

will not be received more positively this time around?

The Howse Pass highway – described by the *Red Deer Advocate* as “a bad idea that won’t go away” – made the news once again in July 2012 when Rick Strankman, Wildrose MLA for Stettler-Drumheller, announced that the highway “could be a tremendous benefit” to the economy of his riding (*Red Deer Advocate* July 12, 2012). Incredibly, he made the extravagant, if not outrageous, claim that such a development could be blasted through a national park “with minimal impact on the environment.” Conservative MPs Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin) and Blake Richards (Wild Rose) quickly added their support to the proposals.

In an April 2004 *Wild Lands Advocate* article (Howse Pass Highway Dream Lives On), Herb Kariel described a previous proposal to build the deeply unpopular highway. The cost in 1984 dollars was estimated at \$200 million, a cost that in today’s dollars would be more than doubled. That proposal came to nought, and hopefully the current proposal will go the same way.

Renewed calls to build the “Highway that Refuses to Die” point to a 2005 pre-feasibility study commissioned for the Red Deer Chamber of Commerce, Clearwater County, Lacombe County and Alberta Economic Development, which concluded that there would be a generous economic benefit that would significantly outweigh the costs of construction. The highway would slice through the ecologically-sensitive Banff National Park for “a mere 34 kilometers,” apparently. In a peculiar twist of logic, the report found that the highway would be beneficial in part because “In the short term, some traffic would be diverted away from current routes through the National Parks.” Of course the study did not take into account the environmental and social costs of building a highway across one of Canada’s premier national parks. I would think those costs would be very significant, perhaps astronomical.

Fortunately, construction of the highway is in no way imminent. Legislative obstacles include an Act of Parliament passed by a previous Liberal government, which made it illegal to put a road through the pass. Although the federal government was happy to dismiss opposition to the Brewster Discovery

Howse Pass Highway: The Ridiculous National Park Highway Proposal that Refuses to Die

One would assume that a proposal to blast a major new highway through the heart of wilderness lands in Banff National Park would be laughed off as a fantasy from a past era in which civilization was measured in numbers of asphalt superhighways. But plans to build a highway from Saskatchewan River Crossing across Howse Pass and into B.C. – plans which have been around since the 1940s – simply refuse to die. And with a current federal government that has already demonstrated its willingness to put economic considerations far above ecological integrity in national parks (see the approval of Brewster’s notorious “Discovery Walk” in Jasper National Park), who is to say that these proposals

Walk (including a 180,000-signature petition against the development), it would be hard to ignore the immense opposition that such an ill-considered highway would arouse.

Let's hope that common sense will prevail, but for the time being, the proposed Howse Pass highway is what the *Red Deer Advocate* likens to "an annoying mosquito in the bedroom that just won't go away."

- *Nigel Douglas*