Community Futures St Paul–Smoky Lake Region

Community Futures Lakeland

ROADS General Population Study

May 31, 2007

Executive Summary

The study conducted by Leger Marketing on behalf of the REACH Community Futures Development Corporation and the Lakeland Community Development Corporation had two main objectives: assessing regional economic development opportunities and employment opportunities that exist within the region. This second part of the research looked at the needs of people living in the communities along the Iron Horse Trail. Provided below are the key findings of the study.

Similar to the results from the Business Survey, the results from the General Population Survey show that not all residents' purchasing needs are fulfilled locally. More specifically, a proportion of forty three percent (43%) do less than three quarters of their shopping in the area where they live.

Overall, people living in the region are well aware of retail gaps within their community. They believe that the region is ready for particular stores and suggest three steps to attract these outlets: drawing more people to live in the area, getting cooperation from the City/Town Council and supplementing that strategy with an advertising/marketing effort.

Two-thirds of the general population (65%) believe that a "big box" store would have a positive impact on the community mostly because it will fulfill local purchasing needs, offer better selection, quality and prices and will contribute to the economic growth of the region. On the contrary, a quarter of the respondents argue that a large department store will "harm" or potentially "destroy" existing local vendors.

With regard to Internet usage, three quarters of the respondents (75%) indicate that they use the Internet at home or at work. Six out of ten of them have done online purchasing (61%) buying mostly small items such as books, DVDs, clothing, software or tickets. Forty six percent (46%) go online to look for local information and community events, forty five percent (45%) use the Internet to research automotive parts, vehicles, equipment, home hardware or building materials and forty one percent (41%) use Internet to research or plan local getaways.

The study also examined the general awareness and usage of the Iron Horse Trail. While most people (84%) living in the Cold Lake, Bonnyville, St. Paul, Smoky Lake and Elk Point communities have heard of the Trail it became clear that sixty three percent (63%) of them do not use it. The survey found that the most popular activities associated with the Trail are walking/hiking (28%), driving all terrain vehicles (26%) and snowmobiling (21%).

The majority of respondents agree that the Iron Horse Trail is a great destination for outdoor activities. In fact, many believe that this characteristic of the region should be in the centre of any strategy for developing tourist attractions.

Three quarters the people living in the area (74%) believe in the potential of tourism to enhance the region's economic development and agree that the region is ready to welcome visitors from around the world, in all four seasons.

Similar to the results from the business survey, the vast majority of respondents (82%) see opportunity for developing resorts and tourism in the area. With regard to types of tourism that have potential in the area, slightly more than half of the respondents see opportunities for aboriginal (57%), cowboy tourism (55%) and agricultural (54%).

Methodology

This study, based on primary research, was conducted by Leger Marketing through telephone interviews among a representative sample of 1,000 Albertans, 18 years of age or older. The interviews were conducted between April 12 and April 29, 2007.

Using a random sample database, Leger Marketing contacted individuals who live in the Iron Horse Trail region (St. Paul to Cold Lake). Similar to the business study conducted two month before hand, a media campaign in the local weekly papers and radio was launched with the objective to increase awareness of the study and encourage participation.

Survey interviews were conducted between February April 12 and April 29, 2007. The total of 1,000 complete interviews produces a margin of error of ±3.1% at the 95% confidence level, nineteen times out of twenty.

It should be noted that the number of respondents within sub-groups (regions) is smaller, therefore margins of error are higher: 334 respondents in Cold Lake region (±5.4%), 295 in the Bonnyville region (±5.7%), 156 in the St. Paul region (±7.9%), 137 in the Smoky Lake area (±8.4) and 78 in the Elk Point region (±11%).

I. Demographic Profiles Following Completion of the Study

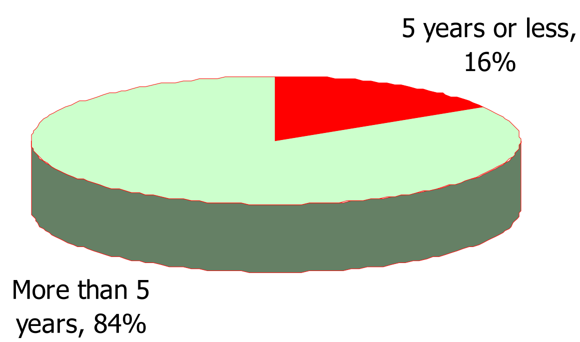
	Total Respondents (n= 1000)
AGE	
18 – 24	5%
25 – 34	19%
35 – 44	25%
45 – 54	25%
Age 55+	26%
MARITAL STATUS	
Married	74%
Single	15%
Widowed	5%
Divorced	5%
Refused to answer	1%
TOTAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME	
Over $150,000	7%
$100,000 to $150,000	15%
$75,000 to $99,000	18%
$50,000 to $74,000	22%
$35,000 to $49,999	13%
$20,000 to $34,999	8%
Under $20,000	6%
Refused to answer	11%
Level of Education	
Elementary School	5%
High School	38%
Technical/Vocational School	18%
Community College	20%
Bachelor's Degree	15%
Master's Degree	4%
CHILDREN UNDER 18 LIVING AT HOME	
Yes	44%
No	56%
GENDER	
Male	43%
Female	57%
REGION	
Cold Lake	334
Bonnyville	295
Smoky Lake	137
St. Paul	156
Elk Point	78

