

RIDEAU HERITAGE ROUTE  
TOURISM ASSOCIATION



3 YEAR STRATEGIC PLAN

2011 - 2013

*Sept 2, 2010 draft*  
*Approved Nov 15, 2010*



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# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Rideau Heritage Route Tourism Association (RHRTA) is a Destination Marketing Organization (DMO) mandated to promote the Rideau Heritage Route (RHR) by developing marketing, communications and promotional programs. The RHR, comprised of the Rideau Canal, its adjoining towns, villages and the cities of Ottawa and Kingston, offers a variety of world-class arts and heritage experiences. The fact that the story of the Rideau Canal is, in part, the story of the creation of Canada itself, reinforces the significance of the RHR.

The overall goal is to position the entire RHR Corridor as a tourism destination by promoting the region's authentic, arts, heritage, cuisine, agri-tourism and natural history experiences with specific objectives as listed below.

Phase	Activity	Completion	Annual				
			Investment	Mun/Feds/Prov / Private			
Phase 1	Burnett Thorne Cultural Study	2004	\$150,000	33%	33%	33%	
Phase 2	Establish RHRTA	2006	\$177,000	43%	28%	28%	1%
Phase 3	Develop & execute Marketing Plans	2007-08	\$260,000	30%	50%	26%	4%
Phase 4	Destination Development 1 (OTMP & EODP)	2008-09	\$1.24 million	6%	20%	69%	5%
<i>Projected</i>							
Phase 5	<i>Destination Development 2</i>	<i>2009-10</i>	<i>\$250,000</i>	<i>25%</i>	<i>48%</i>	<i>20%</i>	<i>7%</i>
Phase 6	<i>Destination Development 3</i>	<i>2010-12</i>	<i>\$300,000</i>	<i>20%</i>	<i>40%</i>	<i>22%</i>	<i>18%</i>

The RHRTA will promote both UNESCO Designations – World Heritage for the Canal and its fortifications and the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve covering the southern portion. Investment into the RHRTA is especially significant with current Rideau Canal visitation showing signs of growth in a period of declining market share making this attraction a definite potential economic generator for the entire region.

The RHRTA will steer these efforts in order that all stakeholders and partners are working in the same direction so that valuable, limited resources are focused and used effectively.

## SUMMARY OF RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Implement Organizational Guidelines**
2. **Focus on Four key functions**
3. **Secure Corporate funding partners**
4. **Implement management fees**
5. **Hire an Administrative Assistant**
6. **Design “fee for service” projects for RTOs with deliverables**
7. **Addition of new Municipalities**
8. **Secure new project funding**
9. **Public / Private funding**

## 2. ASSOCIATION PROFILE

### 2.1 About the RHRTA

Founded and incorporated in September 2004, the RHRTA is a not-for-profit, partner-based organization. A full time (contract based) Executive Director was hired in 2006 to begin execution of the 5 year Business Plan (2006-2010).

### 2.2 Association Objectives

- To create a climate that stimulates tourism investment, development, marketing and other activities along the RHR Corridor enhancing the quality of the visitor experience.
- To provide direction and assist in the development of tourism products along the RHR.
- To promote tourism and increase tourism revenues in the RHR Corridor.

#### RECOMMENDATION 1

RHRTA should implement Organizational Guidelines that would lead the Association in the development of its numerous relationships and to provide a strategic framework for Committee work.

### 2.3 Strategic Vision

The following topics were identified by RHRTA the Board in an early 2010 Strategic planning Session.

