

***A Visitor Information Services
Strategy for Newfoundland
and Labrador***

prepared by

THE ECONOMIC PLANNING GROUP of Canada

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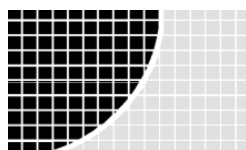
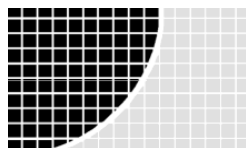


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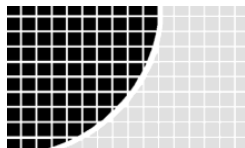
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Section 1

Introduction



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Section 1

Introduction

Background

‘A Special Place, A Special People – The Future for Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism’, a comprehensive product development strategy for tourism in the province, was completed in the spring of 2004. This strategy addressed a wide array of topics related to product development in detail, and touched on a number of other product development issues. One of these issues was visitor information services. The report included an overview of the current situation and identified a number of deficiencies. It concluded that there needed to be a proper review of the province’s visitor information services system that encompassed the provincial tourism chalets, the local/regional visitor information centres and examined modern tools and trip planning aids and their role in the provision of visitor information services.

A supplemental assignment was commissioned by Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador to undertake this assessment. The Economic Planning Group undertook this project. William MacCallum Architecture Ltd. of St. John’s was retained to assist with the physical assessment of selected provincial sites as well as prepare preliminary design concepts for the key Provincial VICs.

Objectives

The objective of the study, as outlined in the Request for Proposals was to “undertake an independent review of the Visitor Information Centre system throughout the province for the purpose of developing a VIC strategy for managing and connecting all centres (provincial, regional, local) including:

- Reviewing/defining the mandates and role of the VIC system
- Reviewing locations from a strategic perspective
- Identifying gaps/deficiencies and areas of overlap/duplication in the present system
- Identifying specific content requirements, training, human resources, return on investment and partnership possibilities”

Scope of Work

The work program included the following tasks:

- Field visits including physical inspections and mystery shopping of all provincial information centres and most of the regional/local centres across the province. These visits included interviews with senior staff at the provincial centres.

- More in-depth assessments of the physical assets at three of the provincial centres – Argentia, Port aux Basques and Whitbourne.
- A survey (by mail) of the managers/operators of all of the regional/local visitor information centres in Newfoundland and Labrador.
- Investigation of the visitor information services systems at the other three Atlantic provinces including visits to selected centres in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick.
- Interviews with key knowledgeable people involved in or with an interest in visitor information services.
- A detailed review of records and information on the operation of the provincial information centres.
- A review of market trends and technological trends affecting the delivery of visitor information services in the province.
- Development of an overall strategic approach to the delivery of visitor information services in the province, along with and of detailed proposals and recommendations for the Provincially-operated VICs.

Summary of Conclusions

The system of visitor information centres in Newfoundland and Labrador play an important role in the infrastructure of the province's tourism, and will continue to do so in future. They are at the centre of the system of visitor information services, which also involve the Provincial government's collateral material, website, call centre, highway signage and elements of the marketing of the province to prospective visitors.

New technologies are broadening the range of visitor information tools used by destinations; witness the growth in the Internet and the use of high-tech kiosks. At the same time, these new tools are making the traditional visitor information centre even more effective in serving visitors' needs. And their in-person, one-on-one standard of service continues to be sought out by many travellers, and that will surely continue to be the case long into the future.

Other destinations are enhancing their visitor information systems in keeping with these trends, although those in the Atlantic provinces are challenged by fiscal pressures in doing so, which has slowed the process somewhat.

At the same time, the province of Newfoundland and Labrador has been losing ground. This is particularly the case with the provincial government's program, to wit:

- Declining budget
- Inadequate capacity and services in some of the visitor centres
- Lack of maintenance of the centres
- Shortened season of operation
- Limited operational flexibility due to union issues
- Politicized system of hiring students
- To name only some major issues ...

As acknowledged at the beginning of this section, the 2004 product development strategy report underlined the importance of enhancing visitor information services as part of the broader effort to strengthen the competitiveness of the province in tourism.

With the growing importance of tourism in strengthening Newfoundland and Labrador's economic future, having a visitor information system meeting contemporary standards and the expectations of visitors needs to be a priority.

The current report picks up the issue at this point and presents detailed recommendations across the spectrum of issues and opportunities involved. The future strategy needs to address these issues and opportunities with the following key actions:

Key Initial Priorities – for Immediate Action in 2005

1. Extend the season of operation of Provincial VICs
2. Establish Provincial VIC services at St. John's and Deer Lake airports
3. Establish a partnership with HNL for VIC training, involving both Provincial and regional/local centres, as a first step in establishing a quality assurance program for VICs
4. Appoint a Provincial Visitor Information Services Co-ordinator
5. Improve the student employment program or replace it with additional seasonal recalls and/or volunteers

Enhance the VIC Services at the Major Provincial Gateways

1. Enhance the VIC services and the facilities at North Sydney and Port Aux Basques, and particularly the 24/7 outdoor services at the latter
2. Expand and enhance the services at Whitbourne, including 24/7 outdoor services
3. Renegotiate the union agreement, particularly for these gateway centres to allow split shifts and call-ins, to modify wage rates, to establish the basis for the recommended enhancements to staff performance standards, reviews and mystery shopping
4. Negotiate with Marine Atlantic for the recommended onboard displays, videos and announcements, and for communication of ferry arrival times
5. Establish an agreement with the City of St. John's for a joint VIC at their location on Water Street
6. Investigate the feasibility of craft shops and other complementary services at the Provincial VICs
7. Develop a policy and procedures manual

Changes for the Other Provincial VICs

1. Investigate the interest of local/ regional DMOs to take over the Argentinia, Notre Dame Junction and Clarenville centres, or close them
2. Investigate the potential for a partnership in the operation of the Deer Lake highway facility

Training and Quality Assurance

1. Establish an 'Official VIC' Certification program
2. Develop and introduce a 'Tourism Frontline' program

VICs Operated by Others

1. Establish a Fee for Service funding and partnership program with designated Regional Gateway VICs and with local VICs in designated Tier 1 and 2 Destination Areas that meet VIC certification standards
2. Discontinue funding other VICs that don't meet the criteria
3. Establish a VIC association to co-ordinate matters of common interest

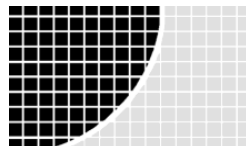
Other

1. Pursue the establishment of a provincial agency to take over Provincial visitor information services

Recommendations in Italics

The recommendations arising from this strategy are included throughout the report and illustrated in italics. They are also summarized in Section 7, along with priorities and budgets.

Section 2
Situational Analysis



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Section 2

Situational Analysis

Introduction

There are approximately 40 visitor information centres (VICs) providing visitor information in Newfoundland and Labrador; seven provincial centres (including one in North Sydney, Nova Scotia) and 32 local/regional centres that were identified as operating in 2004. There are several other local/regional centres the consultants are aware of that did not operate in 2004, and there may well be other facilities that did operate that we are not aware of.

This section of the report provides a summary of the current situation with respect to both the provincial and regional/local VICs, addressing issues such as locations, operating periods, visitation and budgets and the key findings from our field visits to most of these centres.

Provincial Visitor Information Centres

Overview

The Province operated seven VICs during 2004. The operation of the VICs comes under the Tourism Product Development Division of the Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation and is overseen by the Manager, Visitor Services.

All of the centres are operated seasonally – in 2004 from May 19 to September 28. This was a three week reduction in the operating period from previous years, due to budget cutbacks.

The VICs are staffed by provincial employees on seasonal recall status (they are automatically recalled in May and laid off at the end of the operating season), supplemented by students hired seasonally. In 2004, there were 18 seasonal recall staff, and 9 students working from mid-June through August. The student complement was a reduction from 15 in previous years.

The total budget allocated for the VICs from the Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation for 2004/05 is \$328,000, including some \$263,000 for staff salaries and wages (but excluding the salary for the Manager's position¹) and some \$65,000 for travel, supplies and services. In addition, \$76,000 is provided by the Department as grants to regional/local VICs. The Department of Works and Services is responsible for the operational/maintenance costs associated with the VICs, including utilities, building repairs and grounds maintenance. For the fiscal year 2003/04, this totalled some \$72,000.

¹ The Manager's position includes responsibility for the province's accommodation licensing program as well as for visitor information centres.

Locations

The provincially operated VICs for 2004 were located as follows:

- North Sydney, Nova Scotia – within the Marine Atlantic Ferry Terminal
- Port aux Basques – on the Trans Canada Highway, east side, on the edge of Port aux Basques
- Deer Lake – on the Trans Canada Highway, east side, about ½ km south of the intersection with the Viking Trail
- Notre Dame Junction – on the Trans Canada Highway, south side, just west of the intersection with Route 340
- Clarenville – on the Trans Canada Highway, west side, between Route 230 (to the Bonavista Peninsula) and Route 230A (in to Clarenville)
- Argentia – on Route 100, on the north side (i.e. not the same side as traffic arriving at Argentia), just outside of Argentia
- Whitbourne – on the Trans Canada Highway, south side, just east of Route 100.

In previous years, services were also provided on two of the Marine Atlantic ferries – the Smallwood and the Caribou but these services were discontinued in 2004.

The locations of both the provincial and regional/local visitor information centres are illustrated on the map provided later in this section of the report.

Design and Signage

The Provincial VICs (with the exception of the North Sydney facility) have a generally consistent exterior ‘seafaring’ theme, with roof designs in the form of stylized sails, as illustrated, but interior space and layouts are different. The three older facilities (Clarenville, Notre Dame, Whitbourne) are smaller facilities like the one illustrated. Deer Lake was originally the same design but was expanded. Port aux Basques was redeveloped several years ago and is much larger, as is the Argentia facility, which is a much newer facility.



The VIC at North Sydney is very limited – merely a counter with barely space to counsel two visitors at one time, with a small office area. Two brochure racks are provided in the adjacent waiting area.



North Sydney VIC

A more detailed discussion of interior and exterior design issues is provided later in this report.

There is also a standard sign used on the site of each of the provincial VICs, illustrated here. The background colour used varies depending on the region in which the VIC is located, and is a similar colour to that used in the provincial travel guide for that region. Advance warning signs are provided and are of a consistent design, but the number of advance warning signs provided varies, and in some cases is inadequate to give visitors sufficient time to plan a stop.



Marketing

The location of the provincial visitor information centres is indicated on the provincial highway map with a yellow ? on a black background. A similar symbol is used on the Scenic Tour maps located at the beginning of each regional section in the travel guide. Many (but not all) of the regional/local

centres are also marked on the map, with a smaller ? on a yellow background. There is no listing of either the provincial information centres or the regional/local centres, their locations, services provided or season and hours of operation in the travel guide.

Facilities and Services Provided

Facilities

The Provincial VICs generally provide the following facilities and services:

Interior

- A counter for use by staff in counselling visitors
- Brochure racks providing regional guides as well as brochures on individual businesses. These racks are generally organized by travel region, space permitting.
- A display case of Newfoundland and Labrador crafts, provided and maintained by the provincial Crafts Council.
- Posters and pictures of key provincial icons, such as icebergs, and selected major natural and heritage attractions
- Washroom facilities
- Pay phone (1)
- A small staff office

Three of the facilities have more extensive interior display areas. In Port aux Basques, there is a display on the key tourism attractions and appeals of each of the tourism regions in the province. In Deer Lake, the display is on the Viking Trail area and includes a Viking boat model. In Argentia, the display is provided by Festival of Flags Inc. and is on the Argentia's role in American military history (Museum of the Atlantic Allies).

Exterior

- Picnic tables
- Garbage and recycling bins

Exhibit 1 summarizes the facilities and services at each of the Provincial information centres

Services

Visitors can obtain information and advice from counsellors to assist with their trip planning, and pick up travel guides, maps and brochures. It is provincial policy that staff do not make reservations for visitors – they are provided with the information and directed to use the pay phones provided at each centre.

All of the provincial VICs provide visitor information on the entire province, including regional publications and brochures of individual businesses. The province operates a literature distribution service that allows businesses to have their brochures distributed for free to provincial and regional VICs. A copy of the Province's literature distribution policy is presented in Appendix I.

Exhibit 1
Summary of Facilities and Services at Provincial Visitor Information Centres

	Pay Phones Inside	Pay Phones Outside	Public Washrooms On-Site	Washrooms Accessible	Free Public Parking On-Site	Picnic Tables	High Speed Computer - Staff	Computer Access for Visitors	Accommodation Reservations	Reservations for Other Businesses	TV/Video Display	Community Heritage Display/Interior Display	Craft Display	Craft or Souvenir Sales
Whitbourne	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓					✓		✓	
Argentina	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓					✓	Interpretive display on Argentina as an American Military Base	✓	
Clarenville	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓							✓	
Notre Dame	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓					✓		✓	
Deer Lake	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓					Not used	Display on Viking Trail	✓	
Port aux Basques	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓						Panels on tourism regions	✓	
North Sydney	✓		✓	✓		✓								

According to the Tourism Literature Distribution Policy, only literature from the following types of businesses will be accepted for distribution:

- Roofed Accommodations that have a Tourist Establishment Licence.
- Campgrounds and Trailer Parks with a Tourist Establishment Licence.
- Outfitters and Adventure Tourism Establishments with a Tourist Establishment Licence.
- Tour Boat Operations.
- Ecotourism and Adventure Tourism.
- Tourism Events that are regional or provincial.
- National, Provincial, Municipal parks.
- Regional and Community Guides and Maps.
- Transportation Schedules.
- Historic Sites and museums.
- Tourism Attractions, Activities, Sightseeing, Day Tours.
- Craft stores/companies and organizations offering Newfoundland and Labrador goods.
- Restaurants focussing on tourists and offering Newfoundland and Labrador products.
- Government Services (federal, provincial, municipal provided they are tourist related).
- Recreational Vehicle and Equipment Rentals.

Posters will not be accepted. Guidelines are provided as to the size of brochures so that they will fit in the racks available. Businesses can distribute a maximum of 5,000 brochures a year through this service. They are asked to provide an allocation list, identifying the provincial and regional/local VICs to which their brochures should be sent, and how many pieces. Businesses may also take brochures directly to the VICs. Limited brochure rack space in the VICs may restrict how many brochures can be displayed.

Season and Hours of Operation

As noted earlier, in recent years the provincial VICs have operated from mid-May to mid-October, except for Argentia which closed at the end of September when the ferry service was discontinued for the season. Due to budget cutbacks in 2004, the operating season was reduced by three weeks with the opening a week later (May 19) and closing two weeks earlier, on September 28th.

The reduction in the operating season of the provincial VICs is totally contradictory to the evolving patterns of tourism activity in the province, and to the overall strategic directions recommended in the recently completed provincial tourism development strategy. Visitors are arriving in the province earlier in the year, particularly those looking to see icebergs and looking for information on where to find them. At the same time, fall travel generally is increasing. And a major priority in the tourism development strategy is to grow shoulder

season activity – “*The viability of the industry in future will need to come from marketing and growing demand in the shoulder and winter seasons...*”²

The hours of operation for the provincial VICs vary although they are generally from 8:30 AM to 8 PM during the peak season. This assumes that students are available to supplement seasonal recall staff. In the spring and fall, when the students are not working, hours are reduced to 9 AM to 6 PM.

The Port aux Basques VIC is open from 6 AM to 11 PM to accommodate visitors arriving on the ferry. However, the ferry frequently arrives late, sometimes in the middle of the night, and visitors find that the information centre is closed. The operating hours at the Argentia Centre are set such that the centre is scheduled to be open when the ferry arrives, which can be first thing in the morning or late at night, three days a week. Again, however, if the night ferry is late (which is not uncommon), the Centre is likely to be closed.

Maintaining these operating hours is somewhat problematic, particularly in 2004. First, the limited number of staff available means that many centres have only one staff person on during the evening hours. Not only is this a security issue but it also limits the extent of the counselling and assistance that staff are able to provide to visitors. Secondly, the fact that there are no students available outside the June to August period to supplement the seasonal staff makes the spring/fall operating hours a particular challenge, especially at the ferry departure/arrival locations of North Sydney, Argentia and Port aux Basques. Often there are no staff on duty at North Sydney prior to ferry departures. Thirdly, union Collective Agreement Clauses prohibit split shifts, therefore eliminating the opportunity to bring in staff for 2 – 3 hours during peak times, such as ferry arrivals.

Staffing and Budgets

Total Budget

The total budget for the operation of the Provincial VICs is some \$395,100 as follows:

<i>Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation Budget (FY 2004/05)</i>	
Salaries and Wages (excluding Manager)	\$263,452
Travel, Supplies and Purchased Services	60,000 approx. ³
 <i>Department of Works and Services Budget (FY 2003/04)</i>	
Heat, light, grounds maintenance, building repairs	\$71,800

² The Economic Planning Group, A Special Place, A Special People – The Future for Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism, The Top Ten Conclusions

³ The total operating budget for this division (\$64,700) includes costs associated with the Accommodations Licensing program. However, most of the costs are associated with the VICs and we have estimated these at \$60,000

Staffing and Staff Costs

Exhibit 2 provides a summary of staffing levels and wage costs for the provincial VICs during the 2004 operating period. The total salaries allocation for 2004/05 was reduced by \$70,000, the equivalent of closing two VICs. This reduction was absorbed by reducing the overall operating period, cancelling VIC service on the ferries and redeploying the staff positions (one to Port aux Basques and one to Whitbourne) and reducing the number of student positions from the normal 15 to 9.

In 2004, there were a total of 18 seasonal recall staff and 9 students. The hourly wage for the seasonal staff ranges from \$18.86 an hour to \$20.66 per hour for senior travel counsellors and from \$14.46 to \$15.84 per hour for travel counsellors. Students are paid \$7 per hour for their first year and \$7.69 for second and third years. (The provincial minimum wage rate is \$6 per hour.)

Operational and Maintenance Budgets

The Department of Works and Services is directly responsible for maintenance and operations costs associated with the provincial VICs. These costs (for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2004) are also provided in Exhibit 2, by centre. They ranged from almost \$24,000 at Port aux Basques to just under \$5,000 in Clarenville.

Other Costs

The operating costs for the VIC and Accommodations Licensing Program (most of which is expended on the VICs) are as follows:

Travel (by program manager, admin assistant and VIC staff for annual meeting)	\$22,500
Supplies (includes pens, paper, uniforms, postage)	5,700
Purchased Services (phones, training, VIC enhancements, etc.)	36,500
Total	\$64,700

Regional/Local VIC Grant Program

The total budget allocation to VICs within the Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation includes \$76,000 for 2004/05 in grants provided to regional and local VICs that apply and meet basic criteria. This is a decline from between \$86,000 and \$90,000 provided in 2001 and 2002.

In 2004, grants ranging from \$2,340 to \$4,500 were provided to 23 centres across the province. The features of this program are discussed later in this section of the report.

Exhibit 2
Staffing Levels and Costs, and Operation & Maintenance Costs
Provincial VICs

	Staffing Levels			Salaries & Wages			Operations & Maintenance *	Total
	Seasonal	Students	Total	Seasonal	Students	Total		
North Sydney	3	-	3	\$36,700	-	\$36,700	Nil	\$36,700
Port aux Basques	4(a)	2	6	\$49,700	\$8,000	\$57,700	\$23,700	\$81,400
Deer lake	2	2	4	\$26,500	\$7,000	\$33,500	\$7,000	\$40,500
Notre Dame	2	2	4	\$26,500	\$6,900	\$33,400	\$8,100	\$41,500
Clareville	2	2	4	\$26,500	\$6,900	\$33,400	\$4,700	\$38,100
Whitbourne	3(b)	-	3	\$38,600	-	\$38,600	\$8,000	\$46,600
Argentia	2	1	3	\$26,000	\$4,000	\$30,000	\$20,200	\$50,200
Total	18	9	27	\$230,500	\$32,800	\$263,300	\$71,700	\$335,000

Numbers are rounded to the nearest \$100.

(a) One of these employees was redeployed here from the ferry 'Caribou'

(b) One of these employees was redeployed here from the ferry 'Smallwood'

NOTE: Staff costs are for FY ending March 2005; Operations and Maintenance costs are for FY ending March 2004.

Visitation to Provincial Visitor Information Centres

Exhibit 3 provides a summary of visitation to the provincial information centres, by centre, for 1990 through 2004 and Exhibit 4 illustrates this visitation pattern graphically. During this period, total visitation has increased from 84,000, reaching a peak of 137,000 in 2002 (which was a record year for tourist visitation to the province) and then declining to just over 100,000 in 2004.

VICs at Port aux Basques and North Sydney consistently report the highest volume of visitors, in the 30,000 range. The Deer Lake VIC reports the next highest volume of visitors, generally over 20,000 for the past few years. (Visitation to the Deer Lake Centre was down significantly in 2004; this may be due in part to the fact that the Deer Lake Chamber of Commerce operated a small visitor information booth located in the arrivals area at the Deer Lake Airport for this first time during 2004 coupled with the fact that the province is seeing an increasing proportion of air arrivals). The Whitbourne VIC generally has visitation levels in the 12,000 – 14,000 range, with centres in Notre Dame Junction, Clarenville, and Argientia seeing around 10,000 or fewer visitors a season.

In Exhibit 5, we have compared total visitation to provincial information centres to total visitation to the province for the period 1990 to 2004 (provincial visitation data is not yet available for 2004 but preliminary indications suggested a decline over 2003 levels). As illustrated, the pattern of visitation to the provincial VICs has generally mirrored patterns of overall non-resident visitation to Newfoundland and Labrador.

Summary of Key Findings from Field Inspections of the Provincial VICs

The consultants visited all of the provincial VICs (and several of them more than once) as part of this project. In most locations, the visit included a ‘mystery shop’ component as well as a discussion with staff on duty at the time of the visit. A photographic documentation of each facility was also completed and has been provided digitally.

A further inspection by an architect, Bill MacCallum, was carried out at three of the facilities (Whitbourne, Port aux Basques and Argientia) and his detailed findings and inspection reports are also provided as a separate deliverable.

The key findings from the field inspections are provided below. First, we discuss the general findings that apply to most or all of the provincial VICs and secondly, we provide comments on each facility.

Exhibit 3
Visitation to Provincial VICs
1990 - 2004

	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Argentina	Not Open	Not Open	1,570	5,252	5,673	6,455	6,315	8,183	6,425	7,308	4,310	4,684	7,323	8,489	7,714
Whitbourne	8,059	7,893	8,531	7,775	10,951	11,780	11,545	12,381	11,183	13,537	12,857	11,719	13,766	14,064	10,919
Clareville	5,323	5,638	5,305	5,893	7,996	8,618	7,439	8,602	8,323	9,078	8,503	9,069	10,341	10,821	9,091
Notre Dame Junction	6,430	6,456	6,707	6,874	7,860	9,130	9,599	10,460	10,472	11,503	12,145	10,936	12,670	11,611	9,711
Deer Lake	10,995	11,801	11,069	11,413	14,014	18,995	17,349	19,948	21,501	23,844	23,371	24,211	27,092	23,269	16,926
Port Aux Basques	16,522	18,548	17,564	17,160	21,255	23,600	20,305	24,471	21,818	25,877	29,519	28,249	32,138	30,253	24,663
North Sydney	36,771	36,219	30,033	28,882	31,392	31,462	28,187	23,138	26,217	29,316	28,628	30,608	33,809	28,194	21,114
Total	84,100	86,555	80,779	83,249	99,141	110,040	100,739	107,183	105,939	120,463	119,333	119,476	137,139	126,701	100,138

Source: Tourism Division, Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation

Notes:

The operating season for all VICs in 2004 was three weeks less than in the preceding years

Data for the Notre Dame VIC covering the period October 1 to October 3, 2000 is not available.

