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## **Highway #1 Corridor Study - Executive Summary**

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**Catalogue Number: 11-36-7**

11-36-7

HIGHWAY #1 CORRIDOR STUDY

Executive Summary

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**For:** Department of Economic  
Development and Tourism  
**Date:** March, 1989

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## ABSTRACT

**This** study deals **with** increasing tourism along Highway #1 (from the Alberta border **to** the **junction to Highway #7**). **Locations to** be upgraded and an outline of **interpretive** messages **to** be introduced to tourists are outlined **in** the executive summary and detailed **in** the technical document.

The portion of highway **in this** study should not be considered **in** isolation from the other highways: **this programme is** only the **first step in** generating a **unified** system of interpretation and development. The **initial** thrust of the system should be **to** develop the Highway #1 - Highway #7 loop, anchored at either end **with** visitor orientation centres.

For **this** portion of the system, **main** orientation and welcoming **to** the **Territories** and **the** highway system **will** be done **at** the 60th Parallel Border **station** (which requires some upgrading). Secondary orientation and service information is suggested at private restaurants located near the highway junctions.

Three main core development areas are **identified:** the **Alexandra\Louise\Escarpment** corridor; the Lady **Evelyn\Kakisa** area and **Whittaker** Falls. **Main** service, interpretation and recreation **facilities** will be concentrated **in** these core zones.

To increase the attractiveness, comfort, and **accessibility** of **interlying** areas, **minor** upgrading of day use sites/highways **pull-offs** is recommended. An improved signage **programme** and **interpretive** programmed are suggested for **both** the highway and specific sites.

The **main** development **is** recommended over a four year **time** frame. The **preliminary** capital **estimate is** \$4,623,000. An increase **in O&M** will be required **including** at least 3 additional person years or contract staff.

An increase **in** non-resident tourist dollars **is** expected through opening new market segments (e.g. **families**), expanding **existing** markets (e.g. retired people) and increasing length of stay **in** the area. **In addition**, an increase to resident tourism **is** expect, as the corridor would provide a more attractive and safer **travel** product. A full **economic benefit study** would be required to **determine the increase in tourism dollars that could be expected.**

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The portion of the Mackenzie Highway included **in** the study extends from the Alberta Border north to the community of Enterprise, and west **to** the **junction in** the **Liard** Highways. **This is** a busy stretch of road by NWT standards; the **visitor** centre at the 60th Parallel welcomed over 12,000 travelers **in** 1987. The area could, however, host many more visitors. **With** the **view** to increasing tourism **in** the area, the Department of Economic Development and Tourism commissioned **this** study to:

- **to** ascertain locations that **might** be upgraded to become more attractive and accessible to tourists; and,
- **to** develop an outline of the interpretive messages that could be introduced and how they **might** be treated.

The study began **in** the summer of 1988. Over the next seven months, the consultants travelled **in** the study area, studying the highway and pertinent tourism **sites**, and conducting interviews **with** the **public** and government officials.

**This** stretch of highway contains many opportunities for increased tourism. The romantic **image** of the north can be dramatized. There could be many more **opportunities** to meet **with** northerners to **gain** a **personalized** vacation experience that 'cannot be achieved down south. The **minimal** number of routes available to travelers means the opportunity **exists** to 'choreograph" **visitor** experiences along the **entire** system.

These opportunities are not met without overcoming some constraints. Long distances between communities and attractions, biting insects and poor **signage** hamper the enjoyment of **travelling** the highway. The consultants, **in conjunction with** Government officials and community interest groups, studied these opportunities and constraints to develop a set of recommendations for development along the route. The seven **major** recommendations follow.

## Recommendations

### 1. Develop the Subarctic Highways as a System

The subarctic highways can be seen as a **series** of three branches (see Diagram 1) . The **first** branch takes travelers to Fort **Smith**; the second goes up to **Yellowknife**; and the **third** branch goes to the British Columbia border. All three branches are **linked** to the **first** leg of Highway #1 from the Alberta border to Enterprise. An interpretive plan for the area should take all three branches of the road network **into** account. The emphasis should be on developing a coherent set of themes and a **single** aesthetic approach for the **entire** area. In **this way information** available at any **point** along the system **will** carry complementary messages, couched in a coherent voice.