II. Living in North Eastern Alberta

Number of Years in North Eastern Alberta

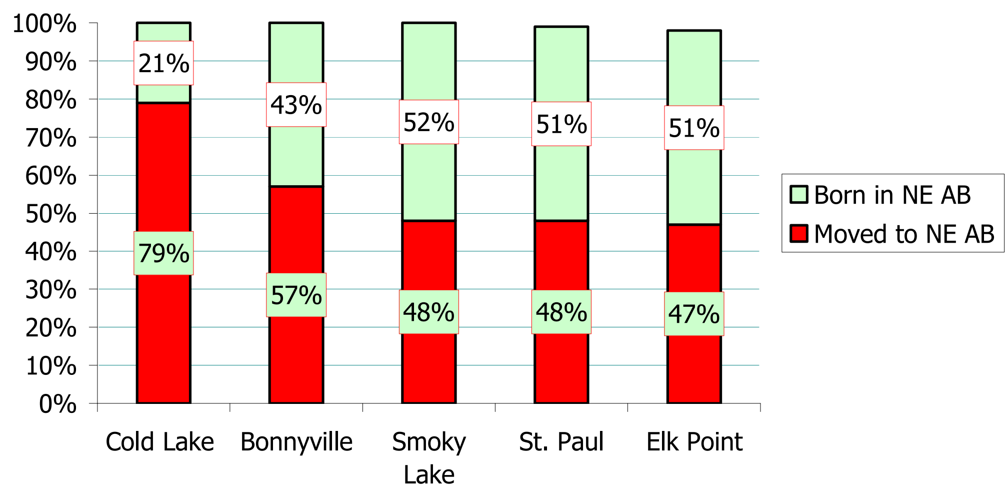
When asked how long they have lived in North Eastern Alberta, only sixteen (16%) of the respondents reported that they have lived there for 5 years or less. Regionally, however, there is a significant difference observed between Cold Lake and all other areas, which can be attributed to the Military Base in the region. More specifically, one quarter of the residents of Cold Lake (25%) have lived in the area for five years or less versus 5% to 15% for the other regions.

How long have you lived in North Eastern Alberta?



Place of Birth

With regard to their place of birth, four out of ten respondents (39%) indicated that were born in North Eastern Alberta and six out of ten (61%) moved there from other places. When comparing by regions, significantly more people moved to Cold Lake than to the other places due to the reason outlined above.



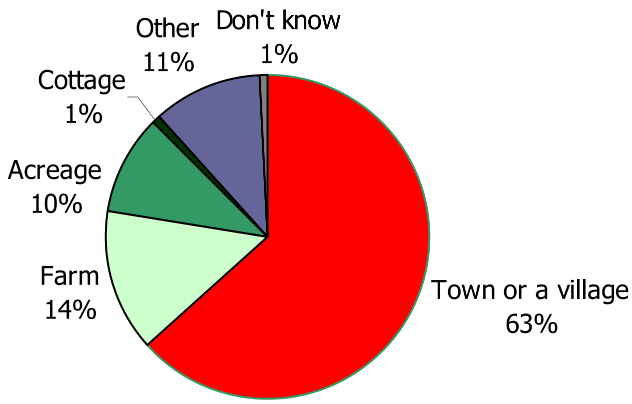
Reason for Moving to North Eastern Alberta

Results indicate that the main reasons that people move to North Eastern Alberta are employment opportunities (33% including those who came to work for the military base) followed by family reasons (16%) such as parents living in the area, spouse's employment or marriage.

Current Location

When asked where they currently live, slightly more than six out of ten respondents (63%) indicated living in a town or a village and one third reported living on a farm (14%), acreage (10%) or other (11%). Almost all respondents (99%) live at these locations year round.

Where do you live?



