

***Peggy's Cove:
Assessment of Capacity Issues and
Potential Tourism Opportunities
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY***



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prepared by

THE ECONOMIC PLANNING GROUP of Canada

In association with

Ekistics Planning & Design

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Executive Summary

Introduction

Peggy's Cove is Nova Scotia's premier tourism icon, internationally recognized and photographed. It offers a unique coastal experience to its 600,000 plus visitors a year. It is also a living community, an active fishing village and home to some 40 residents. For several months a year Peggy's Cove is under capacity pressures resulting from the number of visitors, cars and motorcoaches entering the community. The basic infrastructure within the village – the roads, parking lots, walking areas, water and septic systems, washrooms and services are insufficient to accommodate the volumes of activity during much of the peak season. As a result, the integrity of Peggy's Cove as a living community is at issue, as is the quality of the visitor experience.

The capacity challenges at Peggy's Cove have increased significantly in the past three to five years in large part due to the significant increase in cruise ship activity in Halifax. Excursions including a visit to Peggy's Cove are one of the most popular shore tours. The ever increasing size of the cruise ships, more frequent days with 2 or 3 ships in port at one time and time restrictions on port stays mean that numerous motorcoaches carrying cruise ship passengers arrive and depart Peggy's Cove within a concentrated time period.

The Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage identified a need to address issues surrounding capacity issues and potential tourism opportunities in Peggy's Cove and commissioned this report. A Steering Committee including three Peggy's Cove residents, along with representatives from the Department of Tourism, Culture and Heritage, the Product Development Committee, the Department of Service Nova Scotia and Municipal Relations, Department of Transportation and Public Works (Government Services Division), and Halifax Regional Municipality (Recreation, Tourism and Culture) was established to oversee the study.

The Economic Planning Group, in association with Ekistics Planning and Design, and with the assistance of Corporate Research Associates in conducting a survey of visitors to Peggy's Cove, were retained to undertake this assessment. The specific objectives were:

1. To assess the current capacity issues and forecast future issues over the next five years.
2. To identify options to mitigate capacity issues while preserving the integrity and identity of the living community, given the need to provide a safe and quality visitor experience.
3. To identify the potential tourism opportunities and management approaches.

The consulting team's work plan involved extensive consultation with residents and businesses in Peggy's Cove, and with a variety of other stakeholders including visitors to the

community, tour operators bringing visitors to Peggy's Cove, those involved in Nova Scotia's tourism industry and provincial and municipal transportation and public works officials. The work plan also included research into other destinations that face similar challenges to Peggy's Cove, and several workshop sessions with the steering committee.

Key Conclusions and Recommendations

Key Conclusions

Peggy's Cove is a special place that has unique appeal for visitors. It is evident that there are a number of things that make it special:

- The treeless, rocky terrain
- The sea surging onto the rocks
- The lighthouse
- The cove and its character as an active fishing community
- The homes scattered about apparently at random
- Its dramatic and intimate relationship with the sea
- The fact that it is a real, genuine small village by the sea
- The absence of modern commercial development
- Overall, the authentic, non-contrived nature of the visitor experience

Our conclusion is that Peggy's Cove gets top marks for its unique features - those that are naturally occurring or that are the consequence of its heritage and historic role as a fishing village.

And, the visitor survey indicated that, overall, visitors to Peggy's Cove are very satisfied with their experience – it exceeds their expectations and they would definitely recommend a visit to friends and family.

However, it is evident that the tourist services being provided in the community are not of the same standard of quality and uniqueness as the naturally occurring features. They do not really add to the quality of the visitor experience to any considerable degree, and in some respects they disappoint.

When asked about things that detract from the experience, visitors are quite clear about what they are - traffic congestion, motorcoaches, parking, and line ups and crowds. And these factors were much more problematic on days when cruise ship visitors were in Peggy's Cove. Many of the residents of Peggy's Cove as well as others with an interest in the community also expressed strong concerns about the deterioration in the character of the community and of the visitor experience as a result of these traffic and capacity-related issues.