### 2. Develop Core Zones

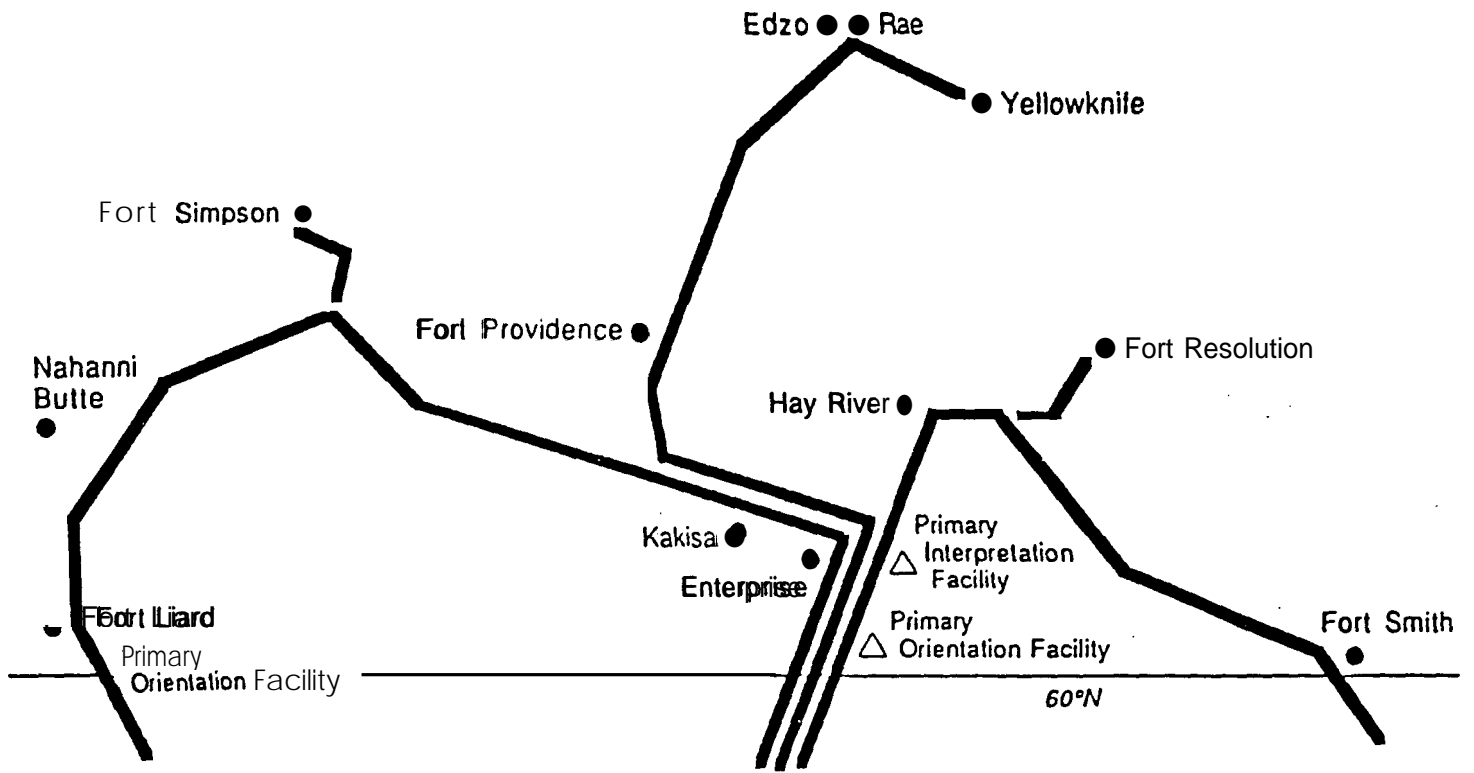
Rather than **trying** to develop **with** equal **weight** all the sites along the Highway, some areas deserve greater emphasis. Core zones, containing recreation, interpretation and services, would be developed around the most dramatic natural feature. Each of the core zones would be staffed and tourists would be encouraged to stay at least a day at the core zones (see Diagram 2).

