

Submission to Banff Town Council, August 9, 2021

Item 7.2 Notice of Motion to Amend Railway Lands ARP

I am writing to address the Notice of Motion brought forward by Councillor Peter Poole to amend the Railway Lands Area Redevelopment Plan Terms of Reference by deleting a potential Norquay gondola terminus. Norquay and Town Administration have acted in good faith for the last two and a half years to create an ARP that supports the Banff Management Plan and Town of Banff Community Plan, and a potential gondola terminus is integral to the ARP. The ARP includes a multi-modal transit hub, nature conservation area, and community and visitor gathering spot. The ARP, which is more than 1,200 pages of science, analysis, and data, is currently in draft form as we are conducting public consultations this summer before presenting it to Council for first reading in the fall. We did not plan on discussing with Council the potential gondola terminus component of the ARP before completing the public consultations. However, Councillor Poole's Notice of Motion requires us to provide details of the potential gondola terminus to Council now. To assist Council's understanding of the importance of a potential gondola terminus in the ARP, I will provide an overview of the role of a potential gondola terminus, its regulatory framework, background on Norquay's first gondola proposal – a Summit Gondola Project, and potential benefits to the Town of Banff for a Town to Norquay Base Gondola.

Executive Summary

A key element of the ARP is to incorporate and develop an integrated gondola terminus connecting the townsite to the Norquay Ski and Sightseeing Resort by an aerial transit system. The purpose of a Town to Norquay Base Gondola is to enhance the ecological integrity of the Cascade Wildlife Corridor and improve the visitor experience. In addition, among many benefits, a Town to Norquay Base gondola generates a revenue stream that allows for providing 600+ stalls of free intercept parking and a 5.2 hectare nature reserve, to be economically sustainable for decades to come. The ARP only includes the gondola terminus. Following a Town of Banff approved ARP, a Town to Norquay Base Gondola will require a separate Parks Canada approval process.

Aerial Transit Regulatory Framework

The Parks Canada regulatory framework governing the Norquay Ski and Sightseeing Resort has stipulated for more than a decade that it pursue the potential of aerial transit from the Town to Norquay's base given its prospect of enhancing both the environment and visitor experience. A key action of the Banff National Park of Canada Management Plan (2010) is to "explore the feasibility of an aerial tramway system from the vicinity of the town of Banff to the Mt. Norquay ski area to provide new visitor experience opportunities while reducing human activity in the Cascade wildlife corridor." The Draft Banff National Park Management Plan (2021) states that it is "built on the groundwork laid by previous plans" and "will build on existing policy and plan direction" and "not starting anew". Mt. Norquay Ski Area Site Guidelines for Development and Use (2011) also state "putting in place a mass transit system to access the ski area that accommodates the increased number of visitors to Norquay" and that such "mass transit measures may include...the construction of a tram or gondola from the Town of Banff". The Site Guidelines (2011) additionally state that a Town to Norquay Base Gondola has "the potential to enhance visitor experience, contribute to ecological integrity by significantly reducing human use in the Cascade corridor, and contribute to the community's and Parks Canada's efforts to explore alternative mass transportation systems".

The Site Guidelines (2011) also contemplates the role of the Town of Banff in advancing a potential gondola and that Parks Canada must "consider the potential of authorizing a tramway/gondola from Town of Banff to the ski area Parks Canada will work with Norquay and the Town of Banff to outline the approach for assessing the feasibility of such a lift, process, and responsibilities. It is anticipated that Norquay will need to take the lead on the initiative."

First Proposal: Summit Gondola, Changes Required for Next Gondola Proposal

In April of 2015 Parks Canada provided Norquay with the Gondola Proposal Feasibility Study Components. This document was a helpful start on the general items Norquay should address in the gondola proposal but did not include important specific items such as size and routing. Parks Canada's approval process was that Norquay would need to first make a proposal and

then it would receive specific feedback as to what Parks would and would not accept. Consequently, Norquay then spent the next 3 years working on a proposal and in May, 2018, shortly after my family acquired Norquay, submitted to Parks its first proposal, a Summit Gondola project. This was a large, 4 station gondola project that took the gondola above the ski runs to Norquay's summit. Subsequently, in December 2019, Parks Canada turned down this Summit Gondola project and will not give further consideration to a Summit Gondola and we will not make another Summit Gondola proposal. However, in subsequent meetings, Parks Canada gave us very helpful feedback as to what were the principal elements of the Summit Gondola proposal they deemed unacceptable and what would have to be different in our next gondola proposal. In particular, Norquay's next gondola proposal could not travel beyond the top of the ski runs to the summit and that the public access to the access road could not be restricted and that a future gondola proposal could only go from the Town to Norquay's base. Importantly, Parks Canada also specified that a gondola proposal would also require the Town of Banff to include a gondola terminus as a permitted use on the Railway Lands. Parks Canada's approval process of "submit a proposal and then get feedback for the next proposal", while cumbersome, we have found constructive.

Next Proposal – Town to Norquay Base Gondola

Consequently, the ARP provides for a gondola terminus not for a Summit Gondola but for what would be a completely different and smaller potential gondola proposal – a Town to Norquay Base Gondola. In order to explore the feasibility of a Town to Norquay Base Gondola it is first fundamental to confirm that the ability to integrate a gondola terminus within the subject lands was both feasible and beneficial for the subject ARP and Town, hence its inclusion of in the ARP. It is also recognized that the integration of a gondola terminus concept within an approved ARP in no way ensures that Parks Canada will eventually endorse a Town to Norquay Base Gondola. A gondola terminus facility within an approved ARP is necessary but not sufficient for Parks Canada to approve a Town to Norquay Base Gondola.