In addition, there is another thing that impacts the visitor experience in Peggy's Cove considerably - the mix of tourist services being provided – visitor information and services, interpretation, parking, restaurants and shops.

The result of all this is that, while the visitor to Peggy's Cove finds the experience worthwhile for a brief stop, a few pictures and perhaps a souvenir - they don't stay very long, they spend very little and they tend not to return on subsequent visits to Nova Scotia. And, to the extent the village is a tourist attraction, which it clearly is in significant part, these are the acid tests. A great picture stop, but let's move on. Been there, done that. Not worth staying longer.

And the congestion of so many visitors being in the community at the same time is a negative aspect that undermines the quality of the visitor experience. In the past Peggy's Cove had also had the appeal of solitude and quietness, but this has largely been lost during the tourist season with the heavy volumes of traffic. As one elderly, lifelong resident put it ... " There used to be artists here all the time, painting the village from the side of the road. We don't see them anymore"

These factors weaken the experience considerably.

It is evident from the visitor survey that, on balance, the visitors to Peggy's Cove enjoy their visit. The unique, appealing things make it worthwhile and memorable. As a consequence, they are quite forgiving about the other things that are less appealing or even disappointing. And they are used to crowds at busy places, so they tolerate that as well. But they don't stay long or spend much money.

Peggy's Cove today is a troubled tourism experience at busy times because of the absence of a method of handling the numbers of people and vehicles. But it is also, more generally, a missed opportunity for tourism. It represents a failure to capitalize on the large numbers of visitors who are coming – making sure that their stay is fulfilling and of quality in all important respects - that it gives people a reason and motivation to stay a little longer, a motivation to spend and a reason to return.

There are also opportunities in Peggy's Cove to significantly enhance the experiential and interpretive nature of the visitor experience, and to extend the stay and spending of visitors, and distributing more revenues among the businesses in Peggy's Cove.

There are some other issues of significant concern in Peggy's Cove, the most critical being related to the safety of visitors and residents. The safety of pedestrians walking along the road with heavy traffic and no shoulders or walkways is of critical concern, as is the limitations on access to the community for emergency vehicles on the many days when traffic is congested. Another major concern expressed by the community is that there is no public agency or department that has responsibility (or the budget) for the management of basic infrastructure services necessitated by the volume of visitors to Peggy's Cove such as garbage collection, first aid, and maintenance of public areas such as the path to the lighthouse.

The challenges can be expected to worsen in future with the predicted substantial growth in cruise ship visitors, and the overall growth in tourism activity in Nova Scotia. The time for action to deal with the challenge is now. There are some short term solutions that can start happening immediately, as can the planning for longer term solutions.

Possible Solutions

The consulting team identified a number of possible options to mitigate the challenges posed by capacity issues at Peggy's Cove as well as potential tourism opportunities that would encourage longer stays and enhance the interpretive and experiential nature of the visit to Peggy's Cove.

The options identified included:

- **Option #1:** Develop a remote parking area and Welcome Centre on the edge of the Peggy's Cove Preservation area (either near West Dover or Indian Harbour or both) with all visitors shuttled into Peggy's Cove by bus during the May through October period. A variation on this option is to require cars and recreational vehicles to park here, but permit some or all motorcoaches to drive into Peggy's Cove.
- **Option #2:** Develop an outside Peggy's Cove parking area and Welcome Centre on the north side of Highway 333 across from the entrance to Peggy's Cove with visitors shuttled into Peggy's Cove by tram during the May through October period. A variation on this option is to require cars and recreational vehicles to park here, but permit some or all motorcoaches to drive into Peggy's Cove.
- **Option #3:** Manage visitors in Halifax with individual visitors required to take a shuttle bus from town and group tours and cruise ship groups scheduled (potentially with restrictions on total numbers) so as to avoid overcrowding in the community.
- **Option #4:** Make the Provincial parking lot in Peggy's Cove the start of the visitor experience, with a significantly expanded parking area and no vehicular traffic beyond this point. Visitors could walk from here along the roadway or take a tram shuttle to other parts of the community.
- **Option #5:** Manage the vehicle and visitor flow within the community, restricting the amount of motorcoach and vehicle traffic that goes beyond the provincial lot to what can be accommodated in the parking spaces available at the Sou'Wester lot. This option would involve maximizing the use of existing parking areas, including some expansion of the parking capacity at the entrance to the community, at the provincial lot and some modifications at the Sou'Wester lot. A flexible traffic management system would be required, as well as a tram shuttle for those visitors who do not want to walk around the community.
- **Option #6:** Do nothing – A status quo with the existing situation and visitor experience.