- Leading flatwater paddle destination in North America
- Pride in what we've done together and achieved
- Leading Tourism Destination for authentic heritage buildings open to the public
- Prosperous boutiques and communities
- Top 5 for web referrals
- Fully integrated regional strategy
- Great multi-themed routes
- 4 season playground for the World
- Quality multi-modal routes / Safe cycling routes
- Top of Mind for residents: Great place to live = Great place to visit
- Private aviation destination
- Most energy neutral destination (ie: TIAC test region)
- Most Welcoming destination: quality facilities, friendly well informed biz owners
- Business Investment friendly
- Interact with and coordinate Rideau Associations. NGOs & lead discussion for future of Rideau tourism
- Leadership with the delivery of Visitor Services / Happy satisfied visitors

#### RECOMMENDATION 2

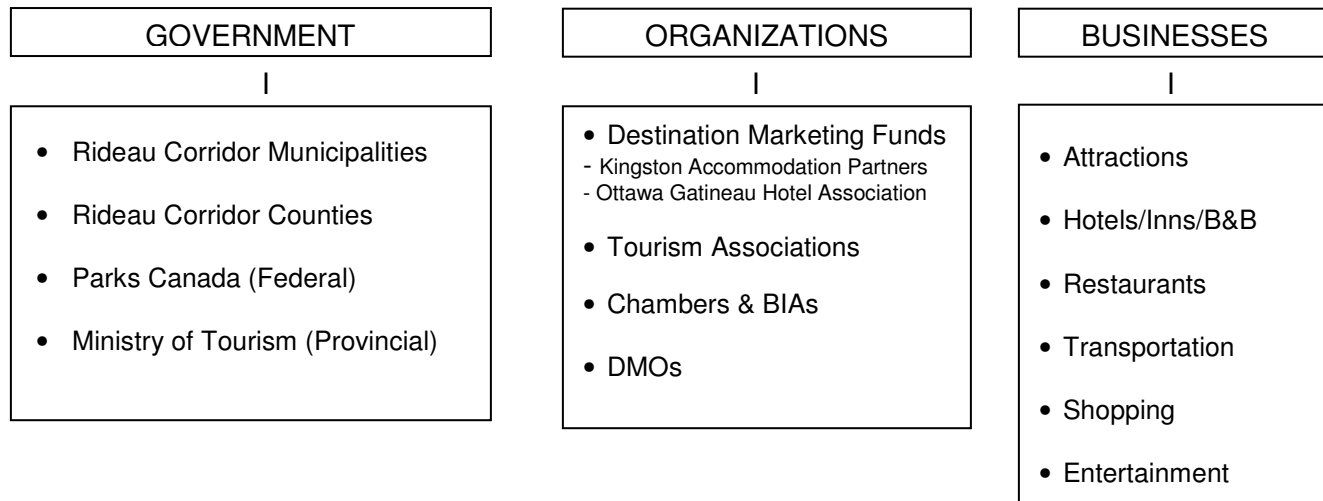
RHRTA should focus on a short list of key topics for development. **For more details see the Marketing Plan or the Product Development Strategy document.**

The items above could be prioritized and put into 4 function areas namely:

- **Marketing**
- **Product Development**
- **Project Management (RTO transition projects)**
- **Visitor Services (coordinated delivery of service, Travel info kiosks...)**

## 2.4 Partnership

The RHRTA has three levels of Partnership/Membership, namely government, organizations/associations and businesses interested in furthering the objectives of the Association. Partners/Members are eligible for nomination and election as Board of Directors or Officers of the Association and eligible to serve on committees, sub-committees, working groups, task forces and advisory councils. Government partners will each have one standing member designated to the board.



### RECOMMENDATION 3

RHRTA should seek project funding & support from regional corporate partners for marketing and product development projects. Businesses and corporations identify well with tangible project deliverables and the RHRTA has an excellent track record of high exposure projects.

Businesses to target could include:

- **Home Hardware**
- **Best Western Hotels**
- **Cooperators Insurance**
- **Ultramar Gas**
- **Canada Trust (Environment Fund)**
- **Royal Bank**

## 2.5 Governance

The Association is governed by a Board of Directors consisting of appointed Government representatives and elected representatives from Organizations / Association and Business. Board members are elected at the Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the Association. The Association and all its officers are governed by Documents of Authority consisting of a Constitution, Bylaws and Board policies.

## 2.6 Organizational resources

A full time Executive Director is hired on contract to manage the Association and will report directly to the Board. The position is based along the route with frequent travel throughout the entire Rideau Heritage Route. Base funding from Municipalities supports Association administration. The ED currently works from a home office with equipment provided by the Association.

