



Briefing Note – COTA at TIAC Tourism Day on Parliament

Monday, December 7, 2007

Purpose

This Briefing Note provides a short synopsis of the meetings held between B.C. tourism industry representatives and select federal officials between Nov. 26-29 in Ottawa, coinciding with the Tourism Industry Association of Canada's (TIAC's) Lobby Day on Parliament Hill.

Background

Through ongoing industry consultations, including strategic visioning undertaken as part of the Foresight Project, it became clear that enhancing the B.C. tourism community's competitiveness would require greater communication and cooperation with agencies of the Federal Government. The main issues consistently identified being: borders, air access, federal marketing support, human resources, and crime and public disorder. COTA was, as a result, asked by its member organizations to put more effort into influencing government policy at the federal level.

In efforts to enhance the BC tourism community's competitiveness COTA has taken a number of steps:

- Throughout 2006 and early 2007, engaged provincial tourism stakeholders in discussions and debates in order to develop a consistent and focused understanding of the issues and potential solutions;
- In May 2007, consolidated our collective understanding and messaging into a "Federal Issues Book";
- From June 2007 onward, enhanced our advocacy activities primarily directed at members of the B.C. caucuses, and ministerial level staff within Industry Canada, Transport Canada and Public Safety; and
- Engaged in regular communication with the TIAC and our counterparts within the Provincial and Territorial Tourism Industry Association (PTTIA) to build support for our federal advocacy agenda.

TIAC Day on Parliament

On November 27, 2007 B.C.'s tourism community was provided an opportunity to partner in a national tourism lobby effort in Ottawa organized by TIAC and the Hotel Association of Canada (HAC). This was viewed as a strategic opportunity not only to support TIAC's and HAC's advocacy efforts, but to use this as a platform to arrange other meetings for B.C. delegates as a way to build relationship directly at the federal level and to deliver our Federal Issues Book. Under the COTA banner, twelve (12) B.C. tourism industry representatives traveled to Ottawa for these meetings, another four (4) hotel representatives participated under the HAC banner. To put this in context, B.C. delegates represented 30 per cent of the total TIAC contingent and 20 per cent of the HAC contingent.

COTA has worked diligently to garner enhanced support from TIAC for B.C.'s priority issues, particularly with regard to the need for enhanced air access from key overseas markets. These efforts have resulted in TIAC's adoption of COTA's policy recommendations in this area. Enhanced air access was identified as one of TIAC's top three policy recommendations during the lobby day meetings.

In addition to the dozens of meetings with Members of Parliament as part of the TIAC Day, COTA discussed B.C. tourism issues with senior departmental and ministerial staff from Industry Canada, the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT), Transport Canada, the Secretary of State for Small Business and Tourism, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (HRSDC), and others.

Analysis of Meetings

The purpose of COTA's meetings in Ottawa, particularly those directly managed by COTA, was:

1. To update federal officials on B.C. tourism priorities,
2. To further efforts at building direct relationships with staff in tourism-related federal agencies,
3. To deepen our understanding of how federal MPs and staff viewed the challenges and opportunities facing B.C.'s tourism community, and
4. To get a sense for the federal appetite to address specific B.C. tourism priorities.

The following summarizes the overall tone and substance of the meetings:

- There was a wide range of awareness of specific BC tourism priorities, with ministerial staff generally demonstrating the highest awareness, followed by departmental staff, and individual MPs from B.C. This makes sense given that ministerial staff are more connected to the issues on a day-to-day basis and that COTA's efforts have been largely targeted at the ministerial level. It suggests we have work to do to ensure others are more engaged and informed.
- The issue of inbound air capacity was well understood by ministerial staff from DFAIT and Transport, with Industry Canada and the Minister of State's offices being less aware of specifics. Senior staff from both Industry Canada and the Minister of State's office were keen to receive more information on our air policy research and gain more awareness of our priority tourism markets.
- DFAIT, Industry Canada, and Transport Canada officials were surprised to hear that B.C. continues to have concerns with progress on the *Blue Sky* air policy to date. They also suggested that there are in general greater obstacles to liberalizing agreements with Asia-Pacific countries. However they seemed optimistic that open skies agreements with Korea, India and Taiwan will be struck in 2008. All agencies requested a consolidated list of B.C. tourism community's priority countries for air negotiations.
- Secretary Ablonczy's office was well informed of COTA's priorities. Highlights from this discussion included:
 - B.C. lauded for its leadership in tourism – Ministry of Tourism Sport and the Arts and Tourism B.C. were specifically noted. Secretary applauded our efforts to support the TIAC event stating 'no impact without contact.'
 - Air access priorities would be supported by the Secretary's office.
 - COTA expressed support for the direction and leadership being demonstrated by the current CTC executive team, and we underscored our interest in their funding being enhanced beyond the recent, one-time \$26 million for the Olympics. There was hesitance to support enhanced CTC funding without a demonstration of improved strategic planning and performance. We were confident this would be forthcoming.
 - Continue to need federal leadership to address border delays and uncertainty. The issue of border "hospitality" was recognized as an area for potential collaboration.
 - The Secretary was invited to participate in the 2008 Tourism Industry Conference in Vancouver.
- A significant part of the contingent from B.C. included six (6) delegates from the Northern Rockies Alaska Highway Tourism Association and related communities. They worked effectively through their MP Jay Hill to set up productive meetings with Minister Fortier, Public Works Government Services Canada, Minister Ablonczy, Business and Tourism, and the Historic Sites and Monuments Board. Progress was made.
- Human resource issues were generally high on the federal radar. Recent financial commitments to the Temporary Foreign Worker Program were applauded as the program aims to reduce processing delays and more effectively respond to regional labour and skills shortages. Unfortunately go2 representatives were not able to join our delegation, they would have helped us make an even stronger impact.
- B.C. MPs recommended COTA utilize their regional offices and Cabinet Committees, both of which have a strong role in identifying priorities to the Privy Council Office (PCO).

- Tourism development opportunity where federal government collaboration could be effectively leveraged with already strong B.C. government/B.C. industry collaboration related to aboriginal tourism, environmental sustainability, and northern/arctic tourism.
- COTA updated HRDSC staff working on Olympic preparedness on the tourism community's ongoing efforts to maximize the benefits of hosting the Paralympics through an accessible tourism strategy. HRDSC, through the Office of Disability Issues, expressed interest in staying connected and will look to participate in the Tourism Industry Conference in February.
- A meeting with the Mental Health Commission of Canada was arranged to underline our desire for federal involvement in helping B.C. address issues related to insufficient supports for persons with mental health issues. Negative impacts of service gaps contribute to the growing perception of street disorder, particularly within urban settings.

Next Steps

- Follow-up letters to be sent to all meeting participants
- Requested documents (economic impact studies, Foresight, etc.) to be distributed as discussed
- Further refinement of messaging on key issues to be undertaken
- Communication of meeting results to B.C. tourism industry / COTA membership
- Follow-up on strategic opportunities for BC tourism industry (e.g., Aboriginal tourism, sustainability, northern / arctic tourism)
- Maintain regular contact with key federal officials