

“Walking Together”

**North Thompson and
Robson Valley C2C**

Facilitation Summary Report

May 2026

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Background & Purpose

On April 9th, 2026, the Village of Valemount hosted a Community to Community forum involving three other municipalities, two regional districts, and Simpcw First Nation.

Community	Participating Leadership	
Village of Valemount (Host Community)	Mayor Owen Torgerson Councillor Donalda MacLean	Councillor Hugo Mulyk Councillor Pete Pearson
Simpcw First Nation	Kúkwpí7 George Lampreau T'kwenem7'iple7 Simone Lampreau T'kwenem7'iple7 Tina Donald	T'kwenem7'iple7 Tracey Strain T'kwenem7'iple7 Doreen Jules T'kwenem7'iple7 Alison Green
District of Barriere	Mayor Rob Kerlake Councillor Judy Armstrong Councillor Scott Kershaw	Councillor Donna Kibble Councillor Louise Lodge Councillor Brody Mosdell
District of Clearwater	Mayor Merlin Blackwell Councillor Theresa Braaten	Councillor Ken Matheson
Village of McBride	Mayor Gene Runtz Councillor Peter Caputo	Councillor Glen Frear Councillor Tina Bennett
Regional District of Fraser Fort George	Chair Lara Beckett Vice Chair Art Kaehn	Director Area H Dannielle Alan
Thompson Nicola Regional District	Director Area B Lee Onslow Director Area A Ussoff Tsao	Director Area O Jill Hayward

The forum was a continuation of the Regional Community to Community meetings between First Nations and local governments within the North Thompson and Robson Valley, with the previous forum being held in Chu Chua. Strategies North Advisory Inc. was engaged to conduct the facilitation, collect participant input and compile this report. Participants met to discuss key challenges and opportunities in Walking Together, Emergency Management, and the Tourism Industry. The overarching theme of the forum was ***Walking Together***, exploring how further cooperation and interaction between partners and communities creates mutual benefit.



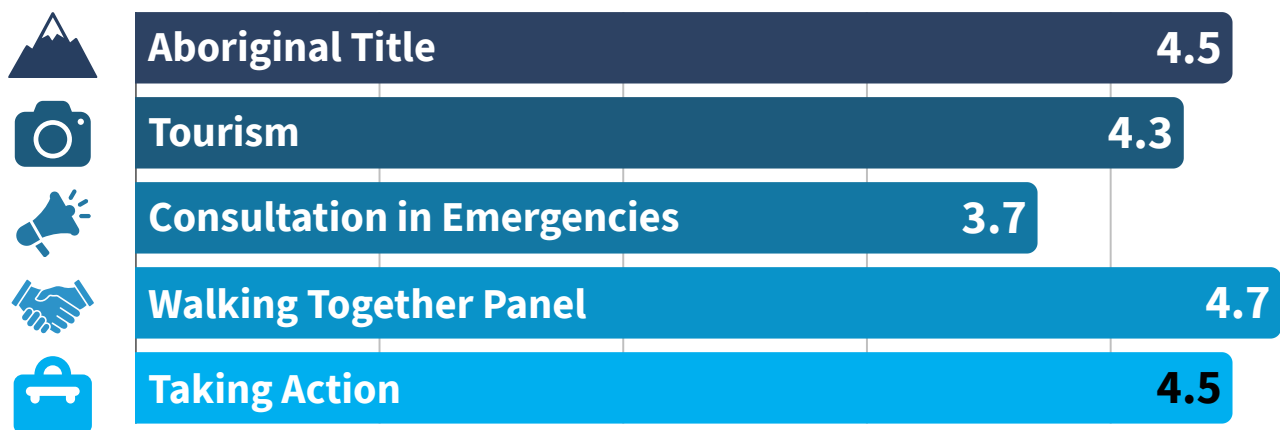
Summary of Forum

The forum began with opening remarks from Mayor of the Village of Valemout Owen Torgerson, and Kúkwpi7 George Lampreau after being grounded through an opening prayer offered by Simpcw Councillors. Kúkwpi7 George Lampreau started the first presentation, discussing the poignant issues surrounding Aboriginal Title due to recent legislation, court action, and topics surrounding it in the Province.

