River Trestle

BELLIS & COUNTY OF ST. PAUL OHV & SNOWMOBILE ADVENTURE PLAY PARKS

It is a fact that the current IHT is straight, flat and offers visitors little challenge and excitement. In addition to what we know from looking at other OHV destinations and what we heard through our engagement process, the many informal hill climbs, off trail travel and random play areas are clear indications that OHV users are seeking some excitement, fun and even challenges in their riding experience. The development of OHV adventure play parks will dramatically enhance the appeal of the IHT and the region as a motorized destination. To date, there are no purpose-built OHV adventure play parks in the province or in adjacent provinces. By developing a play park, the IHT and the region can become a leading OHV destination. These parks will give motorized visitors (ATV, SxS, ORM, snowmobile) an entirely new reason to come to the trail and are anticipated to increase use and enhance the appeal of the trail for new OHV markets. The OHV parks, serving both day use and overnight visitors, will also become event hosting locations, and will provide a potential revenue stream to help support trail operations and management and may stimulate supporting business development.

Site Vision:

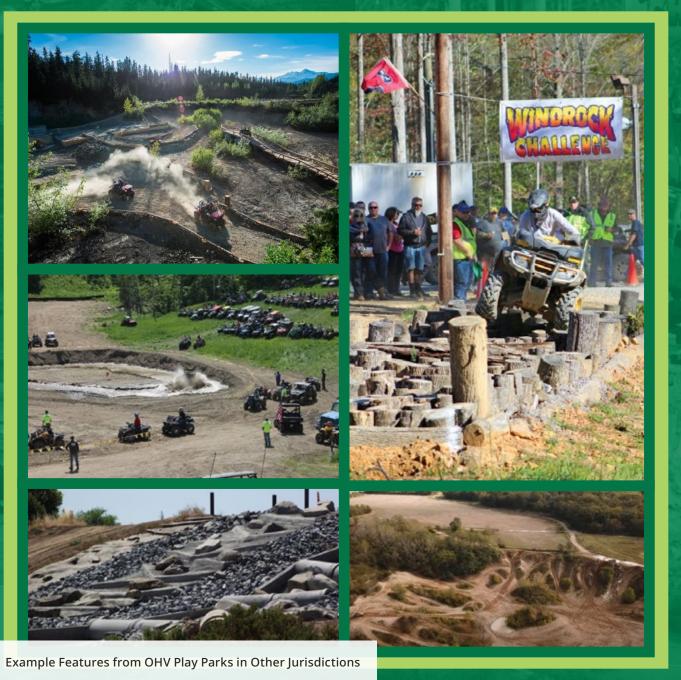
Two fee-for-service OHV adventure play parks are envisioned. The first, known as the eastern County of St. Paul OHV park, would be sited at the active gravel pit that is operating east of Elk Point. The second, known as the Bellis OHV park, would be located at the North East Muni-Corr Ltd.'s abandoned gravel pit west of the Bellis Natural Area. Both sites are easily accessed from existing roads with services nearby.

The park will contain a wide variety of technical trail features and challenge features that appeal to all summer and winter users, from the newest to the most experienced riders including:

- Youth training area with skill building stations
- Learner loops
- Hill climbs
- Rock crawls and boulder fields
- Log and pole obstacle features
- Mud pits
- Winch points

The sites will provide day use areas with pavilions, picnic tables, BBQs, vault toilets, spill kits and staging areas with OHV off-loading infrastructure and sufficient parking for passenger vehicles, RV's and trucks and trailers. The sites will also provide a formalized campground with, ideally, both serviced and unserviced campsites and comfort camping, a shower building and potable water access. Bleachers and spectator viewing areas may also be provided and a location for small concession or mobile vendor (e.g., rentals, equipment, food, beverage) could be considered.

Specific to the proposed Bellis OHV park, the site will connect to an adjacent designated network of purpose-built OHV trails that are narrower, curvilinear, and undulating through the Bellis North Natural Area (pending approval of Alberta Parks) and the grazing lease lands adjacent to the OHV park (through partnership with the province and leaseholder) and natural area. Acquisition of adjacent lands may be required. The site will interpret the steam engine filling process where the visible infrastructure can be seen.



NORTH SASKATCHEWAN RIVER VIEWPOINT & REST AREA

Elevated views of the North Saskatchewan River are limited along the trail. Located south of the Windsor Salt Plant near Twp Rd 646 where the river bends sharply to the southeast, this site provides one of the most impressive viewpoints on the entire trail with exceptional and memorable views of the North Saskatchewan River, its valley, and its uplands. Though it is titled land, the current landowner is reported to be receptive to providing access to the site. Further negotiations to formalize an access route and obtain authorization to build a formalized day use and viewpoint site will be required. The site can be accessed from Twp Rd. 646 and along the trail from both the south side of the property and the north side near the Windsor Salt Plant.

Site Vision:

This site will be designed to be one of the iconic rest areas, picnic area and viewpoint on the trail. The site will provide a formalized all-season viewing platform that integrates and compliments the adjacent grassland setting and provides benches for sitting and reflection and an area for on-trail visitors to park their OHV. This destination is not intended to be a staging area for access to the trail. The viewing platform will be designed to frame the view of the Island (referred locally as Hairbrush Island) and the valley. Appealing and informative interpretive panels, as well as augmented reality on the mobile visitor app (see sections below for more details on the mobile app), will be developed to educate visitors about the river and river processes, the valley, wildlife, the fur trade, and Indigenous peoples. In addition, a modest day use area complete with picnic tables and shade structure(s) will be developed to allow visitors to enjoy a break and picnic. Visitors will also have access to an architecturally and visually appropriate pit or composting toilet. Current access trails to the site will be redesigned to be sustainable (e.g., grades, drainage) while wayfinding will be installed to help visitors navigate to the viewpoint.



Example Features for the North Saskatchewan River Viewpoint & Rest Area

MINOR ATTRACTIONS

1. Engage professional recreation and tourism planners, designers, and qualified professionals (e.g., biologists, archaeologists, engineers) to develop or enhance the following minor attractions. Work with relevant landowners, tenure holders and land managers and authorities to obtain the necessary approvals to develop the attractions. Provide virtual interpretation in all Environmentally Significant Areas.

Segment	Minor Attraction	Visitor Experience Theme	Proposed Site Program Development or Enhancement
	Waskatenau Trestle	Heritage - railway	RedevelopmentViewing platformsInterpretive signs & virtual interpretation
	Train Derailment Site	Heritage - railway	Interpretive sign & virtual interpretation
Waskatenau - Abilene Junction	White Earth Creek Valley & Wetlands	Natural	 Viewing platform with benches Floating boardwalk trail Wetland & wildlife interpretive signs & virtual interpretation OHV parking
	Ashmont Buried Trestle	Heritage - railway	 Enhance interpretive sign (visuals, how trestles are buried) Provide virtual interpretation Provide opportunity to see the buried trestle from the embankment

Segment	Minor Attraction	Visitor Experience Theme	Proposed Site Program Development or Enhancement
	Abilene Junction	Heritage - railway	 Enhance steam engine interpretation and shelter Interpretive panels & virtual interpretation (train turn around process) Day use & picnic area with charcoal BBQ and firepits OHV parking Pit toilets Warming shelter (e.g., old rail car) Improve site organization & flow
	Moose River View Point	Natural	 Elevated wood viewing platform cantilevered over the slope from the eastern trestle approach Interpretive signs & virtual interpretation (river, wildlife, provincial park) Explore potential of OHV parking area adjacent to IHT & non-motorized trails into the park to connect to waterfront
Abilene Junction to Cold Lake	Anshaw Water Tower & Pumphouse	Heritage - railway	 Parking area (OHV & on-highway vehicle) Interpretive panels & virtual interpretation (water tower, pumphouse) Day use & picnic area with charcoal BBQ & firepits Swimming area / water access (if lease agreement can be secured with current landowner)
	Bonnyville Museum	Heritage - culture	Establish connection from trailOHV parking areaWayfinding signage

Segment	Minor Attraction	Visitor Experience Theme	Proposed Site Program Development or Enhancement
	Canadian Forces Base – Cold Lake	Heritage - military	 Interpretive site (CFB Cold Lake), interpretive panels, virtual interpretation Benches
	Edouardville Station Master's House Rest Stop	Heritage - railway	 Picnic tables, picnic area with charcoal BBQ & firepits Defined area to park OHVs for on-trail visitors Interpretive panel and virtual interpretation (station master homestead, role of station master and employees on railway)
	Fort George Buchingham House	Heritage	Trail access, clear intersection and wayfinding signage to Fort George Buckingham House
Abilene Junction to	Windsor Salt Plant	Heritage	Interpretive panel & virtual interpretationOHV parking area
Heinsburg	Middle Creek Rest Stop	Heritage	Pit toiletsDay use & picnic area with charcoal BBQ & firepitsHitching rails / posts / lines
	Heinsburg CN Rail Heritage – railway, fur trade, Station & Water Tower settlement Provincial Historic Resource	 Day use & picnic site with charcoal BBQ & firepits Snowmobile warming shelter OHV parking Upgrade interpretive panels & virtual interpretation (railway, fur trade, North west rebellion, settlement) 	



ENHANCE & DIVERSIFY THE SUPPLY OF ACCOMMODATIONS

The current network of hotels, serviced and un-serviced campgrounds are reasonably distributed to meet the needs of OHV visitors but are inadequate to meet the needs of non-motorized visitors. Market research and engagement participants were clear that we need to ensure an appropriately distributed and diversified network of accommodations to meet the expectations of our target markets. Though accommodations are not what motivates visitors to come to the trail, they can enhance or detract from the visitor experience and are essential to supporting multiday trips, extending length of stay, and increasing spending in the region. A moderate level of service accommodations will meet the expectations of our target visitors.

