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CONNECTING VALUES, PROCESS, AND PROJECT DESIGN: TWINNING THE TRANS-CANADA HIGHWAY IN BANFF NATIONAL PARK IN CANADA

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Abstract

Extending from coast to coast, the Trans-Canada Highway (TCH) plays an integral role in Canada's social and economic wellbeing. For geographic and historical reasons, 83 of its 7,500 kilometers bisect Banff National Park, Canada's first and most popular park. Part of the UNESCO Canadian Rocky Mountains World Heritage Site and known worldwide for this park's spectacular landscapes and exceptional natural resources, Banff has long been considered a harbinger for the future of other parks and protected areas across the country.

Parks Canada is the federal agency responsible for managing national parks in Canada. Under its mandate, Parks Canada must preserve and protect the ecological integrity of national parks for future generations while fostering public use and appreciation of these areas. And while not truly part of the mandate, major highways that run within and through federal park lands have also fallen to Parks Canada to manage.

Between 1979 and 2005, in response to rising traffic volumes and public safety concerns, 43 of 83 kilometers of the Trans-Canada highway in Banff National Park were converted in phases from two to four lanes. Each of these phases sparked national public interest, the first two in particular becoming flashpoints for the many divergent views about development and conservation in protected areas. These divergent views were not limited to external stakeholders, as highway twinning was seen internally to compete with and divert limited Parks Canada's resources away from direct mandate-related needs. Adding to the complexity of the situation is the unique governance context with Parks Canada as land manager, decision-making authority, and project proponent.

This paper offers a 25-year perspective on Parks Canada's approach to developing context-sensitive solutions; specifically use of a collaborative, interdisciplinary approach for developing a transportation facility that preserves scenic, aesthetic, and environmental resources while maintaining safety and mobility. Through four separate phases of the Trans-Canada Highway Twinning Project, this paper details how the nature and substance of public participation has changed over time and how public input can be reconciled with scientific information, project objectives, a challenging agency mandate, and engineering and financial considerations. Lessons learned in earlier phases have been applied to the most recent phase, resulting in improved stakeholder relationships and satisfaction, as well as leading-edge highway and mitigation design.

Biographical Sketch: Terry McGuire graduated in 1975 from the University of Calgary with a civil engineering degree. He is currently the Director of the Western Asset Management Service Center for the West and North Region of Parks Canada. Within this position, his duties include responsibility for highway operations, maintenance, and reconstruction within the Canadian Rocky Mountain Parks of Canada. He is a professional engineer. Of prime concern to McGuire is the mitigation of impacts highways have on ecological integrity within these national parks, as well as highway safety for both through traffic and park visitors.