Note that there would be no restrictions on Peggy's Cove residents or their visitors or deliveries under any of these options. Also, visitor traffic would be permitted unlimited access to all parts of the community in the evenings during the May to October period, and throughout the rest of the year, under all options.

Preferred Options

The consultant's evaluation of these options on a series of criteria indicated that Options #2 and #5 would be preferred. However, the ultimate decision as to which of these options to pursue should be made in the context of several other factors, specifically:

- Relative support/lack of objections from the community
- Ability and willingness of funding partners to support the option
- Ability and willingness of program partners to participate

More information on Options #2 and #5 is provided below. Detailed information on each of these options, including concept plans and preliminary capital budgets, can be found in the main report.

Option #2: An Outside Parking Lot and Welcome Centre

A Welcome Centre and parking area able to accommodate all cars and coaches visiting Peggy's Cove would be developed within the Peggy's Cove Preservation Area, on the north side of Highway 333 and across the road from the entrance to the community. Turning lanes and traffic lights would be required on the highway, along with a slower speed limit. A variation on this option would be to permit some coaches into the village, such as those with meal reservations. The concept provides for some 350 car parking spaces, along with 40 bus parking spaces and 12 spaces for recreational vehicles.

The Welcome Centre would provide interpretative information on Peggy's Cove and its natural and cultural heritage, as well as an orientation to Peggy's Cove and information on the visitor services and things to see and do in the community. It would also serve a visitor information function. Under Option #2, the Welcome Centre would become the start of the experience for visitors to Peggy's Cove and all visitors would have an orientation to the community and what it has to offer.

Visitors would have the option of walking into Peggy's Cove or riding a shuttle tram. The tram would stop at several locations in the community. A low profile, quick loading/unloading tram is recommended. Commentary on Peggy's Cove and what there is to see and do would be provided on the tram. A parking charge would be introduced, with monies used to fund the operation of the shuttle and parking complex, to provide maintenance, garbage collection, first aid and parking management services and to contribute to the operating costs of the Welcome Centre. It is envisioned that this outside parking area and Welcome Centre would only operate from May through October.

Over the longer term, Option #2 could easily accommodate future increases in visitation to Peggy's Cove. Additional parking capacity could be added and the frequency of service and/or number of shuttle trams increased.

Sidewalks would be provided from the parking area, connecting with Peggy's Point Road. To facilitate and encourage walking, and to provide a safe walking environment, a walking

shoulder would be added on both sides of Peggy's Cove road with a granite 'rumble strip' separating the road and the shoulder so that drivers know when their vehicles cross into the shoulder area. Shelters would be constructed at the tram stops, and other infrastructure improvements such as benches and garbage cans would be provided.

The overall benefits of Option #2 would be:

For Visitors

- Visitors would start their Peggy's Cove experience at a fully serviced Welcome Centre with an orientation to the village, what there is to see and do and its natural and cultural heritage. This orientation would continue on the shuttle into the community.
- Finding parking and entrance and egress from parking areas would be much easier, and safer
- The visitor experience in Peggy's Cove will be improved, both in terms of basic services such as washrooms and information, and also from an experiential perspective
- The visitor experience will be safer
- Future expansion to accommodate the anticipated increases in visitation would be relatively simple
- This option would recover to a far greater extent the natural character of the Peggy's Cove experience for visitors. This in turn would result in the greatest strengthening of the Peggy's Cove experience as a pre-eminent attraction for visitors to Nova Scotia and for residents of the province.