- **1.** Evaluate the feasibility and prepare master plans for the development of new serviced campgrounds at both proposed OHV Adventure Play Parks.
- **2.** Evaluate the feasibility of providing rental-based comfort camping units at either or both the OHV Adventure Parks and the St. Paul campground.
- **3.** Develop a serviced campground at the Cold Lake Gateway.
- **4.** Undertake a master planning process to update the design of the Heinsburg campground.
- **5.** Work with Alberta Parks to explore potential solutions to accommodate OHV overnight visitors at the Franchere Bay Provincial Recreation Area.
- **6.** Work with the M.D. of Bonnyville to explore potential solutions to accommodate OHV overnight visitors at Minnie Lake Campground.
- **7.** Recognizing the sustainability challenges, explore options to re-purpose or reclaim the Belvil unserviced campground. Due to the wet nature of the site, accommodating motorized recreation on the site will be challenging to do so sustainably.
- **8.** Given the limited distribution of accommodations, permit non-motorized trail users to temporarily camp within specific designated areas at staging areas located between established campgrounds or communities with fixed roof accommodations.

CONNECT THE TRAIL

The trail serves as a major regional corridor to which other trails currently connect or have the potential to connect. Many municipalities along the trail have developed recreation as well as trails master plans which integrate the Iron Horse Trail as a key component of their local trail networks. To the extent practical and in keeping with the primary objective to provide a long-distance motorized trail experience, there may be opportunity to establish non-motorized parallel trail treads within some of the high density population centers along the trail. In addition, there are a number of near trail attractions that could be further leveraged and enjoyed by visitors if connections were developed or improved. To connect the trail, the following actions will be implemented:



- 1. Work with the City of Cold Lake to establish a formalized mixed-use trail connection between the Cold Lake Gateway and the Cold Lake waterfront and downtown. This route must provide visitors with the confidence that they are on a permitted trail, ensure safe roadway crossings, provide clear signage as well as an approved parking location near the waterfront.
- **2.** In keeping with the Victoria District Economic Development Strategy, work with Smoky Lake County, Victoria Settlement and Metis Crossing to establish both an eastern and western mixed use (OHV and non-motorized) trail loop connection to the IHT.
- **3.** Continue working with the Village of Waskatenau to extend the trail from its current terminus at Range Road 193 into the Village and current staging area. This will require the restoration of the Waskatenau Trestle and resolution of erosion issues.
- **4.** Develop formalized and signed mixed-use trails and on-road routes to connect trail visitors to Whitney Lakes Provincial Park and Franchere Bay Provincial Recreation Area. Work with Alberta Parks to provide legal parking areas and access points for OHV and snowmobile visitors at these sites.
- **5.** Building on existing snowmobile trails, work with partners to plan a snowmobile route between Heinsburg and Cold Lake to provide a large circle route for snowmobiling.
- **6.** Create or improve formal trailheads and trail connections to ensure all rural neighbourhoods adjacent to the trail can access the trail through formalized and intentional routes.
- **7.** Continue to build relationships with 4 Wing Cold Lake to explore the potential for trail connections through the base.

TRAIL FRIENDLY COMMUNITY...

A community that is situated along a longer distance trail. The community recognizes the trail as an integral and important element in the community's character. A trail friendly community allows visitors to easily and conveniently venture off the trail to enjoy the scenery, services, and heritage of the nearby community with its own character and charm. It is a place where trail users can find the goods and services they need.

One trail can revitalize an entire region...

"If you do it right. If you transform that simple path into a place people want to stay, explore and spend, you will pedal every community on your trail forward. The success is all connected: as your trail's communities strengthen, you'll attract even more visitation. And when your economy is thriving, your communities will keep investing in your growth, so the success lasts long-term" – Trail Town Guide



CREATE TRAIL FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES

Growing the benefits from the trail means bringing trail visitors into our communities. The experience visitors have when they enter our communities and travel through them can leave a lasting influence, positively or negatively, on the visitor and their memories of the trail. Our goal is to ensure that every visitor who enters one of our trail-side communities feels welcomed, can easily find their way to the services they need and get the opportunity to learn a bit about each of our communities. To do so, we need to ensure each of our trail-side community's is a trail friendly community or, at least, we promote those communities who are trail friendly to our visitors. To ensure we provide trail friendly communities, the following actions will be taken:

- **1.** Develop a "Trail Friendly Community" program and work to confirm which communities along the trail wish to be identified as and promoted as such. Prepare guidelines for being a welcoming trail friendly community, which addresses topics such as how to provide a welcoming atmosphere, beautification, theming / banners / signage, welcoming storefronts program, business hours. Apply jointly for grants to help offset costs for the trail friendly community initiatives.
- **2.** Work with municipalities to ensure convenient access routes are maintained within each trail friendly community, and incorporated into local trail master plans and MDP's, to enable visitors to travel from the trail legally and conveniently to access accommodations, attractions and visitor amenities and services such as fuel, restaurants, supplies and repair businesses.
- **3.** Support and actively encourage municipalities to create a welcoming trail-friendly atmosphere where the trail travels through the community by using on-trail welcome signage, trail themed banners, beautification and plants, and trail-based branding along storefronts and services near the trail etc.
- **4.** Work with local businesses to develop and market sales and promotions to entice trail visitors to leave the trail and get into the communities.
- **5.** Work with accommodation providers to develop secure overnight lockups / storage for OHVs and snowmobiles.



MOTIVATE VISITORS TO CHOOSE THE IHT & THE REGION TO SUPPORT IT

Growing the benefits of the trail will be dependant on our ability to compel target markets to choose the IHT. Competition amongst trails tourism destinations is fierce and we need to take deliberate actions to attract visitors and claim our market share. We heard clearly the need to refresh our IHT brand and take a strategic approach to marketing the trail. We know that our future marketing efforts will need to reach visitors at each step of the "Pathway to Purchase" (Figure 28) in a way that resonates with them. It is equally important that we continue to manage our brand and that the experiences we are selling to visitors are delivered in ways that meet or exceed visitor expectations.

Though building market interest in the trail is essential, it is equally important to continue to grow internal support for the trail and the benefits it can bring. We need to re-ignite local interest in, understanding of and support for enhancing the trail with residents and local elected officials. We need to ensure our local elected officials, residents, businesses and partners from the region understand and see the trail as a valuable asset and remain, or become, supportive of implementing this plan.

To motivate visitors to choose the IHT and the region to support it, the following actions will be taken:

- **1.** Develop a new, modern, and refreshed brand and identifiers for the Iron Horse Trail that moves beyond the trail's railway history and features what truly makes the trail unique. Integrate the brand and identifiers into all on-trail signage, trail infrastructure, and online and print resources.
- **2.** Develop and implement an internal marketing plan to educate elected officials and residents about the trail, the value it brings to the region, the previous successes the trail has experienced and what is needed to optimize the potential of the trail, integrate the key messages into the NE Muni-Corr Ltd. Directors Handbook.
- **3.** Using leading marketing approaches, develop a comprehensive external marketing plan to entice target markets to choose the Iron Horse Trail. Adopt and utilize Destination Canada's Pathway to Purchase to reach targets markets with the right information at the right time along their pathway to experiencing the IHT. Seek opportunities for cooperative marketing and co-opetition, packaging, and cross-selling.
- **4.** Upgrade the website to match the revised branding, share visitor testimonials, feature videos, entice visitors to choose the IHT, provide a blog, provide a comprehensive user-friendly trip planning tool, provides packages and itineraries, sell merchandise and advertisement, and connect visitors with local guides, service providers, accommodations, and businesses.