Regionally, a higher proportion of respondents of St. Paul and Bonnyville live in a town or village compared to respondents of Cold Lake and Smoky Lake (60% and 48% compared to 72% and 70% respectively).

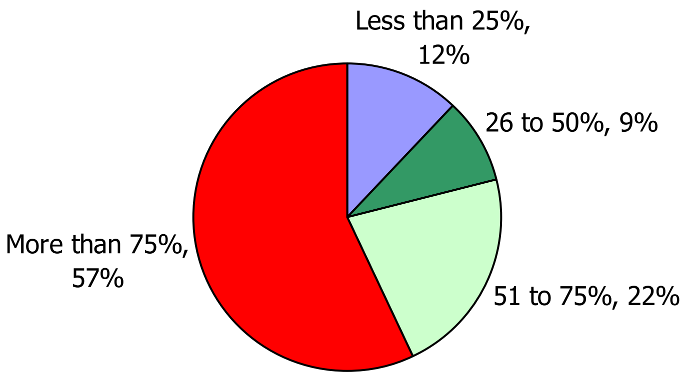
Of those who don't live in a town or a village, the residents of Smoky Lake (66%), St. Paul (58%) and Elk Point (62%) are significantly more likely to live on a farm than the residents of Bonnyville (37%) and Cold Lake (16%).

Compared to the residents of Cold Lake, Smoky Lake and Elk Point (16%, 18% and 28% respectively) a higher proportion of residents of Bonnyville (48%) live on acreage.

Shopping Preferences

With regard to shopping preferences illustrated in the following chart, close to six out of ten respondents (57%) do more than three quarters of their shopping in their community. This is especially true for the residents of Cold Lake and St. Paul, who are more likely than the residents of Bonnyville, Elk Point and Smoky Lake to do most of their shopping in their community (75% and 66% compared to 54%, 33% and 15% respectively). Furthermore, residents of Smoky Lake are significantly more likely than the residents of the other regions to shop outside of their community. More than five in ten do half of their shopping outside the region where they live.

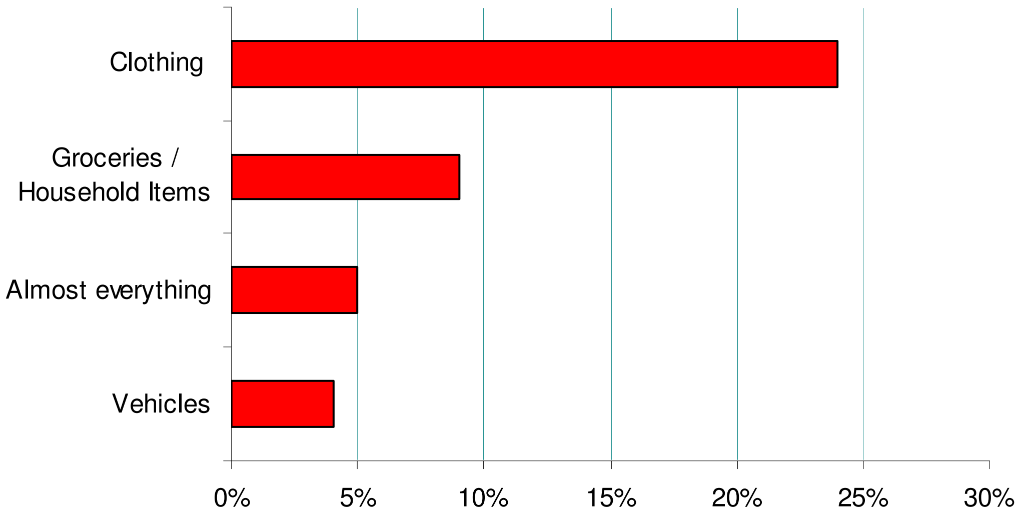
What percentage of your shopping is done in your community?



Shopping Outside Your Community

Clearly, not all residents' purchasing needs are fulfilled locally. When asked what products and services they travel to purchase outside the area, a quarter of the respondents (24%) indicated that they usually take a trip to buy clothing. Other products included groceries/household items (9%), vehicles (4%) and "almost everything" (5%). Appliances, electronics, furniture, bulk items and specialty items were also mentioned.

What products and services do you travel to purchase outside the area?



Better selection, availability and price are the three main reasons that residents travel outside their area to purchase products and services. According to the general population, the region lacks particular stores and those that are available offer limited selection at a higher price.

Retail Gaps

People living in the region are well aware of retail gaps within their community. When asked if they can think of any retail vendors not currently available in the region that might be a good fit for the community, seven in ten respondents (71%) said "Yes" and most of them (83%) believed that the community is ready for these new stores.