Valemout Economic Officer Orlanda Goodell and Tourism Valemout Executive Director Marcie Down then presented a segment on Tourism Collaboration and Opportunities. This presentation detailed key challenges, opportunities, and industry context for Valemout, the Robson Valley, and BC as a whole. An important element of this presentation was the introduction of the Five Pillars, a key element to the forum overall. These Five Pillars are detailed further in their own section, but were involved through the facilitation of several exercises.

After a lunch, where participants got to socialize, discuss topics, and build connections, elected officials gathered on a panel to further explore Walking Together. After this panel the room was split into groups to discuss the key topics of Tourism, Emergency Consultation, and what role they play in Walking Together. The forum ended with a reflection exercise, and closing words from Valemout's Mayor Torgerson, and Kúkwpi7 Lampreau.

During the final reflection, participants were invited to evaluate the core sessions. The resulting feedback was overwhelmingly positive, yielding the following average ratings on a 5-point scale:





Walking Together

The principle of **Walking Together** was the binding theme of the forum, linking the discussions central to each and every activity participants engaged in. To engage on this topic, facilitators formed a panel of all four municipal Mayors, the Chief of Simpcw, Chair of the RDFFG, and TNRD's Director.

Based on the core values and future aspirations expressed by regional leadership, the following mission statement summarizes the intent of the "Walking Together" initiative:

To build a regional neighbourhood founded on mutual respect, patience, and the abandonment of preconceived assumptions. We commit to moving beyond consultation into genuine collaboration—planning cohesively for the next seven generations to ensure shared prosperity in healthy communities, resilience, and economic development, while honouring the diverse histories, cultures, and languages of the land we share.

Each leader on the panel was asked three questions:

1. What does walking together mean to you in your role as a leader in your community?
2. Where would you like to see us Walking Together 10 years from now?
3. What actions are going to be required to make that vision happen?

Question 1: What does walking together mean to you?

Each community leader had a unique but ultimately aligning idea of what Walking Together meant to them. The following word-cloud, a presentation of the most commonly used words by panel members, lays out some of the most important themes.

trust
generations vision
land community legacy
relationships leadership
partnership collaboration
respect





Patience & Empathy:

Walking together literally means taking things slowly and carefully to ensure that progress doesn't come at the expense of breaking down relationships, connections, and regional cohesion.

Genuine Collaboration Over Consultation:

The concept means moving past standard consultation and actively engaging in true collaboration to improve life for everyone.

Losing Assumptions:

It requires leaders to stop, step back, and abandon their preconceived notions. It involves understanding that different communities may operate on fundamentally different timelines, laws, and values.

Mutual Respect:

At its foundation, it relies on complete mutual respect, honoring each other's histories and cultures, and building trust.

Question 2: Where would you like to see us Walking Together 10 years from now?

Leadership was engaged on this question as a future visioning exercise, moving past working definitions to what cooperation and collaboration might look like in the future.

A Regional Neighbourhood: A major legacy the leaders want to leave is one of being good neighbours to not only community leadership, staff, and partners, but community members as well. It is important that this is maintained, regardless of changing leadership or boundaries, so that their communities can thrive and raise families together.

Multi-Generational Thinking: True leadership in this space involves planning not just for the immediate future, but making decisions that will benefit the next seven generations, understanding that today's leaders are that first generation.

Cohesive Regional Operations: The ultimate goal is to stop operating in isolation and instead plan cohesively as a region, addressing shared challenges like healthy communities, resilience, and economic development.





Question 3: What actions are going to be required to make that vision happen?

The last question engaged leaders to identify opportunities to act on that vision.

Formalizing Commitments: Establishing structured agreements, such as Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs), is a crucial first step in defining these new partnerships.

Shared Regional Goals: A major tactical component is rallying around shared, practical objectives. This could come in the form of developing collaborative tourism, economic development, or infrastructure strategies, as well as linking tourism associations together between the valleys.

