



Northern BC Mountain Bike Recreation and Tourism Development Strategy

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Omineca Beetle Action Coalition	City of Terrace	Town of Smithers
Tourism Smithers	Village of Burns Lake	District of Houston
District of Fort. St. James	District of Mackenzie	RD of Bulkley Nechako
RD of Kitimat Stikine	RD of Fraser Fort George	Village of Telkwa Lake
Village of McBride	Northern Development Initiative Trust	

For more information on the strategy, please contact:

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December 4, 2014

Martin Littlejohn, Executive Director

Western Canada Mountain Bike Tourism Association
martin@mbta.ca



Re: Northern BC Mountain Bike Strategy

Dear Martin,

Northern BC Tourism is pleased to be a partner in this project and is looking forward to supporting the implementation of strategies outlined in this report. The people who live here are passionate about the region and it shows in everything they do. We are greatly encouraged by the growth of mountain bike tourism in the province and by what we see happening in our own communities:

- Interest in mountain biking amongst Northern BC residents is generating our own unique Northern brand of mountain bike culture and motivating intra-regional travel.
- The quality of the trails being developed and the diverse experiences they offer are world class - from all-day epics to technical trail features, flow trails to big mountain descents.
- We feel Northern BC is an excellent mountain biking locale. Our diverse terrain and landscapes - from the Rockies to the Coast - offer visual inspiration, and the welcoming communities along the route are no more than two hours apart.

In the north, the willingness to collaborate is second nature and will help access sustainable funding for worthwhile projects. Projects that will attract more people to mountain biking and ultimately bring more visitors to the region.

I encourage you in your efforts to create unique experiences that will excite local interests and allow us to spread the message about the amazing riding opportunities found in the region.

Sincerely,

Clint Fraser, Interim CEO

Northern British Columbia Tourism

NORTHERN BRITISH COLUMBIA TOURISM ASSOCIATION

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December 2014

To the mountain biking stakeholders in Northern BC:

British Columbia has long been a major contributor to the world of mountain biking and the province has become a world class destination for outdoor recreation and adventure tourism. The diverse trails and inspiring landscapes that are cherished by so many that call this place home have caught the attention of riders from around the globe. Mountain biking is a growing opportunity for communities across BC with many social and economic benefits attached to it. What we ride and how we ride may have changed over the years; however, as mountain biking evolves it continues to lead us to a better and more rewarding experience that encourages participation from a widening spectrum of ages and abilities.

Northern BC is the new frontier for mountain biking in the province; one with limitless potential. The MBTA encourages stakeholders to work together to create unique world class riding experiences that highlight the character of the places and the people in the region. This collaborative effort will involve many including local residents, municipal and regional governments, land managers, as well as local and regional destination marketing organizations each bound by these guiding principles:

- *Support* the efforts of the grassroots, for they are the stewards of the trails and help build community pride.
- *Manage* the resource sustainably to ensure high quality experiences for residents and visitors alike.
- *Promote* awareness through multiple channels that will lead to new economic activity throughout the region.

The strategies recommended in this report are designed to build onto the work that a number of communities have already accomplished and will identify key steps and critical success factors that all stakeholders need to address in order to foster a vibrant mountain bike culture and establish Northern BC as a diverse mountain biking destination.

On behalf of the MBTA, we look forward to continuing to support the development of mountain bike tourism in Northern BC!

Sincerely,

Martin Littlejohn

Executive Director, Western Canada Mountain Bike Tourism Association (MBTA)

Northern BC Mountain Bike Recreation & Tourism Development Strategy

Executive Summary Brochure

British Columbia is the spiritual home for mountain biking with thousands of kilometers of trails and riding experiences that attract riders from around the world. Over the past several decades, the sport has grown from an exclusive and high-risk endeavor, practiced by a handful of extreme riders on illegal trails, to a recreational pastime enjoyed by people of all ages.

Northern BC and the regions within the Yellowhead Corridor represent a vast range of geography and a diversity of landscapes that present significant opportunities for outdoor recreation and adventure tourism. Within a distance 1,000km between Valemount and Terrace, the communities along the Yellowhead Highway are actively building and investing in trails and recreation developments that have the potential to establish the region as one of the top destinations for mountain biking in the world. Within a few hours of driving between each community, the region possesses a broad diversity and variety of landscapes from mountains and vast river valleys to expansive forests with stunning views, wildlife, solitude, as well as welcoming and friendly communities with dynamic cultures and rich histories.