### RECOMMENDATION 4

Future program growth is directly reliant on additional funding resources and it is recommended to apply for project funding to secure additional administrative capacity. Each funding application should include a minimum 10% project management fee which comes back to the RHRTA to assist with grant writing and related project services.

### RECOMMENDATION 5

The new project management fee should cover the expense of a part time, contract based tourism assistant which is necessary to assist with administrative duties such as minute taking, travel guide distribution and office activities.

## 3. ECONOMIC & INDUSTRY OVERVIEW

The global tourism marketplace has been in a state of change for the past decade, and this has not been due only to recent economic conditions. The factors impacting travel and tourism can be grouped into six main categories:

1. Internet
2. Emerging markets and destinations
3. Socio-demographics
4. Traveller interests and expectations
5. Concern about the environment.... and in future, energy
6. Geo-political issues and terrorism, including concern about personal safety

### 3.1 The Ontario Tourism Industry today (May 2010)

There are numerous fundamental changes happening in the Ontario Tourism industry and it will take some time before a clear picture can emerge with respect to future opportunities for the RHRTA.

- OTMP is under review. Its future existence, roles and operating parameters are still unknown, including how they will work with partners in future.
- The Regional Tourism Organizations (RTO) will be launched this year but little is known about what they will do and how they will function; in fact it is very possible that they will all function differently.
- The RHRTA jurisdiction has been divided into 3 new RTO regions (Region 9, 10, 11)
- The Ministry of Tourism and Culture and OTMP have yet to clarify if and where the current existing brands fit into the provincial tourism system and how they could be funded.

## RECOMMENDATION 6

RHRTA is now at a strategic crossroads in its development and should play a significant role with service delivery in regards to the new RTOs specifically Region 9, 10 and 11. New projects and specific deliverables should be proposed to each RTO keeping in mind RHRTA's strengths as a unified "World Heritage Destination" brand and the Natural and Cultural assets of the RHRTA.

### 3.2 Tourism Trends and Visitation

#### Statistics in Eastern Ontario, 2008

Eastern Ontario travel statistics are gathered by County so the RHRTA lies within 3 counties (Frontenac, Leeds & Grenville and Lanark) but predominantly in UCL&G.

#### Travel Statistics in Leeds & Grenville United Counties, 2008

Source: Statistics Canada, Travel Survey of Residents of Canada (TSRC) and International Travel Survey (ITS), 2008

**Table 1.1: Person Visits: Length of Stay**

	Total Visits	Overnight Visits	Same-day Visits
Total (000s)	1,620	642	977
Ontario	1,029	373	656
Other Canada	53	38	15
U.S.	504	211	293
Overseas	34	21	13

**Table 1.2: Person Visits: Place of Residence (Top 10 Places) 2008 UCL&G**

	Total Visits	Overnight Visits	Same-day Visits
Top 10 Total (000s)	1,245	391	854
CD06: Ottawa-Carlton Regional Municipality	344	88	257
New York	297	72	226
CD10: Frontenac County	142	35	108
CD07: Leeds & Grenville United Counties	123	21	102
CD20: Toronto Metropolitan Municipality	83	72	12
Pennsylvania	73	52	21
CD09: Lanark County	73	6	67