Integrating Cultures: Taking small but significant actions, such as incorporating Indigenous languages into signage for local parks and buildings, helps fulfill the broader vision of unity.

“If we carry that forward—alignment, respect, and a shared commitment to collaboration—then we’re not just talking about walking together.”

Collaboration on Projects of Mutual Interest: Taking an active role in advocacy for regional projects whether they be infrastructure, tourism, economic development, or communications.

Engaging the Youth: Participants emphasized the importance of bringing youth into the conversation to get past misinformation and pass down a legacy of partnership and understanding.



Five Pillars of Tourism



As part of their tourism presentation, the Village of Valemout and Tourism Valemout introduced the Province of BC's "Look West" plan to double tourism revenue within 10 years. They defined the Five Pillars in the "Look West" plan above.





The Five Pillars in the “Look West” plan are a series of five questions tourism centres and communities should ask themselves to plan to act on tourism opportunities.

They were explored further during the discussion:

What do we build?	What amenities, offerings, or opportunities do we offer tourists and visitors? What do we need to build?
How do we tell our story?	How do we market our communities? What kind of story do we tell about our communities?
What brings people here?	What do current visitors come for? What do people talk about? What services see the most use?
How do people get here?	What highways are people using to get here? What locations are people coming from? What infrastructure do they need or use?
What gets in the way?	What are the main barriers to people accessing our businesses and services? What barriers do we have in our own marketing?

After these pillars were presented, along with key facts, figures, and statistics presented, the forum participants were engaged table by table to explore one of the five pillars.

What do we build?

The group identified the need to build a foundation of essential services and long-term community development. Physically, this means investing in continuous trail development and maintenance—including new bike park trails—alongside accessible, age-friendly improvements like new streetlights, benches, and versatile meeting spaces that accommodate a growing senior population. Foundational infrastructure, like underground utilities, is critical for everyone's benefit, though the cost burden this places on current taxpayers must be considered.

“We already have the relationships. We already have the ideas. Now it’s about putting the structure in place to deliver.”





The group also determined the need to build up our local business ecosystem by encouraging more restaurants, food options, and much-needed coffee stops. Crucially, a sustainable visitor economy requires us to build up our community's core resilience by prioritizing affordable housing, education, and job creation, which helps alleviate the heavy reliance on an unpaid, burned-out volunteer base. Finally, we must construct better navigational networks—such as coordinated visitor information centers at key corridor entry points and comprehensive wayfinding initiatives, like the new welcome signs currently launching in McBride—to ensure our region remains welcoming, connected, and easy to navigate for all.

How do we tell our story?

The group determined that it tells its story through an authentic, approachable voice that reflects our deep pride in our friendly, welcoming communities and the untouched natural beauty of the area. Rather than trying to emulate busy destinations like Whistler or Banff, we celebrate the quiet, small-town feel and world-class, year-round outdoor adventures sharing highlights of backcountry winter snow, mountain biking, snowmobiling, and long-distance hikes.

“There was a strong sense that we are not just planning for today—we are looking ahead for future generations. What stood out to me from this gathering is that we are no longer talking about alignment—we are demonstrating it.”

While word-of-mouth among passionate peer groups is a powerful draw, the group should actively promote local identity through social media, websites, community facilities, local art shows, museum tours, and history ambassadors.

To truly connect with the right visitors and build local pride, the group should focus on telling genuine human stories rather than over-produced marketing, giving people a clear framework of the authentic experiences they can expect. Crucially, telling our story means doing so alongside the Simpcw First Nation, incorporating the Secwepemctsin language and shared histories to create a deeply rooted, collaborative narrative that honours the true spirit of the land.





What brings people here?

People are drawn to the area by an authentic, uncommercialized vibe that offers a peaceful, valuable alternative to crowded destinations like Jasper and Banff. Visitors and new residents, including workers bringing their families for projects like TMX, come to experience the breathtaking natural beauty of the mountains, and the surrounding wilderness. The region provides a vast area for outdoor recreation, featuring varied hiking and biking trails, a bike park, and world-class snowmobiling. Beyond the scenery, people are brought together by a deep, grounded connection to the land, which includes learning about its ecological significance and rich Indigenous culture.