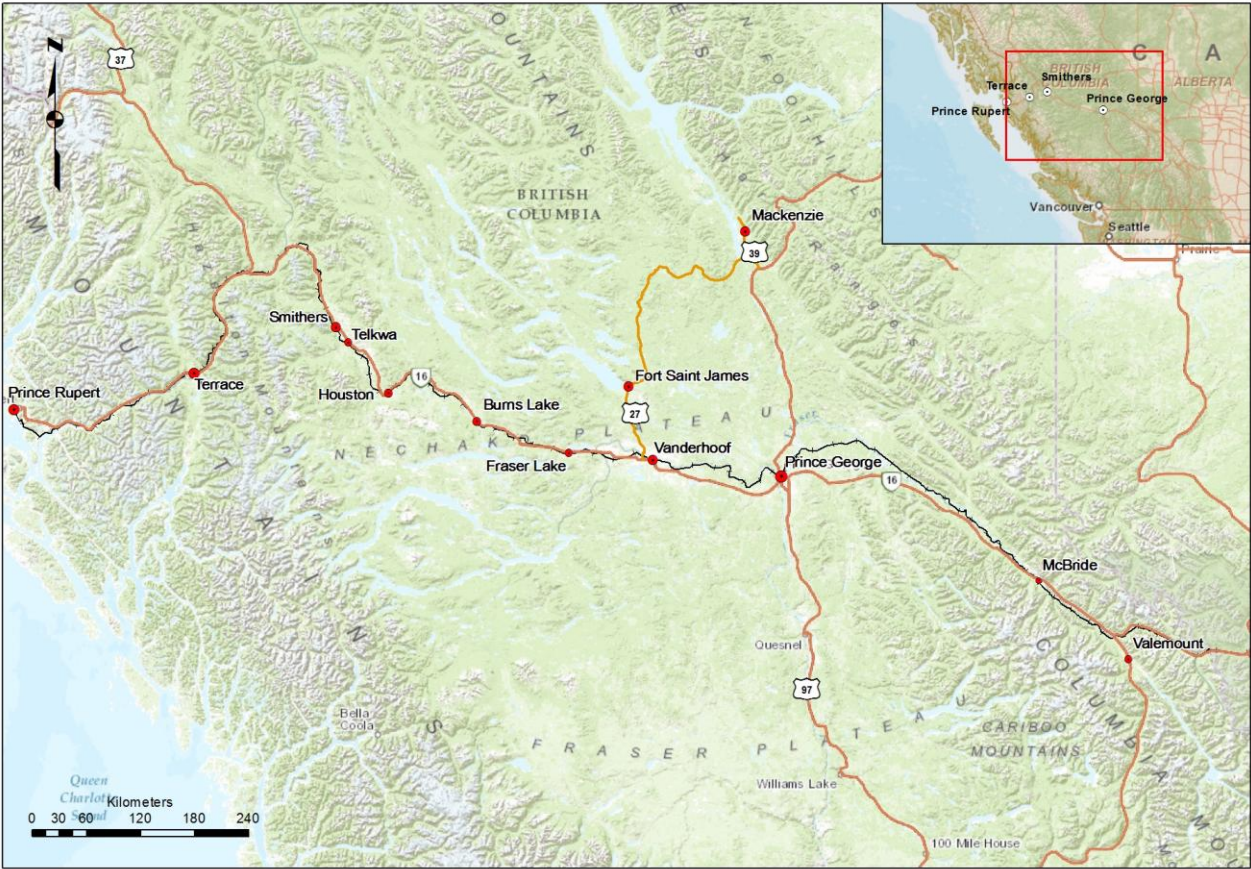
This report refers to mountain bike recreation and mountain bike tourism as two related yet distinct elements. Mountain bike recreation is the practice of engaging and participating in the sport of mountain biking and trail riding in its various physical forms. Mountain bike tourism relates to riders and participants who travel to areas outside their own community to participate in the sport as visitors.

The development of a robust and viable mountain bike recreation and tourism sector faces significant challenges within the Yellowhead Corridor and Northern BC. The region must compete with far more established communities and destinations throughout the province that have built up their infrastructure, and have developed strong brands as quality destinations. Many of these have effective marketing and promotional strategies that attract visitors from around the world.

The Northern BC Mountain Bike Recreation and Tourism Development Strategy was developed as a joint effort between the Western Canada Mountain Bike Tourism Association (MBTA), Northern BC Tourism, and the Regional Districts and communities across the Region. The objective was to explore and assess the viability for the communities along the Yellowhead Highway from Valemount to Terrace, to collaborate and promote the region as a destination for mountain bike recreation and tourism.

Northern BC has the potential to become a significant destination for mountain bike recreation and tourism. Mountain Bike Travellers are seeking opportunities and destinations that can provide a broad diversity and variety of riding experiences that the communities of northern BC can best provide through collaboration.

