

2021-01 Request for Proposal

Project: Beachburg Rail Trail Feasibility Study and Business Plan
Issued By: Discovery Routes Trails Organization in partnership with Near North Trails Association
Date Issued: February 23, 2021

Background/ Context

In the late 90's, CN decommissioned a stretch of rail known as the Beachburg Subdivision between Algonquin Park and the Township of East Ferris in Northern Ontario. Following a number of public and private attempts to acquire the property, the Trans Canada Trail Foundation (TCT) was gifted 'beneficial ownership' of the corridor in 2000 for the purpose of developing a recreational trail. While TCT's intent was always to transfer the property to a local, public sector agency a number of challenges stalled the legal transfer of title. As an interim solution to protect the integrity of the infrastructure, TCT gave access through a lease agreement to Discovery Routes and two local snowmobile clubs. Under this lease agreement, the snowmobile clubs have invested significantly in infrastructure improvements on the west end of the corridor including bridge upgrades and surface treatments to develop a primary trail in the provincial snowmobile network. In addition to the infrastructure investments, the snowmobile club contributes over \$10,000 annually in voluntary and financial resources to operate and maintain the trail. The trail forms an integral part of the popular RAP Tour, a 3-5 day snowmobile tour around Algonquin Park that receives greater ridership than any other snowmobile tour in the province. See Appendix 1 for a map of the rail trail and regional trails network.

Over the years, no formal action has been taken to secure the rail trail beyond the lease agreement with TCT in 2000. It has always been TCT's intent to transfer ownership to a local trails organization and divest of all their land holdings across Canada. However, distinct property rights and obligations from a liability perspective have never been fully understood as they relate to the rail trail and no such transfer has been possible. To compound the urgency, the Ontario Federation of Snowmobile Clubs (OFSC) has been forced to close trails where unauthorized use in the non-operating months exposes the organization to liability as is the case with the rail trail.

Project

Discovery Routes in partnership with the Near North Trail Association requires the services of a consultant to undertake a feasibility study that will explore possible trail ownership and management options, examine liability concerns and investigate the costs of expanding the trail to a four-season tourist attraction. Based on recommendations of the feasibility study, the consultant will develop a business plan to ensure that the trail remains financially viable in the long-term, leads to private sector investments in services supporting the outdoor tourism market and meets regional and provincial tourism goals.

Deliverables

The feasibility study will investigate alternative trail management scenarios that include:

- 1- Continued use as a snowmobile trail only with no summer use;
- 2- four-season trail supporting motorized and non-motorized use in the summer months and expanded winter use of the trail to non-motorized activities;
- 3- four-season trail supporting non-motorized uses year-round and motorized use (snowmobile) in the winter.

For **each of the identified trail management scenarios**, the feasibility study will clearly outline the following:

- **Business case** that identifies existing and potential local, regional and provincial tourism and economic impacts of the trail.
- **Market assessment** to determine viability of the rail trail in the marketplace considering travel behaviour changes resulting from COVID-19, and the increased demand for the types of activities supported by the trail. Regional trail connections including The Great Trail of Canada (Trans Canada Trail), Voyageur Cycling Route and Snowmobile RAP Tour must be considered in the market assessment. Special attention will be made to investigate the **connection to Algonquin Park** and determine viability of opening access to the park for non-motorized trail uses.
- **Ownership options** considering both public and private partnerships. In 2000 TCT was gifted 'beneficial ownership' of the rail corridor. The consultant will be required to provide a summation of what this means legally and recommend actions to secure the property beyond beneficial ownership.
- A **property transfer agreement** will be prepared by TCT. The consultant will be required to facilitate this process, review and recommend changes in consultation with a lawyer specializing in real estate as retained by project partners.
- Outline **liability and risk** management requirements for landowner(s) and trail operator/ manager(s) for all trail management scenarios. This process will also include an **assessment of environmental risks** associated with the previous land use. This item will also require legal counsel that has been retained by project partners.
- A high-level estimate of **infrastructure costs** to upgrade the rail trail to four-season use. Project partners will provide contacts to advise on similar trail infrastructure projects in other jurisdictions.
- Estimate of expenses to **operate and maintain** all trail management scenarios. Project partners will provide contacts to advise on similar trails operating in the region.

Based on the findings of the feasibility study, a business plan will be developed for the most viable trail management scenario as approved by project stakeholders. The business plan will manage identified risks so that the trail will remain viable over the long-term and achieve the tourism objectives of increased visitation and visitor spending, and increased private sector investments.