The group recognized that prioritizing on these strengths, in the face of tourism uncertainty in the region, collaborating where possible to ensure the linkage of the tourism industry throughout the valley.

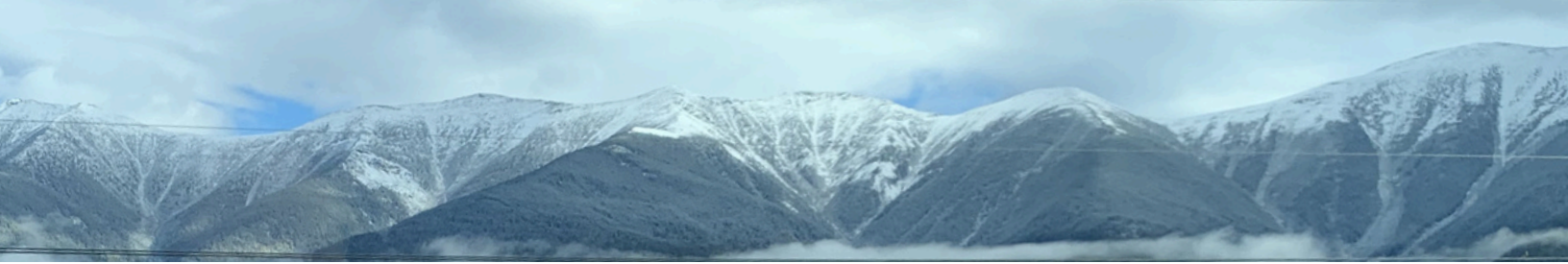
“The challenge in front of us isn’t a lack of vision. It’s turning that vision into action.”

How do people get here?

The group recognized key challenges for prospective tourists. Getting to the North Thompson and Robson Valley relies almost entirely on private vehicles, tour buses, and motorhomes. World-class destination attractions like the Berg Lake Trail, Wells Gray Park, and Murtle Lake draw visitors from enormous distances, including a large percentage of European tourists who fly in and rent motorhomes, highlighting the urgent need for proper regional airports in Kamloops and Hinton to connect with these international hubs.

However, significant physical and infrastructural barriers make access challenging; travelers face unsafe highway conditions due to heavy transport truck traffic, a lack of highway patrols, and frequent closures with no secondary detour routes.





Alternative transportation is virtually non-existent, plagued by perpetually late passenger trains, poor bus services, and a lack of reliable public transit between communities. Beyond the roads, navigational access is severely hampered by poor cell service, inadequate maps, and inconsistent digital resources.

To ensure visitors can easily find their way and are encouraged to return, the region must improve its wayfinding and consistent messaging, advocate for better provincial park funding to match its attractions, and implement comprehensive signage throughout the area, importantly including Simpcw territorial signage to mark significant creeks and cultural areas.