- **5.** Develop, or acquire a commercial mobile device app (e.g., Outerspatial), for the IHT that will improve trip planning, enhance the visitor experience and visitor communications, and provide for revenue generation. The app should work to provide the following functionality:
 - » Broadcast messages to app users
 - » On trail & in-community wayfinding online and offline capable
 - » Self-guided interpretative themed tours and points of interest that are activated by geofences while online and offline
 - » Purchased advertisements for on and near trail businesses that are activated by geofences while online and offline
 - » Comfort and convenience amenity locations
 - » Accommodation locations and campsite booking
 - » Report trail condition and maintenance problems, advisories, or closures



Figure 28. Pathway to Purchase

- 6. Develop and implement an "Iron Horse Trail Host" training program and promotional materials to deliver / distribute to educate all visitor information centers, accommodations, businesses, and services near the trail about the IHT. This program should help ensure the service providers and businesses become welcoming and informative trail hosts and are equipped with accurate information and knowledge to help visitors with questions about the trail.
- **7.** Acquire and maintain a library of high impact, lawful, and eye-catching professional photography and videography to support marketing.



CONTINUE TO MANAGE NON-RECREATIONAL USE OF THE TRAIL CORRIDOR & MINIMIZE IMPACT OF TRAIL USE ON ADJACENT LANDOWNERS

Much of the trail is bordered by private lands. Adjacent landowners and managers have expressed concerns about trespass, noise, dust, vandalism, and cattle harassment. We are committed to a good neighbour approach to trail management. Proactive efforts will continue to be taken to build and maintain strong relationships with local managers and work to minimize impacts of the trail on adjacent landowners and adjacent land use on the trail. In many locations, the trail also serves as a linear corridor for important municipal infrastructure such as water pipelines. This use can co-exist within the corridor but will continue to be managed and administered in a way that mitigates visitor experience and safety impacts.



Use of trail corridor by a contractor to manage vegetation created safety and circulation problems

The following actions will be applied:

- 1. Develop, approve, and apply a clear policy and set of conditions for the non-recreational use of the trail corridor and staging areas. The policy and conditions should address issues such as the process for responding to trespass, cattle management and grazing, civil infrastructure siting and restoration standards (e.g., tread width, trail prism, surfacing, vegetation, monitoring) for any in-corridor works, timing windows for in-corridor work (e.g. avoiding peak seasons, events), visitor management, communications / notices and safety requirements.
- 2. Recognizing that adjacent land use can affect the visitor experience positively or negatively, develop a "Good Neighbour" education program. This program will help adjacent landowners learn about the trail, the importance of the trail to the region, how trail visitors are being managed to minimize impact on adjacent landowners, process for non-recreational use of the trail corridor, vegetation management, and steps adjacent landowners can take to minimize their impacts on, or even enhance, the visitor experience.
- **3.** Improve education of visitors, through trip planning and ontrail information, about staying off private land, respecting gates and cattle and adjacent property owners.
- **4.** Develop an official Iron Horse Trail branded private property sign and install where necessary along the trail to indicate that public should not access the properties.
- **5.** In areas where trespassing, theft and / or vandalism from trail users is a regular concern, we will work with adjacent landowners to develop and install effective access controls.

UNDERSTAND OUR VISITORS& VISITATION

We know that good management decisions are based on having good information. The sound management of our trail and our ability to report on and track the benefits we are generating for the region relies, in part, on accurate information and insights about our visitors. Information on where they come from, when the come, what they do, how long they stay, what they spend, the quality of their experience and their opinion of the trail can all help to inform management decisions. In addition, ensuring our trail and the experiences that are offered along it remain relevant and appealing to visitors demands a sound understanding of our visitors.

To ensure we understand our visitors and the benefits the trail is creating, the following actions will be implemented:

- **1.** Work with an experienced professional to design and implement a visitor counting program to understand total visitation and visitation patterns to the trail. Explore the potential costs and feasibility of monitoring visitation through mobile data analytics (e.g., Telus Analytics).
- **2.** Work with an experienced professional to design and regularly implement a visitor study to understand:
 - » Visitor origins
 - » Demographics
 - » Motivations
 - » Independent, supported or guided visitor
 - » Activity preferences
 - » Start & end locations
 - » Party size and composition
 - » Length of trip
 - » Satisfaction
 - » Spending
 - » Near- / off-trail attractions and experiences
 - » Net promoter score
- **3.** Monitor and analyse online visitor feedback (e.g., Trip Advisor, Social Media) to understand visitor sentiments and manage the brand. Actively respond to online visitor feedback.

ACTIVELY MANAGE VISITATION & VISITOR IMPACTS

Our trail attracts thousands of visitors, both residents and people from afar, each year and our goal is to further grow this visitation. However, as visitation increases it can lead to undesirable impacts to the quality of life in host communities, quality of the visitor experience, increasing conflicts and impacts to environmental and cultural values. With overuse concerns now mainstream, we know we have a responsibility to grow visitation wisely and this requires active visitor use management. In fact, we know that achieving the potential of our trail is dependent on ensuring visitor impacts and conflicts are minimized, and our trail continues to provide a quality and inviting experience for our residents and those from away. We currently manage the trail through a clear policy framework. But moving forward, we know that we need a strong regulatory framework, a consistent and effective education program, and targeted compliance assurance.

"Though we always hope visitors will be on their best behaviour, as responsible trail managers we must plan for their worst behaviour."

- Justin Ellis

The following actions will be implemented to proactively manage visitation and visitor impacts:

- **1.** The bylaws governing the management and use of the trail will be modernized and updated to provide the regulatory tools needed to enable sound management. Key updates will include, but may not be limited to:
 - » Govern OHV use based on vehicle width rather than vehicle type,
 - » Prohibit wheeled OHV use during the winter when the trail is groomed,
 - » Permit Off-Road motorcycles and Dual-sport motorcycles,
 - » Prohibit camping outside of designated camping areas,
 - » Prohibit OHV off the trail tread unless within a staging area, or where permitted,
 - » Establishing speed limits for OHVs and snowmobile use within "quiet zones" which are intended to be applied within more urban areas and adjacent to neighbourhoods and camping areas,
 - » Requiring compliance with orders, signs and notices posted on the trail and in staging areas,
 - » Prohibit interference with the quiet and peaceful enjoyment of the trail,
 - » Prohibit posting of signs and notices unless authorized by a permit from RRTS,
 - » Prohibit the hosting of special events and competitions, including commercial events, without a permit,
 - » Undertaking commercial guiding or commercial businesses on the trail or in staging areas without a permit and establishing a permit fee for these uses,
 - » Allowing RRTS to close the trail or land at any period of time and making it an offence not to abide the closure area (e.g., wet periods, industrial use etc.), and
 - » Require industrial operators / permittees to restore the trail to the conditions specified.

- 2. Using the Interagency Visitor Use Management Council's Visitor Use Management Framework (VUMF) (https://visitorusemanagement.nps.gov/) as a guide, engage a professional to prepare a visitor use management framework for the trail. The VUMF will:
 - » Define the desired visitor experience and resource conditions for the trail.
 - » Identify the indicators and establish thresholds for each indicator,
 - » Determine the current condition (baseline) for each indicator in relation to determined thresholds,
 - » Determine and document that differences between existing and desired conditions and the links between visitor use.
 - » Identify management strategies and actions that will be taken to ensure desired conditions are maintained, and
 - » Establish the monitoring strategy and procedure.
- **3.** Adopt and promote the Leave No Trace skills and ethics program to all visitors. Leave No Trace messaging will be incorporated into all trip planning information, the mobile device app, promotional and marketing materials and through signage in strategic locations on-trail (e.g., trailheads, rest areas, viewpoints, attractions, campgrounds etc.). Trail volunteers, bylaw officers and others who interact with visitors directly will be trained in and familiar with Leave No Trace principles and with share this information with trail visitors. Targeted visitor education campaigns will be delivered during peak seasons and special events to educate visitors about responsible recreational use of the trail.
- **4.** Actively coordinate with municipal bylaw officers and the RCMP to undertake coordinated and targeted compliance assurance campaigns to promote the safe and respectful recreational use of the trail and to respond to recurring non-compliance issues.