Percentages are higher for residents of St. Paul who are significantly more likely to identify retail gaps within their community compared to the residents of Smoky Lake and Elk Point (78% versus 64% and 65%, respectively). Further, residents of Smoky Lake and Elk Point are more likely than the residents of Cold Lake and St. Paul to argue that even if there are retail gaps in the region the community is not ready for the stores that they suggested (23% and 22% versus 6% and 6%, respectively).

Nearly three out of ten (27%) agreed that the region needs large department stores. Examples of outlets considered a good fit for the community included Wal-Mart (15%) in the first place, followed by Canadian Tire (6%), Home Depot (4%) and Costco (3%).

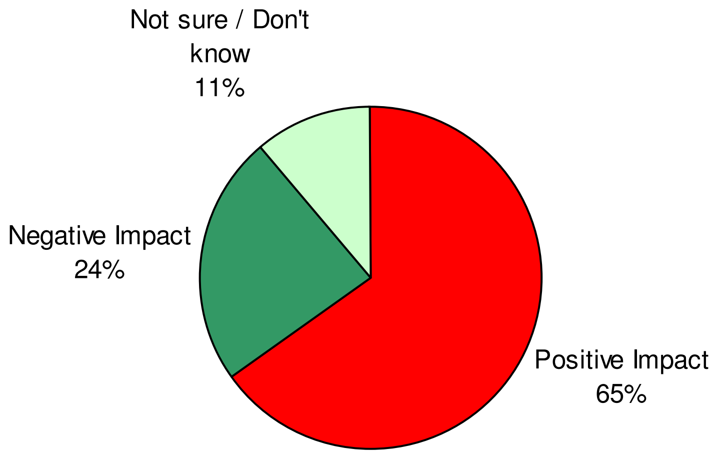
When discussing retail vendors not currently available in the area, people living in the communities along the Iron Horse Trail indicated a need for clothing stores (8%) and restaurants (8%). With regard to types of restaurants, most mentioned fast food chains; Tim Horton's, in particular (6%).

Only three percent expressed a need for a bigger grocery store such as Safeway or the Superstore. A smaller proportion mentioned a need for bookstores, furniture, sporting goods, appliances, electronics and office supplies.

When asked what would need to be done to attract these outlets, respondents suggested increasing the size of the population and increasing marketing efforts. More specifically, attracting more people to the region to justify building large department stores desired by residents. According to respondents' comments, such strategy is not going to be successful without cooperation from the City/Town Council.

Big Box Stores

Do you think a big box store such as Wal-Mart or The Bay would be positive or negative for the community?



With regard to the potential impact of a "big box" store on the community results are very similar to the results from the business survey. More specifically, two-thirds of the general population (65%) think that a store such as Wal-Mart or The Bay would have a positive impact on the community, a quarter disagree (24%) and one in ten (11%) don't know or refused to answer the question.

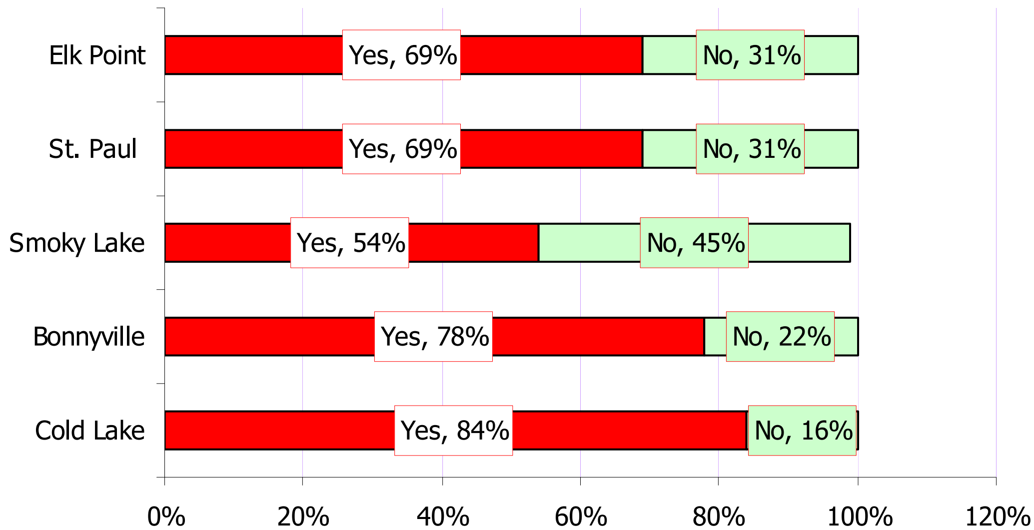
Those who believe in the positive impact of these stores on the community associate large department stores with a better variety, higher quality products and better prices. What is more, a "big box" store is likely to fulfill local residents purchasing needs and eliminate the need for travelling outside the area. Respondents also believe that it will attract people to their region and create employment; all of which equals economic growth. As their final argument, they used the fact that a "big box" store would also create competition, resulting in "better options" and "better pricing"; all of which is "good for the consumer".