For Residents and Businesses

- No or very little traffic from visitors within the village of Peggy's Cove during the day from May through October, making Peggy's Cove a much more appealing place to live and restoring some of the peaceful ambience of the community
- A much safer walking environment will be provided within the community, as well as improved access for emergency vehicles
- Management of the impacts of tourism on Peggy's Cove, such as garbage
- Visitors would all have an orientation to Peggy's Cove, to the businesses in the village and to the things to see and do, allowing for a more equitable distribution of visitor activity
- There would be no further disturbance of land (e.g. for parking areas) within Peggy's Cove beyond what exists today
- There may be excess monies available from the revenues to contribute to the maintenance of community assets such as the Church
- Businesses would benefit from the potential increased spending of visitors who are better oriented to what Peggy's Cove has to offer.
- Peggy's Cove residents would also benefit from the fact that visitors would, through orientation, signage and a community map, have a clear indication of what is public property and what is private property within the community.

Option #2 would, however, necessitate development within the Peggy's Cove Preservation Area and some of this development would be visible to travellers on the highway and to Peggy's Cove.

Preliminary estimates indicate a total capital cost of some \$8.4 million (2004 dollars) including construction, design and project management, contingency and HST, as well as the cost of the shuttle trams and allowances for detailed planning and for new collateral and interpretive material. Annual revenues are estimated at some \$860,000 assuming a \$5 per car parking charge and a \$100 charge for motorcoaches, with incremental expenses (beyond what is now spent by the province on the Visitor Information Centre, washrooms and DeGarthe Gallery) of some \$660,000.

Option #5: Managing Vehicle Flow within Peggy's Cove with expanded parking capacity within the community

Option #5 provides for maximizing the use of existing infrastructure within Peggy's Cove. Three clusters of traffic infrastructure would be provided:

- At the entrance to Peggy's Cove. The entrance road would be relocated to meet Highway 333 at right angles. The land area that is currently disturbed by the entrance road and the gravel parking area would become a parking area with capacity for some 40 cars and 8 – 10 recreational vehicles or coaches. A shuttle pick up/drop off shelter would be provided along with interpretive signage and a map of Peggy's Cove.
- At the provincial parking lot. Modifications would be made including:
 - Adding bus turning circles both at the entry to the lot and at the rear. Buses could be 'stacked' within the lot while waiting to drop off/pick up passengers.
 - Providing parking for 8 – 10 coaches
 - Establishing an expanded parking area using adjacent provincially-owned land immediately south of the existing lot, to provide parking for 130 – 160 cars in total
 - Adding a shuttle parking garage and shelter for visitors waiting for the shuttle
 - Expanding the Visitor Information Centre so that this facility could provide "Welcome to Peggy's Cove" services as well
 - Adding more exterior interpretive and orientation signage
- At the Sou'Wester Lot. Some changes in layout are proposed under this option so as to improve traffic flow. Parking for 8 – 10 coaches and approximately 100 cars would be provided at this location. As well, new washrooms (Clivus Mulch) are recommended, along with a shelter for those waiting for the shuttle, and interpretive signage and a map.

Total car parking capacity within Peggy's Cove under Option #5 would be 270 to 310 vehicles, plus 16 to 20 coaches and 8 – 10 recreational vehicles.

Visitors could park at any of these locations and walk through the community. As with Option #2, a walking shoulder would be added on both sides of Peggy's Cove road with a granite 'rumble strip' separating the road and the shoulder. Visitors that did not wish to walk could

use the shuttle service which would run between the three lots with stops at key locations such as the Cove.

Under this scenario, the provincial parking lot would be the primary “welcome to Peggy’s Cove” since this would be the location of the staffed Welcome Centre. However, signage, maps and brochures would also be provided at the other two lots to help provide all visitors with an orientation to Peggy’s Cove.

A key challenge of Option #5 is traffic and parking management. A company or organization would be contracted to manage the traffic in Peggy’s Cove. This would involve monitoring parking space availability in each lot and directing traffic to lots where parking was available. During slower periods, signs would be used directing traffic to various lots; during busy periods staff would be located at each lot and would actively direct traffic.