Three core zones are recommended:

- **the** area incorporating Alexandra Falls, **Louise** Falls, Escarpment Creek, to the community of Enterprise;
- the area surrounding Lady Evelyn Falls, and **Kakisa** River Bridge, and around **Whittaker** Falls Park.

These core zones would be **within** named tourist "**sub regions**" e.g. , Waterfalls Tourist Zone; **Kakisa Tourist** Zone; and Samba Tu Tourist Zone. The core zones **will** act as destination **points** where tourists **will** be able to break up the lengthy journeys between communities. Highway **signage** would reflect the importance of the core zones, helping to create tourist "**sub region**" around these **main ideas**. For instance, instead of **signage giving** only mileage to the next communities, the core zones would be listed.

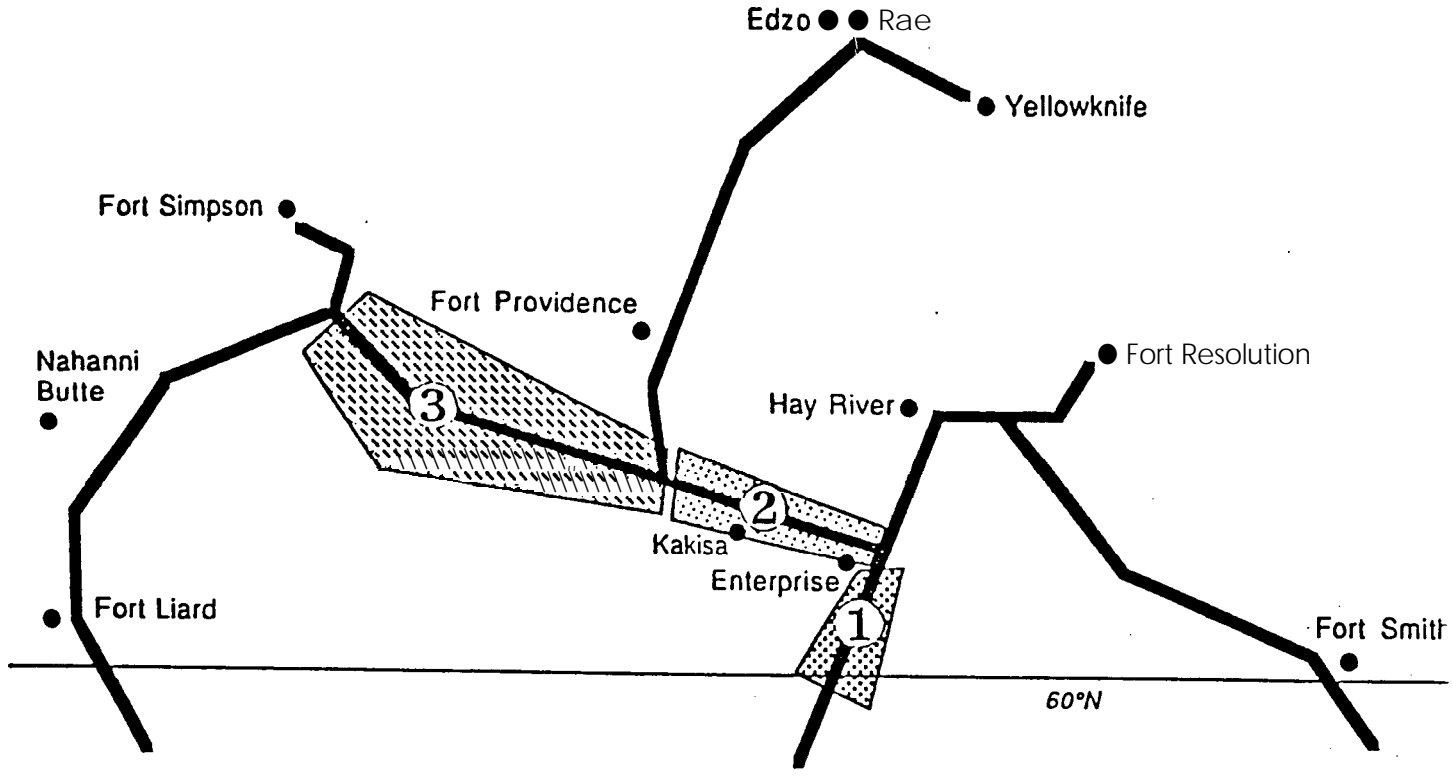
Two other levels of servicing are suggested: secondary orientation facilities and tertiary **sites**. Secondary **sites** would concentrate on orientation and service information at privately owned **sites**