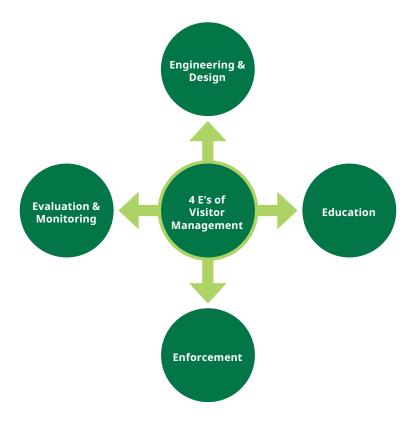


Figure 29. 4 E's of Visitor Management

VISITOR SAFETY & RISK MANAGEMENT

- **1.** To ensure ongoing maintenance and good risk management, develop and apply a trail inspection, maintenance, and documentation procedure. The procedure should specify the frequency with which formal trail maintenance and safety inspections are to occur, protocols for documenting the findings of those inspections, reporting the findings to the respective municipality, and documenting when corrective actions were taken to resolve identified deficiencies.
- 2. Provide and promote a means for visitors to report trail conditions, maintenance problems and accidents or injuries sustained on the trail. A 'report a trail problem' page could be integrated into the mobile app development. Investigate any reported accidents or injuries sustained on the trail and, where relevant, undertake corrective actions and document the actions taken.
- **3.** Provide adequate trip planning information as well as on-trail signage, warnings, and notices to make visitors aware of the information, equipment and skills required to travel the trail safely, risks and potential for injuries, and the trail conditions.
- **4.** Work with local First Responders to prepare and maintain an up-to-date emergency response plan especially for isolated and remote areas on the trail where emergency services access may be challenging.

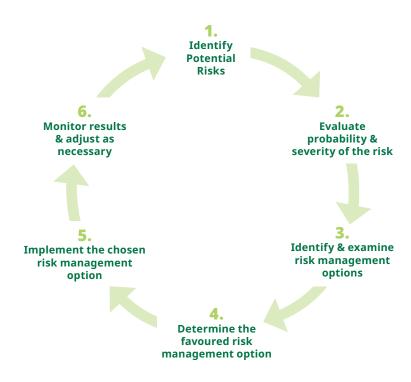


Figure 30. Risk Management Process



UNDERSTAND & CELEBRATE OUR SUCCESSES

To us, the Iron Horse Trail is not simply a trail, it is much more. It is a deliberate strategy that is focused on improving the quality of life and well-being of the residents in our region. However, the benefits that our trail brings to the region are not well understood. It is essential that we take the time to identify and understand the difference we are making locally. To do so, we must regularly celebrate and share those successes within the region and abroad. Though not occurring previously, we intend to implement a transparent cycle of reporting and information sharing. We know that this information sharing will be important to growing support for implementation of this plan to the community and justifying the investment of the resources needed to optimize the potential of our trail. Taking stock and checking in also affords us the opportunity to understand what strategies have worked and which have not, thereby enabling us to adapt our approaches. To understand and celebrate our successes, the following actions will be implemented.

- **1.** Regularly commission an economic impact study of the trail and monitor changes.
- **2.** Prepare and distribute a "State of the Iron Horse Trail Report" annually to present the progress made on implementing this plan, successes, challenges, and key metrics relating to changes in visitation, length of stay, visitor spending, direct / indirect / induced economic impacts, business expansion / creation, employment, visitor satisfaction and future priorities.







ENSURE LONG-TERM SUSTAINABLE RESOURCING & CAPACITY

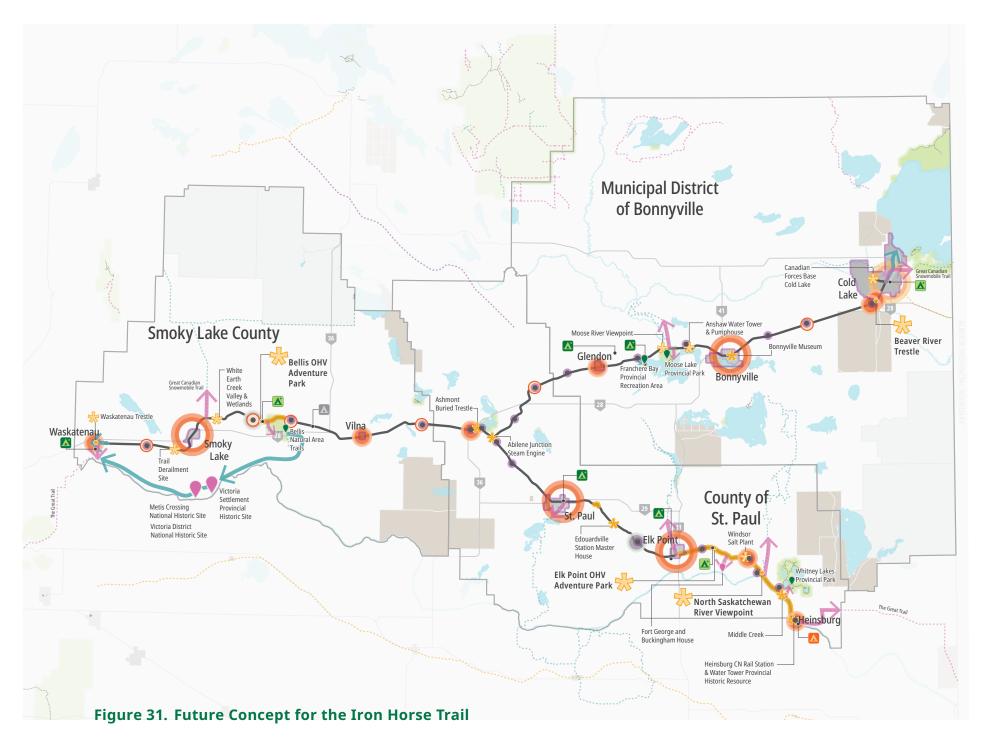
Unlike many trail organizations, we are fortunate to have a strong ownership and governance structure through Northeast Muni-Corr Ltd., a dedicated staff person, committed volunteers from the RRTS and significant contributions from municipalities along the trail. We are also fortunate to have had a strong funding model, though the long-term future of our current funding is limited. Our future success will hinge on our ability to maintain this governance, staffing and volunteer capacity and to plan for alternative operational and capital funding sources. To ensure long-term sustainable resourcing and capacity, the following actions will be taken:

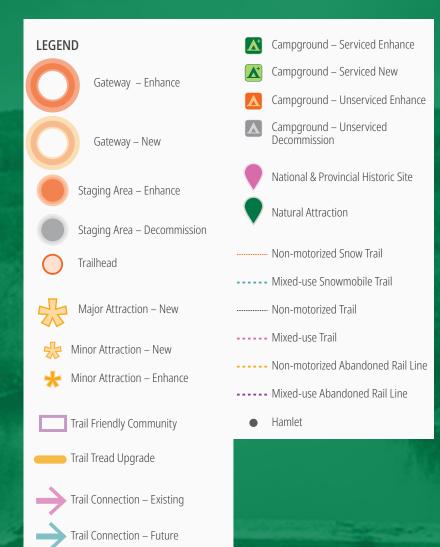
Actions:

1. Work with member municipalities to develop and contribute annually to a capital asset replacement fund to ensure funds are available to enable timely response to both emergent repairs and regular infrastructure life cycle replacements.

- **2.** Establish new revenue streams to support the development, maintenance, and management of the trail. Examples include:
 - » Creating profitable attractions along the trail that will serve as a revenue generator for the trail (e.g., OHV play parks).
 - » As the tourism readiness and quality of the trail experience grows, investigate the feasibility and appropriateness of a trail pass fee to help offset operational costs for the development and management of the trail. The fee could be tiered with a lower fee for residents and higher fee for visitors who come from outside the municipalities through which the trail travels.
 - » Recognizing the direct relationship between the quality of the trail and the future success of tourism operators who will sell experiences on the trail, or businesses who establish to service visitors on the trail, the RRTS will work with tourism operators and businesses to explore the feasibility of establishing a financial contribution model that ensures these operators and businesses reasonably contribute to the ongoing development and management of the trail. This would extend beyond any permit fees required for commercial operation on the trail.
 - » Corporate sponsorship and appropriate advertising along the trail.
 - » Sale of advertising and promotions through the visitor trip planning, on-trail mobile device app and appropriately sited and graphic design controlled advertisements in staging areas.
 - » Sale of appealing, eye catching, and functional Iron Horse Trail merchandise.

- **3.** Develop a Corporate Trail Partner Program to enable and increase corporate in-kind and volunteer contributions to the development, maintenance, and management of the trail.
- **4.** Recognizing the demographic make up of the RRTS board and membership and the current volunteer composition, the RRTS will undertake a board succession planning to ensure depth in organizational knowledge and capacity to continue to support the operations of the trail.
- **5.** Develop and implement a comprehensive and modern volunteer steward program to attract, excite and motivate a new generation of volunteers and volunteering on the trail. Tapping into local volunteerism can also foster feelings of local ownership and pride in the trail.