The Argentina VIC opened August 18, 1992

Exhibit 4

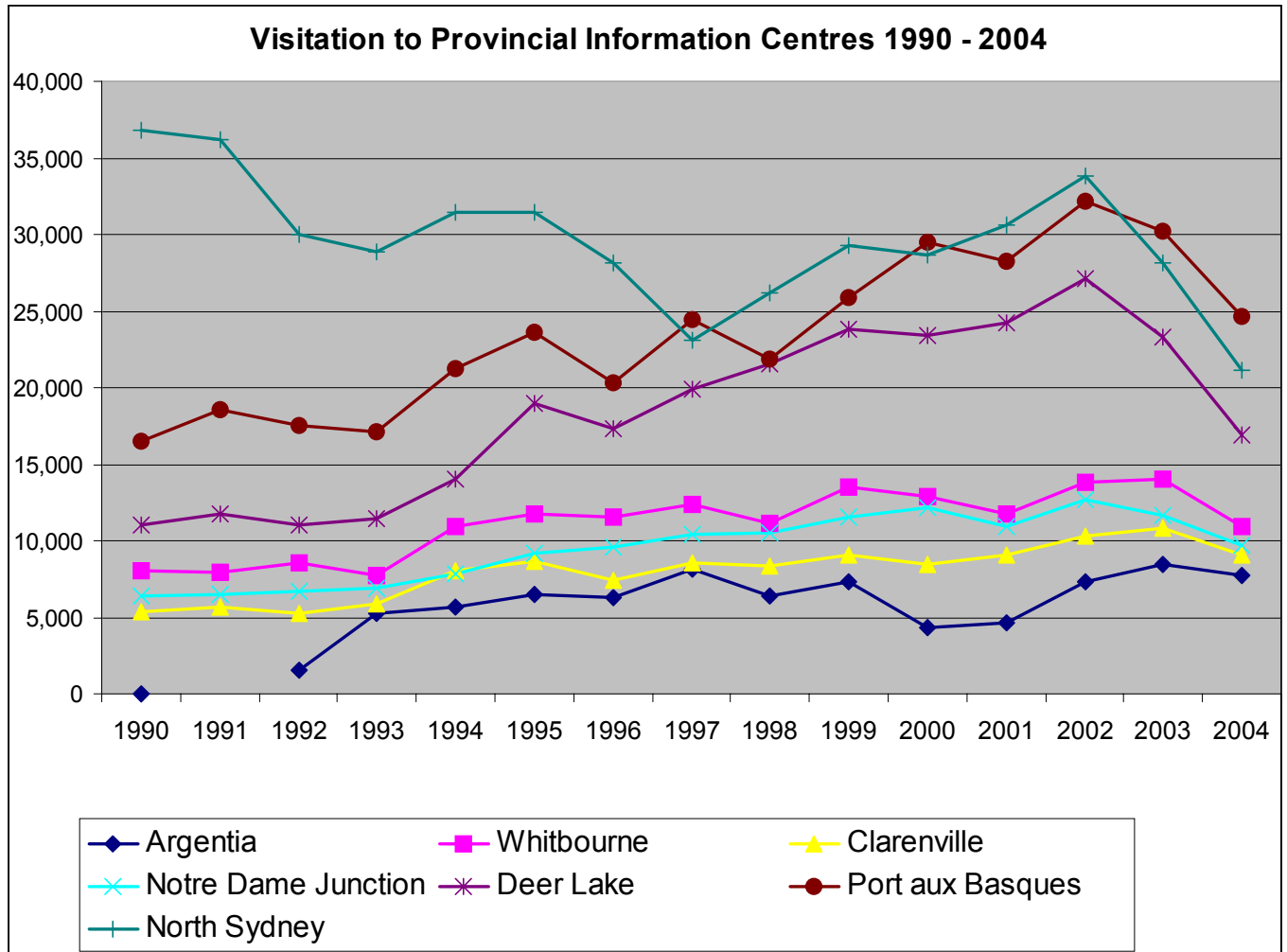
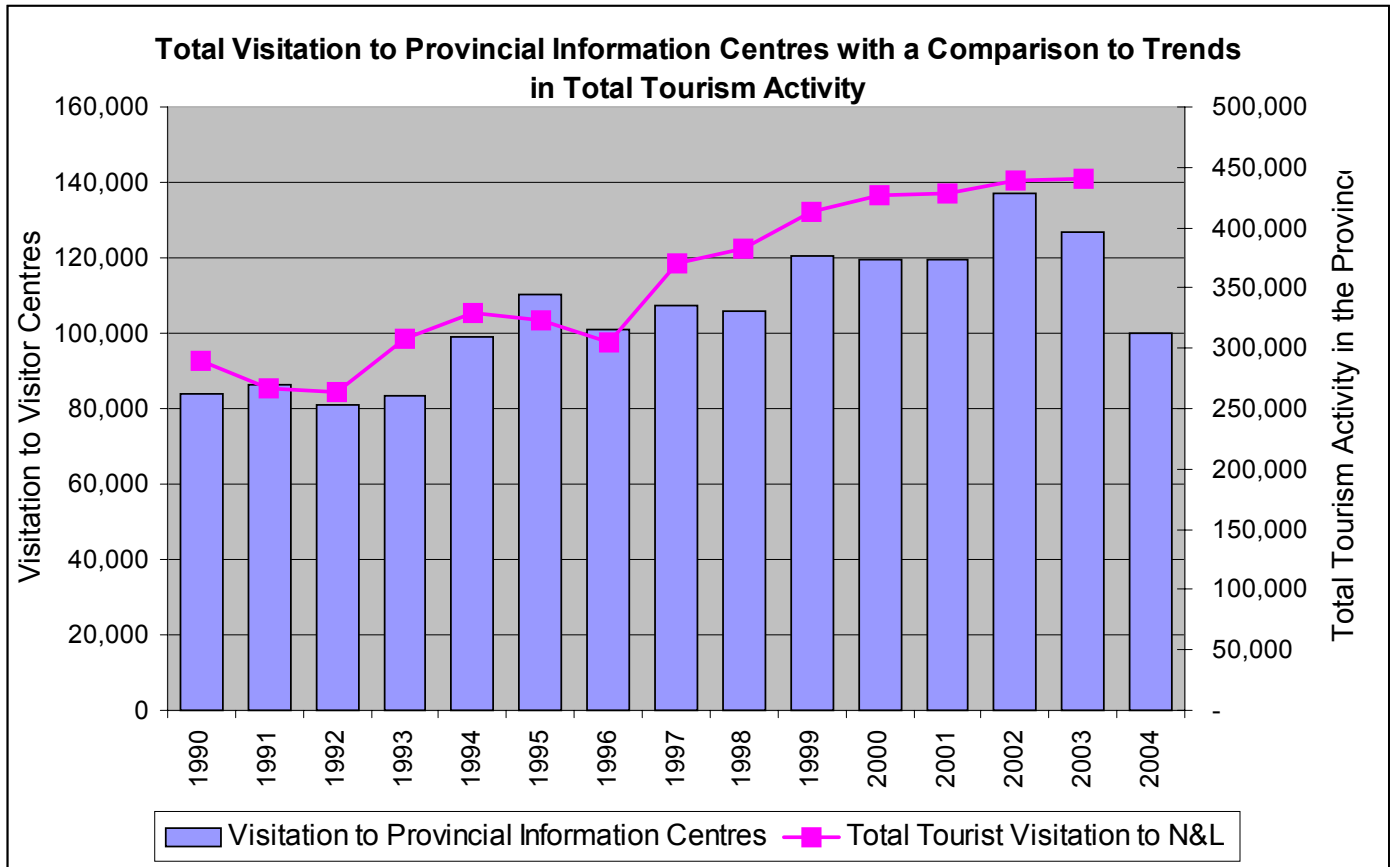


Exhibit 5



General Findings

Physical/Facility Issues

- The space available in all the Provincial centres, with the possible exception of Port Aux Basques, is too limited for more than the most basic functions and displays.
- The counters used for counselling visitors are located around the corner from the entrance. This is not ideal since staff cannot see people coming and going. The counter space at most centres is too small.
- Brochure rack designs are inconsistent, some are outdated, and there is inadequate capacity in all the centres
- There is no space for posters or other displays, other than a limited number of Provincial posters
- All centres need more than one pay phone
- There are no windows to allow staff to see activity on the grounds and parking lot.
- The older facilities (Clareville, Notre Dame Junction, Whitbourne) have only one entrance/exit. There is no second or emergency exit.
- Ventilation is generally poor. There is no air circulation or ventilation or air conditioning in most of the centres.
- Washrooms in the older centres are located inappropriately – opening right onto the counselling area and the exhaust fans ineffective. Also, the washroom capacity in the older centres is very limited.
- Several centres have TVs/Videos but they are not all used; in some cases this is because having the video going causes people to stand around and this results in congestion since the centre is too small.
- Grounds keeping and landscaping is at or below minimum standard.
- There is no alarm or security system or surveillance cameras.
- Storage space is very limited.

Signage/Access/Egress

- The visibility of the VICs from the highways is frequently a problem because of building setbacks, uncontrolled vegetation growth and small signs.
- The on-site signs are small, hard to read and are not lit.
- Entrance and egress onto the highway is poor, with limited (or no) entry/exit lanes. Since most of the VICs are on the Trans Canada Highway this results in a dangerous situation, which is compounded by the poor visibility of many of the centres.
- Advance signage is inconsistent in placement, and in some cases is lacking completely.

Services

- There are no 24/7 services at any of the centres. Things needed include:
 - Washrooms
 - Phone
 - Travel guides and maps

- Information panels with area map, phone numbers, etc.
- Night lighting
- The space available for displaying brochures is insufficient.
- Display space (e.g. for posters, panels on provincial/regional icons) is insufficient.
- Existing displays are, for the most part, out-of-date and have not been replaced in many years.
- There is no access to computers for visitors to check their email or seek out information on the web.
- Hours of operation are inconsistent.
- Most centres have only one pay phone which is insufficient to handle demand at peak periods.

Staff-Related Issues

- Staff are required to work alone in the evenings (and at times during the day) and this poses a security issue. This issue is a particular concern since all the centres are relatively remote, away from built up areas and, for the most part, not close to other buildings.
- Very few of the staff wear nametags.
- There is no consistent uniform. Whereas some managers have a blazer, most staff do not wear uniforms and there is no consistent dress policy.
- Students working at the centres require more training – on the province’s tourism products and appeals, and on customer service.
- The seasonal staff generally have excellent product knowledge but, for the most part, are not ‘selling’ the province – they respond to questions but do not attempt to encourage visitors to spend more time or see more things.

Ferry and Staffing Related Issues

- There are insufficient staff on duty to handle surges in demand at Port aux Basques and Argentia when the ferries arrive, and at North Sydney prior to their departure. This is a direct result of the fact that split shifts are not permitted under the collective agreement.
- There is also no arrangement with Marine Atlantic to inform the three relevant VICs as to changes to ferry departure and arrival times.
- Some ferry arrivals are missed altogether due to rigid shift arrangements.

Clearly, the fixed, full shift model makes no sense whatever when it comes to the three ferry-related VICs.

Facility Specific Findings

The following are additional comments specific to each centre:

North Sydney

- The tiny booth facility leased from Marine Atlantic is much too small given the volume of people at this location. There is no capacity for more than one counsellor.
- The information counter is poorly located in the building, off a side, dark hall, and is difficult to find due to lack of interior signage.
- There is no brochure capacity to speak of, and no space for displays or for storage. As a result, the Centre does nothing to sell visitors on the range of visitor experiences in the province. Its main function is handing out travel guides and maps and providing basic information. Staff do not have the tools (time, literature, etc.) to service customer requests for detailed information.
- Staffing of one person per shift is insufficient to handle the demand.
- The fixed staffing schedule means that the same staff person works alone during slow or busy periods, and if the ferry departure is outside of a scheduled shift, no one is on duty at all.
- There is no exterior signage indicating that there is a VIC inside the Marine Atlantic building.
- The hours of operation are not posted.

Port Aux Basques

- The interior is poorly organized.
- There is a need for more counselling space.
- The centre is closed between 10 PM and 6 AM, so no services are available for ferries arriving between these times. (There is a need for some basic 24/7 services for visitors who arrive on early/late ferries when the centre is closed.)
- The information provided on the computer/Internet kiosks maintained by an outside organization is very poor and misleading – it only includes information on facilities/services in the local area who have chosen to participate in the program but this is not explained to visitors. This is an inappropriate arrangement for a provincial VIC.
- Operating hours were not clearly posted.

Deer Lake

- The highway visibility of this centre is bad, and advance warning signage is poor - there is no advance warning signage coming from the south; the advance sign coming from the east is west of the exit to the Viking Trail.
- The entrance is hard to locate.
- At the time of our visit, the grass was uncut.
- Air circulation and the washroom location are particularly poor at this site. The washrooms are located next to the counselling counter and the noise and smell is intrusive.
- The centre is small; the brochure display area is crowded and storage is a major challenge.
- The counselling and display area is too small.
- The Viking display is modest and of poor quality.

Notre Dame Junction

- The centre is too small; there is only one small counselling counter and brochure display areas and racks are very limited.
- The counter is around the corner, out of sight of people entering the VIC.
- Brochure racks are inadequate.
- The highway entrance/egress to this centre is particularly poor and dangerous due to poor visibility, lack of turning lanes/ramps on to the highway.
- The advance warning sign is not well placed.
- The building is 'accessible' but there is a 6" lip on the step leading to the entrance.
- There is no secondary exit here.

Clarenville

- The centre is too small.
- The centre is badly located and visibility is poor, particularly for westbound traffic.
- Air circulation is a particular problem here.
- Displays are very limited.
- Again, the highway entrance/egress to this centre is poor.

Whitbourne

- The centre is too small.
- There is poor highway visibility from both directions.
- There is dangerous access from both directions from the highway – no departure lane and finding the turn is difficult.
- There is a need for 24/7 services at this location.

Argentia

- The military heritage display is inappropriate for a VIC. *It would be better to have a broader display of the heritage of the entire area (or province), in keeping with the functions of a visitor information centre.*
- The building entrance is badly designed, with a post in the middle of the doorway.
- The centre is located on the wrong side of the road, opposite to the inbound ferry traffic.
- There is a need for more visible signage from the ferry.
- This is the newest provincial VIC and is an attractive building.
- There is a need for 24/7 services at this location.
- Counter space is adequate but needs to be reconfigured because of the intervention of the structural post in this area.
- While this centre, like North Sydney and Port Aux Basques, is ferry-related, and is a gateway to the province, its operating schedule is not linked to the ferry schedule, which is a major flaw.

Regional and Local Visitor Information Centres

Overview

In addition to the seven provincial VICs, there are over 30 regional/local VICs in Newfoundland and Labrador. Almost all of these facilities are seasonal operations, and many operate only during the peak tourist season, from late June (or early July) through to Labour Day. To a large extent, these centres are dependent on students (and federal government student employment programs) for their staffing needs.

The local/regional VICs are operated by a variety of different groups – Chambers of Commerce, regional/local tourist associations or development associations and Boards of Trade. Many are included within another facility, such as in the development association offices or in an attraction; others are stand-alone facilities.

The Province has an annual grant program for regional/local VICs, which totalled some \$76,000 in 2004. Applicants meeting a set of criteria are eligible for grants to assist with the hiring of staff and other operating costs.

Locations

Regional and local VICs are located across the province. The map on the following page illustrates the locations of these facilities, as well as of the provincial VICs. The locations of the regional/local facilities operating in 2004 are listed below, by region.

Avalon

- St. John's Airport
- St. John's Downtown
- Mount Pearl
- Witless Bay
- Manuels
- Harbour Grace
- Bay Roberts

Eastern

- Fortune
- Marystown
- Goobies
- Southern Ba
- Elliston

Central

- Glovertown
- Eastport Peninsula

- Gambo
- Newville
- Fogo/Change Islands
- Gander
- Grand Falls-Windsor
- Green Bay (on TCH at Route 390)
- Baie Verte

Western

- Bay St. George
- Port au Port
- Corner Brook
- Deer Lake Airport
- Wiltondale
- Hawkes Bay
- St. Anthony – Grenfell Centre and L’Anse aux Meadows

Labrador

- Labrador Straits (L’Anse au Clair)
- Labrador West
- Happy Valley-Goose Bay (Lake Melville)

In addition to these facilities that were operating in 2004, the consultants identified a number of other regional/local VICs that are not currently operating during their fieldwork. These included:

- A VIC previously operated by the Town of Burgeo, at the intersection of the TCH and Route 480.
- A site under development, including a variety of information panels and potentially a small information booth, at the intersection of the TCH at Route 410 to the Baie Verte peninsula.
- A VIC in Carbonear at the old railway station.

We are aware of five proposals for new regional/local VICs:

- Turk’s Gut
- Port au Port Peninsula
- A new one at Bay St. George to replace the current centre at a different location nearby
- Another project in the planning stage is the Gros Morne Visitor Centre in Rocky Harbour (this facility is being re-profiled as a visitor information centre featuring the experiences of the Viking Trail; final interior and exhibit design is currently underway)
- An Iceberg Interpretive Centre including visitor information services, on the TCH in the Springdale area.

Facilities and Services Provided

The regional/local visitor information centres are very varied in terms of the facilities in which they are located and the extent of the services provided. Some are located in freestanding buildings; others are in buildings used by other groups such as local development and tourism associations.

Examples of the interior and exteriors of regional/local VICs are illustrated in the pictures in Appendix II. Locations of all VICs are shown on Maps 1 and 2.

There are also a number of unmanned information kiosks/panels in various locations around the province, mostly along the Viking Trail and in the Discovery Trail area. These are also illustrated.

There is no consistent look or distinguishing feature at the local/regional visitor information centres across the province. Exhibit 6 summarizes the facilities and services provided at each of the regional/local visitor information centres. Generally, the centres provide the following:

- Provincial travel guides and maps, as well as regional guides for the various regions of the province
- Brochures on local/regional tourism-related businesses and a selection of brochures on tourism businesses in other parts of the province
- Posters/displays on local area attractions
- Washrooms

Many also have a craft sales area featuring local area handicrafts and a number provide computer access to visitors. Some have displays of photographs and artifacts on the local area and its heritage. Several have landscaped grounds with picnic areas, and occasionally children's play areas or outdoor displays. Some centres assist visitors with making reservations for accommodations, but only a few help with reservations for activities and tours.

Marketing

There is little done in the way of promoting the locations of regional/local visitor information centres to visitors. The provincial travel map does indicate the location of some of these centres, but not all centres are identified and in some cases the locations are incorrect. There is no listing of them in the provincial travel guide but some of the small regional guides do indicate the locations of their facilities in these publications.

Most have advance signage, either a provincial visitor information centre sign or a ? symbol sign and most have on-site signage indicating that visitor information is available at this location. However, as with the physical designs of the centres, there is no consistency in the signage provided or in its design.




Map #1

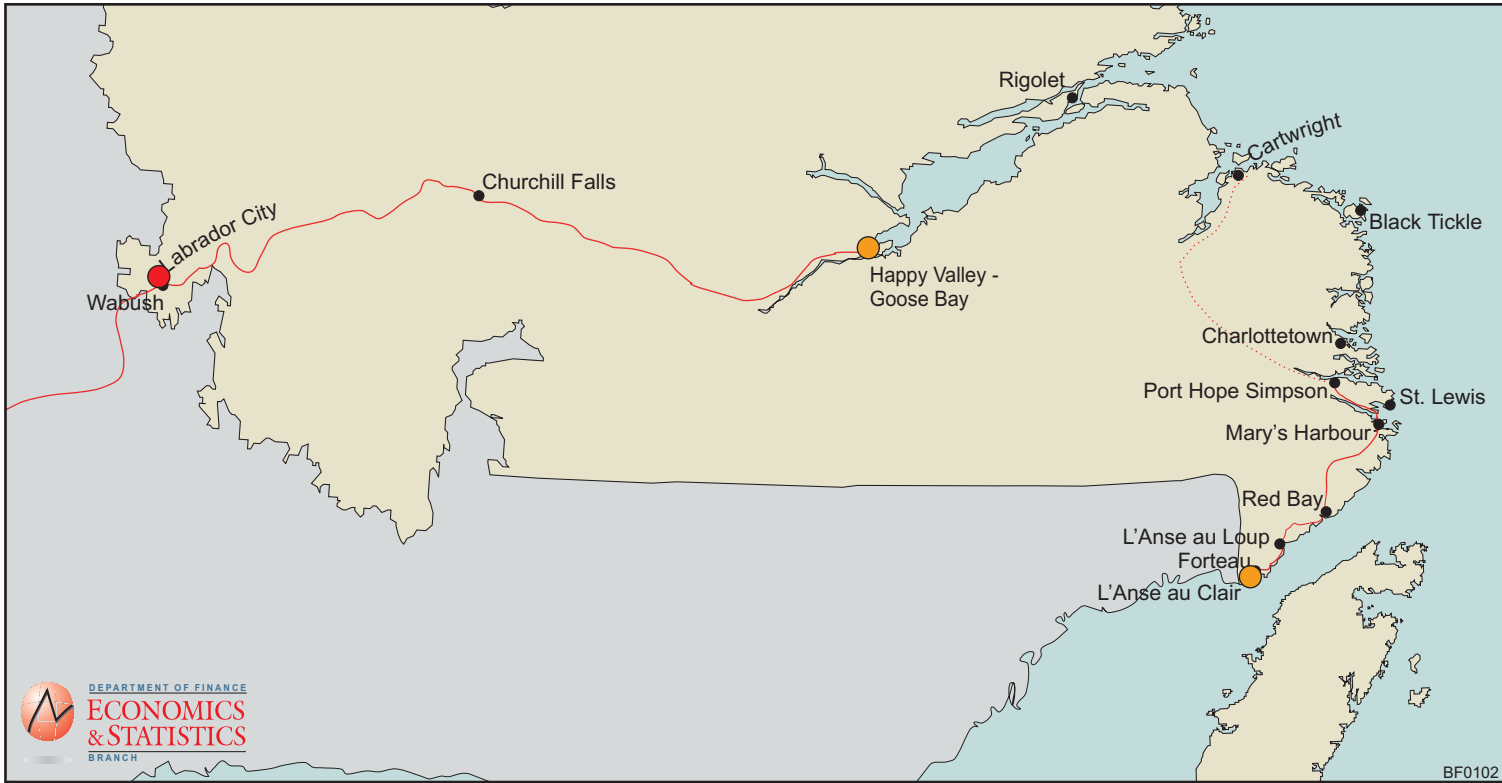
The Island of Newfoundland : Visitor Information Centres : Existing Situation



Map #2

Labrador : Visitor Information Centres : Existing Situation

Legend	
	Provincial VICs
	Local/Regional VICs
	Information Counters in other Facilities



**Exhibit 6
Summary of Facilities and Services at Regional/Local Visitor Information Centres**

	Restrictions on Literature Distributed	Public Washrooms On-Site	Washrooms Accessible	Free Public Parking On-Site	Picnic Tables	High Speed Computer - Staff	Computer Access for Visitors	Accommodation Reservations	Reservations for Other Businesses	TV/Video Display	Community /Heritage Display	Craft Display	Craft or Souvenir Sales
Avalon Region													
St. John's Airport	Yes – ACVB members only	✓	✓					✓	✓				
St. John's Downtown	No – other than due to space	✓	✓			✓	✓						
Witless Bay	No, but Irish Loop TA members get more profile	✓	✓	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Manuels	Must be tourism related	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		
Harbour Grace	No	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓		
Bay Roberts	Bay Roberts & Baccalieu Trail	✓	✓	✓	✓	?		✓	?	✓			
Carbonear	Not Operating												
Mount Pearl	Centre has only provided info by phone & mail to date – new space for 2004 or 5?	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓						
Eastern Region													
Fortune	Members of Heritage Run Tourist Association only	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Marystown	Members of Heritage Run Tourist Association only	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Goobies	Members of Heritage Run Tourist	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

**Exhibit 6
Summary of Facilities and Services at Regional/Local Visitor Information Centres**

	Restrictions on Literature Distributed	Public Washrooms On-Site	Washrooms Accessible	Free Public Parking On-Site	Picnic Tables	High Speed Computer - Staff	Computer Access for Visitors	Accommodation Reservations	Reservations for Other Businesses	TV/Video Display	Community /Heritage Display	Craft Display	Craft or Souvenir Sales
	Association only												
Southern Bay	Tourism related	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓		✓
Elliston	None	✓	?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓
Central Region													
Glovertown		✓	✓	✓							✓		
Eastport Peninsula	No			✓									✓
Gambo	No	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓				✓
Newville (Twillingate area)	No – except accomod' s must be licensed	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Fogo/Change Islands	No	✓		✓				✓			✓	✓	✓
Gander	No	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		
Grand Falls-Windsor	No	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓					✓
Green Bay	Tourism business; licensed; show proof of liability insurance	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓					✓
Baie Verte	No	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓		✓
Western Region													
Bay St. George	No real policy	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓			✓		✓
Port au Port	No	✓	✓	✓	✓					✓			✓
Corner Brook	Businesses pay for brochures to be displayed	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓ Next door

**Exhibit 6
Summary of Facilities and Services at Regional/Local Visitor Information Centres**

	Restrictions on Literature Distributed	Public Washrooms On-Site	Washrooms Accessible	Free Public Parking On-Site	Picnic Tables	High Speed Computer - Staff	Computer Access for Visitors	Accommodation Reservations	Reservations for Other Businesses	TV/Video Display	Community /Heritage Display	Craft Display	Craft or Souvenir Sales
Deer Lake Airport	?	✓	✓	?	?								
Bonne Bay/Wiltondale	No	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓				
Hawkes Bay	No	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓		✓
St. Anthony – Grenfell & L’Anse aux Meadows	Yes – due to limited space	✓	✓	✓	✓			✓	✓				
Labrador													
Labrador Straits	No	✓		✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	
Labrador West	No	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓	In Gateway Complex ?	✓	✓
Happy Valley-Goose Bay (Lake Melville)	No	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓

Management and Staffing

Exhibit 7 summarizes the ownership/management of each of the regional/local VICs as well as their staffing levels. As indicated, these centres are usually operated by the local/regional tourism association, development association or chamber of commerce.

