

FEATURE \$3 billion highway upgrades will open British Columbia's Interior to rubber-tired vacation traffic

Gateway to recreation

DERMOT MACK/GLEN KORSTROM

WESTERN INVESTOR

British Columbia's \$3 billion-plus highway improvement program, which is known as Gateway, should prove a major boost to the recreational industry. The projects – and related highway upgrades – will make it easier for residents of Calgary and Vancouver to access B.C. recreational areas that increasingly rely on domestic traffic.

U.S. travellers, who account for 80 per cent of B.C.'s foreign visitors, have fallen sharply in the past two years, and with new passport requirements and a higher Canadian dollar, this traffic may slow even further.

"Entries from the U.S. were down 6.1 per cent, and overnight trips north of border were down 3.2 per cent in October, the fourth decline in five months," noted **Lillian Hallin** of **BC Stats**.

Fortunately, domestic tourism traffic is rising, as is the demand for recreational property within driving distance of Western Canada's two power centres.

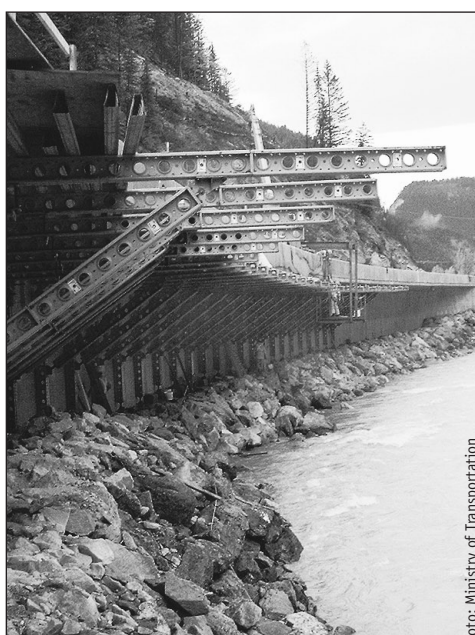
"I call it the golden circle," said **Rudy Nielsen**, founder and president of **Niho Land and Cattle Company Ltd.**, perhaps the most active recreational real estate player in the province. "It is where the drive times from Calgary and Vancouver merge."

Today, the golden circle extends into the Kamloops area, the central Okanagan and the West Kootenays, all of which have seen rapid increases in recreational real estate values.

With upgrades to highway projects at the B.C.-Alberta border and the Lower Mainland, the golden circle could become larger.

Kicking Horse

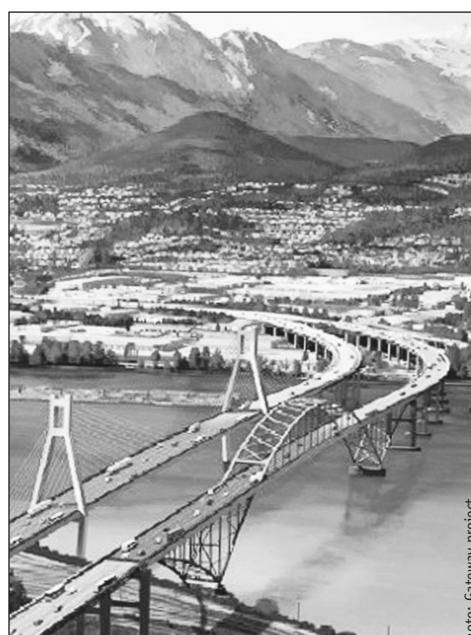
Located on the Trans-Canada Highway as the major east-west connection between B.C. and



Innovative cantilevered bridge being built as part of the upgrade to Kicking Horse Pass on the B.C.-Alberta border helped cut the cost of construction. Right: Twinning the Port Mann Bridge will reduce the biggest traffic bottleneck in the province.

Alberta, the Kicking Horse project is upgrading the Kicking Horse Canyon route between Golden, B.C., and the western boundary of Yoho National Park. This 26-kilometre corridor was – and largely still is – a narrow, winding, two-lane road with steep rock drop-offs to the Kicking Horse River, sharp grades and substandard alignment.

The project is being carried out in three major phases. The largest component of the first phase was the replacement of the Yoho Bridge, which was opened to traffic in August 2004. The latest phase of the upgrading started last October, and will allow traffic on the realigned highway and a new cantilevered bridge, according to project spokesman **Jack Stuempel**. The cantilevered bridge, which opens this spring, replaced an original plan for two bridges spanning the river and saved



more than \$1 million. The entire Kicking Horse upgrade completes in 2008.

Lower Mainland

In the Lower Mainland, the Gateway plan includes a widening of Highway 1 to four lanes in each direction from Vancouver to Langley and twinning the Port Mann Bridge, the most heavily used bridge in the province. It also calls for the construction of a four-lane South Fraser perimeter road along the south side of the Fraser River, extending from Deltaport Way in Delta to the Golden Ears Bridge connector road and Highway 1 in Surrey/Langley.

In addition, the program outlines plans for a North Fraser perimeter road to provide a continuous route from New Westminster to Maple Ridge that includes a new seven-lane bridge to replace the existing Pitt River swing

bridges and an interchange to replace the existing Lougheed Highway and Mary Hill bypass intersection.

The improvements are needed to accommodate future population growth and improve the flow of goods from Vancouver-area ports, according to B.C. Premier **Gordon Campbell**. "If we're going to be competitive, if we're going to be reliable, we have to deal with the issue of congestion," said Campbell.

The Highway 1 improvements and Port Mann twinning come with a price tag of about \$1.5 billion. The Port Mann component includes a proposed \$2.50 toll each way for private vehicles.

Without tolls, the improved highway and additional Port Mann crossing would reach current levels of congestion five to 10 years after their completion, according to the province's 90-page Gateway Program Definition Report. The Port Mann improvements are scheduled to be completed by 2013.

South Fraser links

The proposed \$800 million South Fraser Perimeter Road will connect local communities and the Vancouver Port Authority's expanded Deltaport and proposed Terminal 2 project at Roberts Bank to Highway 1. It will also create a weekend escape route and easier traffic flow east from BC Ferries' South Delta ferry terminal.

No tolls have been proposed for the 40-kilometre route, which is scheduled for completion by 2012.

The \$400 million North Fraser Perimeter Road proposal is aimed at improving existing roads to provide a continuous route between the Queensborough Bridge in New Westminster and **TransLink's** new Golden Ears Bridge in Maple Ridge/Pitt Meadows. TransLink has confirmed the Golden Ears Bridge will be tolled.♦