Based on discussions with Parks Canada, while a Town to Norquay Base Gondola has the potential

to be approved, Parks Canada has made it clear to Norquay that even this smaller, more modest project will still require a full approval process. It is recognized that the approval process for an aerial transit system from the vicinity of the town of Banff to the Norquay Ski and Sightseeing Resort is separate from the ARP approval process for the Town of Banff and is within the jurisdiction and at the discretion of Parks Canada.

With that background, Norquay will only be able to make a specific proposal to Parks Canada for a Town to Norquay Base Gondola post an approved ARP. Such a proposal will have extensive, detailed supporting science, analysis and data.

Aerial Transit Summary Benefits

An aerial tramway system connecting the townsite with the base area of Norquay Ski and Sightseeing Resort would yield many benefits and is consistent with one of the primary goals of the ARP to create a multimodal transportation hub at the gateway to the town of Banff. A Town to Norquay Base Gondola and its associated multi-modal arrival centre aligns with the Banff National Park of Canada Management Plan and supports the Town's "Banff Community Plan" and its goals and objectives.

The following is a summary of the benefits both outside and inside of the townsite of a Town to Norquay Base Gondola.

Town to Norquay Base Gondola Benefits Outside Townsite

I. Enhance Cascade Wildlife Corridor

The Norquay Site Guidelines (2011) identifies 33 times the importance of enhancing the critically important Cascade Wildlife Corridor which the 6 km Norquay access road bisects. A gondola would result in an environmental gain in the Cascade Wildlife Corridor, superior to crepuscular road closure (in particular to large carnivores – grizzlies, cougars, and wolves) should mitigations be put

in place including reducing traffic on the Norquay Road (Miistakis Institute, 2019). Over 2017, 2018, 2019, Norquay Guest traffic accounted for approximately half of total annual access road traffic (more in the winter, less in the summer). A Town to Base Gondola will result in 100% of Norquay's guests no longer traveling by vehicle through the six kilometre access road. Parks Canada will retain full flexibility to manage public access on the Norquay Road to non-Norquay guests.

2. Shrink Norquay Lease

A Town to Norquay Base Gondola would require 10 acres of land outside Norquay's existing lease for the gondola path. In turn, Norquay would move its 900 parking stalls from the alpine down to the Banff TrainStation. This would result in Norquay surrendering 20 acres of its lease in the alpine (important wildlife habitat) and thus have a net shrinkage of its overall lease by 10 acres. That is, for every one acre that Norquay would gain outside its existing boundary, Norquay would surrender two acres of its existing lease.

3. Reduce Per Visitor Carbon Footprint

By removing 100% of the Norquay guest traffic fromthe access road, the per visitor transportation GHGswill be reduced by two thirds (University of Calgary, The Transition Accelerator, 2020).

4. Gondola Path Over Previously Disturbed Land

There are three areas that the gondola path would traverse from the Train Station to the Norquay Base Area and all of these areas have been previously developed:

- Train Station to TransCanada Highway – Fenlands Recreation Centre, former Echo Creek Stores site.
- Norquay Bridge – Four lane overpass with 39 light towers, high voltage Alta Link Power Lines. (Traveling over the Norquay Bridge ensures that the TransCanada Highway does not need to be closed in the event of a gondola evacuation).

- TransCanada Highway to Norquay – Six-kilometre access road bisecting approximately 180 acres.

Town to Norquay Base Gondola Benefits Inside Townsite

5. Enhance Use of Public and Active Transportation

An aerial tramway would provide a fast and efficient transit option across a sensitive landscape and high use vehicle traffic corridor.

6. Ensure Economic Sustainability

An aerial tramway system would provide a revenue stream to support 600+ free intercept parking stalls available to the Town and the proposed Norquay Conservation Area.

7. Increase Energy Efficiency

An aerial tramway system is environmentally sustainable and utilizes very little energy to transport large numbers of passengers. It is considered one of the most environmentally friendly modes of transit at 0.1 kWh/KM / passenger.

8. Increase Safety

Extremely high reliability (>99%) and safety rating compared to other modes of transit.

9. Expand Accessible Activities

Improves connectivity, safety and access to recreational activities. An aerial tramway offers a barrier-free accessible transit option that easily accommodates mobility aids, strollers and bikes.

10. Reduce Choke Point

Reduce traffic at the Bow River Bridge chokepoint. A Town to Norquay Base Gondola and the SulphurMountain Gondola will split the Banff gondola market.

11. Direct Traffic from Downtown

Provide an option to funnel visitors outside of the busy downtown core without having to drive

into the core.

12. Enhance Environment and Visitor Experience

The environmental and visitor experience benefits of a Town to Norquay Base Gondola has led it to be supported by a large majority of Banffites, Albertans, Canadians. National polling of 400 Banffites, 1,308 Albertans and 1,401 Canadians concluded that 62% of Banffites, 81% of Albertans and 88% of Canadians support a Town to Norquay Base Gondola. The sample size is statistically accurate within +/- 4.8%, +/-2.7% and +/-2.6% a 95% confidence level for Banffites, Albertans, and Canadians respectively. (Pavelka, Advanis, 2019)