For the most part, the centres are staffed by students hired with funding obtained through HRSD student employment programs. Management and supervision is provided by the staff of the tourism or development association; in some cases there are full-time (seasonal) managers for the information centres.

Staff training varies significantly from centre to centre. Some of the centres have sent staff to the provincial training program (this program was not offered in 2004) but find that this is problematic due to timing and cost issues – decisions on HRSD funding commitments often do not arrive until late spring, meaning that students are not hired until after the provincial training has taken place. Many send their staff to participate in the one day SuperHost program offered by HNL. In other areas, management delivers their own training programs, sometimes as little as one day on-the-job training in the centre. Other locations offer a regional FAM for the staff with a more in-depth training effort. These training programs focus on the tourism experiences in the local/regional area.

Operating Season and Hours of Operation

Exhibit 7 also summarizes the operating season and hours of the regional/local visitor information centres.

The operating season for these centres varies considerably across the province and from year to year. Centres that are totally dependent on student funding programs often do not open until late June or even early July and close up by Labour Day. A number of centres open in mid-late May and stay open until late September and even into October, but with more limited operating hours and sometimes only on Mondays to Fridays outside of the peak summer season.

A number of the centres are open year round, albeit with limited operating days and hours outside of the peak season. These include:

- St. John's airport
- St. John's downtown (Monday to Friday only from Sept 15 – June 15)
- Marystown (in the Tourism/Development Association offices)
- Gambo (starting in 2004; centre in the Joey Smallwood Interpretation Centre and restaurant is planned to be open all year)
- Neville (Monday to Friday only Sept 5 to early July; in Tourism/Development Association offices)
- Gander (Monday to Friday only Sept 6 to June 11; in Chamber of Commerce offices)

**Exhibit 7
Regional/Local Visitor Information Centres
Summary of Ownership, Season and Hours of Operation and Staffing Levels**

	Ownership and Operating Group	Stand Alone Facility or Shared Facility	Operating Season		Operating Days		Operating Hours	Number of Staff
			Year Round	Seasonal Operation	Open Daily	Open Monday to Friday Only		
Avalon Region								
St. John's Airport	Avalon Visitors & Convention Bureau	No – Counter in St. John's International Airport	✓		✓ (Except Saturdays Oct 31 – mid May)		May – Oct: 8 am – 12 midnight Rest of Yr: 10am – 8 pm	1 FT, YR, 2 Perm, Season 1 PT
St. John's Downtown	City of St. John's – Economic Development, Tourism & Culture	No – Shared with Department of Economic Development Offices	✓		June 15 – Sept 15	Sept 15 – June 15	9 AM – 4:30 pm	1 FT, YR 3 Season
Witless Bay	Irish Loop Tourist Association	No – space in small mall; outside access and separate identity		✓ May 1 – Oct 5	July 4 – Sept 5	May 1 – July 4 & Sept 6 – Oct 1	9 am- 6 pm July 4 – Sept 5 8:45 – 4 pm rest of season	2 Perm, Season 2 students for 8 – 10 weeks
Manuels	Manuels River Natural Heritage Association	Stand Alone		✓ May 17 – late October	July 5 – Sept 3	May – July 5 & Sep/Oct	8:30 am – 9pm July 5 – Sept 3 8:30 – 4:30 Rest of Time	1 FT, YR 3 – 5 students
Harbour Grace	Harbour Grace Tourism	Stand Alone		✓ May 31 – Sept 4	✓		10 AM – 5 PM	3 Perm, Seasonal 3 Students for 7 weeks
Bay Roberts	Town of Bay Roberts	Stand Alone		✓	✓		10 am to 5 or 6 pm	N/A
Carbonear	Not operating							
Mount Pearl	Mount Pearl Chamber of Commerce	No – Shared with Chamber of Commerce office						
Eastern Region								
Fortune	Heritage Run Tourism	Stand Alone		✓	✓		Varies	2 seasonal

**Exhibit 7
Regional/Local Visitor Information Centres
Summary of Ownership, Season and Hours of Operation and Staffing Levels**

	Ownership and Operating Group	Stand Alone Facility or Shared Facility	Operating Season		Operating Days		Operating Hours	Number of Staff
			Year Round	Seasonal Operation	Open Daily	Open Monday to Friday Only		
	Association			Late June - mid Nov -04; early June to mid Sept in 03			depending on staffing	
Marystown	Heritage Run Tourism Association	Stand Alone – Building also houses Tourism Association offices	✓ (with Assoc, staff)	✓ See above	✓		9 am – 9 pm	2 FT, YR (For Assoc.) 6 seasonal Also 5 students for 7 weeks – for all HRTA VICs
Goobies	Heritage Run Tourism Association	Stand Alone		✓ See above	✓		Varies depending on staffing	4 seasonal
Southern Bay	Bonavista South Regional Development Association	Stand Alone		✓ June 14 – mid Oct. 2003 – till end August	✓		8:30 am – 8:30 pm	10 students for 6 weeks (NB: Two sets of positions to cover season)
Ellistown (2004 first year of operation)	Tourism Ellistown Inc.	Separate space in local recreation centre; own entrance		✓ May 22 – Oct 8		May 22 – June 11	May–June 11 9AM to 5PM Jun 12-Oct8 10 AM- 7PM	1 FT, YR 3 students for 8 weeks
Central Region								
Glovertown	Alexander Bay-Terra Nova Development Association	No – space in multi-purpose building; also houses offices, board room and Day Care		✓ May 15 – Sept 19		June 30 – Sept 19 May 15 – June 27	May/June: 1 pm – 6 pm July/Aug 10am – 9pm	Office staff in May/June 3 students for 8 weeks

**Exhibit 7
Regional/Local Visitor Information Centres
Summary of Ownership, Season and Hours of Operation and Staffing Levels**

	Ownership and Operating Group	Stand Alone Facility or Shared Facility	Operating Season		Operating Days		Operating Hours	Number of Staff
			Year Round	Seasonal Operation	Open Daily	Open Monday to Friday Only		
Eastport Peninsula	Local service club – but facility located in campground and is not really a VIC, just provides brochures	Brochure racks in office/store for campground		✓	✓		N/A – Same as campground office hours	None dedicated to VIC services
Gambo	Town of Gambo	No – VIC services provided in J. Smallwood Interpretation Centre. Facility leased to private operator; includes rest 't	✓ Starting in May 2004	June 5 – Oct 15 in 2003	May 1 – Sept 30		May 1–June 15: Noon – 2 & 5 – 8 pm June 15 – Sept 3: 10 am – 10 pm Limited winter hours	2 FT, YR 4 Seasonal 1 Student
Newville (Twillingate area)	Twillingate-New World Island Development Association	No – Space in building with Development Association, meeting rooms, other offices	✓		July 5 – Sept 5	Rest of Year	June 7 – Oct 8 8:30 – 6:30 R of Year: Office Hours	2 summer students – 7 weeks
Fogo/Change Islands	Fogo Island Development Association	Stand Alone		✓ July 1 – Sept 10	July to late August	Late August to Sept 10	July–Late Aug: 10am – 10pm Late Aug–Sep. 10 9am – 4:30 pm	5 summer students 7 – 8 weeks
Gander	Gander & Area Chamber of Commerce	No – In building with Chamber of Commerce and Gift Store	✓		June 14 – Sept 3	May 3 – June 11 & Sept 6 – Oct 24; also rest of year	June 14–Sept 3 9am – 8 pm Other 9 am – 5 pm	1 FT, YR 2 summer students
Grand Falls-Windsor	Exploits Valley Development Association	Stand Alone -		✓ May 2.5 – Oct 1	June 19 – Aug 29	May 25 – June 18 & Aug 30 –	June 21–Aug 27 10 am – 8 pm Other	1 seasonal 4 students – 8 weeks

**Exhibit 7
Regional/Local Visitor Information Centres
Summary of Ownership, Season and Hours of Operation and Staffing Levels**

	Ownership and Group	Stand Alone Facility or Shared Facility	Operating Season		Operating Days		Operating Hours	Number of Staff
			Year Round	Seasonal Operation	Open Daily	Open Monday to Friday Only		
Green Bay	Green Bay Economic Development Association	Shared building with craft shop, quilt display, offices and meeting room for Dev. Association		✓ May 21 – Oct 16	June 7 – Aug 31	May 21 – June 7 Sept 1 – Oct 16	9 am or 10 am – 5 pm or 6 pm June 7-Aug 31 9 am – 6 pm Other 9am – 5 pm	1 seasonal 5 students –12 weeks
Baie Verte	Baie Verte Peninsula Economic Development Association	Shared building with museum, craft shop, wildlife display and offices of Dev. Association		✓ June 7 – Sept 3	June 7 – Sept 3		10 am – 7 pm	1 seasonal 5 students – 8 weeks
Western Region								
Bay St. George	Bay St. George Chamber of Commerce	Stand Alone		✓ June 14 – Labour Day	June 14 – Labour Day		8 am – 10 pm	10 students – 10 weeks
Port au Port	Port au Port Economic Development Association	Stand Alone		✓ July 1 – Aug 28	July 1- Aug 28		9 am – 7 pm	2 students – 8 weeks
Corner Brook	Greater Corner Brook Board of Trade	Stand Alone	✓		All Year		June 15–Aug 31 9am – 9 pm Sept 1–June 14 9 am -5 pm	2 FT, YR 4 students – 10 weeks
Deer Lake Airport	Deer Lake Chamber of Commerce	No – Portable counter in Airport						
Bonne Bay/Wiltondale	Bonne Bay Development Association	Stand Alone – building part of Pioneer Village		✓ June 15 –	June 15 – Sept 15		9:30am - 7:30 pm	1 FT, YR (Dev. Association) 2 students – 7

**Exhibit 7
Regional/Local Visitor Information Centres
Summary of Ownership, Season and Hours of Operation and Staffing Levels**

	Ownership and Operating Group	Stand Alone Facility or Shared Facility	Operating Season		Operating Days		Operating Hours	Number of Staff
			Year Round	Seasonal Operation	Open Daily	Open Monday to Friday Only		
Hawkes Bay	Hawkes Bay Development Committee	complex		Sept 15 (NB- Not open till after June 29)				weeks
St. Anthony – Grenfell & LAM	St. Anthony Chamber of Commerce	Stand Alone – Also office for on-site campground		June 20 – Sept 18	✓		9 am – 10 pm	8 – 10 students – 8 weeks (includes campground)
		No – temporary set ups in both Grenfell Interpretation Centre and L’Anse aux Meadows NHS		July 5 – Aug 28	6 days per week (Day closed varied)		9 or 10 am – 5 or 6 pm	2 students – 8 weeks
Labrador								
Labrador Straits	Labrador Straits Historical Development Association	No – space provided in a restored church; includes interpretive exhibits		June 22 – Oct 8	✓		June 23 – Sep 4 9:30am – 6 pm Sept 5 – Oct 8 9:30am – 4:30pm	3 students - 7 – 9 weeks
Labrador West	Labrador West Tourism Association	No – included in Gateway Labrador facility		June 20 – Sept 5	✓		9 am – 9 pm	1 FT, YR 7 – 9 students 8 – 10 weeks
Happy Valley-Goose Bay (Lake Melville)	Labrador Lake Melville Tourism Association	Stand Alone	✓		June to August	Late August to June	June – August 8 am – 8 pm Rest of Year 8:30 – 4:30	1 FT, YR 2 – 8 weeks

- Corner Brook (open daily; all year)
- Happy Valley-Goose Bay - Lake Melville (Monday to Friday only, late August to June)

The short seasons of some of these regional/local VICs is a problem, particularly in some areas. Whereas there are areas of the province with a good distribution of information centres, there are others with only a few centres – and if these do not open until late June, there are no opportunities for visitors to get the information they are seeking.

This is a particular problem in the northern part of western Newfoundland and in the Labrador Straits.

St. Anthony does not have a visitor information centre, but an information counter that is set up inside the Grenfell Centre and at L'Anse aux Meadows, but they are only open from late June/early July to the end of August. Yet, this is a popular destination area and is seeing increased traffic in the spring iceberg viewing season. Similarly, the next closest centre, in Hawkes Bay, does not open till the third week in June, nor does the centre at L'Anse aux Clair in the Labrador Straits. As such, there are, at present, no visitor information centres open in the spring and fall north of Deer Lake. (The redevelopment of the Gros Morne Visitor Centre into an information centre for the Viking Trail will change this but there will still be nothing north of Rocky Harbour).

The operating hours of the regional/local VICs also vary significantly, with centres opening between 8:30 and 10 AM and closing as late as 9 or 10 PM (later at the airports). Many of the centres that are open in the spring and fall are only open on Mondays to Fridays during this period, since they are staffed by office employees who provide information services as a supplement to their other duties.

Operating hours for the centres are often not clearly posted and few centres have any services (e.g. pay phone or map) outside of their buildings.

Visitation

The local/regional centres that apply for grants from the provincial government are required to provide visitation numbers for their centre. The reported data for the past three years is summarized in Exhibit 8. It would appear, however, that there is no consistent method used to record the number of visitors. Some centres were observed to use manual counters; others develop statistics based on the people that sign their guest books (and by no means all visitors do this) and in other cases, we suspect that the data is a guesstimate. As such, it is difficult to compare these data with each other or with data from the provincial information centres.

We recommend that regional/local centres be provided with some guidelines as to how visitation should be recorded.

Exhibit 8
Visitation to Regional and Provincial Information Centres

Information Centre	2001	2002	2003
Avalon Region			
St. John's Airport	29,860	51,700	71,200
St. John's Downtown	11,415	9,435	11,655
Witless Bay	11,800	12,200	14,000
Manuels	Not Available	Not Available	20,000
Harbour Grace	8,406	9,000	8,640
Bay Roberts	Not Open	Not Open	Not Available
Carbonear	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available
Mount Pearl	Not Open	Not Open	Not Open
Eastern Region			
Fortune	10,260	12,940	15,515
Marystown			
Goobies			
Southern Bay	1,117	5,220	4,686
Elliston	Not Open	Not Open	Not Open
Central Region			
Glovertown	350	380	630
Eastport Peninsula	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available
Gambo	Not Available		500
Newville (Twillingate area)	4,284	4,315	4,185
Fogo/Change Islands	Not Available		1,000
Gander	9,530	8,950	8,090
Grand Falls-Windsor	8,835	9,150	9,510
Green Bay	6,046	9,090	9,335
Baie Verte	Not Available	2,500	2,500
Western Region			
Bay St. George	Not Available	4,925	5,145
Port au Port	795	950	990
Corner Brook	13,350	14,400	14,715
Deer Lake Airport	Not Open	Not Open	Not Open
Bonne Bay/ Wiltondale	Not Available	Not Available	Not Available
Hawkes Bay	Not Available	1,230	Not Available
St. Anthony – Grenfell & L'Anse aux Meadows	1,107	1,700	390
Labrador			
Labrador Straits	2,260	2,890	2,460
Labrador West	3,200	3,415	3,100
Lake Melville	1,379	1,595	2,330
Total: All Centres	N/A	165,970	210,600

Total reported visitation in 2003 was over 210,000 (data was not available for five centres so it is likely that the total overall visitation is around 220,000). Approximately 1/3 of the visits (71,200) were to the St. John's airport centre. The next most frequented centre was in Manuels (though this facility serves other needs and it is unclear who is included in the count), and then Witless Bay and Corner Brook with around 14,000 visitors each.

Budgets and Funding Sources

The regional/local VICs are asked to provide information on their operating budgets and sources of funds when submitting their applications for grants from the provincial government. The information provided in these applications was used to develop an estimate of total budgets, and to identify funding sources, for these facilities. It should be noted that the information provided is, in many cases, incomplete. Also, since some visitor information centres operate as part of another facility, some costs are not included as part of their budget and likewise some of the VIC related costs, such as for management staff, may well be shared with other aspects of the operation.

Information was available on 25 of the regional/local VICs and indicates aggregate operating budgets in the \$500,000 range of which almost \$375,000 is for salaries and wages. Other costs include utilities, building and site maintenance costs, uniforms, insurance, training and marketing materials.

There are three main sources of funding for the regional/local visitor information centres:

- Federal employment assistance programs from Human Resources and Social Development such as Job Creation Partnerships and summer student employment programs;
- The grants received from the province through the Department of Tourism, Culture and Recreation;
- Local municipalities, either in cash or in-kind contributions to utilities, maintenance, etc.

A number of the centres earn revenue from the sale of crafts at their centres and may receive some limited support, usually in the form of staff time, from the tourism association or local development association.

Issues Identified by Regional/Local Visitor Information Centres

As part of this study, the regional/local visitor information centres were sent a mail survey to obtain information on their operations as well. These surveys addressed a number of issues other than those discussed above and these are described briefly below.

Security

Respondents were asked how they handled security issues such as in the evenings when there might be only one staff person on duty. Approximately half of those surveyed indicated that they always had at least two people on duty at one time. Several indicated that they have an arrangement with the local RCMP to check on the centres regularly and several indicated that they had security systems in place.

Future Plans for Facilities and Services

Several of the VICs indicated that there were active plans or plans under consideration to move or replace the facility with several others indicating that renovations were underway, particularly to upgrade the accessibility of the facility for handicapped persons.

A number of the centres indicated that they were installing or considering installing computers so as to be able to provide Internet access for visitors. A number also indicated that they were working on keeping their centres open longer with earlier spring opening dates and a later closing. However, funding for staff was indicated as a major constraint in attempting to do this.

Major Challenges

Respondents were asked what their major challenges were in operating the visitor information centre. The responses all revolved around challenges obtaining sufficient funding to operate the centres, with particular concerns about operations in the spring and fall shoulder seasons. Challenges included:

- Lack of funding – for staffing, and for maintenance and operation of the facility. A particular concern is with getting committed funding for staffing early enough in the season to allow time for hiring and training. Another issue is finding funding for staff in the spring and fall shoulder seasons since the student placement programs are usually only for 8 – 10 weeks in the summer.
- Difficulties finding staff with appropriate skills, particularly for the shoulder seasons
- Challenges with funding programs in terms of the timing (short periods for HRSD student funding), cutbacks in HRDC programs, guidelines that cover the types of people that can be hired and restrict rehiring of the same people the next year, etc.

A number of centres also identified the limited support from the province (mostly financial but also with respect to training) as another challenge.

Key Findings from Field Inspections

As part of this assignment, the consultants visited most of the regional/local visitor information centres in the province during late June and early July. The visits involved a combination of a mystery shop of the visitor information service provided, a review of

physical conditions such as signage, exterior and interior facilities and conditions, and a brief discussion with staff. Several of the centres were not open at the time of our field trip – we understand that in some cases this was due to delays in approval of HRSD funding for students in 2004.

The quality of the facilities and of the service provided varied considerably across the province. For the most part, the physical condition of the buildings was of high quality and a good variety of literature and information was available in the centres. A few centres had only a very limited variety of brochures available, and a couple only had information on their immediate local areas. Advance warning signage was very inconsistent and some centres were difficult to locate. Exterior conditions such as site landscaping and on-site signage was generally OK but many of the centres would have benefited from improved site maintenance and better on-site signage.

The greatest variety was found in the quality of the staff – their knowledge and the level of service provided. This ranged from outstanding, with enthusiastic and knowledgeable staff, to unacceptable, with staff who made no effort to interact with the visitors in the centre and/or had very little knowledge about the visitor experiences available in their area, let alone in other parts of the province. Most of the staff encountered were students and it was evident that some had had very little training. On the other hand, some of the students and most of the mature staff were excellent and very knowledgeable about their region.

Generally, the staff had reasonable to good knowledge about their immediate area. In a few instances, they were also able to enthusiastically describe the experiences available and encourage visitation ('upselling') but these occasions were limited. Most staff responded to questions but did not volunteer much information. However, knowledge of visitor experiences outside the immediate area – for other parts of the region and the rest of the province, was much more limited. It is clear that there is a need for more training of the students working in the VICs, not only product knowledge training but also customer service training.

Most of the staff at the local/regional centres had some type of simple uniform or dress and identification.

Restrictions on Display of Literature

The survey of the regional/local visitor information centres asked respondents if they had any restrictions on the literature that was displayed/distributed through their centres. Most of the centres have no restrictions, although several are limited by the space they have available and several indicated that businesses from their local area get higher profile in their facility. Several indicated that businesses had to be tourism-related; some indicated that the business had to be licensed. However, a number of the centres indicated that they had restrictions, as follows:

- St. John's Airport – Operated by Avalon Visitors & Convention Bureau – restricted to literature of ACVB members only.
- Bay Roberts – only information from businesses in the Town of Bay Roberts and the Baccalieu Trail was available in the centre. (It is not clear if this is a policy.)
- Fortune, Marystown and Goobies – Restricted to members of the Heritage Run Tourist Association
- Corner Brook – Businesses pay to have their brochures displayed.

Use of Visitor Information Centres by Visitors

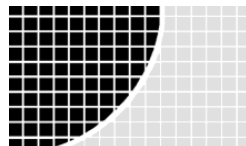
As part of the ongoing Visitor Exit Survey during 2003/04, a number of questions were asked about visitor information services to respondents to the mail back survey. The results of this research are provided on the next page. Note that visitors were not asked to distinguish between their experiences at provincial VICs versus regional/local VICs. These results are based on 785 responses to the mail-back questionnaire; the data is not weighted and has a higher proportion of pleasure/vacation travellers than is seen in overall visitation to the province. It is not, therefore, representative of all visitors to the province.