9. Implementation

To realize the true and full potential of the Iron Horse Trail, each of the priorities and actions identified in this plan will need to be implemented. However, some actions need to be implemented sooner than others to ensure success. To provide a clear path forward, we have developed an implementation plan that articulates the general timelines in which each action is to be implemented pending available capacity and who will lead and support the implementation of each action. To help us prioritize the action, we considered how important each action was to enabling the trail to achieve the outcomes identified in the plan and how challenging each action was to implement (Figure 32).

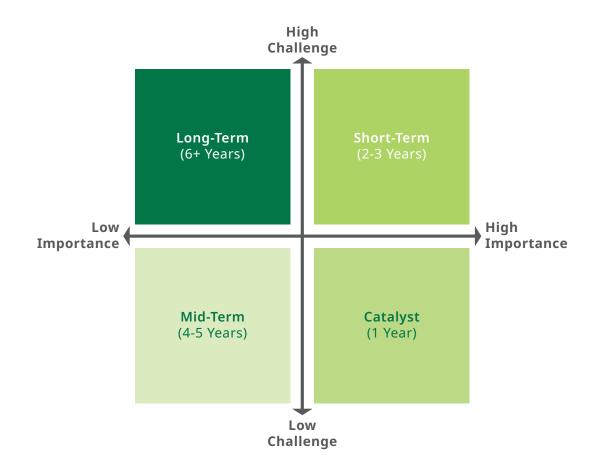


Figure 32. Action Priority Decision Matrix

9.1 Implementation Plan

The actions outlined in this implementation plan have been abbreviated. Please review the plan for full descriptions of each priority and action.

Act	Action				
IMPF	ROVE TRAIL TREAD & CORRIDOR MAINTENANCE				
Trail	Tread & Corridor Maintenance				
1.	Work with municipalities to develop and apply a common maintenance standard.	Catalyst			
2.	Enter into a council approved maintenance agreement with each municipality along the trail to ensure the annual maintenance standard is incorporating into municipal staff work plans and municipal budgeting.	Catalyst			
3.	Work with municipalities to narrow the summer trail tread width to approximately 3m.	Short-term			
4.	Work with municipalities to actively restore the trail prism and remove tread cupping.	Short-term			
5.	Review the grading equipment being used for maintenance with the respective municipalities and ensure the equipment is appropriate to maintaining a 3m tread width and to enabling the restoration of the trail prism.	Catalyst			
6.	Work with Municipalities to ensure trail maintenance crews and equipment operators are actively trained.	Catalyst			
7.	Work with municipalities along the trail to prepare a trail-side vegetation management plan	Short-term			
Trail	Tread & Corridor Improvements				
1.	Implement trail tread upgrades in priority areas (e.g. deep sand, wet clay) to improve the experience for visitors and to reduce maintenance.	Short-term			
2.	Carefully review and assess proposed changes to the trail tread surfacing within communities to ensure the integrity and appeal of the IHT as a long-distance OHV trail is not compromised.	Ongoing			
3.	Engage a Civil Engineer to undertake a detailed drainage review to assess grades and determine the most cost-effective method to prevent trail flooding near St. Paul.	Catalyst			
4.	Engage a Qualified Professional (e.g., Structural Engineer) to undertake a safety and conditions review of all trestles on the trail to confirm their ability to support the TMO, determine any required structural repairs and maintenance, their remaining useful life, and capital replacement timing.	Short-term			
5.	Over time, remove the soils / aggregates from surfaces of the wood-decked trestles.	Short-term			

Act	ion	Timeline
6.	Undertake a review of alternate fencing / barrier materials that are capable of meeting safety requirements while improving the visitor experience and visual character.	Mid-term
7.	Create curved turns around Abilene junction to improve traffic flow and safety.	Long-term
OPT	MIZE & ENHANCE TRAIL ACCESS POINTS	
1.	Work with respective municipalities to establish, or enhance, gateways, staging areas and trailheads in accordance with the future typology designations. Existing sites will be reviewed, and where necessary, redeveloped to ensure that sites provide a quality visitor experience, a logical site organization and circulation, and adhere to the design direction in the plan.	Short-term
IMPF	ROVE SIGNAGE & WAYFINDING	
1.	Work with municipalities to develop a signage manual and sign plan with clear sign typology, design, installation and location standards, style, and visual identity built on the revised IHT brand.	Catalyst
2.	Develop and implement a sign approval process.	Short-term
3.	Work with AB Transportation and local road authorities to install highway signage.	Mid-term
4.	Clearly identify and communicate to cyclists which segments of the trail are unsuitable for cycling at all times of the year and those that are unsuitable during inclement weather. Proactively identify, sign, and communicate alternative routes to bypass unsuitable segments of the IHT.	Catalyst
OPT	MIZE AND ENHANCE COMFORT AND CONVENIENCE AMENITIES	
1.	Develop a comfort and convenience amenities standard.	Catalyst
2.	Work with municipalities to upgrade or replace amenities along the trail to the new standard as existing amenities reach the end of their lifecycle.	Ongoing
3.	Provide, or support the provision, of a network of appropriately spaced, quality warming huts to support snowmobile usership of the trail.	Mid-term
4.	Actively work to attract, encourage, and support local food trucks/vendors and other temporary pop-up service enterprises (e.g., rentals) to attend gateways, attractions etc. during peak periods, seasons and during events on the trail.	Ongoing

Act	on	Timeline				
ANIN	ANIMATE THE TRAIL					
1.	Develop and promote multiple fully independent single and multi-day themed visitor experience itineraries and packages for both summer and winter seasons.	Short-term				
2.	Develop and promote self-guided and themed itineraries in each community to encourage visitors to "stay longer, play longer and spend more" in the communities along the trail.	Short-term				
3.	Engage biologists, historians, and indigenous communities to identify sites and help develop self-guided and themed digital interpretive "tours" of the trail.	Short-term				
4.	Work with partners to stimulate the development of and/or attract and promote a coordinated calendar of diverse events, competitions, and celebrations on, or featuring, the trail.	Ongoing				
5.	Implement an Iron Horse Trail Public Art competition to stimulate the creation of unique public art installations at gateways, staging areas and destinations along the trail.	Long-term				
DEVE	LOP NEW AND ENHANCE EXISTING VISITOR ATTRACTIONS					
1,	Engage professional recreation and tourism planners, designers and qualified professionals (e.g., biologists, archaeologists, engineers) to undertake feasibility studies and master plans for the development of the following three major attraction **Beaver River Trestle** **Bellis & County of St. Paul OHV & Snowmobile Adventure Play Parks	Short-term				
	» North Saskatchewan River Viewpoint & Rest Area					
2.	Engage professional recreation and tourism planners, designers, and qualified professionals (e.g., biologists, archaeologists, engineers) to develop or enhance the following minor attractions.	Short-term – Mid- term				

Action				
ENH.	ANCE AND DIVERSIFY THE SUPPLY OF ACCOMMODATIONS			
1.	Evaluate the feasibility and prepare master plans for the development of new serviced campgrounds at both proposed OHV Adventure Play Parks.			
2.	Evaluate the feasibility of providing rental-based comfort camping units at either or both the OHV Adventure Parks and the St. Paul campground.	Short-term		
3.	Develop a serviced campground at the Cold Lake Gateway.	Mid-term		
4.	Undertake a master planning process to update the design of the Heinsburg campground.	Long-term		
5.	Work with Alberta Parks to explore potential solutions to accommodate OHV overnight visitors at the Franchere Bay Provincial Recreation Area.	Ongoing		
6.	Work with the M.D. of Bonnyville to explore potential solutions to accommodate OHV overnight visitors at Minnie Lake Campground.	Ongoing		
7.	Recognizing the sustainability challenges, explore options to re-purpose or reclaim the Belvil unserviced campground.	Mid-term		
8.	Given the limited distribution of accommodations, permit non-motorized trail users to temporarily camp within specific designated areas at staging areas located between established campgrounds or communities with fixed roof accommodations.	Catalyst		
CON	NECT THE TRAIL			
1.	Work with the City of Cold Lake to establish a formalized mixed-use trail connection between the Cold Lake Gateway and the Cold Lake waterfront and downtown.	Mid-term		
2.	In keeping with the Victoria District Economic Development Strategy, work with Smoky Lake County, Victoria Settlement and Metis Crossing to establish both an eastern and western mixed use (OHV and non-motorized) trail loop connection to the IHT.	Long-term		
3.	Continue working with the Village of Waskatenau to extend the trail from its current terminus at Range Road 193 into the Village and current staging area.	Mid-term		
4.	Develop formalized and signed mixed-use trails and on-road routes to connect trail visitors to Whitney Lakes Provincial Park and Franchere Bay Provincial Recreation Area. Work with Alberta Parks to provide legal parking areas and access points for OHV and snowmobile visitors at these sites.	Mid-term		

