

# Singing Pass Meeting Notes

Thursday, July 26, 2018, Whistler Public Library

## Meeting Objectives

- Update from the Province on access improvements;
- Summary of evaluation/assessment of options;
- Stakeholder feedback and new information on access options;
- Consideration of next steps for continued improvements.

## Attendees

<b>First Name</b>	<b>Last Name</b>	<b>Association</b>
Jennie	Aikman	Regional Director, BC Parks
Eric	Ayotte	Manager – Operations and Maintenance, Innergex
Elyse	Curley	Community Liaison Officer, BC Parks
Arthur	De Jong	Mountain Planning and Environmental Resource Manager, Whistler Blackcomb
Vicki	Haberl	Regional Planning Section Head, BC Parks
Barry	Janyk	Executive Director, FMCBC
Bryce	Leigh	Access and Environment Director & Chair, ACC Whistler
Chris	Ludwig	Vice President, BCMC
Bill	Maurer	Backcountry BC
Sarah	McCullough	Director, Government and Community Relations, Whistler Blackcomb
Tori	Meeks	Sr Manager, Major Projects, FLNRORD
Rupert	Merer	Director, Spearhead Huts Committee
Charlene	Mortensen	Land Technical Officer, Mountain Resorts, FLNRORD
Martin	Pardoe	Manager, Parks Planning, RMOW
Natalia	Pisarek	Communications Coordinator, Outdoor Recreation Council of BC
Roger	Soane	President and CEO, Whistler Sport Legacies
Robert	Van der Zalm	Regional Manager, Integrated Resource Operations Division, RSTBC

## Welcome and Introductions

Jennie Aikman, Regional Director, South Coast, BC Parks, welcomed all and acknowledged the meeting was taking place on the traditional territories of the Squamish and Lil'wat Nations. Jennie also recognised that although the Squamish and Lil'wat Nations were not present at the meeting, they have a strong interest in the park and will be engaged in the outcomes of the meeting. The Lil'wat Nation expressed their preference for government to government communication and engagement on this issue, and indicated that Squamish Nation will likely feel the same way.

Jennie spoke of the purpose of the session - to meet again since 2016 and seek an update and new information on access to Singing Pass. The facilitator, Sandra Bicego PacificaBlue Consulting, reviewed the meeting objectives and agenda. All participants agreed with the process as set out in the agenda. A question was asked about public release of the meeting materials and it was agreed that the information from the session will be made public.

## Update on Singing Pass Trail improvements & Evaluation of Singing Pass access options

Robert VanDer Zalm, Rec Sites and Trails, FLNRORD, summarized what has been accomplished since the 2016 meeting and provided an updated analysis of the options that were explored for the 2016 process. See attached PowerPoint presentation. Key points raised were:

- Sea to Sky Natural Resource Sector Managers/Directors have formed a working group to find proactive solutions to the phenomenal increase in outdoor recreation demand in the region.
- RSTBC is looking to create new/ enhance existing partnerships to help facilitate more proactive planning and growth management in the corridor.
- Option 1 – has the benefit of “Sustainable use.” Option 1 budget - \$1,500/yr is identified and may be more or less, depending on needs.
- Option 2, 3, 4 have the disadvantage of being a summer-only solution; the existing trail on the Whistler side will still need to be maintained for winter egress.
- Opportunities exist for partnerships to off-set costs and maintenance
- Option 2 saves 4.1 km from bus loop and an additional 500 m from parking
- Future access development to the area requires First Nations support
- Unmanaged growth of this trail is anticipated to lead to over-use and significant negative impacts to the environment, similar to the many examples in the Sea-to-Sky corridor e.g. Joffre Lakes.

