

## Environment-friendly Tourism Opportunities in Átl'ka7tsem/Howe Sound [DRAFT 240402]

BC's natural beauty is a world-renowned tourism attraction. Tourism is a profitable business, often environmentally friendly and sustainable, or horribly damaging unless carefully managed. For the unique UNESCO Howe Sound Biosphere Region, low environmental impact tourism must be the goal.

Trails dedicated for Active Transport modes, like walking and bicycling, are a key means of achieving a low impact goal. It's also important to recognize the potential social and economic benefits that long-distance tourism represents. I'm a member of HUB Cycling and the BC Cycling Coalition, and along with many, many other cyclists, can attest that long distance cycling is one of the most satisfying ways to travel and explore, as well as contributing to public health improvement and air pollution reduction.

BC has many short-distance trails but mainly in urban areas<sup>1</sup>. Long distance bike tourism in BC typically means sharing a heavily trafficked public road, like the Sea-to-Sky highway; something only a fearless few take on – check out Paul Woods' catalogue of provincial highway routes<sup>2</sup>.

BC has very few off-road trails that facilitate multi-day, long-distance bike travel – the Trans-Canada Trail and the Kettle Valley Railtrail (KVR) come to mind – but these pale in contrast to the 5000km of the Velo Quebec trail network<sup>3</sup>, or the hundreds of long-distance trails in Europe<sup>4</sup> or the USA. The 54,000-member Adventure Cycling Association<sup>5</sup>, recognizes only the KVR in BC in its North America-wide, 50,000-mile trail catalogue. They surely have more of BC to discover, especially the magnificent Átl'ka7tsem/Howe Sound.

If visitors should come, they will buy services. Users of the 28,000km Trans-Canada Trail were found to have spent \$13 billion per year and supported 220,000 jobs<sup>6</sup>. Evaluations between 2008 and 2019 of long-distance US trails, found a significant economic impact through expenditures on accommodation and food, as well as job creation<sup>7</sup>, some of it in rural communities not usually benefitting from tourism.

These benefits must be compared to the low cost of trail development and maintenance. Clearly, there would be challenges in identifying a comfortable route through the terrain and the several jurisdictions between Vancouver and Whistler, and perhaps beyond. Whatever length, it will be important to have a dedicated right-of-way, funds to build the infrastructure, and importantly, an organization to maintain and promote it. Seeds have been planted.

It is especially encouraging to note the Tsawwassen First Nation's vision of connecting the Salish Sea First Nation communities by sməq'wa? xeł - the Great Blue Heron Way<sup>8</sup> - a trail that must surely share similar objectives to an Átl'ka7tsem/Howe Sound trail. There are existing institutional models such as Trails BC ([www.trailsbc.ca](http://www.trailsbc.ca)) and the Thompson-Okanagan Tourism Assoc. ([www.totabc.org](http://www.totabc.org)) to guide planning and operation. I encourage therefore the Minister to collaborate with, and support the Biosphere Executive in establishing a representative project organization that can bring the vision of a long-distance trail through one of BC's most spectacular regions into reality for all outdoor enthusiasts and residents alike.

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<sup>1</sup> McDonald C. (2018) Lets Go Biking- Easy Rides near Metro Vancouver, [letsgebiking.net](http://letsgebiking.net)

<sup>2</sup> Paul Woods (2008) Cycling British Columbia, Paul Wood Publications, Langley BC

<sup>3</sup> Velo Quebec (2018) Cycling in Quebec (La Route Verte) 9th Edn, Montreal ([routeverte.com](http://routeverte.com))

<sup>4</sup> European Cyclists Federation 2024, Brussels, Belgium [EuroVelo](http://EuroVelo) (accessed 240329)

<sup>5</sup> Adventure Cycling Association, Missoula, Montana, USA ([www.adventurecycling.org](http://www.adventurecycling.org))

<sup>6</sup> Trans-Canada Trail (2023) [impact-study\\_press-release\\_final\\_EN.pdf\(tctrail.ca\)](http://impact-study_press-release_final_EN.pdf(tctrail.ca) (accessed 240329)

<sup>7</sup> Drew E. and Smith J.W. (2020) Long Distance Cycling Routes, Economic Impacts, Best Practices, and Marketing Strategies, Utah State University, Institute of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism

<sup>8</sup> [The Great Blue Heron Way Vision - GBHW - Trails BC](http://The Great Blue Heron Way Vision - GBHW - Trails BC) (accessed 240329)