A significant portion of the visitors surveyed reported using visitor information centres during their trip to the province, primarily for maps and travel distances, and for information on attractions and adventures – things to see and do, as well as accommodations. It appears that those visitors using the VICs were able to find the information they were looking for and were generally satisfied (74% were very satisfied) with their experience and with the knowledge of the staff.

Question																																				
1. During your visit to N&L, did you or anyone in your party visit a VIC?	Yes	76.1%																																		
	No	20%																																		
	Don't know	3.9%																																		
2. What information did your request? (N= 597; multiple responses; only those items requested by 3% or more of respondents is reported here)	<table border="0"> <tr><td>Maps and Travel Distances</td><td>71.2%</td></tr> <tr><td>Attractions & Adventures</td><td>48.4%</td></tr> <tr><td>Information on accommodations</td><td>35.0%</td></tr> <tr><td>Information on tours/hikes</td><td>21.8%</td></tr> <tr><td>General Travel Information</td><td>18.6%</td></tr> <tr><td>2003 Travel Guide</td><td>12.4%</td></tr> <tr><td>Festivals and events</td><td>12.4%</td></tr> <tr><td>Restaurant locations</td><td>12.2%</td></tr> <tr><td>Things to see and do</td><td>7.7%</td></tr> <tr><td>Nature/Outdoor Guide</td><td>7.0%</td></tr> <tr><td>Don't know/Not Sure</td><td>6.5%</td></tr> <tr><td>Scenic Routes & Touring</td><td>5.5%</td></tr> <tr><td>B&B Locations</td><td>5.0%</td></tr> <tr><td>Shops, studios & galleries</td><td>4.4%</td></tr> <tr><td>Iceberg viewing</td><td>4.2%</td></tr> <tr><td>Hours of operation</td><td>4.2%</td></tr> <tr><td>Whale tours</td><td>3.7%</td></tr> </table>	Maps and Travel Distances	71.2%	Attractions & Adventures	48.4%	Information on accommodations	35.0%	Information on tours/hikes	21.8%	General Travel Information	18.6%	2003 Travel Guide	12.4%	Festivals and events	12.4%	Restaurant locations	12.2%	Things to see and do	7.7%	Nature/Outdoor Guide	7.0%	Don't know/Not Sure	6.5%	Scenic Routes & Touring	5.5%	B&B Locations	5.0%	Shops, studios & galleries	4.4%	Iceberg viewing	4.2%	Hours of operation	4.2%	Whale tours	3.7%	
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Shops, studios & galleries	4.4%																																			
Iceberg viewing	4.2%																																			
Hours of operation	4.2%																																			
Whale tours	3.7%																																			
3. Did you receive the information you were looking for?	Yes	92.3%																																		
	No	2.5%																																		
4. Overall, how satisfied were you with the service you received at the VICs?	<table border="0"> <tr><td>Very Satisfied</td><td>73.9%</td></tr> <tr><td>Satisfied</td><td>23.3%</td></tr> <tr><td>Neither satisfied or dissatisfied</td><td>0.8%</td></tr> <tr><td>Dissatisfied</td><td>1.3%</td></tr> <tr><td>Very Dissatisfied</td><td>0.5%</td></tr> </table>	Very Satisfied	73.9%	Satisfied	23.3%	Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	0.8%	Dissatisfied	1.3%	Very Dissatisfied	0.5%																									
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Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	0.8%																																			
Dissatisfied	1.3%																																			
Very Dissatisfied	0.5%																																			
5. How satisfied were you with the knowledge of the staff?	<table border="0"> <tr><td>Very Satisfied</td><td>68.5%</td></tr> <tr><td>Satisfied</td><td>28.1%</td></tr> <tr><td>Neither satisfied or dissatisfied</td><td>1.0%</td></tr> <tr><td>Dissatisfied</td><td>1.7%</td></tr> <tr><td>Very Dissatisfied</td><td>0.2%</td></tr> </table>	Very Satisfied	68.5%	Satisfied	28.1%	Neither satisfied or dissatisfied	1.0%	Dissatisfied	1.7%	Very Dissatisfied	0.2%																									
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Section 3

Visitor Information Services in the Other Atlantic Canada Provinces



Section 3

Visitor Information Services in the Other Atlantic Canada Provinces

Visitor information services in the other Atlantic provinces were investigated through interviews with staff in each province, a review of information they were able to provide us and visits to three centres, two in New Brunswick and one in Nova Scotia.

New Brunswick Visitor Information Program

Interviews were conducted with Greta Wells, Penny Demmings and Marie Jose Michaud.

Overall Strategies – Past, Present Future

Their VIC program is being reviewed currently. Budget pressures continue to be a challenge.

New Brunswick until recently had among the most aggressive marketing and visitor information programs in Canada, and certainly in Atlantic Canada. But it also was clearly very expensive, and some of it has become a victim of aggressive budget cuts in the past few years and particularly this year. As a result, some initiatives have been cancelled and others scaled back considerably.

Visitor Information Centres

There are 6 at gateways into the province, plus one at Aulac (from Nova Scotia) and Cape Germaine (from PEI). The Aulac facility is illustrated in pictures on the following pages.

There is a new VIC at Kings Landing, just north of Fredericton. They needed a new intercept point on the new super highway and are reviewing how it is working. They are trying to emulate the US (e.g. Maine) concept where VICs are located in centre islands on divided freeways. This facility is illustrated later in this section of the report.

Counsellors will make reservations for visitors – both for accommodations and activities. They won't recommend one over another but will help people narrow the choices based on the features they are seeking. In the end, the customer chooses, the staff will make the call to see if there is an availability and then turn the phone over to the customer to make the booking. They are careful to not actually recommend a particular product.

Intercept Strategy

New Brunswick has what it calls an 'Intercept Strategy' in which its various initiatives targeting visitors while they are in the province are integrated. These include the following:

New Brunswick's Aulac VIC



- Provincial VICs
- Municipal VICs
- Partnership with Irving to provide information through their 100 service stations
- Visitor information in Provincial liquor outlets
- The Provincial ‘Cruiser’ program of mobile VIC services
- ‘Experience New Brunswick’ program providing training to frontline staff (replacing the former point-of-sale program)
- Regional presentations by tourism operators to Provincial VIC and Cruiser travel counsellors
- Billboard and media advertising in-province

Each of these is discussed under relevant headings to follow.

Irving Partnership

The Province has a contra partnership with Irving, in which the provincial travel guide is distributed at some 100 Irving stations across the province, in return for marketing support for Irving and some funding for the initiative. Posters are also installed on windows.

This initiative is seen to be worthwhile, however there are some challenges that need to be addressed, and are being done so in a current review of the program. The challenges include:

- While at the larger stations that deal with a lot of tourists – the top 10 or so - the staff are responsive, this is much less the case in the more remote outlets where the staff don’t see themselves as being part of the tourism industry
- The ongoing educational challenge with station staff
- The brochure racks seem to get damaged or they often vanish
- The company has not been very effective in communicating internally or with their outlets on this initiative

The current review and the recent appointment of a dedicated coordinator within the Irving organization is expected to lead to significant improvements.

Day Adventures, Multi-day Adventures and the Point of Sale Program

The day adventure program as a unique initiative focussed on giving visitors packaged part-day experiences of different kinds available in different regions of the province, under a number of themes, such as outdoor adventure, culture, etc. (See the sample page, Exhibit 9, from an earlier day adventure brochure.) Multi-day adventures were also offered in association with accommodations. As with some other programs initiated by the Province, this one was relatively expensive to support and has been shrunk back considerably. Its remains today are ‘activities’ presented in the provincial travel guide.

Exhibit 9 – Sample Day Adventure Page

Three 'day adventure centres' were earlier developed in partnership with municipalities, with capital from the Province and operated by the municipality. These provided information for visitors on area activities and also provided a booking service for day adventures offered in the area under that provincial packaging program.

The Province also, for a time, sponsored a 'point of sale' program in the province, which involved training and equipping front line staff in different tourism businesses to sell the day and multi-day adventures in their respective areas. This involved a huge network of participants, which was expensive and a great deal of work for department staff. It also had a problem in that selected frontline staff, such as bellmen, that participated in the program as shared staff, were drawn away from serving enquirers when they got busy with their main job. This program has been replaced with the current 'Cruiser' program, discussed below, and the 'Experience New Brunswick' program discussed under training.

The Cruiser Program

The Province has 10 student staff, in 5 teams of 2, one team for each of the five travel regions. They travelling around the province in PT Cruisers – going where the action is - visiting attractions, events and other locations having a lot of visitors, to provide visitor information services. . Groups having a major event can actually book the cruiser team to have them provide on-side visitor services. This program is seen to be working quite well.

There are two sponsor/partners in the program; Daimler-Chrysler who supplies 5 PT Cruisers, and Aliant Telecom who supplies cell phones and free airtime.

VIC Designs/Layouts

The first 5 provincial VICs, built in the early 90's, had a standardized design. Two new ones in 2000/01 had an upgraded look. They haven't been able to upgrade the older ones as yet, so there is really no overall look.

The Kings Landing facility, mentioned earlier, is one of the new VICs. It is illustrated on the next couple of pages.

Unique Features of the System

The day adventure and point of sale programs were unique and reasonably effective, but were expensive and have been mostly abandoned in the new budget reality in the province.

Until this year the Provincial VICs were mystery shopped. This was cancelled because of budget, so inspections are now made by departmental staff instead. The staff have bought into this and now use it as a training tool.

New Brunswick's Kings Landing VIC



New Brunswick's Kings Landing VIC cont'd



Use of Technology

Not at present, except there are two computers in each centre for visitors to use, at no charge – to access the Internet and do email. The email service is used extensively.

The provincial VIC staff use the provincial database and website almost exclusively now in their counselling. Industry operators are linked to the provincial website.

People still want to talk to a person at some point. They feel safer and better informed when they get to ask questions.

Trip Planning Tools

No tools are provided other than the travel guide and the map. There used to be additional collateral for day adventures and other initiatives, but everything is now condensed into the one guide.

Support to Local/Regional VICs

There are 65 municipal VICs in the province! There used to be a grant program for those that met criteria and attended training. They also got a training grant.

Grants shrunk as more VICs opened, now the funding has been cancelled altogether. Training is still provided. This is all currently under review.

Training for municipal people is a basic program over two days. It addresses:

- Product knowledge
- Collateral
- Map
- Festivals and events
- Attractions
- New operations
- Customer service and sales

Training of Other Tourism Industry Staff

‘Experience New Brunswick’ Program

Under the ‘Experience New Brunswick’ program, delivered in partnership with TIANB, frontline staff in tourism establishments generally are trained through a half-day program in:

- The importance of frontline staff in tourism, and in generating more tourism
- Basic hosting, PR and promotional skills
- Where to get information for visitors, how to use the travel guide

- The tourism and economic impact of inducing one person to stay one more day (\$200 in spending), and the cumulative impact of inducing many visitors to do so

Ideally, this would be a multi-day program involving product knowledge as well, but it has not been feasible to get operators to commit their staff to an extensive program such as this. Operators wanted it cheap and no more than a half-day. The half-day program provided today, at a bargain price of \$23.50 per person, still has a major challenge in drawing participation. It is a particular challenge to get non-tourism businesses (Tim Hortons, Irving) to participate. In spite of the challenges, 1000 people participated in this program this year.

The previous ‘point of sale’ program had much more extensive training for frontline staff, more like that provided to travel counsellors. This was done through the ‘Showcase’ program, where staff in a region came together to hear 3 minute pitches from tourism operators in the area on their product. This was a good program, however, it has been cancelled due to budget cuts.

The Showcase program has been replaced by a new approach involving tourism operators coming together to present their information to area VIC counsellors and the Cruiser counsellors. While their audience is smaller, the operator has a full 15 minutes to present. The logistics of this initiative are sometimes a bit of a nightmare.

Provincial VIC Staff Training

Provincial VIC counsellors have a one week training program for managers and 3 days for counsellors having 3 years or less experience; 2 days for those experienced counsellors having more than 3 years experience. The latter is more advanced training, including sales training, intercepting visitors, upselling, etc.

Budget cuts have shrunk training down to a core program only. They are now working on a partnership with TIANB for a new training program for the future.

Overall Management and Coordination

The VIC’s are administered under ‘Corporate Operations’, under Luc Paulin, Director Tourism Operations. Gretta Wells is the coordinator. The Cruiser program is under Susan Morell, Director, Marketing Services, with Marie Jose Michaud being the coordinator. The Irving Partnership is administered by Penny Dennings, Manager, Partnerships and Promotions. See Exhibit 10 with the organization chart for the Department of Tourism and Parks.

Seven of the provincial VICs each have a manager and assistant manager. The numbers of counsellors varies, as does the number of students employed.

Exhibit 10 – NB Tourism Organization Chart

Services Contracted Out

None at present (except the call centre?) Who knows for the future?

Partnerships

They are looking at the possibility of commercial tenants in VICs as part of their current program review.

They have a gift shop in one Provincial VIC as a pilot project to see what revenue it might generate.

They have partnerships with some area groups, like area TIAs, where they rent space at provincial VICs. The City of Fredericton and 'Mactaquac Country' (at the new River Valley VIC by Kings Landing) have municipal kiosks with staff, presented as 'local specialists'. This works very well. It was rocky the first year as people were protective of their territory; it took them a while to get them thinking as a team – as partners!

St. Steven VIC provides a room for merchandise samples, business cards and display area for local businesses.

There are currency exchanges at a couple of centres. The VIC gets a fee for this.

Key Issues and Constraints

#1 is budget! Most of the staff are still in place, however.

Nova Scotia Visitor Information Program

Bob Boyd, Manager of Visitor Services, was interviewed and he subsequently provided several documents of interest, which are provided in the Technical Appendix document. These include:

- Visitor Information Services Strategy, December 2003
- VIC Intercept Survey, 2002
- Tender document for the operation of 6 gift shops at Provincial VICs
- Visitor Information Centre Award of Quality program

Overall Strategies – Past, Present Future

Visitor Information Centres

There are 83 VICs in the province of Nova Scotia, including 11 provincial centres. Of the latter, 2 are in Maine (Portland where the Prince of Fundy sails from, and Bar Harbor where the CAT sails from) and the rest are in the province, both at five gateways as well as a couple

of key tourism intercept points – Halifax (waterfront and Barrington St. downtown which is being closed), Peggy’s Cove and Port Hastings (the entrance to Cape Breton).

Four of the provincial centres are operated year round; Amherst, Bar Harbor, Halifax waterfront and Halifax airport. The Amherst centre and signage for this centre is illustrated on the following page. Of the local centres, only Hubbards and Bridgewater are operated year round.

Visitor services are also provided on board the ferries from PEI (very limited) and New Brunswick. (For the Prince of Fundy and the CAT, the services are provided in the provincial land-based centres Portland and Bar Harbor respectively.) Visitor services used to be provided as well on the ferries from Newfoundland, however this has been discontinued.

The provincial budget for the VIC program is \$1 million annually (plus revenue from the Island Beach Company agreement, discussed under Partnerships)

Literature Distribution

The province provides free distribution of industry brochures to provincial VICs and other ‘award of quality’ VICs. A tourism operator can have up to 5000 brochures distributed to up to 40 VICs at no cost.

Brochure racks are also maintained at 48 other locations – in traditional tourist spots not served by a VIC, such as liquor stores and public buildings.

VIC Award of Quality Program

This program provides an ‘award of quality’ to VICs in the province that meet a standard of professionalism and quality. A paper describing this program and the criteria used in its evaluation program is provided in the appendix. Only VICs meeting the standard are eligible for PEP funding for student staffing (see discussion under Support to Local/Regional VICs below). All but 3 or 4 receive the award. The award plaque is illustrated here.

This program is under review as the budget is not available to sustain it in full. While PEP funding and literature distribution continue to be provided to approved VICs, there is no funding at present to monitor and enforce the standards for the program, beyond what can be done by department of tourism staff themselves.

The department used to get additional funding via this award program, but this was lost in a budget cut.



Nova Scotia's Amherst VIC



Nova Scotia's Amherst VIC cont'd



Reservations

This service is provided through Check In. People can call the Check In call centre for a reservation or book through Check In online (only if it is more than 24 hours in advance).

Staff in the provincial VICs can and will make reservations for visitors online within the 24 time period, but visitors can't do so themselves as yet (although they can submit a request online). A new RFP for redevelopment of the Check In website is designed to address this need and to link with the province's website as well.

There has been a growth in reservations made through VICs, which is not consistent with a general decline at Check In volumes.

VIC Intercept Survey, 2002

This research is instructive in a number of areas of interest beyond Nova Scotia alone. A copy of the report is provided in the Technical Appendix. (Some caution should be used with these data, since the sample was skewed heavily to American visitors (45% of the total surveyed) and Quebec visitors (almost 26%). Less than 1% were Ontario visitors. This is significantly different than the mix of overall visitation to the province. The only reasonable explanation might be that these two origins are mainly first time, non VFR visitors who would be more inclined to visit a VIC, whereas other larger markets are much more VFR and repeat visitors, who would tend to use a VIC less.)

Some points of particular interest from this survey of more than 1800 VIC visitors in 2002 include:

- The high level of pre-trip information sought out on the Internet rather than through the call centre (question 9)
- The importance of visibility and signage for VICs (10 and 28)
- The importance of gateways and major communities for VIC locations (14)
- The importance of local community information at the VIC (15)
- The relatively limited interest in Internet access, reservations and gift shops in VICs (perhaps influenced by the limited availability and/or access because of congestion?) (17 and 26)
- 6% of visitors indicated they would spend more time in the province as a result of their visit to the VIC (actual outcomes not known) (22)

Visitor Information Services Strategy

The 2003 strategy is instructive in a number of areas. (A copy was provided under separate cover). In particular, note the value attached to an integrated system of visitor information services. Also, the plan to shift emphasis somewhat from on-trip services in VICs to pre-trip planning, particularly via the Internet is notable (quoting the survey finding that 73.6% of

visitors obtain information before leaving home, and 61% use the Internet as part of this activity). The following is quoted from page 7:

“In essence, a Visitor Information Services Strategy implies everything from a well-designed Travel Guide, a visitor-friendly website, and an effective and efficient central reservation service to an enlightened staff of hosts who are well prepared to ‘sell’ the province to the world.”

The Tourism Partnership Council is also working on a broader, long-term tourism marketing plan for the province which could influence this strategy further.

VIC Designs/Layouts

Nova Scotia uses the pods in their centres and considers them quite successful in larger spaces, as they help with traffic flow/management. They are illustrated in the pictures of the Amherst VIC.

Unique Features of the System

The linkage with the Check In call centre and reservations system is a unique feature.

The provincial VICs are mystery shopped twice per season.

The Award of Quality initiative is unique.

Use of Technology

Provincial VIC staff have computers for their use.

Computers for consumers are only available at Amherst and Barrington St. It was thought they would use them to search for information, however, they are used mainly for email.

Kiosks have been tried through a pilot project with MTT (Aliant) in malls. It was expensive and didn't get the pick up.

Trip Planning Tools

While the provincial website, www.ns.com promotes packages available, there is no trip planning capability.

Provincial VIC Staffing

There are some 120 employees at peak in the provincial VIC program. 65% return annually. Staff are not unionized, except for 5 full time, year round staff at the airport and one at the waterfront.

Staff Training

The department has a training program for its staff, customized for each provincial VIC. It has a more local focus for each location. Traditionally they have only done product training and on Check Ins. However they are now putting more emphasis in hiring on sales skills, and are providing ½ day sessions on selling skills and team building.

Support to Local/Regional VICs

The 'Provincial Employment Program' (PEP) provides wage subsidies to employ students. Funding is provided to the regional tourism industry associations (RTIAs) who in turn provide grants to the community VICs in their region. Only 'award of quality' recipients are eligible. The funding formula is based on regional visitation levels, seasons of operation and capture rates. \$343,000 goes to local/regional VICs, another \$200,000 goes to the 11 provincial ones.

Staff of local/regional VICs can attend the provincial product knowledge training tours of other regions than their own, but not within their own region. The province picks up their travel costs. The idea is to give them improved province-wide knowledge. There is not a lot of buy-in to this. The RTIAs are expected to do the local/region training tours for the staff.

Overall Management and Coordination

The Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage manages the VICs, while Check In manages the call centre and web-based reservations system.

Bob Boyd is Manager; Lisa McIsaac is the coordinator. There are supervisors at each location, in some cases a manager, otherwise a senior counsellor.

Services Contracted Out

None, except for partnerships discussed below.

Partnerships

Island Beach Company has retail shops in 5 of the provincial VICs. They pay a percentage on with a minimum guarantee. This provides some \$300,000 to \$350,000 in income to the VICs.

Atlantic Tours has a tour/ticket desk in the Barrington Street facility. There is also a currency exchange there.

The Yarmouth County Tourism Association has its own booths, staff and uniforms in the Yarmouth provincial VIC. A similar arrangement is in place in Amherst where the Central Nova Tourist Association and the Town of Amherst have staff as well (in provincial uniforms).

Nova Scotia is trying to have a stronger collaboration with other jurisdictions in nearby centres, such as Aulac.

They have no objection to other provinces having representation in their provincial VICs as a tenant.

Key Issues and Constraints

Budget is a continuing issue.

Keeping staff is a challenge, as the average wage rates of \$7.50 to \$8 per hour ‘doesn’t cut it’.

Prince Edward Island Visitor Information Program

The interview was conducted with Heather Pollard, Supervisor of the Province’s VIC program.

Overall Strategies – Past, Present Future

Visitor Information Centres

PEI has 9 Provincial VICs (formerly 10 with the one in Caribou, Nova Scotia being closed recently). They also show 16 ‘Island Welcome Centres’ on their website; those operated by others and supported by the Province. The website address is <http://www.gov.pe.ca/visitorsguide/help/vics.php3>.

Gateway Village Centre

Their ‘showcase’ centre is the Gateway Village facility in Borden-Carleton, at the arrival point from the Confederation Bridge. The Atlantic Canada Group Tour Planner has this to say about it: “A *must stop on any motorcoach tour to Prince Edward Island, **Gateway Village**, Prince Edward Island’s superior welcome centre, is located at the foot of the **Confederation Bridge**. This circa 1900 village offers tourism information, quality shopping, specialty food and superior visitor services. Visit Our Island Home museum (no fee) and learn about PEI’s land, sea and people. Experience the **Northumberland Strait** exhibit and learn about early transportation to the construction of the Confederation Bridge. Gateway Village offers 24-hour petroleum service, designated coach parking and is wheelchair accessible.*”

This has been very successful in drawing traffic because of all the positive synergies. It gives people more than one reason to stop.

Other Centres

The Provincial VIC at Wood Islands, the ferry arrival/departure point in Eastern PEI has recently been supplemented by a complex of shops and services established nearby, developed by a local community group, and branded the 'Plow the Waves' centre. It contains 3 retail shops and a liquor store.

The province used to have a centre at Caribou, on the Nova Scotia side of the ferry, however, it has since been closed as it was not found to be particularly cost effective and expensive to operate (staff commuted daily by ferry) and it was a victim of budget cuts. Mostly it served enquiries about the ferry service. There were lots of people but too little time available to use the services. There was no opportunity for selling.

Information and Reservations

The provincial call centre continues to provide information to enquirers. Reservations are not provided and there is no intention to get into this in future. They are not convinced it is necessary.