### Q&A Discussion

- There was a question regarding safety of the trail crossing the Fitzsimmons slump; there are geotechnical studies that have assessed the area and there are concerns about some sections
  - There may be opportunities to re-route, or extend the by-pass of the key area(s) of concern
- ACC expressed even greater concern with the Harmony crossing than the slump
  - May need to increase risk mitigation for this location

## Stakeholder updates and information sharing

Bill Maurer, Backcountry BC

Bill Maurer presented for Backcountry BC to bring forward their proposal to re-establish parking near the Singing Pass Trailhead. See presentation. Key points were:

- From a parking lot at Innergex intake there could be a new trail built on the old road
- This distance would be 10.7 km compared to either 4.7 (lot 8) or 5.4 km (lot 4)

### Q&A Discussion

- Winter use will always require the Whistler-side egress by some skiers, even if some backcountry skiers would use a Blackcomb-side egress. ~90% slack country/backcountry use is on the northern aspects on Whistler side.
- There is currently no winter driving access to Innergex; snowmobile use only. Grade of the road to parking lot 8 is ~1%.

Rupert Merer, Spearhead Huts Committee

Rupert Merer presented for the Spearhead Huts Committee, highlighting the economic benefits of a higher elevation parking lot. See presentation. Key points were:

- Construction of hut system is a \$6 million endeavour.
- Summer access to 2 of the huts will be very difficult. This hut system is primarily serving the winter ski traverse. However, there is also interest in making all huts as accessible as practically feasible, year-round.
- Access to this area shouldn't be only for those of elite fitness.
- Primary access to huts by winter users will be the Whistler Blackcomb lift system.
- Some of the best hiking is in September and October when the lift system is running at reduced hours; shuts down Thanksgiving weekend.

### Q&A Discussion

- There may be capacity for up to 100 vehicles at a parking lot if constructed at the Innergex intake.
- Whistler Blackcomb is working with RMOW to monitor the compliance around usage of 6 designated parking spots in Village parking lot 4.
  - Sarah would like to receive email with information when there are parking violations around the use of the reserved parking spots.
- Advertising of location and protocol for the designated overnight spots needs to be improved.
- BC Parks provided clarification that the management intent for the Spearhead area is not to increase use but to manage the existing use.
  - There are seasonal closures/restrictions for 2 of the 3 huts on use levels to address certain wildlife concerns, etc.
  - There are concerns around the high levels of use in many provincial parks and increased need for management of these areas.

Barry Janyk, Federation of Mountain Clubs of BC

Barry Janyk presented for the Federation of Mountain Clubs of BC. Barry shared Tibetan prayer flags as a symbol of the desire to find resolution to the Singing Pass access issue.

Chris Ludwig, British Columbia Mountaineering Club

Chris Ludwig presented for the British Columbia Mountaineering Club. BCMC feels they have an historic right to access a parking lot at a location closer to the park. Parking in the village is not acceptable to BCMC. There is strong concern about trust between user groups and government.

## Discussion of access options

Discussion of access options based on shared information and perspectives above are themed and noted as sub-bullets as follows:

### *Need for common objective for Singing Pass*

- Need to establish common objective for the future regarding the Singing Pass trail use.
- Exponential growth in backcountry use throughout the corridor, particularly where easy access is provided, is having significant impacts on environmental, visitor-experience, cost impacts, etc. Carrying capacity is a key issue for BC Parks and RSTBC.
- There is demand for good hiking access and a need to manage impact by creating good established trails. Need to look to other tools to manage numbers.

### *Discussion on parking at Innergex*

- The Innergex access road is relatively driveable compared to many other access options.
  - Question of jurisdiction over the road if it were to become public. Who would control/manage the parking opportunity if it were established at the Innergex intake?
  - How can it be made feasible to allow cars to drive along it?
- Whistler Legacy Society and the Sliding Centre
  - Has jurisdiction over the road area.
  - Road use needs control. Question of how many cars would be needing to drive up?
  - Concerned about liability of public access around the Sliding Centre. The risk would increase if there is an uncontrolled access point beyond the current barriers.
  - Public access would require significant additional measures to secure the Sliding Centre.
  - Insurance costs would increase. Security measures would include fencing.
- Current use of the road is by Whistler Blackcomb, Innergex, and ZipTrek. The existing use is tightly controlled and there are safety protocols for those users to follow.
  - Public access would increase use multi-fold, and safety controls would be difficult to apply to broader use.

