

Forth Junction Heritage Society

## **Annual General Meeting Oct. 25, 2012**

# **Annual Progress Report 2012**

The Forth Junction Heritage Society has focused over the past year on preparing for a feasibility and management study and expanding our knowledge of the history of ground transportation in Central Alberta.

### **Background**

The Forth Junction Heritage Society had its inaugural meeting on April 27, 2009 with 4 members at which time the name and general direction was determined. Although initially, the focus was on the history of railways in Central Alberta, the concept, referred to as the Forth Junction Project, was quickly expanded to include the evolution of transit and other forms of ground transportation. At the time, the potential location for a major facility with a vision of a world-class signature tourist attraction was to be in the redeveloped Riverlands area west of downtown.

The by-laws were finalized in August of that year and the website started. By September, there were 7 members and by December, the Society was incorporated as a Registered Society under the Alberta Societies Act. The first media publicity came in February 2010 with emphasis on the local tourism potential of the project. By April, there were 12 members and by October 21. In January 2011, the Society had a strategic planning session and a new vision and objectives of the Society were finalized in March.

In September 2011, the Society Board adopted some changes to its by-laws and objectives in order to comply with requirements of Canada Revenue Agency for charitable status. At that time, several changes of direction occurred, including less focus on Riverlands and more on a future 40-acre site close to Red Deer, preferably along the current CPR mainline between Calgary and Edmonton. Several sites were identified as possible locations. Another change was identifying a need to create a not-for-profit corporation at some time in the future to promote a variety of 'non-charitable' activities including an indoor and/or outdoor theme park, retail/regional gathering centre, guided heritage tours, railway nature park and railway station and transit heritage resort. Charitable status was achieved in November 2011.

### **Vision and Mission Statement**

The Society's vision is to be Central Alberta's world class heritage destination celebrating the past, present and future of trails, trains and transit. The Mission Statement is to preserve, promote and share the transportation heritage of our community and region, to pass that heritage to future generations in a sustainable and interactive way through education, advocacy and nurturing a passion for the continuous evolution of trails, rail and transit. Primary values of the Society are collaboration, history, education and sustainability.

## **Primary Objectives of the Society**

1. To educate the public on the evolution of the railway, historic trails and transit in the settlement and development of Western Canada through workshops, displays, and interactive interpretation;
2. To preserve the trail, rail and transit heritage of Central Alberta through the acquisition, preservation and restoration of railway and other ground transportation artifacts.

## **The Mintlaw Trestle**

In December 2009, Red Deer County purchased the Mintlaw railway trestle southwest of the city and the former Alberta Central Railway right of way between Tuttle and Benalto, in order to preserve this historic resource, one of the initial objectives of the Society. In late 2010, the County spent about \$350,000 for repairs to the structure.

In February 2011, Red Deer County invited the public to participate in a Mintlaw Bridge Public Access & Preservation Strategy Study, and as a result, the Society started working with the Central Alberta Regional Trails Society to turn the right of way and trestle into part of a regional trail system that could eventually become part of the Trans Canada Trail. Both societies were consulted as part of the study process. Red Deer County council adopted, for information purposes only, the Mintlaw Bridge Public Access & Preservation Strategy in April 2012. The report indicated that the ultimate goal is that the bridge be used as part of a regional trail but in the short term, it will only happen if an organization is prepared to fund and construct it.

As 2012 is the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the completion of the trestle, a proposal was submitted to the Red Deer Heritage Awards for Red Deer County to be recognized for committing to preserving the structure. However, it was the only submission this year, so the Awards were cancelled and the proposal will be carried over to next year.

## **Feasibility Study**

The next step in establishing the objectives of the Forth Junction Heritage Society is the completion of a Feasibility and Destination Study that will include consultation with stakeholders and the general public to get feedback on some of the concepts as well as potential locations. After several consultations with Heritage Collaborative to incorporate the many changes in concept and direction of the Society since the Board originally hired the consultant, a new proposal for funders has been finalized. In October 2012, a proposal for \$10,000 funding was submitted to the Red Deer & District Community Foundation. A proposal for further funding from Alberta Tourism is expected to be submitted in the near future.

## **Activities**

The website is continuing to evolve and is now attracting around 1,875 page views (hits) per month or an average of more than 60 per day. Mostly due to the website, the Society is more

and more frequently being contacted by historical enthusiasts and the media as the authority on trail, rail and transit history in Central Alberta. Much of the website is devoted to expanding the historical perspective of ground transportation of the region with specific research on railway stations and bridges.

The Society now has both Facebook and Twitter pages but there needs to be more work on these social media sites to increase its effectiveness.

Some progress has been made in the creation of displays showing both the history of regional railways and the concepts of the Forth Junction Project. Preliminary renderings of the proposed project site and of the various railway stations of the region have been done.

The Society participated for the third year at Supertrains in Calgary and will participate in the Red Deer Model Train and Hobby Show at the Westerner next month. In addition, the Society had a modest display at the Springbrook Information Fair recently.

The Society received a qualified letter of support from Red Deer County during the past year.

All in all, it has been a very productive year in getting ourselves prepared for the next stages that include the feasibility study, fundraising for specific projects, identifying a site or sites for future facilities and finding a storage facility for major artifacts.