Under Option #5, it is suggested that motorcoaches could be handled in several ways. First, those with meal reservations would be able to park at the Sou’Wester or the provincial lot. Selected others (maximum of 8 – 10 in total including those with meal reservations) could park in each of the Sou’Wester Lot and the provincial lot. All other coaches would be required to drop off their passengers at the provincial lot and exit Peggy’s Cove to hold elsewhere, returning to pick up their passengers. A location for the remote parking of coaches would have to be established. Recreational vehicles would be required to park in the parking lot at the entrance to Peggy’s Cove.

Our analysis suggests a peak car parking requirement of some 350 cars (based on the estimated visitation levels which need to be confirmed through on-site counts). As indicated above, Option #5 would provide only 270 – 310 car parking spaces. It is likely, therefore, that under option #5 there would be occasions when Peggy’s Cove could not accommodate current demand levels for parking, and it may be necessary to provide a remote spill over lot, with a shuttle service, for these occasions.

The overall benefits of Option #5 would be:

For Visitors

- Visitors would be provided with an orientation to the village, what there is to see and do and its natural and cultural heritage, either in person or through signage and brochures
- Finding parking, and entrance and egress from parking areas would be easier than under current conditions
- The visitor experience in Peggy’s Cove will be improved, both in terms of basic services such as washrooms and information, and also from an experiential perspective
- The visitor experience will be safer

For Residents and Businesses

- A much safer walking environment will be provided within the community, as well as improved access for emergency vehicles

- Management of the impacts of tourism on Peggy's Cove, such as traffic, parking and garbage
- Visitors would be provided with more of an orientation to Peggy's Cove, to the businesses in the village and to the things to see and do
- There may be excess monies available from the revenues to contribute to the maintenance of community assets such as the Church
- Businesses would benefit from the potential increased spending of visitors who are better oriented to what Peggy's Cove has to offer.
- Peggy's Cove residents would also benefit from the fact that visitors would, through orientation, signage and a community map, have a clear indication of what is public property and what is private property within the community.

Option #5 does not have the capacity to accommodate significant growth in visitation to Peggy's Cove without a further expansion of parking within the community or the addition of a remote parking lot. As well, management of parking and traffic under Option #5 will be a challenge.

Preliminary estimates indicate a total capital cost of some \$5.35 million (2004 dollars) including construction, design and project management, contingency and HST, as well as the cost of the shuttle trams and allowances for detailed planning and for new collateral and interpretive material. Annual revenues are estimated at some \$880,000 assuming a \$5 per car parking charge (and that there is a parking charge all year) and a \$100 charge for some of the motorcoaches, with incremental expenses (beyond what is now spent by the province on the Visitor Information Centre, washrooms and DeGarthe Gallery) of some \$530,000.

Whatever solutions are ultimately adopted, it is critically important to Peggy's Cove and its position as a tourist icon for the province, that the lighthouse remain in the public domain, and that it be maintained and preserved.

Community Response to the Preferred Options

The six options identified for Peggy's Cove, and the two preferred options, were presented to the community for comment and input. Community members found it difficult to indicate a preference for either option without having much more detailed information. A number of specific concerns and comments were made, as follows:

- Option #6, the do nothing scenario, was not seen as a viable option.
- The idea of a walking shoulder was well received, albeit with some skepticism as to whether traffic will stay off the shoulder, and how the route would negotiate around two or three areas with little space.
- Concern was expressed about disturbing more land, either within the village (with enlarged parking facilities at the provincial lot and the entrance) or in the Preservation Area. It was recognized that there was a need to disturb lands somewhere in order to

accommodate the visitors and address the capacity issues, but there was no consensus on whether this was best done within the village or outside.

- There was concern about the details of the traffic and parking management under Option #5, such as who would be responsible for this, the details of the management plan, etc.
- There was concern about how the vehicles of residents and their visitors would be identified so that they could be permitted access to the village.