At the provincial VICs, the staff will call a property if asked to do so, however, this is not encouraged. There is 'a hang-up in administration with travel counsellors being the middleman'. People are encouraged to use the phones in the VIC to make the call themselves.

PEI has gone through several different information and reservation systems. The call centre service was contracted out for a while, the idea being that it would fund itself from reservation commissions. The trouble was, few operators were prepared to pay commission, so it was abandoned.

More recently, TIAPEI operated an 'availability' system for enquirers, providing information on accommodations being available for particular dates, areas and by type of property. Operators were to provide the information to TIAPEI, however, updating was a major problem and the program was dropped.

A new online 'availability' system has just been launched through an agreement with a company called 'Internet Works', a website development and management company. This is also an availability system, wherein the customer shops by date, property type and area and then contacts the property directly for a reservation. The website is <http://www.gov.pe.ca/visitorsguide/reservation/index.php3>. Sample pages are attached in Exhibit 12 at the end of this section.

Tourism operators are given a listing (free currently, funded by Tourism PEI and ACOA), which will likely be automatically renewed with payment of the license fee each year. The operator can update their information online, or by fax. The program currently deals with accommodation reservations, however, it is being expanded to include golf and other services.

The system shows properties having availabilities based on the search criteria entered by the user.

TIAPEI is handling the industry communications, including information sessions across the province.

We understand that online reservations will also be available in 2005 on this system, initially for accommodations and golf, later for the ferry. This will likely continue as a free service, both to the consumer and the business.

Until recently it was not possible to make a reservation for the ferry service. They have now introduced 'priority passes' which guarantee space. They are looking at making these available via the Internet.

In the provincial VICs the staff continue to maintain a 'vacancy information system' for accommodations in the local region, via magnetic strips on a board, updated daily. For those properties on the online system, their availability information is drawn from the website, while for those not on the system, they can call in to the VIC to have their availability posted on a day to day basis. (They are supposed to call back to close out, but that is a continuing challenge.)

VIC Designs/Layouts

PEI is putting in 'public access computers' in its Provincial VICs to enable visitors to make their own reservations via the new online system by Internet Works.

They tried the service island concept but decided it didn't work. Staff were 'inundated' in an uncontrolled fashion. People also helped themselves to literature. They have gone back to the counter system which they believe to be much better.

Brochures are displayed in racks for each of the six regions of the province.

There is no standardization to the design of the Provincial VICs; each is unique. They have done three of the centres 'with a bit of a blue band' with tag lines, but that is all. There is no intent to standardize. Highway signage is standardized, however.

Unique Features of the System

The availability approach is unique. It assists the traveller without having all the complications of third part reservations and commissions. The success of the new system remains to be seen, however, as it continues to rely on operators updating their availabilities.

Use of Technology

Technology is “still inefficient for us”. They continue to rely on published material. However, they are installing ‘public access computers’ in the VICs for visitors to make their own reservations online or by phone via the Internet Works system. This will be a free service.

Kiosks are not used in Provincial VICs. (Rodds and TIAPEI have one in Champlain Mall in Moncton.)

There has been talk of an Atlantic Canada wide program of kiosks, but this has not materialized.

Trip Planning Tools

The website discussed above is connected to ‘ExplorePEI’, an ‘interactive, map-based vacation planning tool’. See the print out on Exhibit 11. The website is <http://www.gov.pe.ca/visitorsguide/vacationplanner/index.php3>.

Adding reservations to the trip planning tool is problematic as most properties in the province are on dial-up as high speed connections are not yet available in most parts of the province.

Support to Local/Regional VICs

The 16 or so local and regional VICs are part of the ‘Island Welcome Centre’ program. Each of them used to get a \$500 grant, however, the Province is looking at changing this to a training allowance instead, to make them more accountable.

Training is provided to some of these VICs. Those that are market ready get to send staff on the provincial product fairs. They can also send staff to a one-day seminar on customer service (offered in both east and west). Sometimes the Province will send someone to coach the staff. Job shadowing is also available.

Staff Training

The staff training manual is provided under separate cover.

Overall Management and Coordination

Ron MacNeill is Director, while Heather Pollard is Supervisor of the visitor information centres. There are 7 managers for the 9 Provincial VICs. One of them, Brackley Beach, has a student supervisor.

Insert Exhibit 11

Services Contracted Out

No services are contracted out, other than the website.

Partnerships

PEI has a program with their craft council very similar to Newfoundland and Labrador's, with displays in each of the Provincial VICs and sales occurring offsite. Other than this, they have no partners in the VICs.

They also looked at New Brunswick's former 'point of sale' program. They questioned the need for this in the Provincial VICs and couldn't see this being done by their travel counsellors, so they didn't proceed further. Heather acknowledged that this might work with private operators.

The VIC at Brackley Beach is operated in partnership with Parks Canada. Parks Canada simply provides one staff person. The VIC in Cavendish is operated side-by-side with the Parks Canada.

Key Issues and Constraints

A continuing challenge is the ability to close a sale, which is not in place today.

Technology is the #2 challenge; dialup is not adequate to support a modern online system. Only three of the Provincial VICs have broadband so far.

Staffing and budget are a continuing challenge.

The fall is getting busier but the students have left.

Getting the Dept. of Public Works to maintain the buildings is an ongoing challenge.

Lessons Learned

The following are the features of interest in these other three provinces:

New Brunswick

- VIS network approach
- Former point of sale program, linked to activity packages
- The 'intercept strategy'
- Partnerships with TIANB, sponsors, Irving, local/regional DMOs
- Cruiser program
- Experience New Brunswick program
- Irving partnership

Nova Scotia

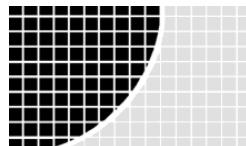
- Reservations through Check In
- Award of Quality program, mystery shopping
- PEP funding (provincial student employment program) linked to standards and training
- Out-of-province VICs
- Tenant partners in VICs
- Flexible, non-unionized environment

PEI

- ‘Availability’ approach to reservations
- Gateway Village Centre in Borden
- Local partners in Wood Islands

Insert Exhibit 12

Section 4
Strategic Directions for the Future



THE ECONOMIC PLANNING GROUP of Canada
Tourism Consultants

Section 4

Strategic Directions For The Future

The discussion and proposals included in this section build on the 2004 provincial tourism product development strategy, 'A Special Place A Special People - The Future of Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism'. This report proposed a number of innovations to the infrastructure of the tourism industry across the province, including such things as Regional DMOs that would play a role in regional visitor information initiatives. The proposals to follow would be greatly facilitated with the implementation of these and other recommended initiatives; in fact, some of the proposals in the report would likely be unfeasible if this is not done. The major example of this is the proposal for joint ventures with local/regional DMOs, which is unlikely to be feasible if there are not viable regional organizations in place.

A Changing Travel Environment

Technology and changing travel patterns are modifying travel information services internationally. Computers, the Internet, travel-savvy consumers, affordable air travel, to name a few new realities, are changing the way people plan and book trips and how they get the information they need.

Newfoundland and Labrador needs to respond to the new opportunities and the changing expectations of travellers.

This section addresses proposed strategic directions for the future, while subsequent sections go on to detail proposals with respect to provincial travel information services, those provided by others in the province and other relevant topics.

The Market Context

Since 1990, tourism activity in the province has increased from some 290,000 visitors to approximately 440,000 in 2003. (Preliminary data indicates that the province, like many others in Canada, saw a decline in visitation in 2004). This includes travellers from all origins, and for all purposes, including those traveling for business, to visit friends and relatives and those on pleasure trips.

The 440,000 visitors includes some 161,000 persons arriving by automobile, primarily via Marine Atlantic service from North Sydney to Port aux Basques, with a small proportion entering via Argentia. Some 260,000 persons arrive by air, most through St. John's, although an increasing number are entering via Deer Lake. Another 18,000 visitors arrive in the province via cruise ships. The province is just completing a yearlong visitor exit survey, which will provide, for the first time, detailed research on visitors to the province over a 12 month period, as well as up-to-date insights into the characteristics of visitors during the

primary tourist season. Unfortunately the results of this research were not available in time for this report.

There are a number of provincial trends, issues and strategic directions, as well as several global trends in the travel and tourism sector that have implications for the delivery of visitor information services in Newfoundland and Labrador. These are highlighted below with some preliminary comments on their implications.

Provincial Trends and Issues

- **A decline in auto traffic and an increase in air arrivals** to the province. This increase in air arrivals is happening not only at St. John's, but also at Deer Lake (and during the winter months as well, not only the traditional June through September period), and, to a more limited extent at Gander which, in 2004, had several arrivals a week from central Canada. This shift to air arrivals is expected to continue.
Implication: Need for comprehensive visitor information services at air entry points.
- An **increasing number of long haul travellers**, spending more time exploring the province.
Implication: Visitors seeking more in-depth, detailed and local information on things to see and do.
- **Increasing visitor activity outside of the mid-June to mid-September period.** As well, the recently completed product development strategy has identified that a major priority for the development of tourism in the province must be an increased effort dedicated to attracting more visitors during the spring and fall periods, and secondly during the winter months.
Implication: Need to ensure that visitor information services are extensively available throughout the spring and fall periods, and, in select locations during the winter.
- **Increasing tourism activity and interest in Labrador.** With the improved road access and plans for an eventual road link to Happy Valley-Goose Bay, visitor traffic in Labrador can be expected to grow over the long term.
Implication: Need to provide information on the entire province to travellers arriving in Labrador.
- Continued **government fiscal constraints** and cut-backs.
Implication: Declining budgets for the delivery of Provincial visitor information services.
- The fluid nature of many of Newfoundland and Labrador's tourism products (e.g. icebergs, whales, birds, cultural events) mean that **visitors are seeking up-to-date (daily) information on sightings, availability, etc.**

Implication: Need to provide reliable up-to-date information on these products, at strategic locations across the province.

National/International Trends

- **A shift to the use of the World Wide Web** for destination information, trip planning and booking. Travellers arrive at their destination much better informed than was the case in the past. However, they also have high expectations and often are seeking more detailed information.

Implication: Need for a co-ordinated approach to visitor information services, from the initial information sought to plan the trip, through to detailed pre-trip and on-trip information requirements.

- Travel markets that have **high expectations for their trip experiences** and are seeking much more than a touring/sightseeing experience.

Implication: Travellers seeking more detailed information, and more information on non-traditional tourism experiences, such as local cultural activities, and more trip planning tools.

- **New technology** available to deliver visitor information, including websites, computer-based kiosks, GPS based systems in vehicles, etc., etc. As well, travellers are demanding access to the web throughout their trip so as to communicate with family, friends, businesses, etc.

Implication: Visitor Information Centres need to provide access to technology, such as computer terminals and kiosks with high-speed Internet connections, web-based/CD-based trip planners online.

Employing New Technology

The new technologies mentioned above are fast becoming widespread. Newfoundland and Labrador needs to continue to strive to take advantage of the more cost effective of these technologies. The key ones are discussed below.

The Provincial Tourism Website

The Department of Tourism, Recreation and Culture (DTRC) is planning to redevelop its tourism website in the near future, providing an excellent opportunity to ensure that the visitor information system in the province is integrated with, and takes advantage of a contemporary website.

The 2002 report, 'Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism Marketing Strategy Review' made a number of recommendations with respect to website redevelopment¹. Generally it

¹ 'Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism Marketing Strategy Review', prepared by The Economic Planning Group, page 74

recommends building the website in the context of the Province's tourism marketing strategy and tactics - to maximize synergies – the website supporting the marketing effort - the marketing effort supporting and optimizing use of the website. The strategy needs as well to embrace and support e-marketing/database marketing.

To complement the Province's marketing effort, the website's functionality should ideally include:

- Lure information on the province as a whole – the icons, experiences by type, experiences by region, by season.
- Background information on natural attractions, cultural heritage, travel information (air, road, ferry access, weather, etc.)
- Suggested itineraries and packages – by themes/categories of experiences, by region, by season
- Trip planning for consumers, ideally by customer/travel characteristics (family versus adults only, by activity interest, by region at the destination, etc.), linked to key words, themes, categories of experiences
- Use of the 'Shopping basket' method for the foregoing
- Custom information and trip planning features for tour operators
- Custom information and trip planning features for other travel influencers - meeting planners, incentive planners, sports event planners
- Other information in the Provincial travel guide
- Links to websites of industry organizations (regional, sectoral, government agencies, etc.)
- Links to database of tourism operators, and also to their websites
- Media section for travel writers, news organizations

It should also be designed to accommodate further functions in future; including online reservations for tourism operators agreeing to participate on a commission basis.

Kiosks

Kiosks can provide another method of providing information to visitors.

The kiosk model has improved dramatically in recent years, with improvements in computers and connections to the Internet. The consultants asked one of Canada's leading suppliers of kiosk systems to prepare an information summary on this topic and it is included here as Exhibit 13.

Later in this section we will discuss how these might be used to enhance the visitor information system in the province.

Exhibit 13

Current Kiosk Technology Today²

A kiosk-based system for tourist information has four main components, the content, the information provider, the connection media and the visitor access kiosk.

The information provider is the repository of content and the systems that support and maintain the content information. As NFLD is considering a new Tourist Web site it makes sense that the content creation and web subsection be included in the deliverables of the Web work as the content will be similar. The subsection of the web content would be made available at individual kiosks, as either a live connection using a high speed internet connection, or the content would be available on the kiosk's hardware, as a local copy of the subsection of the web site. The subsection would be updated by either downloading periodically by a low speed dial-up connection or a DVD Data ROM would be used manually to update each kiosk.

The connection media and process is an important element to consider when designing the system and specifying the interactivity and content to be supplied at the kiosk. Clearly a high-speed Internet connection would offer flexible and current information and would also support a rich set of media such as video, audio, graphics and e-commerce. E-commerce and such features as booking confirmation would require a high-speed connection.

Unfortunately high-speed service is not readily available in rural and remote areas and a system that relies on a high-speed connection will not achieve penetration into areas where it may be most beneficial. The most reliable alternate is to install the content on each kiosk with updates supported by either a dial-up process or a manual DVD process. The dial-up method means that an automated process can keep the content current, while the manual method often fails due to inconsistent execution. The manual method offers the benefit of terminal maintenance at the same time by the staff or contractor that updates the data.

The fourth component is the kiosk terminal that users will access the content. The kiosk usually consists of a Windows-based PC with large hard drive, a monitor, input devices such as a touch screen, or keyboard and mouse and often a printer. Apple-based products have been used, but the cost of Apple components is much higher than a PC system and there is a shortage of kiosk operating software designed for Apple.

Several factors must be considered in the development of the kiosks of which the most important is the location of the kiosk and the environment that it will be installed in.

The most reliable configuration will see the kiosk installed in a protected and manned location and operating in a fashion similar to an Internet café. The kiosk application software will limit user access to just the subsection of the NFLD tourist web site and will prevent users from accessing email or other web sites. This means that low cost hardware including a mouse, keyboard and printer can be included in the installation and someone is available to update the system, clean its components and report problems.

When the venue is not manned, the kiosk must be enclosed and normally the keyboard and mouse replaced with a touch screen. Keyboards and mice or track balls will not survive in an unattended location. A location that is not manned also does not support economical printers and the cost of maintenance and supplies for a rugged automatic printer can be quite high.

The kiosk operating system and a kiosk application for browsing must be supplied that is hardened for public access. Most 10-year-olds have the knowledge to erase the contents of a computer or connect

² Prepared by Ted Ratcliffe of Global Exhibit Technology Inc., 2720 Queensview, Suite 1118, Ottawa, ON, K2B 1A5

it to some inappropriate content. There are several software products designed for the kiosk environment and they are available as individual and bulk licenses at some \$165 / per kiosk cost. (First license is \$500.) "Kiosk in a Box" by Rocky Mountain Multimedia, Inc. is a suitable application. www.rockmedia.com

Summary of Costs

- PC suitable for Kiosk with Windows XP Pro - \$1,000 (includes a modem, network card 80gig drive, XVGA graphics card)
- Kiosk Application Software - \$160.00
- 17 inch LCD Monitor with screen guard - \$1,100
- Harden Mouse and Keyboard - \$350.00
- 17 inch Touch Screen Monitor - \$1,500 (replaces 17 inch LCD, Mouse and Keyboard)
- B&W Laser printer for manned locations - \$750
- Cost per page printed - \$0.03
- Kiosk Printer for un manned locations - \$3200
- Cost per page - \$0.05
- Kiosk Enclosure depending on style and location \$2,500 to \$6,000

Services required at the venue;

- Secure, Dry and Heated location
- 110 VAC power at 6 amps
- Telephone connection or High Speed Connection

An excellent resource web site > www.kiomag.com/kiosk_home

The Overall Strategy for Visitor Information Services in Newfoundland and Labrador

The general approach for the future needs to embrace the following features:

- *An integrated visitor information system, with pre-trip, on-trip and at-destination services*
- *Front line services by industry*
- *Partnerships in delivery*

Each of these is discussed in turn.

Integrated Visitor Information System (VIS)

Destinations today strive to integrate the various components of their traveller information and marketing functions. A fully integrated VIS will include the following system elements:

- Travel guide, map and other trip planning collateral
- Toll free number for travel information and reservations
- Destination website with information, trip planning features, linkages to other websites, reservations
- Linkages with the call-to-action in marketing communications
- Visitor information centres
- Travel information available at tourism establishments and other traveller intercept points
- Database of travel enquirers enabling customized follow-up communications via mail, email, telephone
- Visitor-oriented highway directional signage
- Consistent branding and communications among partners in the system

Pre-Trip, On-Trip, At Destination

The VIS system needs to be designed to assist the visitor prior to their trip, while they are on the trip and while they are at the destination as well.

The pre-trip tools include the Province's website, its call centre, the travel guide and map.

The on-trip elements include these same elements, however, visitor information centres and highway signage become major factors as well.

The at-the-destination tools are all of the foregoing, plus the front line staff everywhere the visitor goes.

We will address each of these briefly in this section and then deal with visitor information centres (VICs) in more depth. Subsequent sections go on to deal with the visitor information centre part of the system in considerably more detail.

Website

As discussed earlier in this section, key features of a good tourism destination website include:

- Localized for different origin countries – language, transportation information, currency
- Trip planning – by interest, by travel party characteristics, by region

Samples of some good ones include:

- gorp.com (outstanding adventures by destination and by type of experience; very successful website)
- Scotland (one of the best)
- holland.com (localized for 20 different origin countries)
- Travel Alberta
- Hello BC
- Bienvenue Quebec
- toronto.com
- 1-800-vermont.com (well designed, localized for several origin countries)
- traveliowa.com (under ‘travel contacts’ is a link to visitor centers. It provides locations and contact details for each one)
- germany-tourism.de (a massive site that is localized for almost every origin country)
- visitmaine.com/home.php (an OK site, but lots of great information)
- missouritourism.org (well done magazine style with simple navigation)
- colorado.com (good trip planning, customized by travel group composition, interest, region)

We recommend that the pending redevelopment of the Province’s tourism website be designed such that it can evolve into an online trip planner.

Call Centre

A toll free call centre is an important component of the VIS. Not everyone is web-savvy, and often it is easier and more effective to talk to someone who knows. Multi-lingual capability is a real asset.

Travel Guide, Map, Other Collateral

The travel guide and map do their jobs reasonably well. The travel guide suffers the fate of most such guides; they end up being a ‘phone book’ of detail. While it works pretty well in

assisting trip arrangements, it doesn't do as good a job with motivating travel, providing details around special interests or experiential highlights.

We strongly recommend that at least one page of the provincial travel guide be dedicated to information on the system of VICs across the province.

A trip planner would be a helpful addition to the Province's basic collateral, and we recommend it become a priority. It would be organized both around regions, as well as by types of experiences (culture/heritage, outdoors, sightseeing, etc.) The idea is to suggest different basic itineraries of possible interest, and possible 'mix and match' add-ons of possible interest.

Visitor Information Centres

VICs continue to play a vital role in tourism information. They are the one part of the system where visitors can interact directly, in person, with someone trained to help them and to provide them with travel information in hard copy. At the same time, they are an expensive way to provide travel information and need to be used sparingly as a consequence. Also, with today's travel-savvy consumer, the quality and scope of services need to be of a high order. Untrained students who have hardly travelled themselves don't cut it.

Newfoundland and Labrador doesn't have the luxury of having VICs extensively located wherever they might be sought. Other more cost-effective methods of providing information to travellers need to be well established, including making the trip planning tools – website, trip planner – of high quality and readily available, and by developing frontline information capabilities across the industry.

With respect to VICs, fewer, better ones should be the strategy. This involves rationalizing the locations of provincial, regional and local VICs. For DTOR, it also means consolidating and cutting back on the number of Provincial VICs, and in some cases, operating them as joint ventures with local/regional organizations, or transferring them altogether to local regional and local partners.

These challenges need to be addressed directly, and we do so in the next sub-section to follow.

Highway Signage

Signage is a critical component of the visitor information system. The tourism product development study completed in 2004 presents important recommendations in this regard.³

Specific signage improvement needs were addressed in Section 2 of this report.

³ "A Special Place A Special People The Future of Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism", page 149

One of the glaring ‘black eyes’ of highway signage in the province is that the first sign visitors see on disembarking from the Port Aux Basques and Argentia ferries is a sign from the RCMP. The first signs should be a welcome from the people of Newfoundland and Labrador, not the RCMP! The next page illustrates the first three signs visitors see upon arriving in Argentia.

Tourism Frontline Services

While well-located visitor information centres play a most useful role, they cannot be readily available to visitors at every turn or whenever a question arises. It is therefore important to develop other resources to support the effort. Key among them are:

- Training and information support tools for frontline employees of tourism establishments
- Temporary services for major events
- Self-serve information at major visitor intercept points, such as ferries, tourist attractions, etc.

This topic is addressed later in this section of the report.

Partnerships in Delivery

The idea of privatizing the Provincial VICs has been considered in the past, however, it is evident that this is unfeasible, as there is no revenue model to support them. They are not self-sustaining enterprises by any means: better they be operated with a combination of public funding and private sector support through industry organizations.

As mentioned earlier, supporting and assisting the local and regional VICs, and the industry itself in providing visitor information services is a vital imperative for DTCR. The Province itself can’t afford to develop and operate an optimal system of visitor information services independently. Partners are needed.

It will be important, therefore, to move away from an exclusively provincial line department model to a more flexible one involving other funding sources and partnerships. The recommendation in the 2004 product development strategy that an agency be formed to become the operational arm of the government in this area, as well as for parks and historic sites would considerably assist this approach. Along with other advantages, it would permit the Province to retain and reinvest revenues and to qualify for federal partnership funding.

Partnerships in information service delivery would appropriately be developed with the following organizations:

- Local/regional DMOs
- Parks Canada
- Provincial parks
- Provincial historic sites

The first two signs encountered after leaving the ferry in Argentina:



And then comes the Province's Welcome sign:



- Marine Atlantic
- Airlines

Other Partnerships

In addition, there are partnership possibilities with others that would provide complementary services at VICs and elsewhere, or sponsor exhibits.

There already is a partnership with the Newfoundland and Labrador Craft Council that can be built upon. That topic is discussed later in the next section of the report.

There is also the possibility of developing relationships with corporate sponsors to assist in defraying the costs of display development and upkeep, and in promoting the network of visitor information services. This topic is also considered further later in this section.

The Strategy for Visitor Information Centres and Services

We now turn to the visitor information centres and proposed strategic directions for them. Detailed consideration of development and operational issues for both provincial and regional/local VICs is addressed in the remaining sections of the report.

