

Fundy Trail Parkway close to reality

Published Wednesday January 14th, 2009

\$20-million investment needed to finish coastal link in three years

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FREDERICTON - With the most rugged terrain resting in their rear view mirror, the checkered flag is in sight for the trailblazers who have spent decades working to make the stunning Fundy Trail Parkway a reality.

Indeed, the president of the Fundy Trail Development Authority says the second and final phase of the spectacularly scenic coastal link between St. Stephen and Sackville can be started and completed within three years.

"We'll get there, and it will be a lot shorter time than we have been used to," said Frank Wilson, an engineer involved with the project.

Wilson said it will cost about \$20 million to link the end of first project's first phase near the Big Salmon River to the western entrance of Fundy National Park, through Alma, but the more than 30 km path will be much easier to tame.

"We are getting away from the river and a little bit further back from the coast. We are working through better materials, we're not going to have to really drill rock, so it's a much better terrain."

The Fundy Trail Parkway consists of a two-lane road for cars and trails for hikers and cyclists. It runs along a coastline which features views of the Bay of Fundy, red sandstone cliffs, waterfalls and secluded beaches.

Wilson said yesterday that the final phase will cost the same amount as the construction of the first phase, despite the fact that there is a longer distance to cover.

The plans and designs of the second phase are already complete, so all that is needed to begin the remaining work is a commitment of government funding from Ottawa and Fredericton.

"We have it all designed, so it is very quick to go," said Wilson.

With both governments pledging to stimulate the economy through massive investments in infrastructure, the timing could be perfect to start the final job in the near future.

The big talk regarding infrastructure spending hasn't been lost on Wilson and others involved in the project. They have been in talks with various government officials.

"I can assure you that we are following that quite closely. We're talking," said Wilson.

In a presentation made to the New Brunswick Roadbuilders Association yesterday at a Fredericton Hotel, Wilson stated that the Moncton area would receive the greatest benefit from tourism spinoffs.

"Moncton will be a major access point to the trail, and it shows a lot of economic benefits because the Fundy Trail then combines with Hopewell Cape Rocks, Fundy Park, and the result of all of them together increases the financial benefits."

Wilson said the parkway will generate almost \$10 million in overnight accommodations annually in Metro Moncton once it has been completed, and marketed, for 10 years.

The annual impact in overnight accommodations alone is estimated at \$20 million for the entire region.

Wilson assured that all the complicated digging, draining, grading, and engineering of the parkway will ensure every last detail blends into the spectacular natural surroundings.

He said the final product will go beyond rivaling Cape Breton's Cabot Trail.

"The Cabot Trail doesn't have anything like the landscaping that's been done here," said Wilson, noting an elegant timber guardrail that blends into its surroundings on the bridge that spans above the Big Salmon River.

"You saw that timber guardrail, we didn't put in an old steel guardrail. It blends in, so it's that quality that makes it a superior parkway. As I say, the Cabot Trail is just a road."