Yet not everyone is so optimistic. A quarter of the respondents argue that a large department store will have a negative impact on the community mostly because it will "harm" or potentially "destroy" local vendors. It is not uncommon for the group of respondents to perceive Wal-Mart as an "American-owned, profit-driven" chain.

III. Use of the Internet

Three quarters of the respondents (75%) indicated using Internet either at home or at work. Regionally, the residents of Cold Lake and Bonnyville are more likely than the residents of Smoky Lake, St. Paul and Elk Point to use the Internet (84% and 78% compared to 54%, 69% and 69%). Clearly, the region with the lowest Internet usage is Smoky Lake, where half of the people do not use the Internet (see bar chart below).

Do you use the Internet, either at home or at work?



Online Purchasing

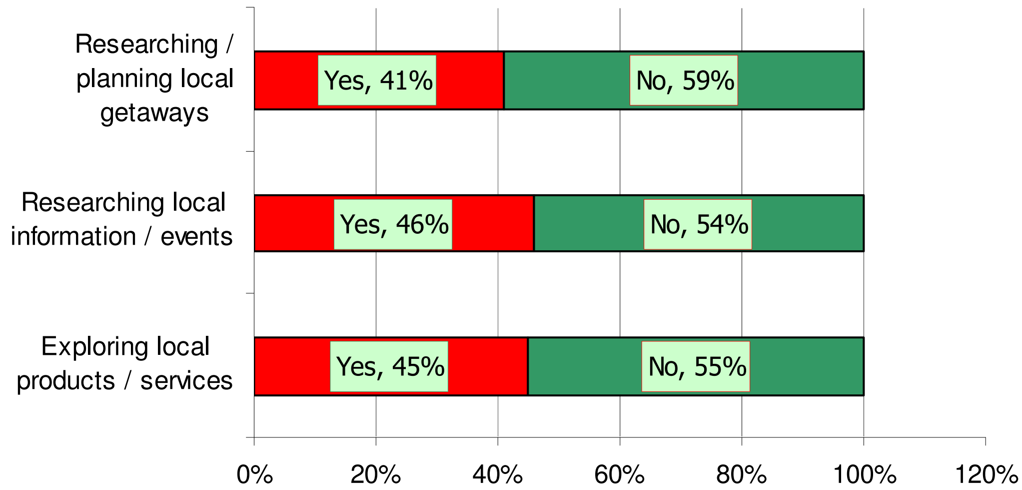
When asked if they have ever purchased anything online six out of ten respondents (61%) of those who use the Internet (or 45% of the total sample) said: "Yes". On the contrary, a proportion of thirty-nine percent (39%) indicated that they have never purchased anything online. Regionally, residents of Cold Lake and Bonnyville were more likely than the residents of Smoky Lake to report using the Internet for purchases (67% and 63% compared to 45%).

With regard to types of products purchased online, residents report buying mostly small items such as books, DVDs, clothing, software, tickets (airplane/other), electronics and, rarely, larger/bulk items.

Online Researching

Results indicate that in general, online research is less popular than online purchasing among people living in the communities along the Iron Horse Trail. Slightly more than four in ten of those who use the Internet go online to explore local products and services (45%) or to look for local information and community events (46%). Even less (41%) have interest in online research and planning of local getaways.

Types of research respondents do online



Interestingly, the types of products researched online differ from the types of products purchased online. More specifically, local residents use the Internet to explore information about vehicles and automotive parts, building materials, electronics, hardware, furniture, parts and equipment.

Regionally, residents of Smoky Lake are more likely than residents of Cold Lake, Elk Point and St. Paul to **research local products and services online** (60% versus 41% for each of the three regions).

The residents of Cold Lake are more likely than the residents of Smoky Lake and Elk Point to **research local information, services and community events online** (51% versus 37% and 35%, respectively).

Furthermore, the residents of Bonnyville are more likely than the residents of Cold Lake to use the Internet for **research and planning of local getaways** (47% versus 37%).