Northern BC Mountain Bike Recreation & Tourism Development Project Area



Next Steps

- A. **Regional Implementation Planning** - the MBTA would like to facilitate another visit to the region to meet with stakeholders and present the results and recommendations of the Strategy Report. These meetings would involve discussions and strategic planning for the implementation of the tourism strategy across the region.
- B. **Regional Branding & Marketing Strategy** - the MBTA will work with Northern BC Tourism to identify funding opportunities and develop a plan to undertake a series of workshops to develop a regional branding strategy as well as marketing strategies
- C. **Form a Regional Mtn bike tourism group** - following upon the implementation planning, MBTA and Northern BC Tourism will work with the interested communities to form a group that would endeavor to implement the strategy and begin planning activities for the 2015 season and beyond

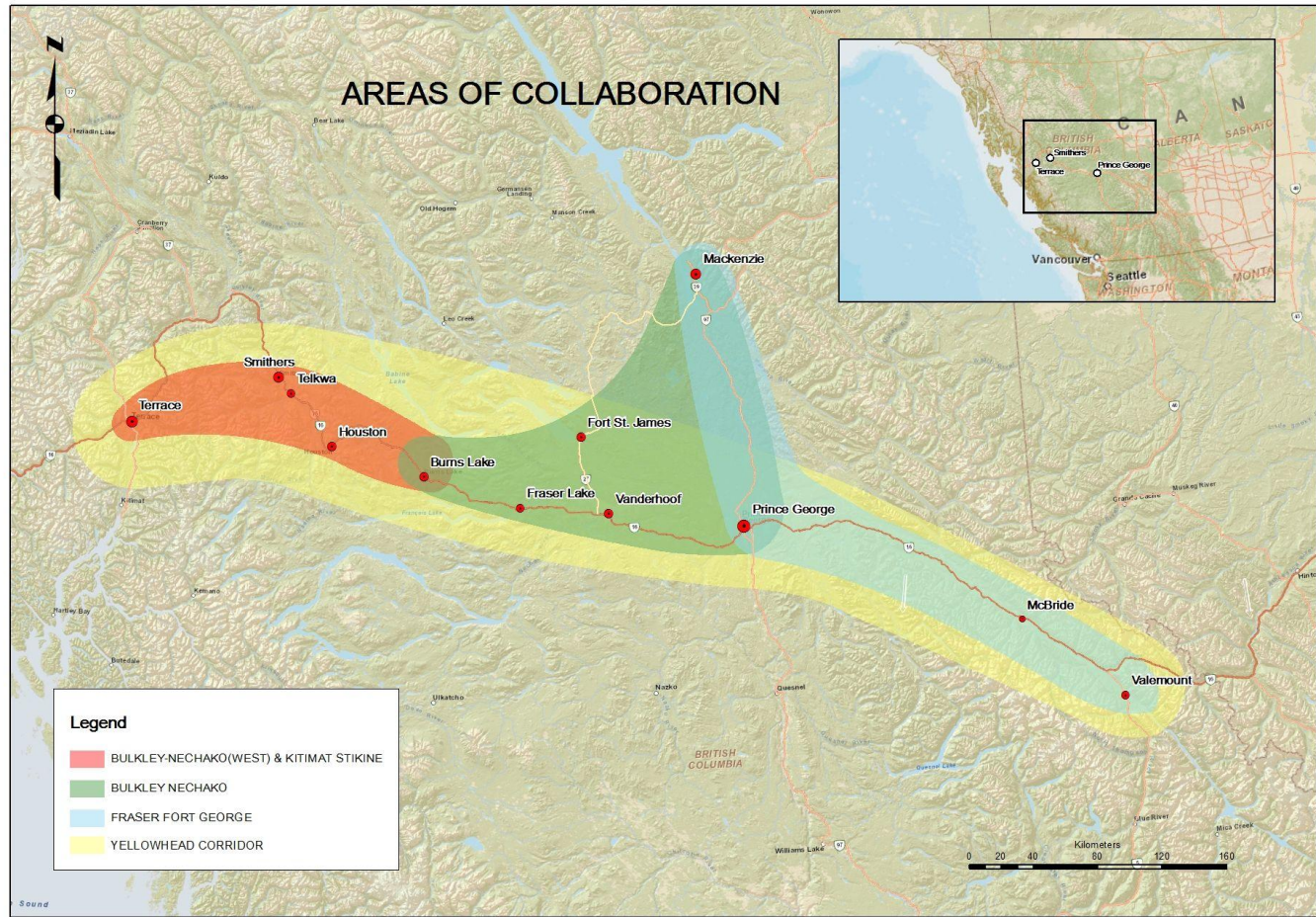
Levels of Collaboration

The Strategic Action Plans are divided into three categories representing different levels of development and collaboration:

Community Level – each individual community participating in the project, as well as any future communities that opt to join the collaborative effort and develop mountain bike recreation and tourism opportunities

