

CARTS President's Report 2016

Much of the focus of trail development in Central Alberta over the past year has been on rural linkages south of Red Deer and north of Lacombe as the TCT is essentially complete between Red Deer and Lacombe, thanks to the efforts of Lacombe County.

Congratulations to Phil Lodermeier and the staff and council of Lacombe County for the recent awarding of the Trail Blazer Award by Alberta TrailNet at their recent AGM.

Trans Canada Trail intends to declare that the trail is connected by the end of 2017 as part of the legacy of Canada's 150th birthday. For sections where trails have not been completed, roadways will be designated as TCT until actual trails can be built.

This past year, our meetings have been hosted by the following communities: the Town of Blackfalds for last year's AGM, the Town of Innisfail, the Town of Penhold, the community of Springbrook (Red Deer County), the Town of Sylvan Lake and the City of Red Deer for this year's AGM.

A revamping of the society website is a high priority for the coming year.

Progress Report:

Red Deer

Red Deer was one of the first communities in Alberta to embrace the Trans Canada Trail concept. It was also one of a handful of communities that was awarded a TCT pavilion, installed in August 2005 near Bower Ponds. Waskasoo Park consists of about 110 km of trails and has consistently been the pride and joy of the city's residents and visitors. Further trails are being constructed or planned along the future 20 Avenue corridor, 22 Street corridor, north of Highway 11A and the future Riverlands area.

Trans Canada Trail North of Red Deer

Red Deer to Blindman River

The section of trail that runs on the C & E Trail roadway between Highway 11A and Blindman River is partly in the city's jurisdiction and partly in Red Deer County's. It is considered to be a temporary trail as it is not up to a reasonable standard as yet until development occurs in the area. The city passed the North of Highway 11A Area Structure Plan in the spring of 2016 that includes a more permanent connecting trail. However, depending on the pace of development, that could be a few years down the road.

Blindman River to Lacombe

The Blindman River Bridge and the 2-km paved link to the edge of Blackfalds was completed in June 2010 by Lacombe County. Subsequently, the Town of Blackfalds completed much of its internal trail system that included a traffic control at Highway 597 and the only indoor portion of Trans Canada Trail through the new Abbey Centre opened in September 2014.

In the meantime, Lacombe County constructed the 8-km paved Blackfalds to Lacombe trail which opened in June 2013. Although it took a few years and there was considerable resistance to the trail, it

has been a resounding success with many of the objectors now praising the trail. Blackfalds completed the connection north to that trail in the fall 2015. This section of TCT is virtually complete.

Lacombe to Ponoka County

The City of Lacombe has been connecting more and more trail within its boundaries and has chosen a 1.9-km route to connect with the new 15.5-km Lacombe to Ponoka County trail which is expected to be under construction later this year by Lacombe County. This new rural trail received funding from Trans Canada Trail Foundation, Alberta TrailNet and the Alberta Community Partnership program.

Lacombe County to Ponoka

The Town of Ponoka has an ongoing program to build and upgrade its trail system. The Battle River Bridge was completed in 2009 with funding from Trans Canada Trail Foundation, the National Trails Coalition and Alberta TrailNet. A gravel trail that included equestrian use was built into Ponoka County in 2010. Discussion are under way to further the work to connect with the upcoming Lacombe to Ponoka County Trail and to maintain the existing trail.

Trans Canada Trail South of Red Deer

Red Deer to Springbrook

Red Deer County accepted on June 2, 2015 the Springbrook - Red Deer Trail Concept Plan as information. On December 8, Red Deer County Council approved a route partly based on cost and eligibility for Trans Canada Trail funding, The route chosen of the four outlined in the plan was virtually identical to the route registered with TCT several years earlier in October 2006. The 11-km route along Range Road 280 and Township Road 381 from the north edge of Springbrook to the 32nd Street interchange with Highway 2 is estimated to cost around \$3 million, of which Trans Canada Trail and Alberta TrailNet will fund 50% to a maximum of \$1.5 million. It was decided that the County would apply for the grants before making any further commitments. Once the grants were approved, County Council, at its June 7 meeting, deferred a decision on whether to proceed until its July 5 meeting in order to obtain further information on trail standard options and whether a proposed donation by a private individual for another trail could be shifted to the trail approved. A requirement of the grants is that the trail must be completed by September 30, 2017. The connecting section from the edge of Springbrook through the hamlet to the paved trail in the nature park area south of the hamlet is projected to be done in 2018, pending approval of funding in the 2018 budget. Therefore, the portion of trail completed in September 2017 would not be directly connected at either end until a later time.