**Highway #1 - The Highway System**

DIAGRAM 1

- 1 - ALEXANDRA/LOUI SE/ESCARPMENT
- 2 - LADY EVELYN FALLS
- 3 - WHITTAKER FALLS



Highway #1 - Core Zones

(see below) . The tertiary sites would be **similar** to the core zones by containing some elements of services, interpretation, recreation and orientation. However, the level of all these would be greatly reduced from core zones. For the most part, services would be **minimal** (e.g., outhouses, **litter** containers), and interpretation/orientation would be through **site signage** and off-site information rather than personalized staff programmed.

### 3. Orientation and Service Information

In addition to interpretive messages, visitors traveling along Highway #1 need two very specific kinds of assistance: **orientation information** to explain where they are; and **service information** explaining the condition of roads, ice bridge weather, availability of private services, etc. Some of this information can be in written and audio form. Two sets of facilities can most efficiently deliver this information to the public in a consistent manner (see Diagram 3).

#### a. *Secondary Orientation Facilities*

Along the Highway #1 corridor there are three places where the highways branch: at Enterprise, near the junction of Highway #1 and #3, and at Checkpoint. A restaurant **is** located near each of these points. These restaurants are **ideal** for **giving** travelers information about each of the adjacent highways. Moreover, because these restaurants are staffed year round they can be used to **give** out information about highway and weather conditions.

#### b. *Rest Stops and Day Use Areas (Tertiary Sites)*

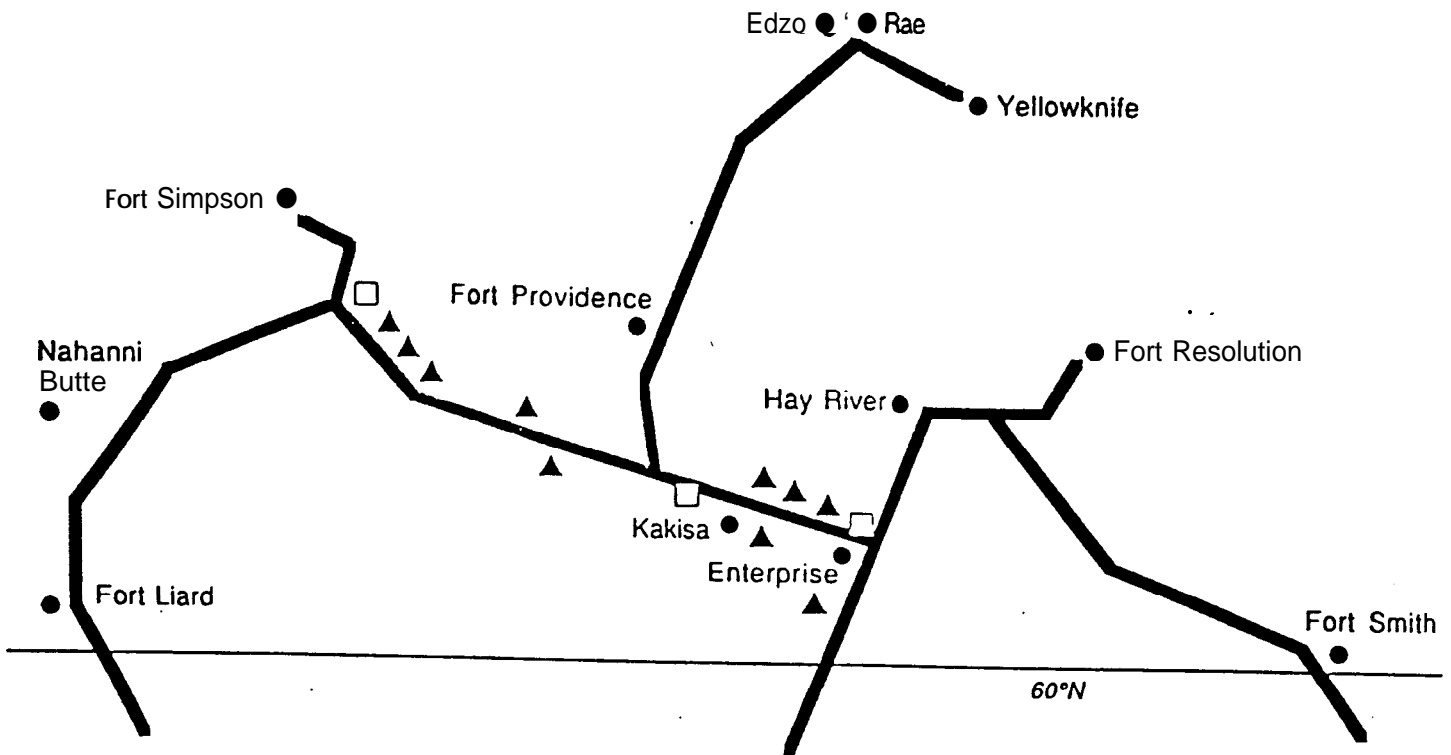
At the present time, there are eight Highway rest areas (serviced primarily by GNWT Highways) and several minor park facilities along the highway where travelers can stop for basic services. Though daily changing information (e.g., weather conditions) is not possible, these areas provide an excellent opportunity for ongoing "reinforcement" of orientation information; how far the traveller has come, what they will see ahead, and so on.