Regional District Level – there are three Regional Districts that are participating in this initiative including the Regional District of Fraser Fort George, the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako, and the Regional District of Kitmat-Stikine

Regional Level - Yellowhead Corridor & Northern BC Tourism

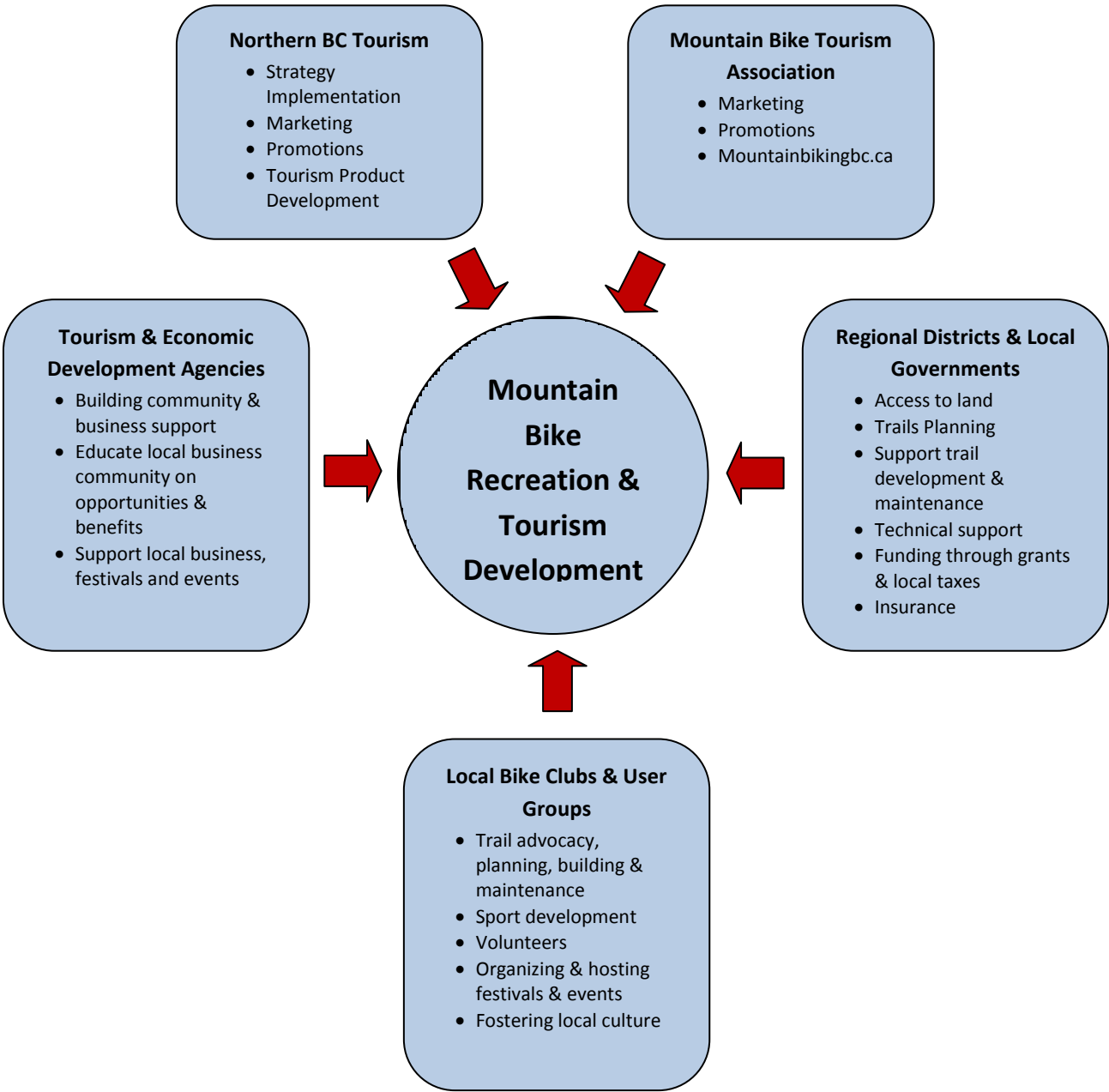


What is the mechanism? How will the strategy be implemented?

Successful and sustainable mountain bike recreation and tourism development is a community oriented and driven process involving community champions, individuals and groups who are passionate about the sport and committed to developing marketable tourism businesses and experiences. There are a number of key actors, catalysts and champions that can be involved in supporting and implementing the Northern BC Mountain Bike Tourism Strategy.

Implementation

The implementation of the strategy will necessitate each of the stakeholder groups outlined in the graph below collaborating and supporting the common goals of developing mountain bike recreation and tourism throughout Northern British Columbia



MOUNTAIN BIKE RECREATION & TOURISM DEVELOPMENT STRATEGIES

The following section outlines the strategic action plans for supporting the development of a robust and vibrant mountain bike recreation and tourism sector in the Yellowhead Corridor and throughout Northern British Columbia.