IV. The Iron Horse Trail

Awareness of the Iron Horse Trail

When asked if they have heard of the Alberta' s Iron Horse Trail the vast majority of the respondents (84%) said: "Yes". Results show that awareness is lower in Bonnyville and highest in the St. Paul and Elk Point regions (76% compared to 93% and 95%, respectively).

Usage of the Iron Horse Trail

While awareness of the Trail is high, the same cannot be said for its usage. Of those aware of the Iron Horse Trail, only thirty seven percent (37%) reported using it. Regionally, residents of St. Paul and Elk Point are more likely to use it than the residents of Cold Lake, Bonnyville and Smoky Lake (53% and 51% compared to 27%, 34% and 37%).

Iron Horse Trail Activities

Survey results indicate that the most popular activities along the Iron Horse Trail are walking/ hiking (mentioned by three in ten of those aware of the Trail), using all terrain vehicles (mentioned by a quarter of those aware of the Trail) and snowmobiling (mentioned by one fifth of those aware of the Trail). As illustrated in the following chart, other popular activities include biking, horse riding and camping, wildlife viewing, fishing/hunting and dining/culinary experiences.

What activities would you participate in along the Iron Horse Trail?

Q21. Top nine activities along the Iron Horse Trail	
Walking, hiking	**28%**
All terrain vehicles	**26%**
Snowmobiling	**21%**
Biking	**15%**
Horse Riding	**12%**
Camping	**10%**
Wildlife viewing	**7%**
Fishing or hunting	**6%**
Dining and culinary experiences	**6%**

Other activities along the Iron Horse Trail (mentioned by 5% or less of the respondents)

Q21. Bottom twelve activities along the Iron Horse Trail	
Heritage and culture	5%
Photography	5%
Provincial Parks	5%
Crafts/antiques/art work	5%
Festivals and events	5%
Museums and galleries	5%
Berry picking	5%
Birding	4%
Visiting public gardens	4%
Golf	4%
Ranch experience	3%
Experiencing cowboy culture	3%
Geo-catching (GPS treasure hunts)	3%

Iron Horse Trail Tourism Opportunities

When discussing tourism opportunities, similar to the results from the businesses survey, the vast majority of respondents (82%) are optimistic and see potential for developing resorts and tourism attractions in the area. With regard to type of attractions that need to be developed, it became clear that the region is most suitable for outdoor activities.

Almost three hundred people mentioned “lake activities/recreation”, mainly fishing and boating. Next on the list of attractions was camping. More specifically, 16% of respondents agreed that the area will attract more tourists if it offers better campsites. Hunting was also mentioned numerous times. Other ideas included tours along the trail, eco tourism, horseback riding, hiking, recreational activities, nature walks, day trips, family attractions and water sports.

Regionally, the residents of Cold Lake are significantly more likely than the residents of St. Paul to agree that there is an opportunity for developing tourism in the area (87% versus 77%).

One in ten respondents (10%) do not see a potential for tourism in the area mainly because there is “no room for a resort”, “no capacity” and “nothing to offer”. Moreover, some indicate that developing resorts and attracting tourists may damage the “pristine” environment. Some simply like the area the way it is.

Use of Local Tourism Office

Seven in ten people (73%) of the population in these five regions of North Eastern Alberta do not use their local tourism office. Those that do are more likely to be residents of Cold Lake, Bonnyville and St. Paul and less likely residents of Elk Point (30%, 27% and 28% versus 17%). There is also a significant difference observed between Cold Lake and Smoky Lake with regard to using the local tourism office (30% versus 20%).

V. Resident Perceptions of the Iron Horse Trail Region

Using a scale from 1 to 10 where 1 is “completely disagree” and 10 is “completely agree” respondents were asked to evaluate ten statements about the Iron Horse Trail region. The statements and the mean scores are presented in the following table:

Table 1. Statements about the region – mean scores and above average ratings

Statement about the Iron Horse Trail Region	Mean Score	Strong Agreement Ratings
My region is a great destination for outdoor activities	8.3	85%
Tourism has the potential to enhance my region’s economic development	7.6	74%
My region is ready to welcome visitors from the world over	7.5	68%
My region is full of unique history	7.3	66%
My region is ready to welcome visitors with unique experiences in all four seasons	7.1	66%
My region provides a great opportunity for aboriginal tourism	6.9	57%
The Iron Horse Trail is a unique tourist attraction	6.9	48%
There is an opportunity in my region to promote agricultural tourism	6.8	54%
My region provides a great opportunity to experience cowboy tourism	6.6	55%
My region is a tourism destination	6.5	55%

Overall, when comparing the mean ratings, we see that eighty-five percent (85%) of the people living along the Iron Horse Trail agree, including thirty-five (35%) who “completely agree”, that the region is a great destination for outdoor activities. They rated this statement with a mean score of 8.3 out of 10.