## Rideau Canal Statistics 2001-2009

**Table 1.3 Rideau Visitation**

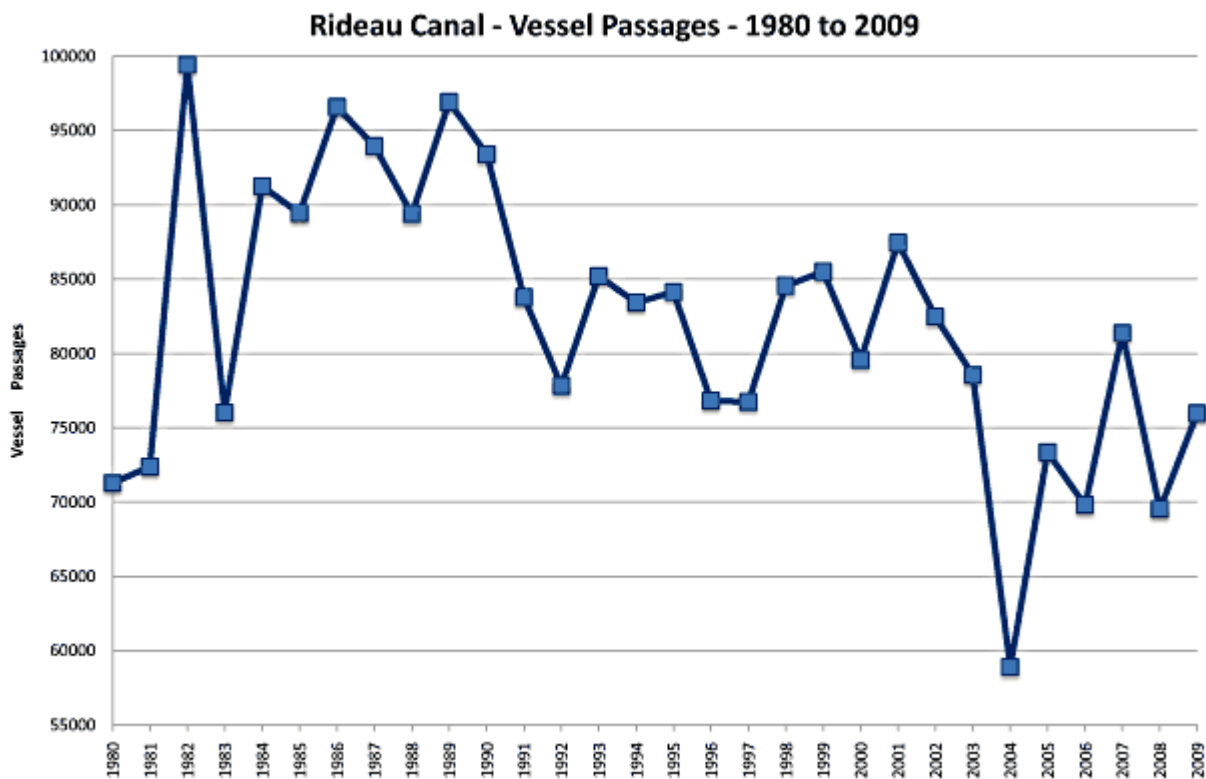
Rideau Canal Visitors		Source: Parks Canada					
Boaters/ Lock use	2001	2003	2004	2005	2007	2008	2009
Ontario	61%	65.6%	60.2%	64.4%	66.1%	68.3%	65%
Quebec	15%	21.6%	27.5%	24.7%	22.2%	20.9%	24.3%
US	24%	12.6%	12.1%	10.6%	11.4%	10.5%	10.2%
Other					0.3%	0.3%	0.5%
Total					81,380	69,529	75,981
<b>Total Land Based canal visitors</b>		1,480,539	1,617,809	1,493,880			

It is also noted that only 5% of visitors are boaters and 95% are land based and but the boaters in fact become the attraction providing hours of viewing enjoyment as they navigate through the locks.

2009, 65.0% of the boats were from Ontario, 24.3% from Québec, 10.2% from the United States and 0.5% "Other".

Interestingly more U.S. boaters passed through the busy southern locks (Newboro, Chaffeys, Davis) than passed through the Kingston Mills locks, an indication of today's popularity of trailer boating.

Moorings increased by 6.2% in 2009, with 11,565 moorings compared to 10,893 in 2008.



Source: Ken Watson



## 4.0 MARKETING

### 4.1 Corridor Brand

On June 30, 2007 the Rideau Canal and its fortifications in Kingston were designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site; a first for the province of Ontario and the fourteenth for Canada. The RHRTA brought together Rideau tourism marketing agencies to develop a corridor brand that would provide a consistent and professional message to benefit all the communities and partners all along the corridor. Communities and partners can promote themselves as "A World Heritage Destination".

The National Geographic Society's Center for Sustainable Destinations rated the Rideau Canal National Historic Site of Canada second best on the 2008 "Places Rated" Destination Stewardship survey. This annual survey measures the world's top historic sites for authenticity, stewardship and their tourism footprint. This newest award is like a book end to the UNESCO designation and will definitely provide economic opportunities for this region.