Specifically, the business plan will:

- Outline a **capital improvement plan** for infrastructure.
- Outline a **revenue generation model** for trail operating expenses and maintenance that ensures the financial sustainability taking into account the financial realities of regional trail management organizations and does not create a dependency of government funding.
- Propose **stakeholder and partnership agreements** that clearly outline all trail responsibilities.
- Present an **exit plan** in case of revenue shortfalls.
- Outline actions needed to encourage **private sector investments** and support local businesses and regional development.
- Determine metrics to **measure return on investment**.

List of Resources Available to Consultant:

Beachburg Subdivision Appraisal Documents prepared by CN (1999)

Beachburg Subdivision Site Plans prepared by CN (1999)

Transfer Agreement between TCT and CN (2000)

Economic Impact of Snowmobiling in Ontario 2018-19, Harry Cummings & Associates (2019)

Snowmobiling and Physical Activity, CCSO

Trekking Our Trails; The Benefits and Significance of Canada's Trail System, Conference Board of Canada (2020)

Other various resources related to the decommissioned rail corridor and acquisition attempts from late 90's including assessment of abandoned rail line through Algonquin Park

Successful candidate will be provided with contacts at CN and TCT.

Qualifications

Preference will be given to proponents who have demonstrated:

- Experience preparing feasibility studies and business planning
- Clear understanding and knowledge of economic development issues as well as public and private sector stakeholders in Northern Ontario
- Knowledge of provincial and federal legislation as it relates to trails liability and or former rail property

Proposal Requirements

To be considered, proposals must include the following:

- Demonstration of leadership and knowledge in developing business plans
- Experience working with multiple partners
- Detailed timeline and project schedule with a clearly presented series of work to be undertaken, and associated deliverables
- Demonstration of qualifications, including a clear identification of the roles and experience of all team members. Identification of dedicated team lead
- Approach and methodology to deliver the deliverables of the project including demonstration of proponent's organizational ability to manage projects, timelines and work within a budget
- Detailed budget including project management fees, expenses and incidental charges that will be included. Provide payment terms
- Listing of similar projects completed, including summary of deliverables
- A minimum of two references from past engagements that are relatable to business planning for multiple partners within the tourism sector

Conflict of Interest

We reserve the right to disqualify any submission due to a conflict of interest.

Each proponent must disclose any actual or potential conflict that may be occurring at time of bid, or may occur during time of project.

If a vendor fails to disclose an actual or potential conflict or where such a conflict cannot be resolved, we have the right to terminate the contract.

Evaluation Criteria

The proposal will evaluate submitted proposals based on the following criteria:

Comprehension of project	= 40 points
Approach and methodology	= 30 points
Qualifications including experience	= 20 points
Detailed budget	= 10 points

Project Budget and Schedule

The maximum level of effort will be \$13,500 plus HST for completion of the Feasibility Study and Business Plan.

Any legal fees incurred as a result of the project deliverables must be approved by project stakeholders in advance and will be billed to the project by the consultant in addition the approved budget of \$13,500.

An initial project report will be delivered to project stakeholders on or before March 31, 2021. The deadline for completion and delivery of a final report to the project stakeholders is **July 31, 2021**.

Questions

Only questions related specifically to this Request for Proposal will be considered.

Questions must be sent by email to projects@discoveryroutes.ca no later than **March 4, 2021**.

All bidders asking questions will be provided answers and confidentiality of bidders will be maintained. All questions will be responded to within two full working days from the inquiry.

Proposal Submission

One electronic copy (PDF Format) of the proposal in English must be received by confirmed email at projects@discoveryroutes.ca no later than **March 9, 2021 at 4:30PM EST**. For ease of distribution please ensure proposals do not exceed 5MB.

The subject line must state "Proposal for Beachburg Rail Trail".

All submissions will become the property of Discovery Routes Trails Organization and Near North Trails Association. Discovery Routes and its stakeholders will not be liable for any costs of preparation of proposals.

Late or faxed submissions will not be accepted under any circumstances.

Reserved Rights

Discovery Routes Trails Organization reserves the right to cancel this project at any time, for any reason without compensation to anyone. Discovery Routes Trails Organization and project partners are under no obligation to award a contract. Discovery Routes Trails Organization reserves the right to reject any or all proposals. Discovery Routes Trails Organization is not obligated to accept the lowest bidding proposal.

Project Supporters



BY



APPENDIX 1