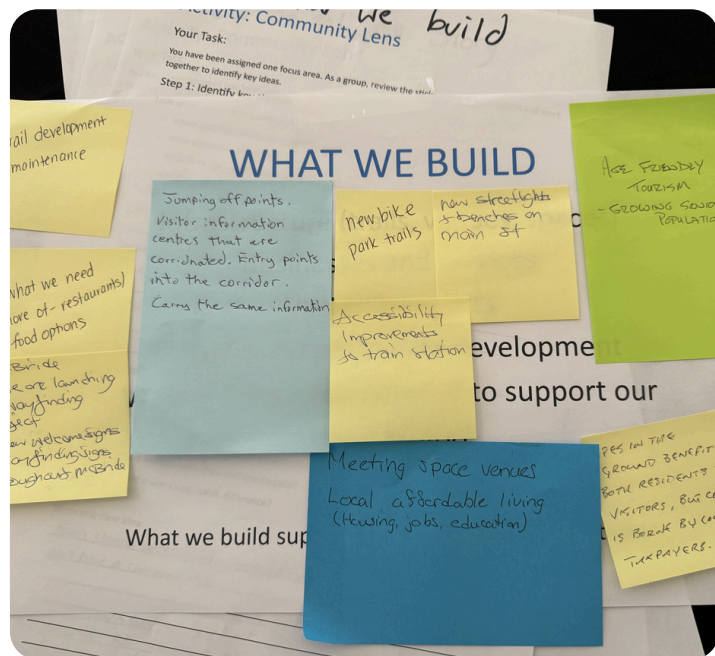
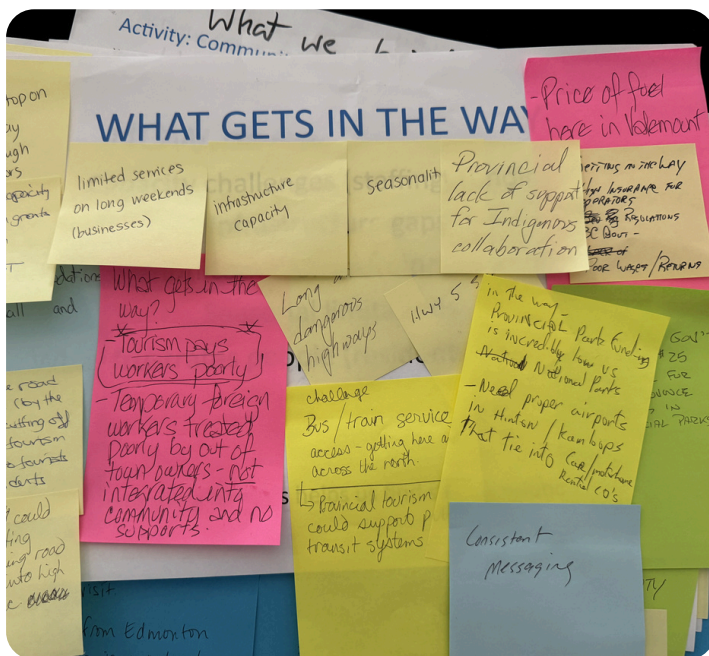
What gets in the way?

“Walking together isn’t measured by the conversations we have—it’s measured by what we accomplish together.”

The group noted that significant barriers stand in the way of a thriving local tourism economy, driven by a combination of infrastructure gaps, economic pressures, and capacity challenges. Getting to and moving around the region is hindered by long, unsafe routes like Highway 5, a lack of reliable bus or passenger train services, and provincial closures of resource roads that cut off access to high-value niche areas.

Once visitors arrive, participants cited they often encounter limited business hours on long weekends, small and outdated local accommodations, and the high cost of fuel, leading many to treat the area as just another pass-through stop. Economic and regulatory hurdles further frustrate operators and tourists alike, including high insurance premiums, strict provincial regulations, and a \$25 provincial surcharge for out-of-province campers.





Behind the scenes, the industry is severely constrained by staffing and funding shortages; there is a heavy reliance on volatile grants, overburdened volunteers, and low tourism tax revenues. Labor challenges are also worsened by poor wages and the mistreatment of temporary foreign workers by out-of-town owners, leaving these workers without community support or integration.

Ultimately, these issues compounded by seasonal limitations, communication gaps, and a distinct lack of provincial support for Indigenous collaboration and regional transit create substantial roadblocks to shared progress and sustainable growth. The group agreed that through collaboration and advocacy many of these barriers could be mitigated.

“A shared financial commitment from municipalities, regional districts, and Simpcw would allow us to move beyond discussion. It would give us the ability to sustain this table and, importantly, bring in dedicated support—someone whose role is to take the ideas we generate and turn them into a clear, actionable plan.”



Opportunities

Based on the guiding pillars, and discussion from the group, we identified some opportunities to answer the main questions in Tourism.

