

Honourable Ravi Kahlon
Minister of Jobs and Economic Growth
Room 134, 501 Belleville Street
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Via email: JEDI.Minister@gov.bc.ca

RE: Infrastructure Projects Act - Expedited Environmental Assessments Tourism Considerations & Request for Meeting

Dear Minister Kahlon,

On behalf of the Tourism Industry Association of British Columbia (TIABC) and the more than 17,000 businesses we represent, thank you for advancing the Infrastructure Projects Act (IPA) and the Province's work to improve the efficiency and certainty of project approvals.

As the government modernizes its approach to infrastructure delivery and environmental assessment, it is essential that infrastructure projects which support tourism are also recognized as critical public infrastructure that strengthens BC communities, improves regional connectivity, and contributes to the Province's broader economic and social well-being.

Tourism generates \$23 billion in gross revenue and contributes nearly \$8 billion to provincial GDP annually; exceeding the GDP contributions of forestry, agriculture, fishing, mining, and oil gas. Tourism should be recognized and considered in the same way as these sectors within provincial economic and infrastructure planning. This is also consistent with the new *Look West: Tourism Sector Action Plan* that reinforces the sector's importance by setting a goal of doubling annual visitor spending to \$48 billion by 2036. Ensuring that investment-ready tourism projects can proceed with clarity and certainty will be critical to achieving that objective.

That need for greater clarity and confidence was also clearly expressed at the March 3, 2026 Adventure Tourism Investor Summit, a cross Ministerial meeting that included government, investors, and tourism operators. A clear message emerged: capital is ready to invest in BC's tourism sector, but greater certainty and consistency are needed to advance projects.

For that reason, tourism must be more intentionally considered within the Province's infrastructure and approvals framework. While the current structure is more closely aligned with traditional resource sectors, tourism also merits recognition as a priority economic sector. Unlike extractive industries, tourism creates recurring economic value without depleting the underlying resource and delivers broad benefits across urban, rural, remote, and Indigenous communities. It is therefore important that tourism infrastructure projects be meaningfully considered within the Infrastructure Projects Act. Without that recognition, the sector risks being overlooked in expedited approvals despite its significant economic, community, and

April 2026

sustainability benefits. Ensuring tourism is included in this framework would better align provincial policy with British Columbia's economic diversification, regional development, and long-term sustainability objectives.

Key Challenges Identified by the Tourism Sector

1. Tourism Not Clearly Included in the IPA Framework

This creates a gap between the Province's economic and tourism growth objectives and the regulatory systems intended to enable them. The expedited environmental assessment process is contingent on projects being designated as "provincially significant" under the IPA. Tourism infrastructure such as trails, gondolas, visitor access, and cultural sites is not explicitly included.

Impact:

- Tourism projects are unlikely to qualify for expedited pathways
- Industrial projects may proceed more quickly without equivalent consideration of tourism impacts
- The sector becomes structurally disadvantaged within BC's approval system

2. Approval Processes Do Not Reflect Tourism Business Reality

This creates a misalignment with expedited EA criteria that prioritize "advanced readiness," which many otherwise viable tourism projects are unable to demonstrate due to their scale and business model. For example, the proposed expedited EA framework prioritizes projects with:

- Significant upfront capital
- Advanced technical readiness
- Extensive early-stage work

Tourism operators are typically small and medium-sized businesses that:

- Build incrementally
- Operate within short seasonal windows
- Require timely approvals to remain viable

Impact:

- Projects are delayed beyond construction windows
- Investment is deferred or cancelled
- Existing operators struggle to reinvest and modernize

3. Cumulative Effects on Tourism Are Not Adequately Considered

Tourism is uniquely sensitive to cumulative impacts, including:

- Wildlife disruption

- Landscape and visual changes
- Loss of access
- Degradation of visitor experience

Expedited processes risk narrowing the scope of review. Without explicit consideration of tourism values, there is a risk that individually low-impact approvals may collectively degrade the environmental and experiential assets that underpin the Super, Natural British Columbia tourism brand.

Impact:

- Incremental degradation of tourism assets
- Erosion of BC's global brand as a nature-based destination
- Long-term economic loss from reduced visitor appeal

4. Connectivity and Access Are Overlooked as Tourism Infrastructure

Tourism depends on reliable and integrated transportation networks, including road, air, marine, and rail.

The proposed discontinuation of CN Rail service along the Squamish–Interior corridor highlights a broader gap in how BC defines and prioritizes infrastructure, particularly as it relates to tourism access and regional connectivity.