VIC Roles

Visitor information centres can play a considerable number of important roles. The list includes the following (things that are not currently done by the Provincial VICs in Newfoundland and Labrador are indicated in italics):

- Providing information in response to queries from visitors
- Providing travel guides, maps and other travel literature
- Showcasing provincial, regional and local tourism attractions and experiences (*The current displays are outdated and modest.*)
- Counselling and itinerary planning assistance (*not consistently available from Provincial VIC staff, particularly students not having the product knowledge*)
- *Up-selling – exploring the interests of visitors and suggesting things to see and do that will enhance their visit*
- Assistance preparatory to making reservations for accommodations, local tours and other things
- *Making reservations for visitors*
- Access to washrooms, telephones, *computers for obtaining travel information and for email*
- *Linkage to other services of the VIS network*
- *Optionally, provision of complementary commercial services for travellers – crafts and souvenirs, refreshments, etc.* (the craft displays do, however, provide directions on where items displayed can be bought)

Recommendations for the Provincial VICs with regard to the foregoing are presented in this section.

A Model for the Future

We propose a tiered approach to delivering visitor information centre services in the province. It involves continuing with Provincial services at key gateways, combined with joint ventures and fee for service contracts with regional and local DMO groups. (As mentioned at the beginning of this section, the assumption here is that there is a viable network of regional DMOs in the province. If not, then the opportunities for joint ventures and contracting out will be much more limited.)

Joint Ventures and Fee for Service (FFS) Contracts

A joint venture arrangement would involve a full partnership between the Province and a local/regional group in staffing and operating a particular VIC. Both parties would contribute staff and operating funds. The Department of Works and Services would continue to maintain the facilities for those centres that are currently Provincial ones. These would be established in a limited number of cases where the province has a significant interest in providing province-wide services and desires a measure of direct control in that regard.

Joint venture agreements will be customized for each case, however, the facility and services must meet at least the minimum standards for certification. (See later discussion in this section on certification.)

Provincial support to other organizations to provide regional and provincial VIC services would be provided under fee for service (FFS) contracts. Only a designated number of VICs strategically located in a regional context and meeting certification standards are eligible. Particulars are described below.

Fee for Service Program

A contract would be entered into wherein financial support is provided for the local/regional DMO to provide both regional and province-wide services, on behalf of both the five regions and the Province.

We are suggesting two levels of fee for service (FFS) arrangements. FFS #1 contracts would provide a greater level of funding and also require a greater range of province-wide information services and for the five regions as well. FFS #2 contracts would require more basic regional/provincial levels of service. The terminology used in the discussion to follow is based on the proposals in the 2004 tourism product development strategy⁴.

⁴ Ibid, Sections 7 and 8.

Fee For Service #1

The FFS #1 agreement would have the following kinds of provisions:

- VIC must be certified as an ‘Official N&L VIC’ (See later discussion on certification.)
- VIC must fit the provincial strategy as a provincial priority area for VIC services; in other words, fill an identified need in a designated tier 1 or tier 2 destination area and/or at a gateway to one of the five travel regions
- Must be sponsored or endorsed by the Regional DMO
- VIC sponsor agrees to provide the following content and services:
 - Display of provincial icons
 - Brochures racks for province-wide information, including the provincial travel guide, map and other DTCR publications
 - Information on each of the five travel regions, including the regional travel guides for each region and/or the guides for the smaller regions/themed route areas
 - Basic counselling on the province’s icons, major attractions and all the travel regions
- With respect to the last bullet above, the sponsor must have its counselling staff attend a VIC training program or participate in an approved self-training process (see Section 6.)
- The operating season for the VIC is a minimum of May 1st to October 15th, or perhaps Thanksgiving, no less than 10 hours per day in summer and 8 hours in the shoulders
- An annual operational plan and budget must be submitted to DTCR by (date) each year
- Funding of \$10,000 will be provided annually by the Province
- The Province will provide basic logo materials as an ‘official VIC’ for display purposes

Fee For Service #2

The FFS #2 agreement would have the following kinds of provisions:

- VIC must be certified as an ‘Official N&L VIC’
- Must be endorsed by both the Regional DMO and the local tourism organization representing the tourism industry in the community or area
- VIC must fit the provincial strategy as a regional priority area for VIC services; in other words, fill an identified need in a tier 3 destination area, and/or a touring corridor (traveller service hub and/or a priority themed touring route)
- VIC sponsor agrees to provide the following content and services:
 - Display of provincial icons
 - Brochures rack(s) for province-wide information, including the provincial travel guide, map and other DTCR publications, as well as the regional travel guides for each of the five regions
 - Basic counselling on the province’s icons, major attractions and all the travel regions
- With respect to the last bullet above, the sponsor must have its counselling staff attend a VIC training program or participate in an approved self-training process (see Section 6.)

- The operating season for the VIC is a minimum of June 1st to September 30th, no less than 8 hours per day
- An annual operational plan and budget must be submitted to DTCR by (date) each year
- Funding of \$5,000 will be provided annually by the Province
- The Province will provide basic logo materials as a certified VIC for display purposes

Three Categories of Official VICs

The tourism product development strategy⁵ recommended strategies for gateways, hubs, service centres, themed touring routes and designated destination areas, each of which play a vital role in the tourism industry. *In this context, we recommend an approach to visitor information centres that complements and supports those strategies, including the following components:*

- *Provincial gateways*
- *Regional gateways and regional hubs/service centres*
- *Designated destination areas*

The recommendations for each of these are presented below and are illustrated on Maps 3 and 4.

Category 1 – Provincial Gateways

*The major provincial gateways would have Provincial VICs. These include **North Sydney, Port Aux Basques, Whitbourne, St. John’s Airport and Deer Lake airport and highway location.***

Neither of the two airports currently have Provincial services, so these locations would need to be added to the Provincial program, preferably in a joint venture with regional/local groups.

*For the secondary provincial gateways, including **Argentia and Labrador West**, VIC services would be provided either in joint venture partnership with local/regional groups, or by the local/regional groups under fee-for-service agreements (FFS #1) with the Province.*

The specific strategies by location are summarized below (Details are presented in Section 5):

- **North Sydney** - continue provincial operation, expand and enhance the facility and service level
- **Port Aux Basques** – continue provincial operation, partner with local/regional DMOs for local information delivery, enhance the VIC with internal changes and the addition of an outdoor 24/7 self-serve area. The VIC should operate at least from April 1 through

⁵ Ibid, Section 8

Map #3




The Island of Newfoundland : Proposed System of Visitor Information Centres

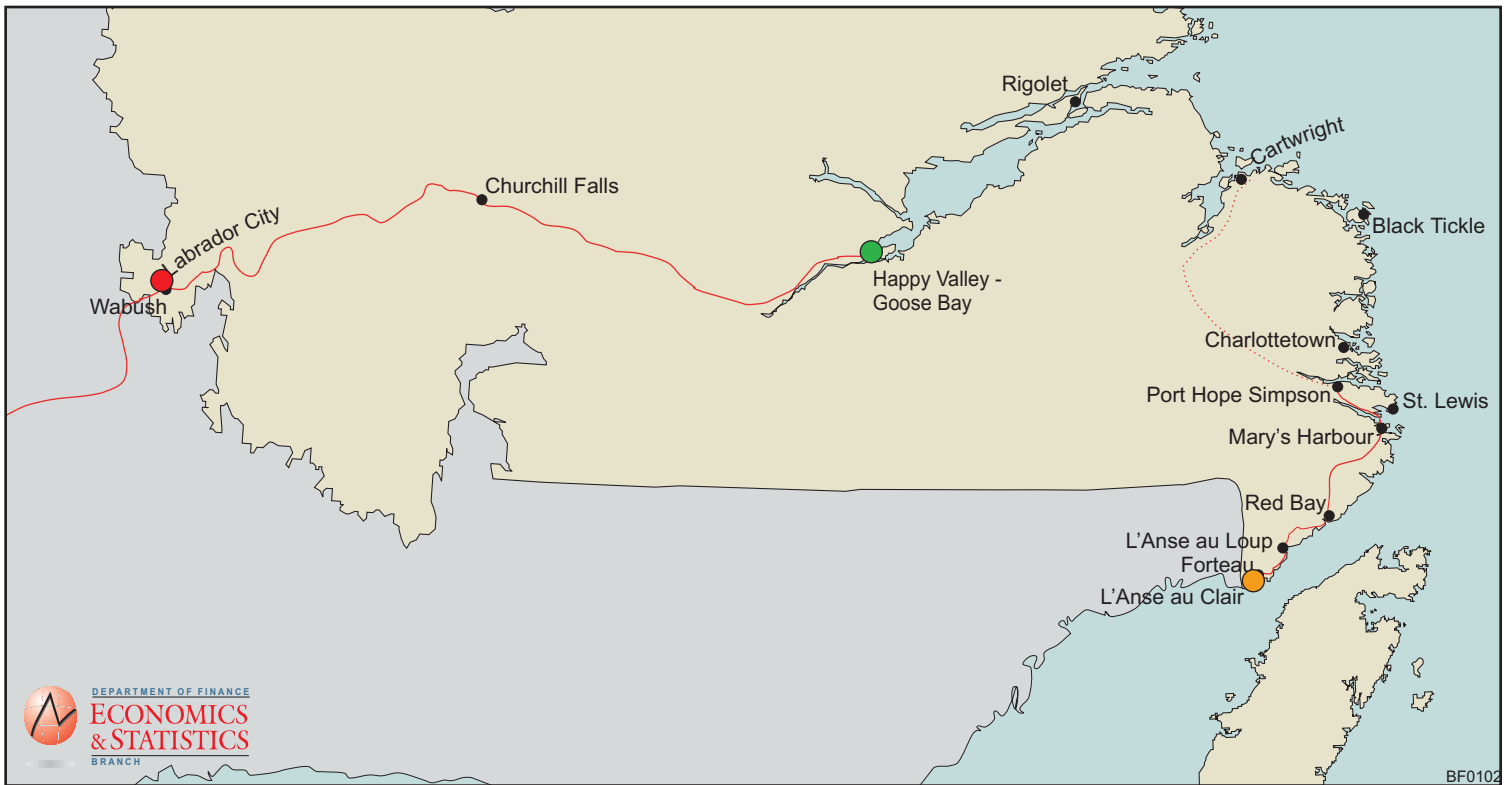
The Island of Newfoundland



Map #4

Labrador : Proposed System of Visitor Information Centres

Legend	
	Provincial Gateways
	Regional gateways /Major Service Centres
	Designated Key Destination Areas



the end of October. Shift operating hours to fit ferry arrivals as much as possible, using split shifts where necessary.

- **Whitbourne** is uniquely strategically located and we believe it should be treated as a special case provincial gateway, and continue in operation as a Provincial VIC, perhaps with regional partners involved in providing support services. Its unique qualifications in this regard are:
 - For visitors arriving at the major gateway, St. John's airport and travelling to points within the Avalon Peninsula and westward to the rest of the province, this is the next logical point after the airport itself for them to stop for information following their arrival.
 - It is a logical 'information nerve centre' for the Avalon and eastern Newfoundland, a concentrated area that receives a relatively heavy volume of visitor traffic.
 - Thirdly, it is a logical secondary intercept point for visitors arriving through Argenteia. In fact, in the absence of a Provincial VIC in Argenteia, as recommended shortly below, this location can provide the services. It is only a 30 minute drive from Argenteia.

This centre should be expanded and upgraded Re-assign seasonal recall staff from Argenteia here. (More details are presented in Section 5.)

- **Deer Lake airport** – establish new provincial services, preferably in a joint venture partnership with the Deer Lake Chamber of Commerce and potentially other local/regional partners as well. (See the further discussion to follow shortly below regarding the current VIC in Deer Lake.)
- **Deer Lake** (the current Provincial VIC on the highway) is a similar case to Whitbourne and we propose it also continue, in this case, however, as a joint Provincial-Regional VIC operated under a joint venture agreement:
 - For visitors arriving at Deer Lake airport and travelling to points within the Western region and eastward to the Central regions and the rest of the province, this is the next logical point after the airport itself, and Port Aux Basques as well, to stop for information following their arrival in the province.
 - It is a logical 'information nerve centre' in the western part of the province for auto traffic, as it is a transfer point for travelling south to Corner Brook and beyond, north up the Great Northern Peninsula or east to the Central region and beyond. (As discussed in Section 5, a broader partnership in supporting the operation of this VIC is possible.)
- **St. John's airport** - establish new provincial VIC services, ideally in partnership with ACVB under a joint venture agreement, or operate as a provincial centre separate but adjacent to the ACVB booth

The secondary gateways would be dealt with as follows:

- **Argentina** – Turn over to local/regional partners under a joint venture or FFS #1 contract. (If it is a joint venture arrangement, provincial staff should be provided only at ferry arrival times. In the event either of these options prove to be impossible or unacceptable, the ‘plan B’ alternative should be to open only at times of ferry arrivals, which would mean sending staff based elsewhere here for limited periods, or employing local people on a part time basis. The demand during no-ferry periods is extremely small and does not warrant being open. The other change proposed is the removal or reduction of the military display to recover most or all of the space for displays and brochures. In the event none of these options are acceptable, this VIC should be closed.)
- **Labrador West** – continue operation with local/regional partners under a FFS #1 contract

Ferries

The service on the **Marine Atlantic ferries** was discontinued in 2004 due to budget cuts and a number of ongoing challenges. It is a very expensive way to deliver VIC services, is lightly used and is redundant with the North Sydney and Port Aux Basques/Argentina VIC services.

Our conclusion is that *the onboard VIC service should be permanently abandoned in favour a more affordable and simple approach having the following features:*

- *Show videos on the province at scheduled and announced times on each northbound voyage*
- *Install and maintain an unmanned display area with both displays of provincial icons along with brochure racks, particularly for Provincial travel guides and maps. This would be serviced daily by Provincial VIC staff in North Sydney, or by ferry staff if that were feasible, however we understand that the likelihood of the latter is somewhat remote.*
- *Arrange with Marine Atlantic to have announcements made with respect to the videos and self-service visitor information area.*

This approach we understand would be reasonably welcomed by Marine Atlantic, as long as the space involved was limited, and also as long as their staff didn’t need to do anything other than include announcements about the showing of videos and the availability of the self-service information. It would be nice if they would also agree to announce ‘Welcome to Newfoundland and Labrador’ when the ferries arrive in the province.

Flexible VIC staffing to Link with the Ferry Service

We strongly recommend the Province renegotiate its union agreement for Provincial VIC staff, particularly those in the four gateway centres affected by ferry traffic, including Whitbourne. Split shifts and on-call arrangements are needed.

Accompanying this plan should be an arrangement with Marine Atlantic whereby the latter provides regular information to the Province on changes to the ferry schedule, including variances on a daily basis.

With these two things in place it will be possible to vary staffing levels in response to demand surges associated with ferry departures and arrivals.

Category 2 - Regional Gateways And Regional Service Centres

Each of the five recognized and designated travel regions in the province should have VICs located at either the gateways and/or central communities that serve as major service centres for their region.

These would be operated by the regional DMOs under a FFS #1 arrangement with the Province, or by the Province and the regional DMOs together under a joint venture arrangement in selected cases where the province would continue to be actively involved.

The specific strategies for the regional gateways/service centres are summarized below:

Avalon Region

- ***Downtown St. John's*** – operate in a joint venture partnership with the City in the City's facility on Water Street, or under a FFS #1 contract with provincial staff provided as well. (More details are presented in Section 5.)
- ***Bay Roberts*** - support a regional DMO operation here under a FFS #1 contract, if the Town of Bay Roberts is prepared to agree to full regional and provincial information services

Eastern Region

- ***Goobies*** - support the regional DMO operation with a FFS #1 contract
- ***Southern Bay*** – support the regional DMO operation under a FFS #1 contract, and perhaps re-assign the Provincial seasonal recall staff at Clarenville to participate in staffing this facility

Central Region

- ***Gambo*** - support an enhanced regional DMO operation at the Joey Smallwood Centre with a FFS #2 contract
- ***Gander*** - support the provision by the regional DMO of limited services at Gander Airport – FFS #2 contract, for both the airport and the highway locations
- ***Springdale*** - support the proposed new regional DMO operation in establishing visitor services as part of the proposed new iceberg/whale interpretive centre, assuming that

project actually proceeds, under a FFS #1 contract. (Potentially, seasonal recall staff from Notre Dame Junction might be re-assigned here.)

Western Region

- **Gros Morne** – support the proposed new VIC in the present Parks Canada Interpretive Centre in Rocky Harbour under a FFS #2 contract
- **St. Anthony** – support an enhanced facility to be operated by the local DMO in the Grenfell Centre, under a FFS #1 arrangement. (This may not be feasible if adequate space in a good location by the entrance can't be made available. The alternative in this case would be to build an adjacent structure for the VIC. Failing those possibilities, another location may need to be found. This is a very important tier 1 destination area and St. Anthony is its hub, so having a quality VIC here needs to be a priority.)

Labrador

- **Labrador Straits** – support the regional DMO's VIC operation at L'Anse Au Clair under a FFS #1 contract

We recommend closing the Notre Dame Junction and Clarenville Provincial VICs and the resources deployed elsewhere in the Provincial system. (Unless the Springdale Centre and/or the Southern Bay arrangement don't happen, in which case one or both of the current provincial centres might continue as regionally operated gateway centres.) Both of these centres play relatively marginal roles from a provincial perspective, and would be even more marginalized if the more strategically located regional centres proposed for support were in place to provide province-wide services on a quality basis.

The property and facilities could perhaps be made available to the regional/local DMOs in the event one or more of them wanted to use them, however, any support provided by the Province should be instead of that suggested for one of the other centres in the region. In other words, that would only happen in the event the regional DMO were to prefer one of these locations over the ones proposed herein.

We considered the merits of a new centre located at **St. Barbe**, or perhaps onboard the **Labrador ferry**, to act as a gateway to Labrador. However, it was concluded that, with quality centres in Gros Morne, Deer Lake, Rocky Harbour, Hawkes Bay, St. Anthony and L'Anse au Clair, there is really no need for more to showcase Labrador to visitors in the Western Region.

Category 3 – Services Provided in Support of Designated Destination Areas

There should also be VICs strategically located in Tier 1 and Tier 2 Destination Areas, and in the major touring corridors as described in the 2004 tourism product development strategy.⁶

⁶ Ibid, Sections 7 and 8.

All of these would be operated by regional/local groups under FFS #2 contracts.

The specific strategies by location, in addition to those identified under category 2 are summarized below:

Labrador

- **Happy Valley/Goose Bay**

Western Region

- **St. Georges area**
- **Corner Brook**
- **Hawkes Bay**

Central Region

- **Baie Verte**
- **Grand Falls/Windsor**
- **Twillingate Islands**

Eastern Region

- **Terra Nova** – support Parks Canada VIC services at the Marine Interpretive Centre
- **Bonavista** – support a VIC if one were to be established here
- **Marystown**

Avalon Region

- **Brigus/Cupids area** - support a VIC if one were to be established here
- **Witless Bay**

*There is little or no strategic case to merit providing support to other existing centres, including those at **Wiltondale, Port au Port Peninsula, Fogo Island, Glovertown, Eastport, Elliston, Fortune, Harbour Grace, Manuels, Mount Pearl**. All of these locations can be better served at other VICs more strategically located, existing or new ones.*

Functional Design and Capital Budget for a Basic VIC

The following guidelines are presented to assist in planning and designing a visitor information centre. The included functions and scope of content should be used as the minimum standard for an Official N&L VIC, however, the square footages are only guidelines and are subject to variation depending on particular circumstances. The functional areas include (total square footage of net usable area – 950 sq. ft. +/-):

- Counselling area with counter(s) or desk(s) or kiosk station(s) (100 sq. ft.)
- Lure display area for the local area and region featuring pictures, posters, video and/or other such methods, done in a quality manner (200)
- Similar lure display area for the provincial icons (100)

- Brochure racks for:
 - Local area and regional attractions, accommodations and other tourism enterprises (100)
 - The other four regions of the province (100)
 - Province-wide directories and guides (50)
- Desk(s) or table(s) with computer(s) and room to open a map (100)
- Payphone(s) (50)
- Public washrooms (100)
- Storage room (50) (no materials should be stored openly)
- Outdoors – payphone and display panel with local area map and phone numbers for accommodations and other important services, including emergency services

When staff areas and mechanical/electrical areas are considered, the total gross building area dedicated to the VIC will likely be some 1200 square feet or more.

Other design considerations include:

- Public areas need to be barrier free
- Highly visible exterior and interior signage is important
- Advance signing from both/all directions
- Operating hours should be posted
- Parking area and landscaped grounds
- Ideally, some off-hours services should be available outside the building, including telephone, local area map, important phone numbers and emergency numbers, garbage receptacles. If access to washrooms can be provided as well, all the better.
- Smoke alarm, fire extinguisher and First Aid kit provided on the premises and readily evident

Capital Budget

This will vary depending on local conditions; such as cost of land, etc., however, the following guidelines should be helpful for planning purposes. The budget amounts are for a basic building and reasonable quality interior fixtures and materials on an undeveloped site (land cost and bringing services to the site are not included):

- Building construction and connection to services (assumes a simple pad foundation) - \$100 per square foot
- Furnishing, fixtures and equipment - \$25 per square foot
- Landscaping, lighting and exterior signs – allowance of \$25,000
- Highway signs – allowance of \$20,000
- Parking (30 spaces) and driveways (gravel) – allowance of \$30,000

This budget assumes that display materials are provided by others. If that is not the case, then allow \$200 per square foot of net display area to design, develop and install quality displays.

For the basic facility described earlier, this would amount to a budget of some \$225,000, plus design and contingency of 25%, plus HST of 15%, providing a total of some \$325,000. Land cost and any cost to bring services to the site would be extra.

Sponsors, Advertisers and Revenue Opportunities

VICs need to pursue sources of funding beyond government. Their sponsors should accept this challenge. We were impressed that a considerable number of local VICs in the province were active in this regard.

VICs can develop alternative sources of financial support from their members and others through providing on-site sponsorship opportunities and by offering promotional opportunities, all in return for money.

Sponsors could pay for a display in the building or for some component of the VIC facility, such as outdoor panels.

Members could be provided with promotional opportunities, such as:

- Special display – wall, counter, kiosk
- Poster

And the VIC could retail items itself, or have rent-paying tenants do so:

- Gifts and souvenirs
- Outdoor clothing
- Local art and crafts

The Provincial VIC Grant Program

We have reviewed the Provincial VIC grant program and other matters with respect to the regional and local VICs across the province. A number of recommendations are made in the following areas:

- *Qualification for support based on strategic considerations*
- *Grant program linked to standards and certification, and training, linked to FFS contracts*
- *Consistent identity, logo and signage*

The proposals to follow assume the implementation of a program of funded regional DMOs in the province. In the absence of this it is unclear where local/regional groups could find their share of the financial support necessary for operating a quality VIC. *In any event, there needs to be a more rational and strategic approach, with real criteria for evaluation and a monitoring process as well.*

Fee For Service Agreements Rather than Grants

The first need is to change this program to the fee for service agreements discussed earlier.

Strategic Criteria for Support

First of all, we recommend that in order to receive Provincial and federal agencies financial support, regional and local VICs meet strategic criteria and fit within a cost-effective system of visitor information services across each region and for the province as a whole. The strategic context should be the 2004 tourism product development strategy, along with the specific recommendations as to strategic locations presented above.

At the same time, nothing is static and circumstances will in future suggest modifications to the system described herein. We therefore suggest the following criteria to be used in considering future additions and deletions to the VICs receiving support:

- Level of tourism activity in the area providing evidence of need and opportunity
- Location within a designated tourism destination area as per the 2004 tourism product development strategy
- Sponsored by a not-for-profit organization
- Absence of other 'certified' VICs in place and well-located to serve the area properly
- Presence of an organization willing and able to manage a quality VIC for the full tourist season
- Support from the local and regional tourism industry
- Meet the facility and service standards required for certification
- Commitment to provide both regional and province-wide information services
- Financial wherewithal to fulfill the commitments

We have drawn some of the criteria from Nova Scotia's VIC Award of Quality program standards.