Proportion of strong agreement ratings (between 7 and 10) and strong means (between 7 and 8) is also higher for the following statements:

- “Tourism has the potential to enhance economic development” (three-quarters of the respondents or 74%, mean of 7.6)
- “My region is ready to welcome visitors from the world over” (more than two-thirds of the respondents or 68% mean of 7.5)
- “My region is full of unique history” (two-thirds of the respondents or 66%, mean of 7.3)
- “My region is ready to welcome visitors with unique experiences in all four seasons (two-thirds of the respondents or 66%, mean of 7.1)

Differences by Sub-segments of the Population

Eighty-five percent (85%) agree that the region is **a great destination for outdoor activities.** It should be noted that a proportion of strong agreement ratings (between 7 and10) is higher among residents of Cold Lake (91%) compared to residents of the other four regions (80% - 83%).They are also the strongest believers when it comes to the potential of tourism to enhance economic development (see table 2, pg. 12).

People living in Cold Lake are also more likely to think that the Iron Horse Trail region is **ready to welcome visitors from the world over** as well as **visitors with unique experiences in all four seasons** than the residents of all other areas.

Compared to the residents of Cold Lake and Bonnyville (a range of 47% and 53%, respectively) a higher proportion of residents from St. Paul (68%) strongly agree that the region provides a great opportunity to experience cowboy tourism. Further, residents of Smoky Lake were more likely than residents of Cold Lake to agree to this statement (59% versus 47%).

Table 2. Differences by Sub-segments of the Population

Statement about the Iron Horse Trail Region	A higher proportion of residents of… agree	Compared to the residents of…
My region is a great destination for outdoor activities	Cold Lake (91%)	All other regions (80% - 83%)
My region provides a great opportunity to experience cowboy tourism	St. Paul (68%)	Cold Lake (47%) and Bonnyville (53%)
My region is full of unique history	Smoky Lake (80%), Elk Point (78%), St. Paul (71%)	Cold Lake (62%) and Bonnyville (58%)
My region provides a great opportunity for aboriginal tourism	Elk Point (63%), St. Paul (62%)	Bonnyville (51%)
There is an opportunity in my region to promote agricultural tourism	Smoky Lake (68%), Elk Point (64%), St. Paul (62%)	Cold Lake (45%)
The Iron Horse Trail is a unique tourist attraction	Smoky Lake (61%), Elk Point (68%), St. Paul (56%)	Cold Lake (42%) and Bonnyville (39%)
My region is ready to welcome visitors from the world over	Cold Lake (78%)	All other regions (60% – 67%)
My region is a tourism destination	Cold Lake (61%)	St. Paul (48%) and Bonnyville (49%)
My region is ready to welcome visitors with unique experiences in all four seasons	Cold Lake (72%)	Bonnyville (63%), Elk Point (63%) and Smoky Lake (59%)
Tourism has the potential to enhance my region's economic development	Cold Lake (89%)	Bonnyville (67%)

With respect to **agricultural tourism**, residents of Smoky Lake, Elk Point and St. Paul were more likely than residents of Cold Lake to agree that the region is ready to promote this type of tourism (68%, 64% and 62% compared to 45%).

Again, regionally, residents of Smoky Lake, Elk Point and St. Paul were more likely than residents of Cold Lake and Bonnyville to agree that the Iron Horse Trail is a **unique tourist attraction** (61%, 68% and 56% compared to 42% and 39%, respectively).

Furthermore, residents of Smoky Lake, Elk Point and St. Paul were more likely than residents of Cold Lake and Bonnyville to agree that the **region is full of unique history** (80%, 78% and 71% compared to 62% and 58%, respectively).

Residents of St. Paul and Elk Point were more likely than residents of Bonnyville to agree that the **region provides a great opportunity for aboriginal tourism** (62% and 63% compared to 51%, respectively).

When asked if they agree that **the region is ready to welcome visitors from the world over**, the proportion of strong agreement ratings (between 7 and10) is higher among residents of Cold Lake (78%) compared to residents of the other regions (60%-67%).

Slightly more than half of the respondents believe that **the region is a tourism destination** (54% gave rating between 7 and 10). Again the residents of Cold Lake are the strongest believers (61%), especially when compared to the residents of St. Paul (48%) and Bonnyville (49%).