### 4.2 Marketing Strategy

A detailed Marketing plan will be developed annually and shared with participating municipalities, area Chambers of Commerce and tourism partners to promote cooperative marketing efforts.

This region has been the focus of a great deal of activity related to tourism based on natural and cultural heritage (sustainable tourism). We also have the Frontenac Arch Biosphere Reserve and particular new interest by the National Geographic Society in a special region-wide designation relating to sustainability. All of these factors indicate an opportunity to reposition the region in the minds of that rapidly growing market segment interested in natural and cultural heritage.

### 4.2 Familiarization Tour Strategy

The RHRTA has recommended the formation of a Fam Tour Committee to prepare a strategy and to provide direction and assistance with the delivery of Familiarization tours. Fam tours will continue to be a very cost effective way to target several key markets including the consumer market, travel trade and niche markets such as paddling, boating, cycling, cultural explorers and many others since Travel media have the ability to reach these markets efficiently and in a precise manner with relatively low cost to RHRTA.



## 5.0 TOURISM PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

### 5.1 Product Development Strategy

The Rideau Heritage Route Association (RHR) hosted a Tourism Stakeholders session on January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2010 in Perth. Over 65 stakeholders attended the session.

The objectives for the session were:

- To educate attendees about the tourism marketplace and product development
- To identify and connect the market-ready Rideau Tourism products
- Strategize and brainstorm
- Develop actions and identify champions

The Economic Planning Group was retained to facilitate this session and to prepare a report on the session that also outlines a Tourism Product Development Strategy for the Rideau Heritage Route. This report summarizes the information presented at the session and its outcomes. It goes on to identify a Product Development Program.

The Economic Planning Group of Canada proposed the following six strategies in moving forward with product development:

1. Give priority to experience-based products, particularly those involving special interest activities. Both suggested itineraries and flexible packages should be pursued.
2. The RHR Product Development Committee should direct the building of 2 to 3 new products per year, working with stakeholder teams.
3. For this year, review the 6 products started on Jan. 11<sup>th</sup> and select the 2 or 3 to adopt initially.
4. Use the EPG developed 19 step Product Planning Template.
5. Retain professional help to refine and enhance the products before taking them to market.
6. Contract the services of a person or company to provide receptive services and generally assist in product delivery.



## 5.2 Touring Itineraries

Rideau touring itineraries will continue to be developed and will link market ready tourism products and businesses into suggested touring itineraries to provide potential visitors with a strong call to action. The itineraries will drive more visitors to the experiences along the route and result in an increased capacity for this entire region to welcome more visitors, coming as a result of the new UNESCO World Heritage Designation of the Rideau Canal. This World Class status is recognized internationally and our region needs to step forward and work together to create “buyable” experiences to accommodate these new visitors. Most UNESCO World Heritage sites see an increase of 40-50% in visitation within the first five years of designation so the time to act is now in order to capitalize on this opportunity.

The touring itineraries we will develop are based on strong themes that define the strength of our region. Identified themes include:

- Cycle touring (work in cooperation with VIA rail & Bike Train initiative)
- Paddling (work in cooperation with local associations, Parks Canada and Paddle the Arch/ FABR)
- Hiking (work in cooperation with Trans Canada Trail, Rideau Trail & Eastern Ont Trails Alliance)
- Fall Drives (work in cooperation with OTMPC Great Fall Drives)
- Motor-cycle touring
- Cruising (possible link to Great Lakes Cruising as shore excursions)



## 6. FINANCE

### 6.1 Budget

The RHRTA prepares an annual balanced base budget that outlines the association’s administrative functions and the basic marketing initiatives that will occur with the projected funds. Any municipal funds coming into the RHRTA are strictly “projected” since partner municipalities must pass their budgets and also approve the RHRTA contribution request before investing into the RHRTA. It is recommended that municipal funding partners indicate the RHRTA contribution as an Economic Development expense rather than a “Donation” since it is an investment that is levered 7-10 times through creative marketing and tourism development initiatives.