Act	ion	Timeline
5.	Building on existing snowmobile trails, work with partners to plan a snowmobile route between Heinsburg and Cold Lake to provide a large circle route for snowmobiling.	Mid-term
6.	Create or improve formal trailheads and trail connections to ensure all rural neighbourhoods adjacent to the trail can access the trail through formalized and intentional routes.	Short-term
7.	Continue to build relationships with 4 Wing Cold Lake to explore the potential for trail connections through the base.	Long-term
CRE	ATE TRAIL FRIENDLY COMMUNITIES	
1.	Develop a "Trail Friendly Community" program and work to confirm which communities along the trail wish to be identified as and promoted as such. Prepare guidelines for being a welcoming trail friendly community, which addresses topics such as how to provide a welcoming atmosphere, beautification, theming / banners / signage, welcoming storefronts program, business hours. Apply jointly for grants to help offset costs for the trail friendly community initiatives.	Catalyst
2.	Work with municipalities to ensure convenient access routes are maintained within each trail friendly community, and incorporated into local trail master plans and MDP's, to enable visitors to travel from the trail legally and conveniently to access accommodations, attractions and visitor amenities and services such as fuel, restaurants, supplies and repair businesses.	Catalyst
3.	Support and actively encourage municipalities to create a welcoming trail-friendly atmosphere where the trail travels through the community by using on-trail welcome signage, trail themed banners, beautification and plants, and trail-based branding along storefronts and services near the trail etc.	Short-term
4.	Work with local businesses to develop and market sales and promotions to entice trail visitors to leave the trail and get into the trail-friendly communities.	Ongoing
5.	Work with accommodation providers to develop secure overnight lockups / storage for OHVs and snowmobiles.	Short-term

Act	ion	Timeline
мот	IVATE VISITORS TO CHOOSE THE IHT & REGION TO SUPPORT IT	
1.	Develop a new, modern, and refreshed brand and identifiers for the Iron Horse Trail that moves beyond the trail's railway history and features what truly makes the trail unique.	Short-term
2.	Develop and implement an internal marketing plan to educate elected officials and residents about the trail, the value it brings to the region, the previous successes the trail has experienced and what is needed to optimize the potential of the trial. Integrate the key messages into the NE Muni-Corr Ltd. Directors Handbook.	Catalyst
3.	Using leading marketing approaches, develop a comprehensive external marketing plan to entice target markets to choose the Iron Horse Trail.	Short-term
4.	Upgrade the website to match the revised branding, share visitor testimonials, feature videos, entice visitors to choose the IHT, provide a blog, provide a comprehensive user-friendly trip planning tool, provides packages and itineraries, sell merchandise and advertisement, and connect visitors with local guides, service providers, accommodations, and businesses.	Short-term
5.	Develop, or acquire a commercial mobile device app (e.g., Outerspatial), for the IHT that will improve trip planning, enhance the visitor experience and visitor communications, and provide for revenue generation.	Catalyst
6.	Develop and implement an "Iron Horse Trail Host" training program and promotional materials to deliver / distribute to educate all visitor information centers, accommodations, businesses, and services near the trail about the IHT.	Short-term
7.	Acquire and maintain a library of high impact, lawful, and eye-catching professional photography and videography to support marketing.	Short-term

Action				
MAN	AGE NON-RECREATION USE OF THE TRAIL & MINIMIZE IMPACT ON ADJACENT LANDOWNERS			
1.	Develop, approve, and apply a clear policy and set of conditions for the non-recreational use of the trail corridor and staging areas.	Short-term		
2.	Develop a "Good Neighbour" education program.	Short-term		
3.	Improve education of visitors, through trip planning and on-trail information, about staying off private land, respecting gates and cattle and adjacent property owners.	Short-term		
4.	Develop an official Iron Horse Trail branded private property sign and install where necessary along the trail to indicate that public should not access the properties.	Short-term		
5.	In areas where trespassing, theft and / or vandalism from trail users is a regular concern, we will work with adjacent landowners to develop and install effective access controls.	Ongoing		
UND	ERSTAND OUR VISITORS & VISITATION			
1.	Design and implement a visitor counting program to understand total visitation and visitation patterns to the trail.	Short-term		
2.	Design and regularly implement a visitor study.	Short-term		
3.	Monitor and analyse online visitor feedback (e.g., Trip Advisor, Social Media) to understand visitor sentiments and manage the brand. Actively respond to online visitor feedback.	Ongoing		

Act	ion	Timeline			
ACTIVELY MANAGE VISITATION & VISITOR IMPACTS					
1.	Modernize and update the trail bylaws to provide the regulatory tools needed to enable sound management.	Catalyst			
2.	Prepare a visitor use management framework for the trail.	Short-term			
3.	Adopt and promote the Leave No Trace skills and ethics program to all visitors. Leave	Short-term			
4.	Actively coordinate with municipal bylaw officers and the RCMP to undertake coordinated and targeted compliance assurance campaigns to promote the safe and respectful recreational use of the trail and to respond to recurring non-compliance issues.	Ongoing			
Visit	or Safety & Risk Management				
1.	To ensure ongoing maintenance and good risk management, develop and apply a trail inspection, maintenance, and documentation procedure.	Catalyst			
2.	Provide and promote a means for visitors to report trail conditions, maintenance problems and accidents or injuries sustained on the trail.	Mid-term			
3.	Provide adequate trip planning information as well as on-trail signage, warnings, and notices to make visitors aware of the information, equipment and skills required to travel the trail safely, risks and potential for injuries, and the trail conditions.	Short-term			
4.	Prepare and maintain an up-to-date emergency response plan especially for isolated and remote areas on the trail where emergency services access may be challenging.	Mid-term			
UNDERSTAND & CELEBRATE OUR SUCCESS					
1.	Regularly commission an economic impact study of the trail and monitor changes.	Short-term			
2.	Prepare and distribute a "State of the Iron Horse Trail Report" annually.	Short-term			

Act	Action			
ENS	JRE LONG-TERM SUSTAINABLE RESOURCING & CAPACITY			
1.	Work with member municipalities to develop and contribute annually to a capital asset replacement fund to ensure funds are available to enable timely response to both emergent repairs and regular infrastructure life cycle replacements.	Short-term		
2.	Establish new revenue streams to support the development, maintenance, and management of the trail.	Mid-term		
3.	Develop a Corporate Trail Partner Program to enable and increase corporate in-kind and volunteer contributions to the development, maintenance, and management of the trail.	Mid-term		
4.	Undertake a board succession planning to ensure depth in organizational knowledge and capacity to continue to support the operations of the trail.	Catalyst		
5.	Develop and implement a comprehensive and modern volunteer steward program to attract, excite and motivate a new generation of volunteers and volunteering on the trail.	Short-term		