Although these facilities are developed **primarily** to meet a specific need for services, they can also play a role in making the tourist's visit to the North more enjoyable. A recreation/interpretation component can be added at each of the rest areas,



□ Secondary Orientation Facility (private)

▲ Tertiary Orientation/Interpretation/Service Facility



Highway #1 - Orientation and Service Facilities

encouraging the visitors to take a brief, interpreted walk around the immediate area.

#### 4. Consistent Highway Signage Programme

Many signage systems currently in use in the North employ a wood structure and muted colours so that signs that are "visually harmonious with the environment"

This signage approach was developed for southern provincial and national parks where an unobtrusive **signage programme** stood apart from the commercial **signage** along the highway. Such a subdued **signage programme** may not be the best alternative to employ in the Northwest Territories. It tends to blend **into** the landscape and can be obscured by the **twilight** of **winter** and the dust of the roads.

We would recommend a signage programme that has more punch, so that it stands out from the surrounding landscape and serves as a visual break from the monotony of the road. Such a programme would have the following features:

##### Visual Strength

It would employ strong colours, rather than blues and greys, so that the signs can be seen from a distance, particular in winter.

##### Visual Coherence

All of the signs, from small to large, for both interpretive and orientation functions, should be a part of the same modular system.

##### Combination of Materials

The system **might** combine a natural element, **like** wood, **with** more industrial elements **like** enamel signs and steel tubing, to **give** a contrast in texture and colour. **Signage** would then stand out from the surroundings.

In effect these signs, and the recreation and interpretive opportunities that surround them, will become an important visual break offered to tourists along Highway #1.

#### 5. Exhibit Strategy

There are **serious** constraints hampering the **exhibit** strategy for

this area, e.g., the lack of electricity and a long **winter** season in which the **exhibits** must be removed or stand unattended. However, technical and stylistic devices at the leading edge of the **design discipline** can be adapted to the North. It is recommended that the **exhibit** style for Highway #1 create an **image** of the North as modern and dynamic.

As with the **signage**, **exhibits** should employ contemporary materials, textures and **colours**. The graphic style should **aim** for a **high** standard of effectiveness: **clarity** of **line** and strength of **image**. Indoor and outdoor **signage** should have the same graphic styles for best **visual** coherence.