Goal Statements

Through the Northern BC Mountain Bike Tourism Initiative community engagement activities, the project team identified three overall goal statements to guide the development of mountain bike recreation and tourism in Northern BC.

Sense of Community & Mountain Bike Culture – Communities throughout the region will possess strong and flourishing sense of community and culture as destinations for mountain bike recreation and tourism

High Quality Trails & Riding Opportunities – Communities throughout the region will possess high quality trail networks that will support recreation and economic development

Awareness of Northern BC as Mountain Bike Destination – Northern BC will be known as a world-class mountain bike recreation and tourism destination



Summary of Development Strategies

The following table summarizes the key strategic actions with their recommended priority. Ultimately, consensus will be needed among the key stakeholders as to which strategies to address first based on available resources, local capacity and the logical sequence of events.

Primary Strategic Action Plan	Key Stakeholders
➤ Support the Growth of Mountain Bike Recreation	Community groups, local government
Regional Collaboration Strategies	
➤ Create a Regional Branding Strategy ➤ Create a Regional Trails & Mountain Tourism Group ➤ Coordinate Events & Festivals across the Region ➤ Provide trip itineraries and suggested circle routes ➤ Develop Regional Race Series & Events ➤ Develop & Implement a Regional Marketing Strategy	Tourism, ec dev agencies & community groups
Community Strategies	
➤ Build Capacity within Communities ➤ Establish Clear Visions & Planning for Trails & Mountain Bike Recreation ➤ Foster Mountain Bike Culture & Community ➤ Build Mutually Beneficial and Supportive Partnerships ➤ Develop Sustainable Mountain bike Trails & Supporting Infrastructure ➤ Support Local Business to Service & Cater to the Mountain bike Recreation & Tourism Market ➤ Ensure Trail Networks are Maintained ➤ Monitor, Evaluate & Report on the Social & Economic Impacts & Benefits	Community groups, municipal government agencies
Regional District Strategies	
➤ Trail Plans & Ensure Sustainable Access to Lands ➤ Regional Trail Coordinators ➤ Regional Trail Maintenance ➤ Financial Support & Fund-raising	District government agencies

Northern BC as a Mountain Bike Recreation & Tourism Destination

Awareness & Familiarity of Northern BC – There is a growing level of awareness for the Yellowhead Corridor and Northern BC as a mountain bike destination with Prince George, Burns Lake, Smithers & Terrace having the greatest awareness among riders from outside the region.

Impressions of Northern BC

Results from focus groups and mountain bike travellers surveys indicate there are a number of perceptions regarding northern BC as a mountain bike destination that need to be addressed. These include:

Lack of Trails! There is a perception that there are not enough trails or epic riding experiences to justify a trip to the region	Too Far! The perception that northern BC is too far of a drive to provide motivation to visit the region
Short Season! The perception is that the riding season is short and overlaps with the best times to ride in southern BC	No Information! The perception is that there is little information to be found about opportunities to ride in Northern BC
Isolated & Hard to Reach! The region is considered difficult to access and the perception of remoteness and isolation can be intimidating	Bugs! There is a strong perception that riding in the region would be an uncomfortable experience due to the prevalence of insects

Intention of Visiting Northern BC

As awareness of the region and the perceptions change, the intention of visiting northern BC increases. Providing appropriate information to key target markets has a high likelihood of increasing the number of visitors to the region.

Travel Motivations & Preferences

- The majority of mountain bike travellers are most likely to visit the region by car. They will consider other modes if there are convenient options and can ensure bike security.
- Are seeking information on trail loops, itineraries and circle routes

Sources of Information

- Mountain bike travellers consider recommendations by friends and reputation as most important when considering riding destinations, followed closely by mountain bike specific websites such as mountainbikingbc.ca or Pinkbike.
- Video and photography are considered important for understanding the character and type of riding available.
- Mountain bike travellers place little importance on general travel information provided by tourism organizations. ***Rather than target mountain bike travellers through generic tourism resources, the tourism industry is encouraged to work with mountain bike specific websites*** to promote their destination’s attributes.



Key Messages for Making Northern BC an Appealing Destination

The following outlines the key messages & elements that should be addressed in marketing and promotional efforts for the region:

Signature Trails & Recommended Rides (Loops)– these are key attractions for mountain bike travellers

Promote the diversity and variety of riding experiences – mountain bike travellers want a diversity of trails and riding experiences available

Provide Memorable Riding Experiences – mountain bike travellers are not just looking for places with the most trails; they are choosing to pursue excellent all-round riding experiences.