Springbrook to Penhold

This section of trail is currently on hold until an agreement can be reached between Red Deer County and the Town of Penhold on timing and routing. The County informally approved the 3.6 km trail in July 2007 and formally approved it in March 2009. A 1-km section of trail south of Springbrook in the nature park was started in September 2009 and paved in October 2010. It was anticipated by the County at that time that the connection to Penhold would be completed in 2011. However progress was stalled when the Town of Penhold indicated it wasn't ready to make the connection within the newly-annexed area until there was development in that area. A connection plan was adopted by Penhold Council in March 2012 pending funding being available. The issue was somewhat complicated by the Highway 2A Twinning Study that suggested a commuter trail on the east side of the highway between Gasoline Alley and Penhold, a much more direct route and closer to Penhold amenities. However that trail could be

many years in the future and would require a pedestrian crossing on Highway 2A at Springbrook. Although the County has no immediate plan to expand the existing portion of trail, it is hoped that a way can be found to connect the trail in 2017.

Penhold to Innisfail

After a number of meetings, a committee consisting of representatives of Red Deer County, Town of Penhold, Town of Innisfail, Town of Bowden, Alberta TrailNet, CARTS and the study consultant, Red Deer County and the other municipalities accepted the Penhold to Bowden Regional Trail Concept Plan during the summer and fall of 2013 as information. Bowden decided to not participate further until the section between Penhold and Innisfail is built. Three potential routes were identified. Further work will need to be done including funding options and a decision on routing before the trail will be constructed. The County prefers that Innisfail take the lead on any further progress as it did in the original study.

Future Trail Linkage Red Deer to Sylvan Lake

The idea of a regional trail linking Red Deer and Sylvan Lake on the former Alberta Central Railway (operated by Canadian Pacific Railway) has been discussed since its abandonment in 1983 (the last train being in 1981). The focal point of the trail would be the 633-metre (2100-foot) Mintlaw Trestle (the 3rd longest railway bridge of its type in Western Canada and the longest abandoned steel trestle) built in 1912 over the Red Deer River about 6 km southwest of Red Deer. In the mid-1990s, some current members of CARTS visited each landowner along the route with varying degrees of acceptance. In 2009, Red Deer County bought the bridge and right of way for \$1. Since that time the County has spent between \$500,000 to \$750,000 on maintenance and repairs.

In April 2012, Red Deer County accepted the Mintlaw Bridge Public Access and Preservation Strategy as information. Council indicated that it would be open to proposals for a regional trail using the bridge but the County was not in a position to fund it. It was also noted that there is considerable opposition from some adjoining landowners to the trail that would need to be overcome. The study indicated that it would cost about \$3 million to rehabilitate the bridge to trail standard.

The Mintlaw trail linkage has been included in the County's award-winning Open Spaces Master Plan, a result of the County's 2003 Community Needs Assessment that determined that trails, parks and open spaces were the top desired recreational amenities for residents in the county. The bridge and right of way have also been identified in the inter-municipal Red Deer River Valley and Tributaries Park Concept Plan (July 2010).

It was also one of the four options included in the Springbrook - Red Deer Trail Concept Plan completed in June 2015. That study indicated that a trail from the Highway 2 bridge along the river and Sylvan Creek to the west side of the Mintlaw Bridge to Springbrook would cost in the neighbourhood of \$8 million.

Alberta Transportation has also considered commuter trails along Highways 11 and 11A.

The Town of Sylvan Lake has done considerable trail development within the municipality in recent years including a major promenade along the lake shore and a large portion of the Alberta Central Railway abandoned right of way.

Paul Pettypiece, President 2015-16

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