**Exhibits** should also exploit up to date technology when possible. Some example might be:

- short, snappy video programmed could replace the longer documentary style;
- computer games that use humour and illusion;
- hands on exhibits that allow the visitor to become a participant as well as an observer.

This will be balanced by **using existing** structures whenever possible. For example, rather than creating completely new structures for interpretation and orientation exhibits, **exhibits** will be placed in and around **existing** emergency shelters, park shelters, etc. whenever possible.

## 6. People and Programmed

The barriers to northern tourism, are considerable: long distances, unpaved roads, and a dearth of services. **Exhibitions** and **visitor** centres cannot overcome these barriers alone. Visitors will not travel these distances to see an **exhibit**, no matter how powerful. They travel to have adventures, to meet "**real northerners**".

In order to become a destination point for visitors to the North, the new tourism facilities must offer exciting programmed that will give visitors the adventures they crave. Some of the programmed should appeal particularly to Northwest Territories residents who may have decided on a northern holiday or local residents making a one day excursion to a park.

It is our recommendation that the exhibits for the new visitor facilities develop in conjunction with staffing and programming possibilities, so that they offer tourists to the North a comprehensive vacation package. Such an approach could take the

following form.

a. *Programme Variety*

A new interpretation centre in the Louise Falls area could offer short programmed for road tourists as well as longer programmed for people who come to the park specifically to spend several intensive days in the area. These programmed could tap a variety of audiences by offering special activities related to recreation, science and culture.

b. *Demonstrations*

The exhibit base for the visitor centre could be supported by demonstrations of northern skills: hunting, trapping, needlework and so on. These workshops could be run by local residents on a contract basis.

c. *Fireside Chats*

Facilities in the core zones could be provided with screened "pavilions" that could be used for evening interpretive talks by staff.

d. *Interpretive Walks*

Short interpretive walks can be integrated into each of the parks along the highway system. These parks could include experiences that are a little less protected than those in similar parks in the South. For example, the walk at Whittaker Falls might include a suspended cable bridge that lets visitors walk above the chasm.

These interpretive possibilities, developed in conjunction with local people with particular skills, would give tourists their dreamed of Northern adventure.

## 7. Enterprise as a Service Centre

Enterprise is the first community to greet many travelers arriving

into the NWT, as well as the last **community** to **visit** when leaving the Territories. As such, it is an important service **centre**, a role **which** should be strengthened and enhanced. For **instance**:

- a **focal display** should be considered, **centred** on a **transportation** theme. The former Tundra Steak House could be developed as a **small centre**, and the lot beside it used as both a **play area** and **display area** for various vehicles.
- if the **private** sector chooses to **build** a new **facility**, a restaurant looking out over the gorge (e.g., second floor of a **building**) should be encouraged.
- the **building** could include a rental/concession for the park (e.g., bicycles, canoes).
- a **visual upgrading** programme should be implemented for the **community**. For example, the "island" outside the gas station could be landscaped (a common feature of many gas stations).

## Site Development

Following from these recommendations, the consultants have made suggestion on development of individual sites. The sites recommended for development are:

### 1. Main Orientation Facility

60th Parallel Border Crossing (Visitor Centre and Campground)

### 2. Core Zones

Waterfalls Tourist Zone (Alexandra, Louise, Escarpment to Enterprise Corridor)

Kakisa Tourist Zone (McNallie Creek, Hart Tower, Lady Evelyn Falls, Kakisa River)

Sambaa Tu Tourist Zone (Whittaker Falls)

### 3. Secondary Orientation Facilities

Restaurants:

- Enterprise
- Pineview
- Checkpoint

### 4. Tertiary Sites

Swede Creek

**McNallie Creek**

Hart Tower

Pull off km 157.6

Pull off km 187

Pull-off km 222.6

Pull-off km 278.9

Wallace Creek

Pull-off km 331.6

**Ekali Lake**

Pull-off km 379

## 5. Enterprise

### Transport Display

Varying degrees of development are suggested for these sites. Plans for each are in Section 6 of the report. In addition, there are several sites listed in that section which may warrant some off-site interpretation (e.g. , through brochures, audio, car games etc.) .