### *Current parking option management*

- Discussion of who controls/manages the current parking option for Singing Pass overnight hikers in the village. Answer - Whistler Blackcomb, RMOW.

### *Management tools to manage, control, limit or restrict trail use*

- There are tools that can be used to manage the challenges of use and over-use such as lottery, and reservations.
- Using the Whistler Blackcomb lift system is perceived as a barrier to users including cost and time constraints. Whistler Blackcomb has made some concessions to address some of the barriers (including earlier lift times and has offered to decrease lift fees for members of certain clubs).
- It was noted that Ziptrek operates a shuttle; would they be interested to provide shuttle service to facilitate getting hikers closer to the trailhead?
  - The group discussed how to overcome the challenges and inconveniences of a shuttle system. One example mentioned was the use of cell phone app that would enable easier communication with service providers.
  - Are there other tools? One suggestion was exploring the option of E-bikes though cumbersome to ride these with heavy multi-day packs.
  - Any shuttle service on the north side of Fitzsimmons Creek would still require pedestrian bridge over the creek.
- RMOW is currently amending the Official Community Plan (OCP) to address many of their trailhead access points to be lower elevation, in an effort to manage the increasing use and associated impacts.
  - Draft policy states: “Promote use of preferred modes of transportation to access recreation and leisure amenities to reduce public vehicle parking requirements with consideration given to maintaining site-by-site accessible parking.”
  - *Preferred modes of transportation* are detailed elsewhere in the Draft OCP: “Give priority to walking, cycling, transit, and other preferred modes over the single occupant vehicle and private automobile.”<sup>1</sup>

### *Wildfire risk concerns*

- Whistler Blackcomb underscored their concern about wildfire risk, which is an increasingly high-threat due to climate change combined with the unique south facing topography along the Innergex access road. Whistler Blackcomb may even be implementing closures in this area due to the wildfire risk hazard.

### *Mountain Resort Branch (MRB)*

- MRB is seeking clarity around whether there is any new information, whether the interest(s) and concerns and potential solutions have changed since the 2016 process concluded.
- New options for access must be accompanied with detailed plans, rationale and supporting studies in order for them to be considered.
- MRB has contractual obligations to other interests on the land base, and stakeholders that may be impacted by any changes to the access. It was noted that the Province must make decisions that would address those interests, and the interests of the broader public (including the user groups at the meeting, but not exclusively).

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<sup>1</sup> From the DRAFT Recreation and Leisure Chapter of the Resort Municipality of Whistler’s DRAFT OCP.

## Next Steps

1. Meeting Summary: Meeting summary circulated the week of August 13<sup>th</sup>. (Completed)
2. RMOW, Whistler Blackcomb: Opportunities to address results of summer overnight parking.
  - a. RMOW and Whistler Blackcomb to continue to monitor use of overnight parking stalls in Lot 4 and identify options for adding additional spaces if needed as well as addressing challenges as they arise.
  - b. Improve signage and information about parking options and park permit requirements for Singing Pass.
  - c. Explore options for improving location of the designated overnight parking stalls.
3. FLNRORD, BC Parks: Opportunities to add value to existing trail access:
  - a. Improve signage
  - b. Monitor use (i.e., trail counter) and access; and observe changes that may be attributed to development of the Spearhead Hut (system).
  - c. Re-routing or improving any problematic sections on an on-going basis
4. FLNRORD, BC Parks:
  - a. Internal review of the discussion results.
  - b. Meet with First Nations to discuss results and seek input.
  - c. Identify possible approaches to make further improvements to the current access.
  - d. Respond to this group with outcomes on approach (by winter-time).