## 6.2 Projected Annual Base Municipal funding (2010 funding requests)

City of Kingston (KEDCO)	10,000
Town of Smiths Falls	10,000
The County of Lanark	10,000
Township of Rideau Lakes	5,000
United Counties of Leeds & Grenville	10,000
Corporation of the Town of Perth	6,000
Municipality of North Grenville	5,000
Village of Westport	2,000
Village of Merrickville-Wolford	2,000
Township of Drummond North Elmsley	1,000
Township of Tay Valley	1,000
Township of Leeds and the Thousand Islands	1,000
<b>Total requested</b>	<b>63,000</b>

### RECOMMENDATION 7

The RHRTA should investigate the addition of new municipal partners to join the base municipal funders in 2011 and beyond. Namely, the Township of Montague and the County of South Frontenac which follows the western bank of the Rideau from the City of Kingston boundary and up to Westport. There are numerous artisans, B&Bs, lodges and outfitters in this area that are looking forward to working cooperatively with the RHRTA so this would be a natural progression.

## 6.3 Project Funding

RHRTA will access funding from suitable grant programs that are in line with RHRTA Marketing and Tourism Product Development goals. These additional projects are not currently indicated in the base budget but will be created according to committee and board recommendations. Project funding is accessed by leveraging the base municipal investment which proves to be the most critical element in the association's existence and success in the future.

### RECOMMENDATION 8

RHRTA should apply for project funds from:

- Ministry of Culture & Tourism (IPP, TEMP, IDO)
- Ministry of Health Promotion
- Ministry of Citizenship
- Trillium Foundation
- Southern Ontario Development Program
- Eastern Ontario Development Fund
- Regional CFDC Offices (Valley Heartland, Frontenac, Grenville, 1000 Islands)

## 6.4 Public / Private Funding

RHRTA will continue to provide tourism businesses within the Partner Municipalities with basic listings on the website but all additional “enhanced” services will be available for purchase as indicated on the annual Cooperative Marketing Plan. The RHRTA Tourism Partner Program will strive to increase tourism partner buy-in at all levels as follows:

1. Increase Trailblazer Partners from 22 partners in 2010 to **40 partners in 2011**
2. Increase Cooperative buy-in for marketing initiatives from \$10,000 in 2010 to **\$15,000 in 2011**
3. Strive to increase Private Tourism Business investment from 10% of total funding in 2010 to 20% in 2011.

### RHRTA FINANCIAL OVERVIEW BY PHASE

Phase	Activity	Completion	Annual Investment				
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Phase 1	Burnett Thorne Cultural Study	2004	\$150,000	33%	33%	33%	
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### RECOMMENDATION 9

RHRTA should work closely with Chambers of Commerce to cross promote sales of the RHRTA Tourism Partner program and the Chamber membership where possible. A public-private partnership should also be established with a commission based ad sales program for the Visitor Guide and the Travel map.

## 6.5 Performance indicators

The [www.rideauheritageroute.ca](http://www.rideauheritageroute.ca) website has a sophisticated tracking program through URCHIN Reports. The program is able to use web-based tracking to indicate quantity of visits, content of downloads, visitation by user and much more useful information that can then be used to develop and enhance the current site.

RHRTA should continue to use existing TAMS (Travel & Motivations) research and the new OTMP Segment Travel Research to clearly identify travel characteristics for the development of the itineraries. Recent surveys show the average tourist spends \$153 per day, excluding accommodation. By increasing tourism traffic to the Rideau Heritage Route and its neighboring areas of Eastern Ontario, the destination can benefit substantially from this infusion of tourism dollars.

RHRTA Tourism Partners should be asked to provide valuable testimonials from their actual business experience. Some of the more valuable information would include visitation numbers, origin of visitors and any current trends they see emerging.

The RHRTA Performance Measures Committee can also investigate ways of capturing campsite/dockage visitation numbers, established municipal indicators, event attendance and local success stories to include in the annual report but this information could also be shared regularly in the form of a newsletter posted to the website and sent out electronically.