Appendix A: Trail Management Objective

McElhanney	Trail Management	Objectives	McElhanney	Trail Management Objectives
Region: Alberta Trail Manager Riverland Re	ecreation Trail Society Land Ma	nager Northeast Muni-Corr	Trail Name: Iron Horse Trail - S	Summer Trail Number: n/a
			Travel Management Strategies	
Trail Name: Iron Horse Trail - Summer Trail Beginning: Waskatenau Trail Ending: Cold Lake (northeast leg) and Ho Trail Inventory Length: 278 km	einsburg (southeast leg) Trail Mileage Source: Wheel	Trail Number: n/a Beg. Milepost: 0 End. Milepost: 195 km / 177 km GPS X Map Unknown	Managed Use (Fill in all that apply) To I Date (mm/dd) (mm Hiker / Pedestrian Equestrian	
TMO Trail Section			X-Country Ski	Hiker / Pedestrian
n/a Sec.# Section Begginning:n/a Section End: n/a		Beg. Milepost: <mark>n/a</mark>	Snowshoe Mountain Bike Motorized (>1.83 m wide) Maintenance Vehicles Year-round	
Trail Classification (Check any that apply) Trail Type X Summer (snow-free) Winter (snow-covered) Water Vertical Level of Development Developed X Moderately Developed Minimally Developed	(Check one in each category) Enthusiast Group Non-Motorized Mechanized Motorized X Mixed Use Use Type Single-Use Multi-Use	Degree of Challenege X Easy Moderate Difficult Most Difficult	Cross-Country Ski Snowshoe Snowmobile Watercraft-NonMotorized Watercraft - Motorized Other Use	Cross-Country Ski Snowshoe Snowmobile Watercraft - NonMotorized Watercraft - Motorized Trail User Objectives
(Check all that apply) Pedestrian Equestrian X-Country Ski Snowshoe Mountain Bike X Two-Wheel Motorized X Motorized (<1.83 m wide) Motorized (>1.83 m wide) Motorized (>1.83 m wide) Snow Vehicle (<1.83 m wide) 10 - 15 - 0.1 m	Tread Width (m) Target Grade (%) Maximum Grade / Proportion (%) Target Cross-Slope (snow-free) [%] Clearing Width / Height (m) Turning Radius (m) Tread Profusion Height (snow-free)	Target Frequency Per Year (Fill in all that apply) 1 Trail Opening 1 Tread Repair 0.5 Drainage Cleanout Monthly Enforcement Patrol 1 Brushing 2 Tread Maintenance - Grading 1 Condition Survey	(Optional: Check any that apply) Hiker / Pedestrian Equestrian Equestrian	X Escape Solitude Challenge Play Nature Risk Exercise X Socializing X Effeciency X Connectivity Connectivity Effection The IHT is an all-season, mixed-use, motorized-optimized tr. that is moderately developed. Separate TMOs are provided for summer (snow-free) and winter (snow-covered) uses. In summer, the trail is optimized for OHVs and ORMs/DualSpot (<1.83 m wide) use and other summer uses indicated are permitted but not actively maintained or managed for.

McElhanney	Trail Management	Objectives	McElhanney	Trail Management Objectives
Region: Alberta Trail Manager Riverla	and Recreation Trail Society Land N	lanager Northeast Muni-Corr	Trail Name: Iron Horse Trail -	Winter Trail Number: n/a
Trail Name: Iron Horse Trail - Winter		Trail Number: n/a Beg. Milepost: 0	Travel Management Strategies Managed Use	Prohibited Use From To Date Date (Openidad)
Trail Ending: Cold Lake (northeast leg) Trail Inventory Length: 278 km	and Heinsburg (southeast leg) Trail Mileage Source: Wheel	End. Milepost: 195 km / 177 km GPS X Map Unknown		(Check if applicable) (Check if applicable) (mm/dd) (mm/dd) (mm/dd) (mm/dd) (mm/dd) (mm/dd) (mm/dd)
TMO Trail Section n/a Section Begginning: n/a Sec.# Section End: n/a		Beg. Milepost: n/a End. Milepost: n/a	Snowshoe Mountain Bike Motorized (>1.83 m wide) Grooming Equipment Maintenance Vehicles Year-rou	Equestrian
Trail Classification (Check any that apply) Trail Type Summer (snow-free) X Winter (snow-covered) Water Vertical Level of Development Developed X Moderately Developed Minimally Developed	(Check one in each category) Enthusiast Group Non-Motorized Mechanized Motorized X Mixed Use Use Type Single-Use Multi-Use	Degree of Challenege X Easy Moderate Difficult Most Difficult	Cross-Country Ski Snowshoe Snowmobile X OHV / ORM - track modified	Motorized - wheeled Two-wheel motorized When snow When s
Optimized Activity Types (Check all that apply) Pedestrian Equestrian X-Country Ski Snowshoe Mountain Bike Two-Wheel Motorized Motorized (<1.83 m wide) Motorized (>1.83 m wide) X Snow Vehicle (<1.83 m wide) X Snow Vehicle (<1.83 m wide) Non	Target Grade (%) Maximum Grade / Proportion (%) Target Cross-Slope [%] Clearing Width / Height (m) Turning Radius (m)	Target Frequency Per Year (Fill in all that apply) 1 Trail Opening n/a Tread Repair n/a Drainage Cleanout Monthly Enforcement Patrol n/a Brushing Weekly Snow Trail Grooming 1 Condition Survey	Other Use (Optional: Check any that apply)	X Escape Solitude Challenge Play Nature Risk X Exercise X Socializing X Effeciency X Connectivity Connectivity

Appendix B: Trail Conditions and Enhancements by Segment

Segment No.	Start	End	Length (km)	Tread Type	Tread Width	Tread Issues	Tread requirements for OHV TMO	Condition Rating for OHV TMO	Tread requirements compared to MTB TMO, in addition to requirements for OHV use	Condition Rating for MTB TMO	Representative Photo
1	Heinsburg	Elk Point	34	Hardpacked fines (Silt& Clay)	3-5m	The fines hold and retain water causing many medium to large sized puddles	~ 10 sections of 100m each require raised trail tread with appropriate ditching	Fair	To be all weather, 12.5mm minus crushed rock would need to be mixed into this entire trail tread	Failing	
2	Elk Point	Range Road 84 (8km east of St Paul)	22.5	Loose sand and gravel	3-5m	without sufficient fines the tread surface is loose and forms washboard	Grading required as part of regular maintenance ~700m requiring appropriate drainage to drain flooded trail/pond that is blocked by the trail or the highway culvert which is located too high	Fair	Requires clay and silt to be added to bind together the loose sand along this entire section or capped with well graded surfacing material	Poor	
3	Range Road 84 (8km east of St Paul)	Range Road 85 (6.5km east of St Paul)	1.5	Frequently flooded and exhibiting drainage issues	3-5m	Water is flooded over the trail for roughly 70m, typically 0.4m deep. Drainage issues along this entire 1.5km section contribute to the flooding.	Proper drainage needs to be established at either the east or west end of this waterbody, or the tread needs to be raised by approximately 0.7m.	Poor	Area not passable by bicycle without acquiring wet feet. Same tread repair as for OHV TMO	Failing	

Segment No.	Start	End	Length (km)	Tread Type	Tread Width	Tread Issues	Tread requirements for OHV TMO	Condition Rating for OHV TMO	Tread requirements compared to MTB TMO, in addition to requirements for OHV use	Condition Rating for MTB TMO	Representative Photo
4	Range Road 85 (6.5km east of St Paul)	St Paul	6.5	Clay Cap	3-5m	A clay cap was trialed here, many small potholes have formed	Grading for maintenance	Fair	To be all weather, should be surfaced with well graded surfacing material	Fair	
5	St Paul Area		3.5	Pavement beside gravel	3-4m	Excellent	None	Good	None	Good	
6	St Paul	Bellis	64	Loose sand and gravel	3-7m	Frequent deep washboard	Routine grading maintenance	Fair	Requires clay and silt to be added to bind together the loose sand along this entire section, some sections require rock mixed in as well.	Poor	
7	Bellis	Edwand	9	Loose sand	5-8m	Very loose sand, deep washboard	High frequency grading required for maintenance or requires clay, silt, and 20mm minus rock to be added to bind together the loose sand along this entire section	Poor	Requires clay, silt, and 20mm minus rock to be added to bind together the loose sand along this entire section	Failing	

Segment No.	Start	End	Length (km)	Tread Type	Tread Width	Tread Issues	Tread requirements for OHV TMO	Condition Rating for OHV TMO	Tread requirements compared to MTB TMO, in addition to requirements for OHV use	Condition Rating for MTB TMO	Representative Photo
8	Edwand	Waskatenau	37.5	Generally well graded compact tread	2.5-4m	One 500m section of loose sand, West of Smokey Lake, one 500m section of recycled pavement which is failing needs to be removed. Remainder is good quality surface of well graded material	Upgrade two identified sections and routine grading maintenance. Near Waskatenau no grading required until washboard begins to develop as trail has reached a good width and firm surface.	Good	Approximately 5km of additional trail require binder to reduce loose material	Fair	
North Arm	of IronHorse Tra	il									
9	Abilene	3km east of Mallaig	18	Generally well graded compact tread	2.5-4m	Good condition	None	Good	None	Good	

Segment No.	Start	End	Length (km)	Tread Type	Tread Width	Tread Issues	Tread requirements for OHV TMO	Condition Rating for OHV TMO	Tread requirements compared to MTB TMO, in addition to requirements for OHV use	Condition Rating for MTB TMO	Representative Photo
10	3km east of Mallaig	Glendon	9	Loose cobble & rock	5-6m	Loose cobble & rock	Grading for maintenance	Fair	Fines required to bind surfacing together and grading to remove large cobble	Poor	
11	Glendon	3km east of Glendon	5	Pavement beside hardened 10mm minus trail surface cap, functioning for both motorized and non- motorized	5-6m	None	None	Good	None	Good	
12	3km east of Glendon	Ardmore	44	Loose sand or rock or cobble	5-6m	Loose material	Grading for maintenance	Fair	Grade the subgrade to remove large cobble, cap with well graded surfacing material	Poor	

Segment No.	Start	End	Length (km)	Tread Type	Tread Width	Tread Issues	Tread requirements for OHV TMO	Condition Rating for OHV TMO	Tread requirements compared to MTB TMO, in addition to requirements for OHV use	Condition Rating for MTB TMO	Representative Photo
13	Ardmore	8km east of Ardmore	8	Recently graded due to water line, high native clay content	4-5m	None currently	None currently	Good	To be all weather, should be surfaced with well graded surfacing material	Fair	
14	8km east of Ardmore	Cold Lake	13	Soft & Rutted	2-6m	Soft and muddy with some ruts, some ok sections	Grading for maintenance	Fair	To be all weather, should be surfaced with well graded surfacing material	Poor	

Appendix C: Tourism Readiness Criteria

Visitor Ready—Refers to a legally operated trail that is ready to support local visitors. These trails provide a relatively undeveloped trail experience, are likely known primarily by locals and potentially short-haul domestic travelers and are not actively promoted beyond local markets.

