
What's Next for Dawson Creek?

We asked you to help build the future of Dawson Creek by attending a public open house regarding strategies for tourism and heritage attractions and downtown improvements. Here's what you told us.

Why did we ask for your help?

Over the past year, Tourism Dawson Creek and the Northern Rockies Alaska Highway Tourism Association, with support from the City of Dawson Creek, worked together to create a concept for strengthening our community by enhancing tourism, putting a new face on our downtown and strengthening ties along the Alaska Highway.

A consultant team was hired to help us create the concept: they held a number of workshops with interested business owners and residents, conducted an economic analysis of our attractions and developed a Communications Plan to guide enhancement of tourism and heritage attractions, and downtown revitalization. Then it was time to ask you: is this where you see Dawson Creek going?

The Open House

On March 20, 2006, we held a community open house to get your feedback. Over 150 people attended. Attendees filled in comment forms, wrote their remarks on flip charts and talked to the planning team about their concerns. We received additional comments from others who were not able to attend. Thank you to everyone who responded.

The Questionnaire

We asked a number of questions about four proposed strategies:

- **Alaska Highway Corridor Concept:** a strategy for distributing highway stories between communities, consistent with a larger vision of the significance of the Alaska Highway.
- **Thematic Strategy for Dawson Creek:** aims to enhance community pride and help bring a strong sense of identity for our community by building on and strengthening the idea that Dawson Creek is "Mile 0". This, in turn, creates a seamless visitor experience, which will lead to longer stays.
- **Downtown Revitalization:** a strategy to enhance the overall appeal of the downtown area as a pedestrian-friendly environment for both residents and visitors to Dawson Creek.
- **Alaska Highway House:** a proposed facility in Dawson Creek that will interpret the history of the Alaska Highway.

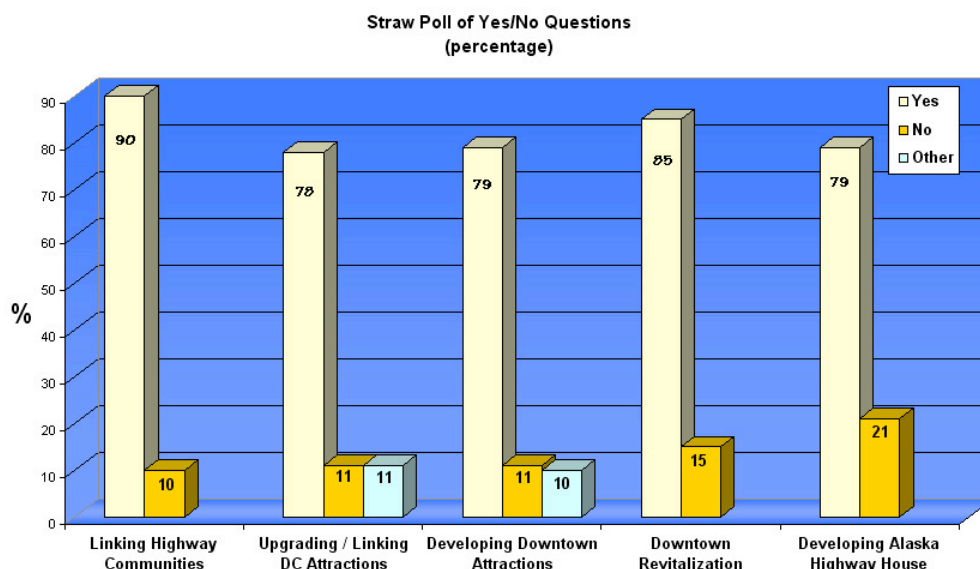
Sixty-eight participants filled in the questionnaires. These forms have been analyzed to assist us in determining which elements of the strategies should proceed on the basis of public support; which requires further conceptual development; and which requires a comprehensive review, changes or abandonment.

What You Said

Overall Support

In the questionnaire, all of the strategies were introduced and framed as questions requiring a yes or no answer followed by opportunities to explain your answer. The yes/no questions, i.e. "Do you support...", were the easiest to chart and they provide an informal assessment of statistical significance, i.e. 95% margin of error. Note that these values are based on the assumption of an unbiased sampling—a condition that cannot be easily proven. For this reason, we term these questions a "straw poll": an unofficial vote taken to determine general opinions on some issue.

All of the major strategies received clear support from the public in terms of votes.



Alaska Highway Corridor Concept

This strategy received a high level of support. You agreed that the Alaska Highway is important to Dawson Creek and creating linkages with other communities along the highway will be beneficial.

What you had to say:

"If everyone works together to make the whole journey along the Alaska Highway memorable, it will bring more travellers."