Certification of 'Official N&L VICs'

A quality assurance program would be in place for FFS #1 and #2 funded VICs, delivered by provincial VIC staff. Those maintaining the standards of the program and having staff properly trained would be 'official N&L VICs'. They would be shown on the map and listed in the travel guide. They would be entitled to use the official logo and signage.

Certification criteria should include:

- The VIC facility meets or exceeds the minimum standards as described in the previous section.
- The services provided to visitors include, at a minimum:
 - Provide information in response to queries from visitors
 - Provide provincial travel guides and maps, regional guides and other travel literature

- Showcase provincial, regional and local tourism attractions and experiences
- Counselling and itinerary planning assistance
- Assistance in support of making reservations for accommodations, local tours and other things
- The VIC agrees to provide no less than 30% of its displays and brochure racks to province-wide information, including provincial icons and information on each of the five travel regions.
- The operating season for the VIC is a minimum of June 15th to September 30th, no less than 8 hours per day.
- The manager and other available staff will participate in the Provincial VIC training program.
- The VIC sponsor organization undertakes to ensure that facility and service standards are maintained, and to respond to the needs for improvements that might arise from a mystery shop report.
- The VIC has adequate insurance, including liability insurance.
- The VIC sponsor organization has the support of the local and regional tourism industry and its organizations.
- The VIC is inspected annually (mystery shopped) and meets basic criteria of cleanliness and tidiness, good state-of-repair, and maintained grounds. As well, the VIC staff must pass a quality of service mystery shop including items such as acknowledging visitors, eye contact, friendliness, ability to assist the visitor and product knowledge of the local area, the region, and the province.

Monitoring

Having a program like this will require monitoring through mystery shop inspections, otherwise it will end up being simply a grant giveaway system, which is really what the Provincial VIC grant program is today. This will be an essential component of the program.

A Tourism Frontline Program

This concept was introduced earlier in this section. It would involve some number of these elements:

- *Training and information support tools for frontline employees of tourism establishments*
- *Temporary services for major events*
- *Self-serve information at major visitor intercept points, such as ferries, tourist attractions, etc.*

Tourism Establishment Frontline Visitor Services

Frontline employees in hotels, attractions, gas stations, restaurants and the like, all play an important role in responding to traveller queries. This is, in fact, an important part of a visitor information system and should be approached as such. *There should be a systematic*

orientation program made available to frontline employees in the industry, accompanied by support tools.

New Brunswick has their 'Experience New Brunswick' program, which was discussed in Section 3. It involves a half-day workshop offered at a nominal cost. It replaced their earlier 'Point of Sale' initiative, which proved to be too expensive to sustain. They have obviously struggled with this issue and are still doing so.

One of the problems with any initiative of this kind is that it is not seen by many tourism operators as benefiting their business; only other people's businesses; hence they are often lukewarm at best about having their staff spend time on it, or for them to invest in it. It is important, therefore that the training be easily and cheaply accessed and that the tools accompanying it make it easy to deliver.

We suggest that the tourism frontline program be simple and easy to use, consisting of the following elements:

- *A good tourism website (discussed earlier)*
- *Copies of the provincial (and regional) travel guides made available to establishments dealing with tourists*
- *A poster or counter card to inform visitors that services are available at this location*
- *The provincial call centre*
- *A website instructional piece on how to access and use all three of the foregoing*
- *A brochure instructional piece with the same information provided to establishments and their staff*
- *Addition to the SuperHost training program*

This initiative would logically be sponsored by HNL, with the support and assistance of both federal agencies (funding) and DTCR (content and advice). HNL would publicize this initiative to its membership and distribute the brochure. DTCR would distribute copies of the travel guide to HNL members and provide content for the brochure.

In instances where a chain of establishments is participating in this program, such as service stations or restaurants, it will be important that they provide a consistent standard of service to visitors. This will require a commitment from the company with respect to staff training at each of their properties as well as displaying the poster/counter card in a prominent location. (See the comments offered in Section 3 with respect to New Brunswick visitor information partnership with Irving.)

Self-Service Information Service

In addition to in-person information, it is proposed that a further system of self-serve tourist information services be developed and maintained through the installation and maintenance of brochure racks at visitor intercept points across the province.

In fact, this is already done on a limited scale. Cabot-Eiriksson 1998 Inc. operates its 'Island Wide Brochure Distribution' service, which is exactly the kind of service we mean. Their service involves maintaining brochure displays at some 65+ locations; primarily accommodations and attractions across Newfoundland (not in Labrador currently) on behalf of 100 clients. The clients pay \$495 per year for tourist-season distribution or \$695 for year-round distribution.

We recommend that this company be approached with an eye to encouraging them to considerably expand the scope of their service to more locations and with more clients. (This would likely require some modifications in the service, to allow a regional-only option for clients, otherwise the racks would become unwieldy with too many brochures and a lot of wastage. At the same time, that sort of option is likely to considerably expand the client market base.)

Mr. Ed Kennedy of this company is, not surprisingly, very enthusiastic about expanding this literature distribution program. He also indicated that the cost per client could be lowered considerably by having a more extensive program, as there are considerably economies of scale achievable.

HNL could assist the company in expanding both their network of clients and locations by helping promote the service. Another thing that could help would be to contract this company to handle the distribution of more materials. Perhaps some funding could be found to assist with the expansion effort.

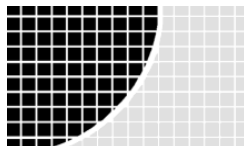
Visitor Information Services at Events

Offering visitor information services at events that are popular with visitors would also be a valuable initiative. New Brunswick's 'Cruiser' program, involving travelling VIC services in the form of two staff and information services and displays at events is an interesting model. But this is likely to be a little expensive for Newfoundland and Labrador. Perhaps Cabot-Eiriksson could establish a temporary display module for use at major events and include this service in an expanded program.

Headquarters Staffing

With the various proposals presented in this section, and others to come in the following sections, it is obvious *there will need to be additional Provincial headquarters staff to coordinate the various initiatives and programs*. That topic will be addressed in Section 7.

Section 5
***Facility and Service Enhancements at Provincial
Visitor Information Centres***



THE ECONOMIC PLANNING GROUP of Canada
Tourism Consultants

Section 5

Facility and Service Enhancements at Provincial Visitor Information Centres

This section of the report presents recommendations for improvements to the Provincial visitor information centres. First are a number of general issues that need to be addressed, following which we will deal with each of the Provincial centres in turn.

Common Needs and Issues with the Provincial VICs

Section 2 presented a detailed list of things that need to be addressed at the various Provincial VICs, both in general as well as particular issues per site. That list is not repeated here, however, it will be important that the various problems and issues get dealt with in due course.

Beyond that there are a few issues that need further discussion, as they involve proposals for innovations in the facilities and services offered to visitors.

24/7 Services

A general need is to provide some basic after-hours and out of season visitor information at the VICs. This would involve adding the following things to current VICs, at a minimum, outdoors next to the building:

- *Telephone(s)*
- *An information panel with an area map and important local phone numbers and emergency numbers*
- *A weather-protected receptacle with travel guides and maps*
- *Site lighting*
- *Washrooms (optional)*

Visibility and Signage

The VICs are generally set back on their sites and often not visible until coming upon them. The following enhancements would be desirable in improving on this:

- *Clearing of vegetation that restricts view-planes from both directions*
- *A minimum of two advance highway signs in each direction*
- *A considerably larger, lit sign at the front of the property*
- *Upgrading of the grounds and landscaping to make the site attractive and appealing*

Logos and Sign Masts

We propose that a professional design company be retained to develop a distinctive logo and sign design for the VICs. The logo should be applied to a tall sign mast on the property as well as on signs on the highway leading to the site.

Also, we propose a facsimile of the logo to be rendered into both a standardized on-building sign and a decal that could be used at both Provincial and certified regional/local VICs as well. This would make all VICs more recognizable and create an integrated approach for the system as a whole. It would also be a stamp of certification for these VICs.

(The same design company should be retained to apply the design concept to other features of the VIC visual presentation, including staff uniforms.)

Services and VIC Content

The services offered at Provincial VICs should be enhanced with a higher level of assistance to visitors in the following areas:

- *Counselling that involves determining the special interests of visitors and then offering suggestions; essentially encouraging them to do and see more.*
- *Initiating accommodation reservations calls on behalf of visitors for the property they select from among the ones suggested to them as possibilities. Once the property was contacted and the availability of space confirmed, the phone would be turned over to the visitor to complete the transaction. (The new 'availability system' recently implemented by PEI should be monitored. It may prove to be a feasible partial reservations system option to a full reservations service, the latter having proven to be very problematic due to the reluctance of operators to surrender control over the transaction process.)*
- *Bilingual services should become a priority, particularly at the major provincial entry points*
- *More pay phones. One is not enough, particularly in locations that have surges of visitors, such as Argentia and Port Aux Basques.*
- *The informal system being applied in some Provincial centres of posting daily iceberg reports should be made a mainstream part of every VIC. Ideally reports on whale activity would be provided as well.*
- *Posting events occurring in the region in a prominent fashion would similarly be valuable.*
- *Updated and improved exhibits, and the addition of digital videos showcasing provincial icons and highlights in the various regions. These should be varied seasonally.*

We also propose a number of policy and practice enhancements with respect to hiring, training and other operational matters. These are addressed in Section 6.

Technology

Computer terminals or touch screen kiosks locked onto the tourism website should become a standard feature at Provincial VICs. Also, one computer should be provided where visitors can check for email.

Due to the limited availability of high-speed connections, the touch screen terminals should employ CDs rather than be logged onto the Internet. These can be updated frequently and provided to the VICs to update databases.

We strongly recommend removal of the 'MIST' terminals at Port Aux Basques, North Sydney as well as the Marine Atlantic ferries. They should be replaced with terminals/kiosks using the Province's tourism website database.

Security

Security and protection for staff needs to be improved. The following are recommended:

- *Night lighting of the grounds*
- *An alarm system that can be activated by staff in emergencies that notifies the local RCMP office*
- *Security cameras with the tape machines installed in a secure location. (These should be used exclusively for security and not for performance evaluation.)*

Gift shops and Other Tenants

The Newfoundland and Labrador Craft Council has indicated a potential interest in operating craft sales at selected Provincial VICs. They are expanding their craft sales program and acknowledge the importance of tourism and VICs in this regard. The addition of such a feature would be mutually beneficial and the opportunity should be pursued in collaboration with the council. It would also provide a strong quality assurance dimension, as all of their products are juried, quality offerings.

Having a gift shop in a VIC provides positive synergies; each role reinforces the other in terms of giving people reasons to stop at the VIC; it's like the shopping centre concept, where the critical mass of reasons to come and shop generates the traffic.

The same can be accomplished with other services that could potentially be located at provincial VICs; a coffee shop, snack bar, clothing items that travellers seek out, local Chamber of Commerce promotional material, displays of local/regional attractions, events and the like. All of these are complementary to providing visitor information and all of them offer potential tenants for the VIC to help in sharing the costs of running the centre.

A number of the independent VICs in the province exemplify this approach; Corner Brook, Baie Verte, Grand Falls-Windsor, to name a few.

There is no reason that the Provincial VICs couldn't accommodate a similar. At the same time, other than Port Aux Basques and Argentinia, the buildings would have to be expanded to accommodate such tenants.

This is an opportunity that is going to need further consideration in that it would involve a significant capital investment and a number of operational complications for the department. We recommend that it be considered further at a future time, once more immediate priorities are addressed.

The tenants themselves could make the investment in leasehold improvements necessary, and they would be eligible for ACOA funding in doing so.

Detailed Proposals for Specific Provincial VICs

We provide detailed design recommendations for both Port Aux Basques and Whitbourne, both of which will continue to be primary gateway centres. Conceptual design drawings of both existing facilities and proposed enhancements to these two centres are provided under separate cover.

Port Aux Basques VIC

As noted earlier in this report, the following are problems with the VIC facility here:

- Poorly organized interior
- More counselling capacity is needed
- It needs an outdoor plaza with 24/7 services

We present under separate cover a number of conceptual drawings for proposed enhancements to this VIC (Note: these are conceptual at this stage. Actual designs will need to be developed to guide implementation and confirm the budgets.)

Site Plan

The proposed innovations include:

- Location of a new 'logo mast' at the entrance
- Modify the side entrance to the status of a 2nd main entrance.
- Install an outdoor sheltered self-service area that would be accessible 24 hours per day, 7 days per week (24/7), preferably all year.
- Optionally, if there is sufficient interest, establish several seasonal kiosks to house tenants interested in operating small seasonal shops catering to tourists.
- Optionally, expand the VIC to be able to provide for the establishment of a seasonal gift and coffee shop; to be developed and operated by a commercial tenant

Floor Plan

We recommend a new layout internally having the following features:

Upper level:

- The modified and enhanced side entry mentioned above
- Redesign of the counselling counter to increase capacity and the addition of a second counter, providing up to six counselling positions in total
- Addition of another counter for a local Port Aux Basques information service, to be managed by the local tourism association
- Installation of security cameras
- Installation of a couple of flat screen TV monitors for videos featuring provincial tourism icons – icebergs, whales, cultural events, etc.

Lower level:

- New display storyboards on provincial icons
- New brochure racks, organized by travel region
- A large table with computer stations and space for laying out a map, for use by visitors

24/7 Visitor Service Area

This area would contain the following features:

- Washrooms
- Weatherproof receptacles containing provincial maps and the provincial travel guide. (These would be stocked by VIC staff in-season, and by the local tourist association under an agreement for the rest of the year.)
- Telephones, with local phone numbers for hotels, police, etc. clearly posted
- A panel for the local tourist association to post notices, ads, etc.
- Six display panels; one for each of the five travel regions and one (or more) featuring provincial icons

The area would be well lit at night. It should ideally have a security camera that is armed at night, and an alarm system alerting the RCMP that can be activated from within the washrooms.

Comments from the Architect on Needed Building Improvements

MacCallum Architects identified the following needed improvements to the existing facility:

- Larger exterior sign needed
- Concern about pedestrian safety with respect to exterior eave flashings and overhangs
- Landscaping improvements
- Building exterior maintenance and painting
- Automatic door opener

- Two leaks in clerestory window
- Interior directional signage inadequate
- Improve artificial lighting
- Main HV unit not in use
- Security issues

Whitbourne VIC

This VIC suffers from the following serious problems:

- It's too small
- Its visibility is obscured from both directions
- Access is dangerous from both directions from highway: there is no exit lane eastbound.
- 24/7 services are needed here as well

These will need to be addressed if this centre is to play an enlarged role in future, and more particularly if regional partners become involved in providing supplemental services.

Site Plan

Recommended site plan improvements include:

- An extension to the VIC building added on its western side to provide more space for counselling, displays and brochures, along with a couple of tables for people to lay out maps on
- Optionally, a further expansion of the building to house tenant enterprises, such as a gift shop. (A coffee shop is already available next door at the Irving Station.)
- Pedestrian walkway connection to/from the Irving Station to the west
- Addition of a 24/7 outdoor visitor services area to the east of the building, essentially the same as that proposed for Port Aux Basques, also with lighting, security camera and alarm system
- Addition of the VIC logo mast
- Addition of a highway exit lane for eastbound vehicles and a highway entry lane eastbound as well
- Clearing of vegetation to improve visibility of the VIC for eastbound traffic

Floor Plan and Extension

With basic expansion proposed would expand the building from 730 square feet at present to 1838 square feet. The existing floor plan of the building and the expanded floor plan are illustrated in the two drawings that follow in this report.

If a gift shop is to be included, that would require another 500 to 1000 square feet. The basic changes and additions are described below:

Changes to Currently Existing Spaces:

- Conversion of the current counselling area to general office area, with a counselling counter separating that space from the visitor area (This would be the sole counselling station in use during quiet periods and when there is only one person on duty.)
- Addition of a skylight in this area that can be opened to improve ventilation
- Addition of an emergency exit from the existing corner office for staff
- Expansion of the washrooms and change in their entry locations

Features of the New Extension Space:

- This new area would have skylights that open for ventilation
- A four-sided counselling area, including one station for a local/regional DMO partner
- Area for display storyboards on provincial icons
- Area for regional displays and brochures
- Area for tables with computers and room to lay out a map

Comments from the Architect on Needed Building Improvements

MacCallum Architects identified the following needed improvements to the existing facility:

- Larger exterior sign is needed
- Landscaping improvements –site maintenance needs to be upgraded, and the retaining walls along the ditch repaired
- Building exterior maintenance and painting is required
- Automatic door opener should be installed
- Repair the drop-in slab at the entrance door
- Operable window/skylights (VELUX) providing natural ventilation should be installed
- Interior directional signage needs to be improved
- Improve artificial lighting
- Security issues need to be addressed, as discussed earlier
- Exit signs need to be installed

Capital Budgets for Port Aux Basques and Whitbourne

MacCallum Architects, with the assistance of CBCL Ltd., have prepared preliminary budgets for the proposed enhancements at Port Aux Basques and Whitbourne, and they are provided in Exhibit 14. Appendix III provides some additional details on the construction and engineering costs; these are incorporated into the costs outlined in Exhibit 14. (Other than the items listed, there will be additional costs for security and alarm systems, items that aren't listed on in the exhibits, and potentially for septic fields that may be due for replacement. If so, modern small sewage treatment systems would cost about \$100,000 each.)

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Exhibit 14
Port aux Basques and Whitbourne Provincial VICs
Capital Cost Estimates

Item	Description of Costs	Cost Estimate
Port aux Basques		
A. Rehabilitation/Maintenance	\$50,000 CA	\$50,000
B. New Interior Fit Up		
• Cabinetry	\$39,500	
• Kiosks		
• Mechanical/Electrical	\$39,500 (see A)	
• Exhibits	\$50,000 CA	\$149,500
C. Trellised Plaza		
• Civil/landscaping	\$78,700 (1)	
• Architectural/Structural	\$100,000	
• Mechanical/Electrical	\$12,000	
• Exhibits	\$20,000 CA	\$210,700
Potential Seasonal Kiosks		
• Civil/Landscaping	Incl. Above	
• Architectural/Structural	\$50,000	
• Mechanical/Electrical	\$3,200	\$53,200
Potential Seasonal Gift/Coffee Shop		
• Civil/Landscaping	Incl. Above	
• Architectural/Structural	\$125,000	
• Mechanical/Electrical	\$28,700	\$153,700
D. Logo Mast		
• Civil/Landscaping	\$15,000	
• Electrical	\$17,500	\$32,500
Sub Total Port Aux Basque		\$649,600
Whitbourne		
A. Rehabilitation/Maintenance	\$30,000 CA	
• Mechanical/Electrical	Incl. With Extension	\$30,000
B. Extension		
• Civil/Landscaping	\$61,250 (2)	
• Architectural/Structural	\$200,000	
• Mechanical/Electrical	\$65,000	\$326,250
C. New Interior Fit Up		
• Cabinetry	\$50,000 CA	
• Kiosks		
• Mechanical/Electrical	Included with B -Extension	
• Exhibits	\$30,000	\$80,000

Exhibit 14 Port aux Basques and Whitbourne Provincial VICs Capital Cost Estimates		
Item	Description of Costs	Cost Estimate
D. Trellised Plaza		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil/Landscaping • Architectural/Structural • Mechanical/Electrical • Exhibits 	Included with B -Extension \$100,000 \$12,000 \$20,000	\$132,000
Potential Seasonal Kiosks		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil/Landscaping • Architectural/Structural • Mechanical/Electrical 	Included with B- Extension \$50,000 \$3,200	\$53,200
E. Logo Mast		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil/Landscaping • Electrical 	\$15,000 \$17,000	\$32,500
Subtotal: Whitbourne		\$653,950
Total		\$1,303,550
Fees & Contingency (35%)		\$456,250
GRAND TOTAL (Plus HST if applicable)		\$1,759,800

Notes: CA = Cash Allowance

Contingency could cover: Geo technical testing, general testing, surveys/legal/topographic; as built drawings required; special consultants/exhibits; reimbursable expenses, etc.

It is important to be mindful of the vagaries of the Port aux Basques construction market.

Due to the hoc and varied nature specialities of the various building components, conservative costing has been used.

- (1) Includes civil/landscaping costs associated with the potential seasonal kiosks and potential gift/coffee shop.
- (2) Includes civil/landscaping associated with trellised plaza and potential seasonal kiosks.

North Sydney

In the case of North Sydney, Marine Atlantic is planning the redevelopment of its passenger terminal at some point so it would not be appropriate to plan major changes at this time, so the recommendations are limited to general descriptions of things that can and should be done in the interim to improve the functionality of the present centre. At the same time, it will be important to become involved in Marine Atlantic's planning for the new terminal to ensure that a quality Provincial VIC facility becomes available in the future.

The tiny VIC in the ferry terminal is woefully inadequate. Hopefully a larger and better one can be included in the design of the new terminal building Marine Atlantic is intending to develop. In the meantime, there are a number of enhancements that could be accomplished. (These have been discussed on a preliminary basis with Neil Paterson of Marine Atlantic and we understand they might be feasible.):

- Take over the TV lounge adjacent to the present Provincial VIC; install a counselling counter, displays, brochure racks, etc.
- Use the current VIC as an office and storage area
- Install exterior signs over the side entrance adjacent to the space referred to above, and at the main entrance
- Install a interior directional sign from the main entrance

While we have not prepared a budget for this, the costs should be reasonably modest, perhaps in the order of \$50,000.

A more substantial budget will be needed for a new VIC in the planned new terminal.

Argentina

In the case of Argentina, we recommended earlier that it be turned over to a local group and not continue as a Provincially operated centre; Whitbourne would take over its role in this regard.

However, in the event the Province decides to continue operating this centre, we recommend that the military display be removed or cut back significantly to allow the centre to return to its proper role as a VIC. More of the space is needed for this purpose, as, at present there is almost no space for brochures, for example. Other needed enhancements were set out in Section 2.

Notre Dame Junction and Clarenville

We also have not proposed major changes to two other Provincial VICs; Notre Dame Junction and Clarenville, as we are recommending they be turned over to regional groups, or operated in a joint venture partnership with them, or be closed.

In section 2 we spelled out the basic needs for each of these centres, which need to be addressed in the event the Province decides to continue operating them independently;

otherwise, any additional changes would need to be considered in collaboration with the new partners. Both of these centres need to be expanded and other enhancements made as well.

Deer Lake (highway location)

Similarly, we are not proposing major changes for the Deer Lake centre as it is also a candidate for being turned over to others or operated in partnership with others. The case of Deer Lake is a little different, however, as the existing VIC may, in fact, become an adjunct to a new facility at the airport. This is expanded upon in the discussion to follow below.

Other than that, this centre is larger than Notre Dame Junction and Clarenville and is therefore of adequate size, however the Viking display is of mediocre quality and doesn't add much value. It should be replaced with an expanded brochure and regional display materials.

New Provincial Centres

The three recommended new joint venture Provincial VICs; at Deer Lake airport, at St. John's airport, and in downtown St. John's, are discussed in general, however, detailed design and budgeting will need to await decisions on how these services are to be delivered and by whom.

Deer Lake Airport and Highway VICs

The Deer Lake Chamber of Commerce in 2004 established a seasonal VIC counter at the Deer Lake airport, staffed in accordance with scheduled flight arrivals, which reportedly was very busy. (This is likely one of the reasons the Provincial VIC in Deer Lake saw a significant decline in visitors in 2004, from more than 23,000 in 2003 to slightly less than 17,000 in 2004.) The airport saw a 14% increase in passengers in 2003 over the previous year and was running another 14% ahead up to the end of May in 2004.