Trails that are visitor ready...

Approvals

 Are formally approved by the land manager / owner

Uniqueness

 Are typically of local significance and importance for recreation and active transportation

Planning, Management & Maintenance

- Are operated by a trail operator who has accepted responsibility for management of the trail
- Communicate the basic trail classification and intended, optimized and permitted trail uses of the trail
- Are inspected at least once per year but maintenance actions to address identified maintenance problems are dependant on the availability of resources and overall capacity of the operator and may be delayed
- Maintenance problems that pose unreasonable visitor safety concerns or threaten the ability of visitors to use the trail are resolved

Wayfinding

- Are signed
- Are mapped

Visitor Amenities & Services

 Provides the essential, yet basic or rudimentary, infrastructure and amenities that, if not in place, would make the trail unusable to visitors

Brand, Marketing & Promotion

- May or may not have a website
- May of may not have a recognized brand

Market Readiness Evaluation Criteria

- Landowner / Manager Approval
- Trail Management Plan
- Trail Operator Insurance
- Signage
- Mapping
- Inspections & Maintainenance
- Visitor Management
- Trail Uniqueness
- Scenery & Attractions
- Trail Quality & TMO Alignment
- Accommodations
- Amenities
- Services (guided & self guided)
- Branding
- Trip Planning Tools
- Trail Condition Information
- Marketing
- Scenery & Attractions
- Visitor Safety Plan

Market Ready—Refers to a trail experience that meets the visitor ready criteria, provides a refined trail experience and visitor amenities, the trail has a brand, is known regionally and provincially and is being actively marketed to potential visitors in domestic short and long-haul markets.

In addition to the visitor ready criteria, trails that are market ready...

Uniqueness

- Are regionally and provincially unique
- Are one of, if not, the best representation of a particular trail experience that the province or region has to offer
- Provides a branded sense of arrival and gateway experience for visitors at the trailhead(s)

Planning, Management & Maintenance

- Are purpose built, or converted, based on target market expectations
- Have a master / management plan that is strategically guiding the development and management of the trail and its visitor experiences
- Most maintenance and management issues are resolved rapidly by the trail operator

Visitor Amenities & Services

- May provide safe trail connections that lead visitors into adjacent communities and to off-trail visitor attractions, accommodations, amenities and transportation
- Provide a small cluster of market ready visitor services (e.g. guiding, equipment repair, rentals, food and beverage), trail friendly and themed accommodations (e.g. comfort camping, camping, hotels etc.) and visitor attractions (e.g. indigenous, culinary, nature, heritage / culture etc.) on or near the trail
- Provide moderate quality infrastructure and comfort and convenience amenities that are desired by trail visitors
- Transportation services to and from the trail and nearby attractions may be available but may not be dependable
- Communities along the trail may or may not invest in developing a welcoming and inviting atmosphere for trail visitors (e.g. themed banners, trail-based storefront branding, beautification, welcome signage etc.)
- Trail-oriented events may or may not be occurring along or integrating the trail

Wayfinding

- Communities along the trail may provide signage and deploy visitor information strategies to help visitors easily access the trail
- Communities along the trail may provide signage and deploy visitor information strategies and invite visitors to get off the trail and explore the community and nearby attractions and services

Branding, Marketing & Promotion

- Has a recognized brand and is being actively marketed at each step of the visitor's Pathway to Purchase
- Has a branded and high-quality website that provides excellent trail and trip planning information, packages, itineraries, promotes visitor services etc.
- Have high resolution photos and video footage for promotional purposes
- May have a mobile app that supports wayfinding but also contains elements to elevate and enrich the visitor experience (e.g. interpretation, education)
- Trail operators work with regional and provincial DMO's to promote the trail

Staffing & Funding

- Have frontline staff, or other partnership arrangement, that are trained in customer service and can respond within a few days of receiving enquires about the trail
- May have a long-term sustainable funding model for trail operations and asset management

Export Ready — Meeting the criteria for both visitor and market ready, these trails are the best of what Canada has to offer and are uniquely positioned amongst the best trail destinations in the world. These trails contain a critical mass of on and off trail related experiences that are capable of providing multi-day experiences. As primary travel motivators, these trails provide a refined and fully integrated experience providing exceptional quality infrastructure and amenities, dependable supporting services, excellent trip planning information and access to knowledgeable staff and tools are in place and ready to meet the needs and expectations of the more experienced and sophisticated trail tourist. The tourism industry in this region are ambassadors for the trail and highly knowledgeable about the available trail experiences. The trail is regularly maintained, and visitation is actively managed to ensure the desired trail experience can be achieved.

Uniqueness & Visitor Experience

- Internationally and nationally unique
- One of, if not the, best representation of the particular trail experience Canada has to offer and possibly only found in Canada,
- Outstanding and inspiring beauty
- Involve spectacular world class natural, indigenous, cultural, heritage, art, culinary and / or other attractions on or near the trail

Planning, Management & Maintenance

- A visitor use management plan is in place to guide the active management of visitation on the trail
- Maintenance and management issues are resolved immediately
- Strong local support for and commitment to the trail and understanding of the value of the trail
- Tourism industry in the region are ambassadors of the trail and highly knowledgeable about the trail experiences available

Visitor Amenities & Services

- Provide quality and trail connections that lead visitors into adjacent communities and to off-trail visitor attractions, accommodations, amenities, and transportation
- Provide an extensive cluster of export ready visitor services (e.g. guiding, equipment repair, rentals, food and beverage), trail friendly and themed accommodations (e.g. comfort camping, camping, hotels etc.) and visitor attractions (e.g. indigenous, culinary, nature, heritage / culture etc.) on or near the trail
- Provide fully integrated visitor packages and itineraries that are sold through travel trade
- Are regularly animated with high-profile events, festivals and / or competitions
- Transportation services to and from the trail and nearby attractions are available, dependable and integrated into visitor packages and itineraries
- Communities along the trail fully embrace the trail, celebrate the trail and create and maintain a welcoming and inviting atmosphere for trail visitors (e.g. themed banners, trail-based storefront branding, beautification, welcome signage etc.)
- Businesses in communities along the trail develop and market retail promotions that entice trail visitors into the communities
- Communities along the trail provide self-guided and themed itineraries that make it easy for visitors to explore the community and attractions

Wayfinding

- Communities along the trail provide signage and deploy visitor information strategies to help visitors easily access the trail
- Communities along the trail provide signage and deploy visitor information strategies and invite visitors to get off the trail and explore the community and nearby attractions and services

Branding, Marketing & Promotion

- Has a distinct, unique, and compelling brand with strong penetration in target markets
- Is being marketed to visitors at every stage of the visitor "pathway to purchase"
- Have high resolution photos and video footage and can provide to travel trade and travel media for promotional materials and editorials
- Utilize a refined and sophisticated mobile app that supports wayfinding but also contains elements to elevate and deepen the visitor experience (e.g. self-guided interpretation, education),
- Trail operators work with national and provincial DMO's to promote the trail
- Provide support for international media and travel trade familiarization tours
- Sell the trail experience through Travel Trade

Staffing & Funding

- Have frontline staff, or other partnership arrangement, that are trained in customer service and can respond with 24hrs of receiving enquires about the trail
- Have a frontline staff and destination training program to ensure service providers and businesses are trained and informed about the trail
- Has a long-term sustainable funding model for trail operations and asset management