## **Schedule**

There was a strong concern in the communities that this programme should be commenced as soon as possible, preferably in March, 1989. There was considerable interest was evident in the communities for the development recommendations, and a strong feeling that the corridor should be developed as one unit, not piece meal over several years. Most of the capital development recommended should be completed within three years.

If the capital development does take place, there will need to be a considerable increase in the operations and maintenance budget for this area. In particular, seasonal staff at the core areas is required.

The various roles and responsibilities of the Department of Economic Development and Tourism are listed in Section 7 of the report. The main items required include:

### Year 1

April 1989 - March 1990

- a. *60th Parallel*
  - Research and Planning
  - Design Begins
- b. *Alexandra/Louise to Enterprise Corridor*
  - Research and Planning
- c. *Whittaker Falls/Lady Evelyn Falls*
  - Research and Planning
  - Design
- d. *Secondary Sites*
  - Research and Planning
- e. *Tertiary Sites*
  - Research and Planning
- f. *Transport Display*
  - Research and Planning



## Year 2

April 1990 - March 1991

- a. *60th Parallel*
  - Design
  - Implementation (Building and Exhibit)
- b. *Alexandra/Louise to Enterprise Corridor*
  - Design
- c. *Whittaker Falls/Lady Evelyn*
  - Implementation begins
- d. *Secondary Sites*
  - Design
  - Implementation
- e. *Tertiary Sites*
  - Design
- f. *Transport Display*
  - Research and Planning Ends

## Year 3

April 1991 - March 1992

NOTE: A considerable number of events are planned over the summer of 1992. It is the celebration of the Alaska Highway Opening. Hay River will be having 100th anniversary celebrations. There will likely be considerable spin-off from this event; therefore, most of the work on the corridor should be completed by June, 1992.

- a. *60th Parallel*
  - Implementation Ends (Site Construction)
- b. *Alexandra/Louise*
  - Implementation Begins
- c. *Whittaker/Lady Evelyn*
  - Implementation Ends
- d. *Tertiary Site*
  - Implementation
- e. *Transport Display*
  - Design

## Year 4

April 1992 - March 1993

- a. *Alexandra/Louise*
  - Implementation (Stage II)
  - Design (Interpretive Centre)
- b. *Transport Display*
  - Implementation

## Future Years

- a. *Alexandra/Louise*
  - Implementation (Interpretive centre)
- b. All *Projects*
  - Evaluation

**This is** a **tight** though realistic schedule. The private sector/ community groups would definitely **like** to see **this** schedule compressed. However, a number of factors, e.g., lands **claims** negotiations, funding approval, could delay some of these projects. As the **initial** indications by the Fort Simpson Band and Regional Council members were **positive** regarding approval of lands, **it is** important that **this** be followed up as quickly as possible to enable the project to go ahead. A **critical** path chart has been provided as an appendix to the technical report, **which will aid in** keeping to, or accelerating, **this** implementation schedule.

## **Funding**

Capital funds have been identified by project and by year in the technical report. A summary of the yearly capital expenses follows:

<b>Year 1</b>	(April 1989 - March 1990)	\$ 323,000.
<b>Year 2</b>	(April 1990 - March 1991)	\$ 1,254,000.
<b>Year 3</b>	(April 1991 - March 1992)	\$ 1,459,000.
<b>Year 4</b>	(April 1992 - March 1993)	\$ 662,000.
<b>Future Years</b>		\$ 925,000.
<b>Total Capital Costs</b>		<b>\$ 4,623,000.</b>

The development of **this** corridor **will** also take considerable operations and maintenance funds and staff **time**. Regular and comprehensive co-ordination **with** other government departments will be necessary. A commitment of considerable staff **time**, at the regional and headquarters levels, of both the Departments of Economic Development and Tourism and **Public** Works and Highways must be **given**. The development of the corridor **will** require a large increase **in** the operations and maintenance budgets for the Fort Smith and Deh Cho regions. If **the** commitment is not made for an adequate O&M budget, the development plans must be downscaled, which would reduce the ability to increase tourism.