



New baseline study shows Banff National Park has highest transportation greenhouse gas emissions of any National Park in North America

Grassroots initiative BANFF NATIONAL PARK NET ZERO 2035 targets transit transition for tourists

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Banff, AB: A new research report shows that Banff National Park, the 6th most visited National Park in North America, has transportation greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) five times higher than the Grand Canyon, the National Park in the U.S. with the highest transportation-based emissions.

The report also highlights that Banff National Park has per visitor transportation GHGs that are 63 times higher than Zion National Park, a protected area in Utah that attracts similar visitation to Banff National Parks' 4.2 million annual visitors and has comparable topography with visitation concentrated in a central valley. Zion's emissions and traffic congestion dropped dramatically over the last two decades after adopting an integrated transit system with intercept parking and a shuttle-only-service to popular points-of-interest.

Liricon Capital's Jan and Adam Waterous, owners of the Banff Train Station and Mt. Norquay, partnered on the study with University of Calgary's Canadian Energy Systems Analysis Research (CESAR) initiative and [The Transition Accelerator](#), a national non-profit organization that supports business and social change that reduce emissions.

"We can't get to where we want to be without knowing where we are," said Jan Waterous, a 23-year Banff local and Managing Partner, Liricon Capital. "This research identifies the vehicle congestion challenges Banff National Park faces. Fortunately, there are sustainable models that best-in-class mountain communities and national parks like Zermatt, Switzerland and Zion National Park have pioneered that we can adopt. Together with innovative technology, we can lower the per visitor environmental footprint, and transform Banff National Park to net-zero. By applying this formula of "Best Practices Per Visitor" and the latest low-carbon technology, the Park can 'Leapfrog to First' and serve as a 'Green Transit Laboratory' for others in Canada to emulate."

The research was led by Dr. David Layzell, a leading academic authority on leveraging technology to reduce emissions. Dr. Layzell and his team conducted a detailed analysis of how visitors and residents traveled through the Town of Banff and the Park, including to popular points-of-interests such as Lake Minnewanka, Johnston Canyon, Lake Louise, and Moraine Lake.

Data shows Banff National Park, including the townsite, produces from transportation (not including through traffic) almost 105,000 metric tons/year of CO₂; over 95 per cent of that comes from visitors. Transportation emissions produced by visitors are equivalent to a city of 216,000 people—imagine Burlington, Ontario.

Most of these emissions are generated outside of the townsite as visitors access popular points-of-interest, such as travelling 144-km round trip from Banff to Moraine Lake. Currently, 93 percent of visitors arrive in Banff National Park in personal vehicles, only 7 percent by bus.

“Our research shows that visitors account for 96 percent of the greenhouse gas emissions associated with personal mobility in Banff National Park compared to four percent by the residents. Fortunately, there are some compelling solutions to dramatically lower the visitor footprint. For example, our research shows that shuttle-only-service to Lake Minnewanka and Johnston Canyon using plug-in electric or hydrogen electric buses would reduce visitor transportation emissions in the Park by about 20 percent,” said Dr. Layzell.

In September 2020, [BANFF NATIONAL PARK NET ZERO 2035](#) was formed to exchange and advance ideas on how to transform the Park into North America’s first net zero emissions community. The grassroots, bottom-up initiative’s [Working Group](#) is comprised of key stakeholders from three levels of government (Municipal, Provincial, Federal), local business leaders, and academic researchers with experience in data collection, systems analysis and identifying innovative technologies needed to drive science-based change.

[BANFF NATIONAL PARK NET ZERO 2035’s](#) approach looks at “Best Practices Per Visitor” models that have been proven by world leaders in mountain town and national park vehicle management—in particular Zermatt, Switzerland and Zion National Park – that have created seamless mass transit systems to ensure that once visitors get to an arrival centre they do not require a personal vehicle to move throughout the destination. BANFF NATIONAL PARK NET ZERO 2035 aims to combine these models with the latest low-emissions technology—including hydrogen powered passenger rail and electric shuttles—to create an ultra low-carbon, integrated transportation system.

Reducing the impact of vehicles in the Park accomplishes three 3 goals at once: enhances the ecosystem (by protecting wildlife habitat), improves the visitor experience (by making the Park more pedestrian friendly), and lowers emissions (thereby helping to fight climate change). To achieve BANFF NATIONAL PARK NET ZERO 2035, all three levels of government will need to partner with public and private organizations to develop innovative, sustainable transportation, energy and waste solutions which will position the Park to take a leadership role in Canada’s transition to net zero.

Members of the [BANFF NATIONAL PARK NET ZERO 2035](#) Working Group recognize the need for change.

“My research over the last two years has shown that Albertans and Canadians care passionately about Banff National Park and are concerned about how congestion is impacting the environment and visitor experience. Thirty percent of visitors cut their trip short and 20 percent would not come back due to congestion. Almost 40 percent said that local authorities should be doing more to address congestion. This research shows that visitors want innovative solutions so that they don’t have to experience the Park through the windshield of their own vehicle,” said Joe Pavelka, researcher and ecotourism professor, Mount Royal University.

“There have been a lot of initiatives that have made the Town of Banff within the Park a much better and more sustainable place, in the form of building improvements, bike and walking culture, intercept parking, and, especially, our ROAM public transit system. The next step is to extend this progression to the Park as a whole, so our visitors can truly experience Banff without having to drive a vehicle,” said Gord Lozeman, President, Banff Lodging Co.

"Alberta can lead Canada in developing innovative low carbon transit solutions. Specifically, Banff is ideally positioned to follow other best sustainability practices done by Zermatt in Switzerland and Zion National Park in Utah that have integrated transport so that visitors don't require their own vehicle to see all the best parts of the Park. By leveraging Alberta's new hydrogen economy, Banff can emerge as Canada's flagship low carbon destination," said David Knight Legg, CEO, Invest Alberta.

"Banff Centre is an institution founded in, and committed to, a mission of creativity across a range of artistic and leadership disciplines. Our decades of experience in Indigenous Leadership, and environmental and mountain culture programs, will contribute important convening capacity to the development of innovative solutions to the challenges of reducing emissions in Banff National Park. As a Provincial Post-Secondary Institution located in Canada's first National Park, Banff Centre campus is ideally positioned to act as the figurative 'Base Camp' for housing the continuing qualitative and quantitative research, scholars in residence, and broad-based dialogue that will be required to advance the BANFF NATIONAL PARK NET ZERO 2035 initiative," said Janice Price, CEO, Banff Centre for Arts and Creativity.

"Our destination needs to take back space allocated to cars and give them back to people. The only way to successfully embrace this value is for the Park to embrace integrated mass transit. Renting a personal vehicle and driving to a point of interest should be a part of Banff's rich history, much the same way we look at the horse and carriage," said Mike Mendelman, Chief Executive Officer, Banff Hospitality Collective.

"BANFF NATIONAL PARK NET ZERO 2035 is standing on the shoulders of the great work the Town of Banff has done to make the community more sustainable including expansion of the Roam Transit system," said Jan Waterous. "We hope to build upon the Town's efforts and use the "Best Practices Per Visitor" model to make the entire Park a sustainable testing ground for the rest of Canada. If Banff National Park can't become Net Zero by 2035, then Toronto and other large cities across Canada don't stand a chance by 2050."

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Media contact:

Kevin Duncan

403-431-2859

kevin@shift-consulting.ca

banffnationalparknetzero2035.ca