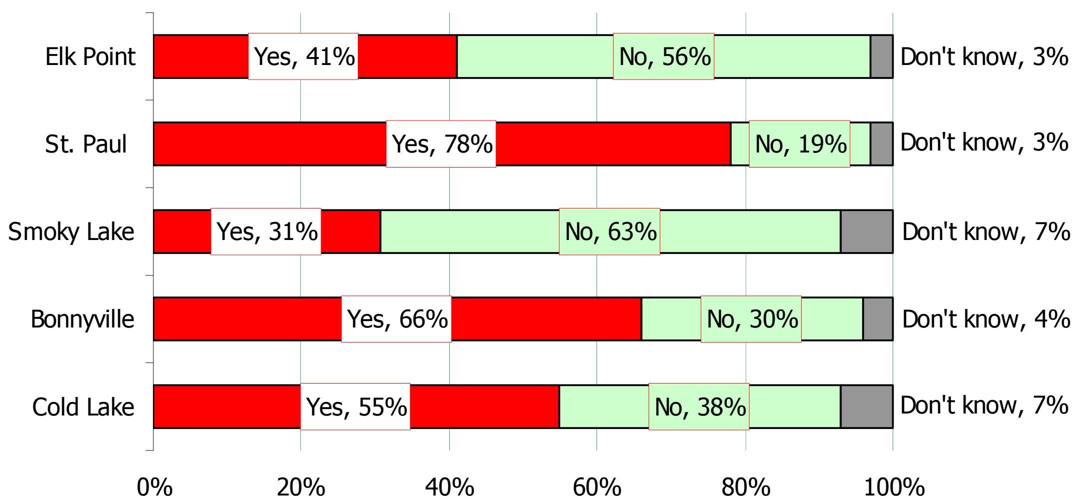
VI. Bilingualism

When asked if they speak both Canadian official languages a quarter of the respondents (24%) answered positively. Compared to the residents of all other regions (a range between 15% and 24%) a higher proportion of residents from St. Paul (35%) indicated speaking both languages.

Service in Both Official Languages

When asked about the availability of service in both official languages in their region more than half of the respondents (57%) indicated such service exists in the area where they live. Compared to the residents of Smoky Lake (31%) and Elk Point (a range of 41%) a higher proportion of residents of St. Paul (78%), followed by residents of Bonnyville (66%) and Cold Lake (55%) reported availability of service in both official languages in their region.

In your region, can you be served in both official languages?



Importance of Service in Both Official Languages

With regard to the importance of service in both official languages slightly more than four in ten (42%) believe it is important and about the same number (44%) are of the opposite opinion (13% find it neither important nor unimportant). Compared to the residents of Smoky Lake (37%) a higher proportion of residents from St. Paul (49%) think that service in both official languages is important.

Concluding Remarks

The third part of the research study looked at the needs in the communities along the Iron Horse Trail. The report findings reflect what one thousand people had to say on a wide variety of issues regarding the economic potential and gaps in the area where they live. As indicated by the results of the study, some of these issues should be further and more closely examined.

Clearly, the growth opportunities and economic activity in the region present various challenges, not only to the businesses in the area but also to the local residents. As evidenced in the study, both groups were able to easily identify retail gaps within their community. It became apparent that these gaps cannot be reduced or eliminated by online purchases. For that reason, there was strong support for establishing “big box” stores in the region. This suggestion was then questioned by the fact that there are not enough people living in the area to justify opening large department stores. In addition, such stores were seen by a quarter of the respondents as a threat to local vendors.

It can be inferred that any strategies aimed at eliminating retail gaps within these communities should be developed with caution; the size and characteristics of the particular community as well as the specific needs of the local population must be considered and developments that are proposed should not affect local businesses in a negative way.

Results from both the business survey and the general population study show that in general, people residing in the region see opportunities for developing tourism in the area and have plenty of ideas for seasonal and year-round activities. Examples include lake activities and recreation, fishing, boating, water sports; snowmobiling, camping, hiking, hunting, family activities, horseback riding and trail tours. Eighty-five percent (85%) of the general population agree that the region is a great destination for outdoor activities.

What is more, they believe building resorts and attractions will enhance the region’s economic development. This positive outlook is however clouded by the problem of labour shortages, especially in service and construction areas - a serious challenge that is likely to affect tourism developments.

When addressing the critical issues for each district reviewing similar practices is imperative. For example, the problem with employee shortages is present in many other Canadian cities/regions currently experiencing growth. New developments, work opportunities and regional advantages need to be marketed well. Whatever the strategic approach is, it needs to consider local businesses and support their expansion. Finally, while various groups work together to address the needs outlined above, the general population is convinced that nothing can be done without the cooperation of the Municipal (City/Town) Council.