The community members at the meeting generally preferred a slower approach, with the introduction of some infrastructure improvements, more management (particularly of cruise ship visitors) and a small parking fee so that the impacts on visitation and the flow of visitors in the community could be assessed. There was recognition that there under either option there remained many details to be worked out and the community indicated that they needed to understand all the details before expressing a final opinion.

A variation of Option #2 was suggested at the community meeting, involving the Welcome Centre but less parking in this area (and therefore less land required) and using existing parking in Peggy's Cove to the extent possible. Visitors would then have the choice of taking the shuttle in or getting back in their cars and driving into the community if parking was available.

Measures to Enhance the Visitor Experience

The development of a Welcome Centre either off-site or in the provincial parking lot would provide visitors with an orientation to Peggy's Cove, either in person or through interpretive signage and literature, will go a long way to enhancing the visitor experience. The consultants are recommending that a number of other measures be taken to enhance the visitor experience. Many of these items can be implemented in the short term (i.e. within 1 – 2 years), and independently of the solutions to the capacity issues identified earlier.

Short Term

- Preparation of additional interpretive materials on Peggy's Cove and its unique natural and cultural heritage features. These would include:
 - A map of the community illustrating visitor services, washrooms, walking routes, interesting features such as the Church, the DeGarthe Gallery, the Lighthouse, and clearly illustrating private lands and homes.
 - At least one interpretive brochure on the unique natural heritage of the community and the surrounding Preservation Area. A second interpretive brochure on the cultural heritage and history of Peggy's Cove should also be considered.
 - Additional interpretive signage in selected locations around Peggy's Cove

- An expanded ‘live’ interpretation program offered through a Peggy’s Cove Welcome Centre including videos, staff and programs such as guided walks within the community and in the Preservation Area.
- Ensure that provincial visitor information centre staff are fully trained on the natural and cultural heritage of Peggy’s Cove and have access to interpretive material; also, train front line staff in local businesses to respond to information and interpretation inquiries
- Interpretation spots at several additional locations in the community with information panels.
- Reduced speed limits on Peggy’s Point Road
- Design small signs for use by residents to indicate private property as well as warn visitors of dangerous areas on private property.
- Benches and garbage cans at selected locations throughout the community.
- Add staff or contract services to provide:
 - Assistance with directing traffic and parking management at the provincial lot and also with managing cruise ship coach activity within Peggy’s Cove
 - First aid services (and a first aid station)
 - Roving safety officers/parking enforcement officers
 - Increased basic services such as garbage pick-up
- Encourage the provision of additional capacity in both food and beverage service and gift/craft shops.

These short term items are estimated to require some \$200,000 in initial funding (as well as costs associated with the annual reprinting of collateral material) and some \$30,000 in staffing costs.

In addition, consideration should be given to implementing two of the ‘pieces’ of the overall plan in the short to medium term. These items are components of both Option #2 and Option #5.

- Development of a walking ‘shoulder’ along Peggy’s Point road to create a safer and more pleasant walking environment within the village; (\$900,000)
- Additional public washrooms in the vicinity of the Lighthouse and the rocks. Given the challenges with septic servicing in Peggy’s Cove, these should most probably be similar to those provided in the provincial parking lot (Clivus Mulch). (\$400,000)

Finally, it is clear that a considerable amount of detailed planning, design and community consultation will be required before fully implementing either Option #2 or #5. This detailed

planning should start immediately. In future, both in the short term and over the longer term, there is expected to be increasing numbers of visitors to Peggy's Cove, particularly from the cruise ship sector. The traffic associated with these visitors, and the visitors themselves, will continue to place a strain on the community, on its infrastructure and on the services and experience provided to visitors. The challenges can be expected to continue to worsen and the time for action to deal with the challenge is now.

Peggy's Cove is a special place - an international icon and a huge asset for Nova Scotia's tourism industry. But it deserves to be more than a brief picture stop experience for visitors. There are clearly opportunities to enhance the visitor experience and make the village an even more valuable tourism generator for the province. Pursuing the opportunities and resolving the problems will definitely be worth the effort. And it will clearly benefit both the local businesses and residents of the community as a whole.