"As each community has different offerings, it provides an opportunity for the visitors to see/take part in a variety of options. It's better to promote the big picture rather than work in isolation."

Thematic Strategy for Dawson Creek

The idea of upgrading and linking heritage and tourism attractions in Dawson Creek was very well received and many saw it as an obvious benefit to tourism. A strong majority favoured the idea of a number of attractions close enough together to constitute a significant draw.

What you said:

"I think it's much needed."

"Take a theme (identify) that we become well known as. It seems a natural process to me."

"I don't think the parking is great enough to add more attractions at the N.A.R. Park."

Downtown Revitalization

The majority of respondents were in support of an attractive and pedestrian-friendly downtown core, but there was lots of debate about how best to achieve this. Three options for street design were presented with no clear "winner". There were, however, favourite components of the options: pedestrian benefits and improved store façades. The least favourite components of the options were those that resulted in narrower streets: medians and parallel parking.

"Do not want widened sidewalks and bicycle paths on the street. Want the streets left wide for traffic movement."

"I really like the consistent store frontage idea, and the added landscaping."

We asked how you would like to see improvements funded: the majority voted for tax breaks or incentives for businesses and agencies participating in the improvements or programs, or a combination of tax breaks and incentives, direct funding from the City, the Province or Federal agencies, and a business improvement tax where local businesses pay a special levy for downtown area improvements.

Alaska Highway House

The majority of respondents were in support of a new Dawson Creek attraction that focuses on Alaska Highway history. When asked why, many were in favour of it as a way of encouraging tourism and an essential place to tell the history of the highway; "It is important to the history of Dawson Creek and the youth who are growing up in the area, of course it should be a great tourist attraction also."

There was support for the proposed themes and stories. Respondents also had some important additions and comments: "More emphasis should be on our pioneers and the farming industry" and "Work in conjunction with Pioneer Village—don't duplicate."

Most respondents supported linking the Alaska Highway House with other facilities, e.g., "It is all about history and a link between these facilities would give visitors a real feel for what-when-how and why Dawson Creek exists."

Where to locate the Alaska Highway House? There was no clear "winner" amongst the choices, with similar support for a downtown location, the old post office building and N.A.R. Park.

What's Next?

The strong public support received leads to additional development of these strategies. Due to the different nature of the strategies, each will move forward at its own appropriate pace. At key intervals, where important decisions must be made, the public will again be brought directly into the process.

Alaska Highway Corridor Concept: Discussions among Alaska Highway communities have led to cooperative initiatives, including a memorandum of understanding among 13 communities along the highway, including Dawson Creek, who have agreed to "work cooperatively to recognize the Alaska Highway as a Living Museum". There are also plans to adapt the framework of the American Scenic Byways Program to develop a corridor management plan. Any further thematic planning in Dawson Creek will be done with these initiatives in mind.

Thematic Strategy for Dawson Creek: Given the strong support for this strategy, we will move forward to refine it in a Master Plan. This will include consultation with all of the attractions in Dawson Creek. There are a number of questions to answer: what resources do they have, what are their needs, what stories are they telling and how will they play a role in the overall thematic strategy? Once complete, Dawson Creek attractions will have a blueprint for upgrades, changes and additions: some can be implemented right away and others can be made over time as funding allows.

Downtown Revitalization: We received a clear message from many respondents: let's start on the road to revitalization! The specifics of street options, however, require a careful review. Dawson Creek residents do not want to sacrifice angle parking for wider sidewalks, but they do want to see improved façades and a more pedestrian-friendly downtown.

Our next step will be to revise the street design to incorporate these changes and then present a new design to City Council, downtown merchants and Dawson Creek residents. This design will include a façade redevelopment plan and building concept drawings, plus specific recommendations for items like signage and colour schemes. It will also include recommendations for phasing: some improvements can be made in the near future, while others need to be planned for in the coming years.

Alaska Highway House: The next step for the Alaska Highway House is to fit it into the Master Plan for Dawson Creek. This work will answer many outstanding questions: where should the facility be located and what themes and stories are appropriate to explore there. Once the Master Plan is complete, the design can be moved forward.

Thanks Again for Your Participation

We appreciate your comments. We'll keep in touch as we go forward with a Master Plan and a revised Downtown Revitalization Plan. If you have any comments or questions, or if you'd like a copy of the Communications Plan, the Public Open House Comment Forms Analysis or the verbatim open house comments, please go to the Tourism Dawson Creek website (www.tourismdawsoncreek.com) or contact Dustin Bodnaryk at Tourism Dawson Creek by phone 250-782-4714 or email dustin@tourismdawsoncreek.com.