Promote riding experiences that link the region together as an interconnected product - presenting a series of trails, one or more in each community, that can be undertaken as a challenge could provide an opportunity for establishing northern BC as an appealing destination. This could involve establishing trip and riding itineraries with themes connected to riding preferences including trails in each community across the region.

Family Friendly Riding Experiences and Itineraries – providing information on riding experiences and trail loops that are suitable for families and young children will be important for appealing to this growing segment of the mountain bike recreation and tourism market

Northern BC as a place for exploration with friends and family – although mountain bike travellers are looking for detailed information, maintaining a sense of exploration of new places and riding experiences will be a key part of promoting and creating a sense of adventure

Character and culture of the region and each community – mountain bike travellers are attracted to communities that have a strong sense of culture & community. Vibrant and welcoming town centres, restaurants, friendly people, etc

Local “authentic” business – cafes, restaurants, pubs, heritage buildings, accommodations, etc. Mountain bike travellers want authentic experiences and to support local business (chain restaurants & franchises are not preferred options).

Bike shops and key supporting services –Mountain bike travellers also want to know that these services will be open and available beyond normal hours that are typical for smaller towns.

Relative distance of northern BC to other popular destinations – there is a strong perception that northern BC is too far of a drive. However, as awareness of offerings and riding opportunities increase compared with other locations, the attractiveness and perception of distance of the area also changes

Short driving distances between communities & growing riding opportunities – mountain bike travellers want a substantial level of riding experiences compared with the time it takes to travel to a destination. Highlighting the growing number of trails that are within short drives of each other throughout the region will be a key marketing strategy

No crowds & solitude – a key advantage for northern BC is the relatively low numbers of riders and solitude that can be experienced while riding. Juxtaposed against the more crowded urbanized experiences in other areas of the province could be very appealing to many travellers

Safety – while mountain bike travellers are typically self-sufficient and prefer to be self-guided, they will hire local guides for more adventurous pursuits into back country or high alpine areas

Long daylight hours – the opportunity to ride during the long daylight hours of the summer time can be an appealing attraction that sets northern BC apart from other destinations

Unique seasonal riding experiences – autumn colours and favourable weather can also set northern BC apart as a potential riding destination

Target Markets by Geographic Region

Local & Regional Market

The most immediate opportunity for mountain bike tourism will be from within the local riding community of each of the communities across the region.

- Local riders are already travelling between communities generating economic activity as a result
- Creating awareness of riding opportunities and attracting riders from across the region will be important for growing the sport locally and retaining visitors who might otherwise travel outside the region
- Encouraging and supporting new riders and demographics to enter the sport will also be an important part of enhancing local market opportunities

Inter-Regional & Provincial Market

- Neighbouring regions throughout the province are potential markets for visitors to northern British Columbia
- BC residents represent the largest travel segment in the region, providing approximately 61% of leisure travellers to Northern BC and 51% of total leisure travel spending within the region (source: Destination BC – Regional Tourism Profile, April 2013)
- The Mountain Bike Travelers Survey indicated a fairly strong likelihood of travelling to and visiting Northern BC for mountain bike recreation (17%)
- Northern BC, and the Yellowhead Corridor in particular, could attract significant numbers of riders from other regions of the province with the appropriate marketing and branding



Wooden Feature in Burns Lake

Interprovincial Market

- The largest provincial market for mountain biking in BC is from Alberta. Recent studies in BC communities have shown that the majority of Canadian mountain bike travellers from other provinces were from Alberta
- Studies (Summer 2011) indicate that proximity to major highway corridors connecting Alberta to BC can have a substantial impact on the number of mountain bike visitors
- Albertans also represents approximately 15% of website traffic to www.mountainbikingbc.ca
- There are growing numbers of mountain bike riders and travellers throughout Alberta, with substantial numbers visiting Jasper National Park for mountain biking

There is also a growing mountain bike recreation community in the Yukon Territory with both Whitehorse and Carcross developing into significant destinations. Anecdotal evidence indicates that mountain bike travellers from the Yukon are travelling south and visiting communities throughout the area for riding

US Market

- A 2006 Travel Activities and Motivations Study (TAMS) indicated that up to 135,000 U.S. visitors came to BC for the purpose of mountain biking
- There are significant barriers to attract these visitors to northern BC and the Yellowhead Corridor including a travel time, cost as well as the overall lack of awareness of the riding opportunities in the area
- There may be some visitors who would venture to northern BC with an enhanced awareness of riding opportunities, particularly from Washington and Alaska. Washington State is a growing mountain bike market with great interest in BC destinations
- There is also a general interest among many Americans to travel to Alaska which suggested there could be an opportunity to attract those who are mountain bikers to stop and stay longer in northern BC while on route.
- Alaskans also travel through the region when driving south via the Stewart-Cassiar Highway (Hwy 37), similarly they too could spend more time in the region if they become more aware of the mountain biking opportunities
- Visitors from both Washington and Alaska enter the region via the Alaska State Ferry service in Prince Rupert, with over 260,000 ferry passengers visiting the region in 2012 (Alaska State Ferry)

