

Pave Paradise and Put up a By Pass?

As reported in last Friday's *Daily Herald Tribune*, an Edmonton-based consulting group is working with Alberta Infrastructure on a proposal to build a bypass and connector linking Highways 40 and 43. Given the recent and anticipated growth in the area, it's pretty hard to argue with the basic concept.

However, the devil is in the details. The consultants have proposed three options for connecting the proposed bypass with Highway 40 north of the Wapiti River Bridge. Option 1 uses the intersection of the Correction Line/County Industrial Road with Highway 40; Options 2 and 3 have the new bypass meeting Highway 40 at the intersection with the Dunes/Wapiti Nordic Ski Trails Road.

At this point, Option 1 appears to be least favored by the consultants due to costs and a lack of room around the intersection.

Options 2 and 3, on the other hand, would have a disastrous affect on the Wapiti Nordic Ski Trails and related user groups. Simply put, a 4 lane highway running through the middle of the trails will in no way enhance the recreational experience.

The Wapiti Nordic Ski Trails and surrounding lands are much more than just two grooves in the snow in the winter months. The venue plays host to a Church camp, a Boy Scouts camping area, a forest education program, hiking paths, and mountain biking trails. Oh, and it also happens to be one awesome place to go trail and x-country running.

I'm not sure that the consultants, Alberta Infrastructure, and our local politicians are fully aware of the extensive, year-round recreational use of these lands. Sure Options 2 and 3 might be less costly in dollars and cents, but has the cost of replacing a world-class recreational area been factored into the equation?

Surely there has to be a better option than running a 4 lane highway through Grande Prairie's equivalent to Vancouver's Stanley Park, Edmonton's River Valley or New York City's Central Park?

If you'd like to provide input into the planning of the proposed bypass, please e-mail your comments to the Lovatt Planning Consultants at lovattplanning@shaw.ca. Speak up now to preserve one of the area's true recreational gems.

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