What do we build?	Valley Wide Tourism Strategy Establish a comprehensive valley-wide tourism strategy by forming a dedicated tourism committee with representatives from each community to coordinate joint marketing, prevent event overlap, and leverage shared strengths.
How do we tell our story?	Co-branding and Indigenous Storytelling Enhance authentic visitor experiences by increasing arts and culture initiatives, creating interpretive Indigenous experience centers, organizing community attractions, and offering specialized training tours covering geological and Indigenous history.
What brings people here?	Travel information and Messaging Develop a cohesive wayfinding and signage strategy across the corridor, particularly focusing on Simpcwúlecw integration, consistent Indigenous messaging, and clear trail or road signs to enhance the visitor experience.
How do people get here?	Collaborative Route Development Create and promote shared regional opportunities of mutual interest, such as cross-community passes, unified winter route promotions, and collaborative circuit routes through the valley.
What gets in the way?	Advocate for Key Resources Advocate for critical tourism infrastructure, funding, and support from levels of government collaboratively as a region.





Collaboration: Emergency Management

The third major discussion of the event was Emergency Management, introduced by ECMR staff and discussing the recent EDMA regulations. Presenters outlined key changes and necessary Indigenous consultation practices required by EDMA, such as communication at all key phases of an emergency, culturally sensitive accommodations for evacuations, and other relationship-minded activities. During the discussion period, participant communities noted that they were already moving forward with many of these aspects within Simpcw's traditional territory, but noted that this presentation provided a good opportunity to discuss it further.



Through this discussion participants noted several opportunities to further engage, involving the sharing of resources, further developing understandings through community visits, viewing of plans, and co-ordination. Most importantly participants recognized how close their relationships between communities have become, particularly in the wake of these evacuations, emergencies, and crises. The group identified a number of key opportunities, summarized and organized as the following:





Establish robust pre-emergency communication and action plans to ensure a unified approach, clearly defining roles, first points of contact, and consistent messaging for neighbouring communities during crises.

Engage in continuous, cross-community training and preparedness activities, including regular tabletop exercises, mock drills, and joint training sessions between distinct fire departments.

Develop a framework for mutual aid that facilitates the sharing of resources, local knowledge, accommodations, equipment, and vulnerability assessments across the region that integrate with existing Emergency Operating Centres (EOCs).

Advocate collectively for adequate emergency funding and investments, specifically targeting initial attack crews, search and rescue operations, FireSmart programming, fuel mitigation, and training for local volunteer firefighters.

Create dedicated policy groups that secure budgets and create space for staff to collaborate on multi-level pre-emergency planning, address staffing gaps, and share each community's specific resource wishlists.



Action Items

Based on the activities, discussions, and key opportunities of the C2C session, the Strategies North team developed the following action items for the participating Robson Valley members to pursue. It will be up to the collective group to consider the timelines and the responsibilities for doing the work.

Action Item What?	Strategic Objective Why?	Timeframe When?
Develop a Collaborative Tourism Strategy	Developing a connected tourism strategy leveraging community resources and direction from tourism operations will lead to a stronger tourism circuit. The Thompson Okanagan Tourism Association is a suitable body to lead a collaborative and executable strategy.	Over the next 3 years.
Collaboratively Develop Emergency Management Strategies Aligned with EDMA	Moving on the recent EDMA legislation and further developing relationships, the Regional partners should collaboratively share knowledge in developing Emergency Management Plans to aid in crisis response and management.	Over the next 3 years.
Regional Advocacy Strategy	As discussed by the participants of this C2C, there is real power in co-advocacy particularly with higher levels of government. This group should develop an advocacy strategy and guide of when, and how to advocate for one another.	Over the next 3 years.
Economic Strategy Alignment	Genuine economic development cannot be done in silos. Aligning economic development strategies in the region can help create a unified roadmap to reduce redundant efforts, improve resource allocation, and strengthen collective advocacy.	Over the next 3 years.

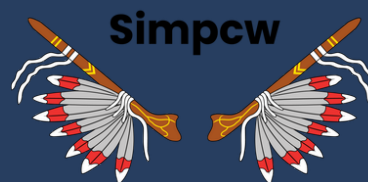




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