International Market

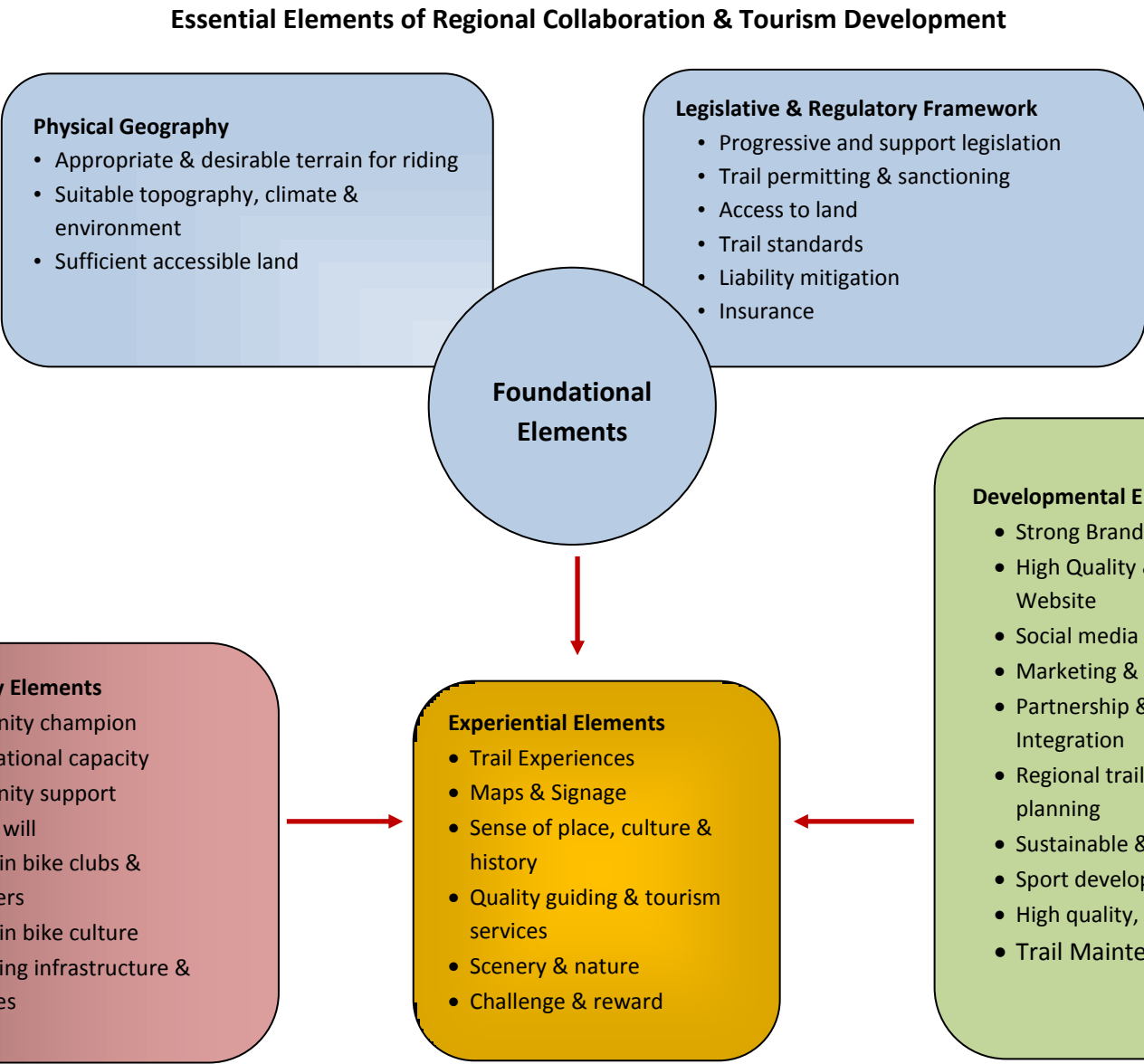
- There are a substantial number of international visitors who visit BC each year for mountain biking
- The barriers and challenges for this market of potential visitors to Northern BC are likely different from US visitors stemming more from issues around transportation as well as an overall lack of familiarity and awareness of the riding opportunities in the region
- Germany has the greatest interest in Northern BC among international visitors albeit only 2% share of visits to the region (source: Destination BC)
- German visitors are drawn to BC primarily for its beautiful natural scenery (source: Global Tourism Watch 2012 Germany Summary Report – CTC).
- Germany is also a thriving mountain bike nation with some of Europe's top mountain bike manufacturers and athletes and leads all European countries in terms of bicycle sales (European Bicycle Market & Industry Profile - 2013 Edition).
- Opportunities with European adventure travel or cycling media may be one way to develop the allure of adventure and new riding opportunities that may be highly attractive to this market.