Impact:

- Reduced access to rural and remote destinations
- Increased pressure on highway systems
- Lost opportunity for passenger rail and low-carbon travel
- Constraints on regional tourism growth

This corridor represents not only a current connectivity asset, but a future opportunity for passenger rail, low-carbon travel, and tourism growth across multiple regions. Its potential loss underscores the need to consider tourism within system-wide infrastructure planning, not solely project-specific approvals. Taken together, these connectivity and recovery challenges reinforce the need to view tourism not as a secondary outcome of infrastructure decisions, but as a primary economic driver that requires equivalent consideration alongside other resource sectors.

5. Growing Risk to Tourism Investment and Business Viability

Operators across BC are already experiencing:

- Lengthy and uncertain permitting timelines
- Increasing regulatory complexity
- Barriers to new entrants

Impact:

- Up to 50% of small tourism businesses may be at risk over the next decade
- Capital investment is shifting to more predictable jurisdictions
- Rural and Indigenous economic opportunities are reduced

Recommendations for Government Consideration

A. Include Tourism in IPA Eligibility Criteria

Amend the IPA eligibility framework to explicitly recognize tourism infrastructure and destination development projects as provincially significant.

B. Recognize Tourism as a Renewable Resource Sector

Position tourism alongside other resource sectors, acknowledging its reliance on natural capital and long-term stewardship.

C. Implement a Risk-Based, Tiered Approval Approach

Introduce a streamlined pathway for low-impact, high-value tourism projects, aligned with the Province's objective of enabling investment-ready opportunities identified through the *Look West Tourism Sector Action Plan*.

D. Require Tourism and Cumulative Effects Consideration

Ensure expedited EA processes include explicit assessment of:

- Visitor experience
- Wildlife and ecosystem integrity
- Cultural and heritage values

This will help ensure that accelerated approvals do not unintentionally undermine long-term economic value derived from tourism.

E. Strengthen Connectivity as Core Infrastructure

Recognize transportation access, including rail corridors, as critical to tourism and integrate these considerations into infrastructure planning and designation decisions.

Case Examples from the Tourism Sector

- **Cascade Skyline Gondola Project (Fraser Valley):** A high-value tourism project experiencing prolonged permitting timelines despite strong economic and community benefits.
- **Rail Trail/Trans Canada Trail:** Ongoing uncertainty and decommissioning pressures affecting sections of the Rail Trail (including portions of the Trans Canada Trail network) highlight the vulnerability of tourism-critical infrastructure to competing land use

priorities. These trails are foundational to regional tourism economies, supporting cycling, hiking, and multi-day visitor experiences across communities.

The loss or fragmentation of these corridors reduces connectivity, limits access and undermines long-term tourism development. This example illustrates the need for greater recognition of tourism infrastructure within provincial decision-making, particularly where competing resource and land use interests are being advanced. It also reinforces the importance of equal consideration with other resource sectors when evaluating land use and infrastructure decisions.

- **Existing Operators (Province-wide):** Increasing regulatory burden for tenure renewals and upgrades is discouraging reinvestment.
- **Disaster Recovery (Coquihalla / Fraser Valley Flooding):** Recent flooding events highlighted the vulnerability of BC's tourism economy to infrastructure disruptions. Extended timelines for restoring critical transportation corridors and access routes resulted in lost operating seasons, reduced visitor access, and significant economic impacts across multiple regions.

More broadly, these events underscore the need for a more coordinated and expedited approach to rebuilding tourism-critical infrastructure, recognizing that delayed recovery timelines have immediate and compounding economic consequences for communities and small businesses.

- **Rail Connectivity (Sea-to-Sky / Interior Corridor):** Potential loss of rail service highlights the need to consider tourism access in long-term infrastructure planning.

Conclusion

The Infrastructure Projects Act and expedited environmental assessment framework represent an important step toward improving project delivery in British Columbia. There is a clear opportunity to align this work with the Province's broader economic and tourism objectives, including those outlined in the *Look West Tourism Sector Action Plan*, as well as insights shared through recent cross-ministry engagement with investors and operators.

To fully realize this opportunity, it is essential that tourism infrastructure is recognized as a:

- Form of critical public infrastructure
- Renewable natural resource
- Key contributor to BC's current and long-term economic resilience

With targeted adjustments, the Province can support both economic growth and the protection of the natural assets that define BC's global competitiveness, while aligning public policy with private sector readiness to unlock meaningful and measurable growth in BC's economy through tourism.

Minister, thank you for your leadership on this file. TIABC welcomes the opportunity to meet with you and your team to further discuss these recommendations and support alignment across ministries as this work advances.

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CC:

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