We propose a joint venture between the Province and the Deer Lake Chamber of Commerce to operate a joint VIC service at the airport, at least on a seasonal basis. The rest of the year, a self-service information display and receptacles for provincial travel guides and maps should be provided and maintained. The airport manager is willing to support this proposal.

The airport is planning an expansion and the manager is willing as well to consider a permanent VIC facility as part of this plan. This should be pursued collaboratively by the airport, the Province and the chamber of commerce.

Similarly, we recommend that the Provincial VIC on the highway continue to be operated seasonally, however, staffing and information services we propose be delivered on a similar joint venture basis with the chamber of commerce.

We discussed this idea with the Susan Golding of the Deer Lake Chamber of Commerce and at a subsequent executive meeting the decision was made to welcome discussions with the Province regarding a possible joint venture as described.

There may also be other organizations that would be willing to assist in sponsoring the two Deer Lake VICs in return for having their tourism offerings showcased. We have in mind the following groups:

- City of Corner Brook/Chamber of Commerce
- Parks Canada
- Viking Trail Tourism Association
- Gros Morne Cooperating Association
- Western Newfoundland Tourism Partnership

Consideration might also be given to involving potential major corporate partners, such as Marble Mountain and Humber Valley Resort.

As there will be a new Viking Trail VIC in Gros Morne National Park in what is currently the Parks Canada visitor centre at Rocky Harbour, it may be appropriate to change the current exhibit in the Deer Lake VIC to one showcasing western Newfoundland icons and the centre's regional sponsors. (The current exhibit is not a quality exhibit in any case and is unlikely all that effective.) Perhaps one or more of the organizations listed above would have an interest in sponsoring a new exhibit.

St. John's Airport

The Avalon Convention and Visitors Bureau (ACVB) operates a VIC desk at the airport, providing information primarily about its members, but responding to more general enquiries as well. The provincial travel guide and map are provided upon request. The numbers of people counselled at this location has risen dramatically with the growth in air arrivals, from just over 24,000 visitors counselled in 1999, to more than 71,000 in 2003.

It should be of first order of priority to establish province-wide services here with a Provincially sponsored VIC. We suggest a similar joint venture partnership arrangement with the ACVB as with the City at the downtown location, with staff providing province-wide as well as ACVB member services, again operated year round. Ideally, a larger facility with more than one counselling station would be provided.

The same report quoted above had this to say about the idea; “...*given the importance of this airport as the leading gateway to the province, there is an acute need for a proper Provincial VIC there. We recommend that DTCR attempt to negotiate a joint venture arrangement with ACVB in this regard, failing which the Province should establish its own facility there.*”¹

¹ Ibid, page 148

St. John's Downtown

The City of St. John's recently opened a new city VIC in a renovated building at 348 Water St., and has made a proposal to the Province to operate it as a shared city-province facility. This would be a worthwhile initiative if a suitable joint venture arrangement can be made. The 2004 provincial tourism product development strategy endorsed this proposal with the following statement, "*This appears to be a worthwhile and cost-effective initiative as long as the Provincial presence is prominent and the level of service is adequate to the need*"²

We would suggest the following:

- Jointly staff by the City and the Province, with staff cross-trained and all of them providing both city and province-wide information services
- The Provincial VIC logo be prominently displayed on the front of the building and inside as well (The current city VIC signage on the building is not at all prominent.)
- This service should be operated on a year round basis.
- The City operates the facility only until 4:30 PM outside of the summer period, and only Monday through Friday. Budget limitations are the reason. We strongly recommend that it be open on a seven-day basis, year-round as part of the joint venture budget arrangement. Ideally it would be open until 6 PM as well.

Regulatory Matters

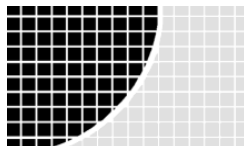
The following are the organizations that have regulations that apply to VICs:

- NBCC -National Building Code of Canada
- NFPA -National Fire Protection Association
- ASHRAE -American Society of Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Engineers
- MNEC -Model National Energy Code

In addition are the standards for accessibility. The Province should register the VICs with the government services centre in this regard.

² 'A Special Place A Special People The Future for Newfoundland and Labrador Tourism'; The Economic Planning Group, 2004, page 148

Section 6
Operational Policies, Practices and Budgets for
Provincial VICs and for Industry Support
Initiatives



THE ECONOMIC PLANNING GROUP of Canada
Tourism Consultants

Section 6

Operational Policies and Practices for Provincial VICs, and Co-ordination for Industry Support Initiatives

This section presents proposals for enhancements to the operations of the Provincial VICs, as well as those operated under joint venture arrangements with others. It then addresses training and other support needs for regional/local VICs and for the Tourism Frontline initiative, and the overall co-ordination of initiatives.

Service Policies

Section 5 mentioned several service addition proposals, including enhanced counselling, assistance with reservations and bilingual services at the major gateways. Some operational policy enhancements are also warranted, as discussed below.

Uniforms

Staff are provided with uniforms, which is a union requirement. However, the uniforms are not distinctive at all; it is difficult to distinguish that these are counsellors. And student counsellors are not provided uniforms at all. *We recommend that the uniforms be more distinctive in future so that the counselling staff stand out. Alternatively, we recommend that the staff wear a unique and distinguishing dress feature to make they stand out and be recognized; something like the tartan sash worn by Nova Scotia VIC staff. Perhaps a sash would be appropriate, or a large logo badge, or a cap with the VIC logo perhaps? And all staff should be wearing the distinguishing feature, including the students.*

Staff should also be required to wear nametags, with their first name only. The security concern raised with us wouldn't apply if only the first name is indicated, and only this name is needed in any event.

As mentioned in Section 5 in regard to signage, we recommend that a design company be retained to apply a consistent design and logo to all of the visual elements of the VIC program, which would include uniforms.

Policy and Operations Manual

The small booklet that serves as a policy and operations manual for staff is inadequate. A more comprehensive one should be developed.

In addition to setting out policies and expected practices, it should also provide a summary of the 'how to's' of visitor counselling along with helpful suggestions on various topics. In that

way it can assist and support the training program as well as substitute for training when necessary.

The other Atlantic Provinces have done a reasonable job in this area and their manuals are readily available to provide a basis for a new one for Newfoundland and Labrador.

Once the manual is developed and staff trained in its use, there should be periodic mystery shop visits to ensure the policies and practices are being followed.

Staffing

There are a number of staffing issues needing attention.

Headquarters Co-ordinator

Only one person in DTOR is involved with the VICs, and he is also responsible for accommodation licensing and other matters. It is clear that *there needs to be a full-time VIC program co-ordinator*, particularly with the scope of recommended program enhancements recommended herein.

Seasonal Recalls

Recommendations involving the 'seasonal recall' staff include:

- *Recall should not be automatic. It should be conditional on achieving a high rating in an end-of-season performance review.*
- *This performance review should be based on criteria and standards that are clearly spelled out in the policy/operations manual. (See discussion to follow below.)*
- *We recommend negotiating changes in the union agreement in line with the foregoing; to establish a special category with particular features that are appropriate to VIC operations, including:*
 - *Split shifts,*
 - *Flexibility in staff scheduling*
 - *Removal of the bumping provision*
 - *A more modest pay scale*

With respect to rates of pay, the unionized seasonal recall staff are paid very generously relative to the job requirements, and particularly when compared to what the students get paid (See Section 2.). And these rates of pay are considerably higher than those in the other Atlantic provinces. This matter needs to be addressed, particularly given the fiscal pressures associated with this program.

Students

Students are hired each season to supplement Provincial VIC staffing. The whole process associated with this is fraught with problems and is in urgent need of attention:

- The students to be hired each year are selected by the minister's office, without input from the VIC manager or anyone else. Clearly the process is entirely political. This demeans the whole integrity of the VIC program.
- There appears to be little attention paid to the skills the students need to have to be effective travel counsellors.

The result of this situation is entirely unsatisfactory: some of the students lack even rudimentary skills in interpersonal communications, few have any knowledge of the province from a tourism perspective and few have themselves travelled and are generally unaware of the needs of travellers. Unless they are lucky in getting a student that has some natural talent and a good attitude, the senior travel counsellors find themselves in a situation where they have to do the job for the student and receive no benefit from their presence. This undermines both teamwork and morale.

We make several recommendations:

1. *Discontinue the practice of having the minister's office involved in hiring.*
2. *Establish criteria for evaluating candidates, such as suggested below*
3. *Interviewing and hiring should be by the program manager and/or the respective VIC managers.*
4. *Advertise in the late fall for applicants, interview and hire during the winter (contingent hiring if funding is not committed at this time), and arrange for training in the spring prior to starting work. If necessary due to funding not being confirmed, require the students to attend the basic training on an unpaid basis.*

Criteria might include:

- Outgoing personality
- Courteous and well-mannered
- Enthusiastic about the job opportunity and the kinds of duties
- Some understanding of the tourism industry in Newfoundland and Labrador, and of traveller needs
- Well groomed
- Willing to conform to approved policies and work practices
- Good references provided

The Option of Employing Additional Seasonal Recall Staff

The other option is to cut back or terminate the student employment model and hire a few more seasonal recall staff. This would overcome some of the problems described above. It would also recognize the legitimacy of taking a professional approach to visitor information services, which it certainly warrants.

Seniors as Volunteers

Training and using seniors as volunteers is another way of providing additional staff to assist with counselling, wherein adults, primarily seniors, would be engaged to assist the seasonal recall staff during the peak tourist season. It is used successfully by many other destinations, particularly in the USA. It is worthwhile pursuing.

Also, in the event the student situation cannot be changed adequately to make students a viable and satisfactory addition to the VIC staffing, or if more seasonal recall employees are not to be hired, the other option would be a volunteer program.

Seniors offer some significant advantages over students:

- They are more likely to be comfortable in relating to travellers
- They will be closer in age and more understanding of many pleasure travellers
- Presumably they will have travelled themselves somewhat, stayed in commercial accommodations and therefore have a better understanding of what's involved
- They are more likely to have a greater level of product knowledge

Of course, all of this is irrelevant if they don't have the personality and communication skills to be effective. These are more important. Care needs to be taken in the recruitment process to ensure that the right kinds of people are enlisted.

The development and management of volunteers is not a simple task and requires an organized effort, including training of VIC managers in this regard. It can also require more management attention, as volunteers don't always have the same level of commitment to make themselves available when needed.

Performance Reviews

The end-of-season performance reviews would be made on the basis of the following kinds of criteria:

- *Product knowledge*
- *Skill in drawing out visitor interests and suggesting appropriate things to see and do*
- *Enthusiasm and standard of hospitality extended to visitors*
- *Effort and ability at teamwork with the other staff*
- *Compliance with operational policies and approved practices*

Ideally each VIC and staff member would be 'mystery shopped' at least once during the season and the report used in the evaluation.

The Manager of the VICs would evaluate each VIC manager, while the managers would evaluate their staff, both seasonal recalls and students, and provide those evaluations to the program manager. The performance review would be shared and discussed with each

employee, in confidence, and whether they are to be recommended for re-hiring the following year.

Training and Certification for Provincial VIC Staff

No product or other training has been done for either recall staff or students for the past several years. This is extremely unfortunate. *Obviously reinstating training and product familiarization tours should be a priority.*

12 of the 18 seasonal recall staff have gone through the HNL certification program for travel counsellors, which is certainly helpful. *Becoming certified should be made another condition of employment and recall, and recognized in the payscale.*

However, that doesn't assist with product knowledge training, which is critically important. The best way for this to be done is through product familiarization tours. Perhaps these can be reinstated with the help of other partners, including HNL. A possible way of accomplishing this is considered shortly, in the discussion of training for the proposed Tourism Frontline initiative. At the same time, there are other things that can be done in this regard that require little or no budget:

- Requiring staff to study the current VIC Information Manual
- Making it a condition of employment that students study the manual and be examined on it prior to starting work at the VIC, on their own time
- Arranging for senior travel counsellors to train their staff and students themselves during periods of low visitor activity. They would need to go through a train-the-trainer orientation program, plus be given the training tools required.

Another possibility, one well worth pursuing, would be to build Provincial VIC training on the back of a broader training initiative designed for all VICs and for the tourism industry under the Tourism Frontline initiative described earlier. We consider that concept later in this section.

Operating Season

The season for the Provincial VICs has been shortened because of budget cuts. It is now shorter than what most consider the basic tourist season, and much shorter than what evidence over the past several years indicates as being the trend being for the future. *It is a priority to extend the season of operation. Hopefully that can be accomplished by a much-needed increase in the budget. If not, then hopefully the opportunity to enter into joint ventures and downloading and closing other centres will allow this to happen.* We recommend the following minimum season of operation:

- The major gateways, North Sydney and Port Aux Basques, should operate daily, in conjunction with ferry departures/arrivals, on an extended season of at least of April 1 - October 31.
- Whitbourne should operate for a similar period.

- The two airport gateways and the St. John's downtown location should be operated all year, seven days a week.
- The other joint venture centres should operate daily on an extended season basis, proposed to be May 1 – Thanksgiving.

Literature Distribution

The provincial literature distribution system seems to be working reasonably well, so we have no recommendations for modifications. (The current service is presented in Appendix I.)

Earlier we discussed the idea of expanding the system of unmanned brochure racks in the province and suggestions were made of ways of assisting the company involved, Cabot-Eiriksson.

An Integrated VIC and Frontline Training Concept

As proposed in Section 4, we believe that the province's lead agency for professional development, HNL, should play a lead role in establishing and coordinating a very basic and simple 'tourism frontline' self-study program for people in the industry, basically drawing elements from the SuperHost program, combined with product knowledge training. The idea is to give frontline people basic skills and product awareness, along with tools at hand for reference when queries come their way.

This initiative could be broadened to one also providing real training for VIC staff, both Provincial and regional, and for industry people where businesses are prepared to do more than the minimum. This could be delivered in workshop across the province, or it could be delivered through online tools and/or with the distribution of a 'toolkit' containing a CD and/or hard copy of learning aids and reference materials.

The Reference Manual could also be shared with the certified VICs across the province for use as described above in both the self-study and training initiatives.

We recommend that HNL investigate the feasibility of these concepts and means of funding them.

Coordination of Other Joint Initiatives with Regional and Local VICs and Industry

In addition to training, there is a need to coordinate a number of things if the various stakeholders are to function as part of an overall visitor information system, including the network of VICs. Again, HNL can play an important role here. Some of the key needs include:

- Coordination of training and certification, distribution of logos and signs

- An annual meeting to review common issues and concerns, particularly as they relate to coordination amongst the stakeholders
- Distribution of literature
- Coordination of dealings with external ‘partners’, such as HRSD (see further comments on this to follow below)
- Communications on day-to-day information on iceberg sightings, etc.
- To name only a few....

The agency proposed in the tourism product development strategy would be able to play this coordinating role. In its absence, HNL would be a logical lead organization, at least for parts of the coordination. Other elements involving only the Province and the VICs alone, such as literature distribution and the distribution of logos and signs, would logically be coordinated by the Province instead of HNL.

HRSD Funding

The funding for the students for the local/regional centres is provided by HRSD. It is for a very limited period of employment and, in 2004 at least, perhaps because of the election, funding approval didn’t come until late in June. This meant there was no time for training. We understand that this has been an annual issue and student training has consistently been limited or non-existent.

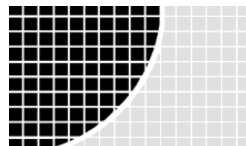
We suggest an attempt should be made to negotiate a modification of the HRSD funding wherein it would cover the targeted period of employment and where approval is given much earlier, ideally the previous fall.

Provincial Management and Administration

Within the provincial government there is a need to coordinate linkages between marketing and the VIC program, particularly with respect to the website functionality, the travel guide and other features that impact directly on visitor services. That should be reasonably easily accomplished with the development of an annual visitor information system plan involving the stakeholders within government and periodic meetings during its implementation.

In the future, if the provincial agency mentioned earlier were to be established, the management function would be broadened to include the other partners, namely HNL and ACOA; and its role would be considerably enlarged by taking over more of the coordination functions listed above.

Section 7
Implementation Priorities and Budgets



THE ECONOMIC PLANNING GROUP of Canada
Tourism Consultants

Section 7

Implementation Priorities and Budgets

This section summarizes the recommendations made throughout the report, by topic area, along with recommendations as to priority, lead agency and provides budget comments and estimates where possible.

Summary of Recommendations and Priorities

First Priorities

In the table to follow, the first section includes those initiatives that should be pursued as first actions and top priorities, in advance of starting on the others. These are all the 'high' priorities that we recommend be introduced in 2005. We estimate a budget of \$275,000 (includes a contingency), which will be an annual operational DTCR budget increase henceforth; plus a one-time capital investment of an estimated \$75,000 to establish VIC services at the two airports, for a total of \$350,000 in 2005.

Other Priorities Over the next Three Years

The remaining sections are organized by program area, with the priorities and suggested timing indicated.

The major capital items, recommended for 2006, include the expansions and enhancements at North Sydney, Port Aux Basques and Whitbourne, which are estimated at \$1.8 million. Other capital items include design fees for logos, signs and uniforms; displays on the ferries; and capital for the VIC in St. John's downtown. This brings the total capital costs beyond 2005 to \$1.86 million.

The additional operating budget beyond 2005 is estimated at \$290,000.

Total Costs

Overall, the annual budget is estimated to rise by \$565,000, and the capital investment to total \$1.935 million.

The budgets in the table to follow are all incremental to the current Provincial VIC budget.

Exhibit 15 Recommendation Summary				
Recommendations	Priority and Timing	Lead Agency	Budget Allowance/ Comments	Report Reference (section #)
Key Initial Priorities				
Extend the season of operation of Provincial VICs	High 2005	DTCR	\$100,000/ year	6
Establish coordination with other elements of the Provincial visitor information system, including Provincial collateral, website, etc.	High 2005	DTCR		4
Establish Provincial VIC services at St. John's and Deer Lake airports, potentially in partnership with the local DMOs (The budget item is the net amount of an estimated budget for this of \$120,000, less the redeployment of payroll from Argentia, Clarenville and Notre Dame Junction.)	High 2005-06	DTCR	\$75,000 capital \$40,000/ year operations (net)*	4, 5
Establish a partnership with HNL for VIC training, involving both Provincial and regional/local centres, as a first step in establishing a quality assurance program for VICs	High 2005-06	HNL and DTCR		6
Appoint a Provincial Visitor Information Services Co-ordinator for the provincial VICs and the broader Visitor Information System coordination	High 2005	DTCR	\$40,000 payroll \$25,000 travel and admin/ year	6
Improve the student employment program or replace it with additional seasonal recalls and/or volunteers	High 2005-06	DTCR	\$40,000	6
Contingency			\$30,000	
Subtotal – annual budget			\$275,000/ year	
Subtotal - capital			\$75,000	
Total Initial Priorities for 2005			\$350,000	

Exhibit 15 Recommendation Summary				
Recommendations	Priority and Timing	Lead Agency	Budget Allowance/ Comments	Report Reference (section #)
Existing Major Provincial Gateway VICs				
Enhance the VIC services and the facilities at North Sydney and Port Aux Basques, and particularly the 24/7 outdoor services at the latter (and remove the MIST terminals)	High 2006	DTCR	\$50,000 NS \$870,000 PAB capital	5
Make the recommended expansion and enhancements to Whitbourne, including the 24/7 outdoor services	High 2006	DTCR	\$880,000 capital	5
Retain a professional designer to develop a logo for the centres, and the system of Official VICs, improved signage and visibility, and staff uniforms	Medium 2006	DTCR and HNL	\$15,000 - 25,000 capital for design	5, 6
Renegotiate the union agreement, particularly for these gateway centres to allow split shifts and call-ins, to modify wage rates, to establish the basis for the recommended enhancements to staff performance standards, reviews and mystery shopping	Medium 2006-07	DTCR		6
Negotiate with Marine Atlantic for the recommended onboard displays, videos and announcements, and for communication of ferry arrival times	Medium 2005	DTCR	\$10,000 capital	6
Establish an agreement with the City of St. John's for a joint VIC at their location on Water Street	Medium 2005	DTCR	\$25,000 capital \$90,000/ year operations	4, 5
Investigate the feasibility of craft shops and other complementary services at the Provincial VICs	Medium 2005-06	Craft Council and DTCR		5
Upgrade the staff uniforms and add nametags	Medium 2005	DTCR	\$15,000/ year	6
Develop a policy and procedures manual	Medium 2006	DTCR		6

Exhibit 15 Recommendation Summary				
Recommendations	Priority and Timing	Lead Agency	Budget Allowance/ Comments	Report Reference (section #)
Other Provincial VICs				
Investigate the interest of local/ regional DMOs to take over the Argentia, Notre Dame Junction and Clarenville centres, or close them	Medium 2005-06	DTCR		4, 5
Investigate the potential for a partnership in the operation of the Deer Lake highway facility	Medium 2006	DTCR		4, 5
Training and Quality Assurance				
Expand the VIC training program into the proposed Official VIC Certification program	High 2006	HNL and DTCR		4, 6
Establish the mystery shopping program	High 2005-06	HNL and DTC	\$25,000/ year	4, 6
Develop and introduce the Tourism Frontline program	Medium 2006-07	HNL		4
Investigate further the feasibility of expanding the Tourism Frontline program into self-serve locations		HNL, and an industry partner		4
Regional Gateway VICs				
Establish the proposed Fee for Service Program with the Designated Regional Gateways	High 2006	DTCR	10 locations at \$10,000/ year each = \$100,000	4
Establish a VIC association to co-ordinate matters of common interest	Medium 2006	HNL		6
Local VICs				
Extend the Fee for Service Program to Designated Tier 1 and 2 Destination Areas	Medium 2007	DTCR	12 locations at \$5,000/ year each = \$60,000	4

Exhibit 15 Recommendation Summary				
Recommendations	Priority and Timing	Lead Agency	Budget Allowance/ Comments	Report Reference (section #)
Discontinue funding other VICs that don't meet the criteria	Medium 2005-06	DTCR		4
Other Recommendations				
Pursue the establishment of a provincial agency to take over Provincial visitor information services	Medium – long term	HNL		6
Subtotal – Additional annual budget beyond 2005			\$290,000	
Subtotal – Additional capital budget beyond 2005			\$1,860,000	
Total Annual Budget Increase			\$565,000	
Total Capital Budget			\$1,935,000	

* The \$40,000 is a net increase in payroll. The estimated cost is \$120,000, less redeployed budgets from three other centres no longer to be operated by the province.

Co-ordination of Implementation and Partnerships

Coordinating the elements of the visitor information services system will require a few organizational and budgetary arrangements. We suggest the following:

1. Establish a joint venture partnership between HNL and DTCR to coordinate matters both organizations are involved with.
2. DTCR would request a budget increase for the Provincial components of the program, perhaps with some of DITRD's budget redeployed to DTCR for this purpose.
3. Form an association of Official (certified) VICs to provide a partner for HNL, DTCR and ACOA.
4. The partners would establish an MOU with ACOA, and perhaps HRSD as well, with respect to funding support of eligible elements of the program.

Examples of Roadside Information Kiosks



Viking Trail Interpretive Kiosk



Viking Trail Roadside Display Panel

Examples of Local/Regional VICs – Exteriors – Stand Alone Facilities



Bay St. George VIC



Corner Brook VIC



Harbour Grace VIC



Hawke's Bay VIC

Examples of Local/Regional VICs – Exteriors – VICs included with other Facilities



Newville VIC



Springdale VIC



Baie Verte VIC



Elliston VIC

Examples of Local/Regional VICs – Interior



Southern Bay VIC



Glovertown VIC



Lavrador Straits (L'Anse aux Clair) VIC

Newville VIC



Witless Bay VIC