Regional Collaboration

Communities in regions around the world are collaborating and creating successful models for promoting and encouraging the development of mountain bike recreation and tourism. A case study review indicates that regional collaboration along with strong branding and marketing, coupled with the development of high quality trails and infrastructure, has a high likelihood of resulting in increased rates of tourism and economic activity.

Regions that take a collaborative approach to development and marketing experience the following impacts:

- **Substantial growth in the numbers of riders counted on trails**
- **More visitors** – each of the regions/communities experienced increases in the number of visitors to their area
- **More economic activity** – each of the regions experienced increases in the revenues of local businesses with a particular increase in accommodations and service sector operations
- **More employment related to mountain biking and trails**
- **Increased total value of the mountain bike sector**
- **Greater participation in regional mountain bike events**



Summary of Case Study Review Comparative Analysis

Cariboo Chilcotin		Sea to Sky Corridor – Squamish		7stanes - Scotland	
Strategies	Outcomes	Strategies	Outcomes	Strategies	Outcomes
<div>➤ Collaboration between four communities</div> <div>➤ Providing a range of riding experiences</div> <div>➤ Regional Organization – Ride the Cariboo Consortium that provides coordination & marketing</div> <div>➤ Strong Brand – Ride the Cariboo</div> <div>➤ Provides itineraries and trail loops</div> <div>➤ Strategic ad campaigns in target markets</div> <div>➤ Promotional trips & contests</div> <div>➤ Encouraging new riders (women & youth)</div> <div>➤ Free shuttle services to trails for visitors</div>	<div>➤ 11.5% increase in economic activity since 2012</div> <div>➤ 30% increase in trail usage</div> <div>➤ 21% increase in visitor spending</div> <div>➤ 20% increase in jobs associated with mtn biking</div> <div>➤ Website receives up to 17,000 views monthly</div> <div>➤ 8% increase in activity for regional mtn bike businesses</div> <div>➤ Total value of mtn bike sector estimated to be over \$2.2 million annually</div>	<div>➤ Regional District has a trails coordinator that provides overall support & planning</div> <div>➤ Strong brand awareness</div> <div>➤ Multiple businesses promote Sea to Sky related events</div> <div>➤ Multiple signature & epic trails</div> <div>➤ Requisition tax based on property values provides funds for trail development & maintenance</div> <div>➤ Highly developed and vibrant mtn bike clubs and local culture</div> <div>➤ Numerous high profile events and races</div>	<div>➤ Rider traffic has quadrupled from 591 riders in 2006 to 2,600 in 2013 (not sure what this is referencing)</div> <div>➤ 75% of riders are non-residents</div> <div>➤ 85% on key signature trails</div> <div>➤ Conservative to moderate estimates indicate that between 25,000 and 37,500 riders visit Squamish over the course of a 26 weekend season</div> <div>➤ Mtn bike tourism is estimated to inject \$8 million into the local economy annually</div>	<div>➤ Collaboration between 7 communities</div> <div>➤ Trails designed for all riding levels and types</div> <div>➤ Strong central organization that coordinates development & marketing</div> <div>➤ Strong Brand – 7stanes captures history and culture</div> <div>➤ Provides quality maps & signage</div> <div>➤ Well-developed website</div> <div>➤ Provides trip planning, itineraries and loops (strong focus on families)</div> <div>➤ Strong focus on cross promotion of local businesses</div> <div>➤ Places a premium on encouraging local riding culture</div>	<div>➤ Visitors increased from 172K in 2004 to 400K in 2007</div> <div>➤ More people visiting from outside Scotland</div> <div>➤ Increasing number of families</div> <div>➤ Visitor awareness of trails has increased from 75% to 96%</div> <div>➤ Increase in overnight stays</div> <div>➤ Generates \$16.4 million (CAD) annually in economic activity</div> <div>➤ Generates more up to 211 jobs at regional level and 236 at the national level</div> <div>➤ 67% of business report increases and sales/occupancy as a result of trails</div>
Source: Economic Impact Assessment and Phase 2 Implementation Report (Fall 2012) Justin Calof, Executive Director – Cariboo Mountain Bike Consortium		Source: Economic Impact of Mountain Biking in Squamish – Executive Summary (January 3, 2014) SORCA		Source: 7 Stanes Phase 2 Evaluation Report for Forestry Commission Scotland (October 2007) EKOS Limited & Tourism Resources Company	