



Alberni Pacific Railway Extension Opportunity

Client: Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District

Project: Rail Corridor Planning Study

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1. Alberni Pacific Railway Extension Opportunity

The Alberni Pacific Railway (APR) is a heritage railway that was founded in 1984. Today the railway runs a community and tourism focused service within Port Alberni, serving as a historical and educational attraction. Today's ~20 minute service operates along the waterfront, between the Port Alberni Port Authority Office, past the Port Alberni Train Station, and northward to near Stamp Avenue.

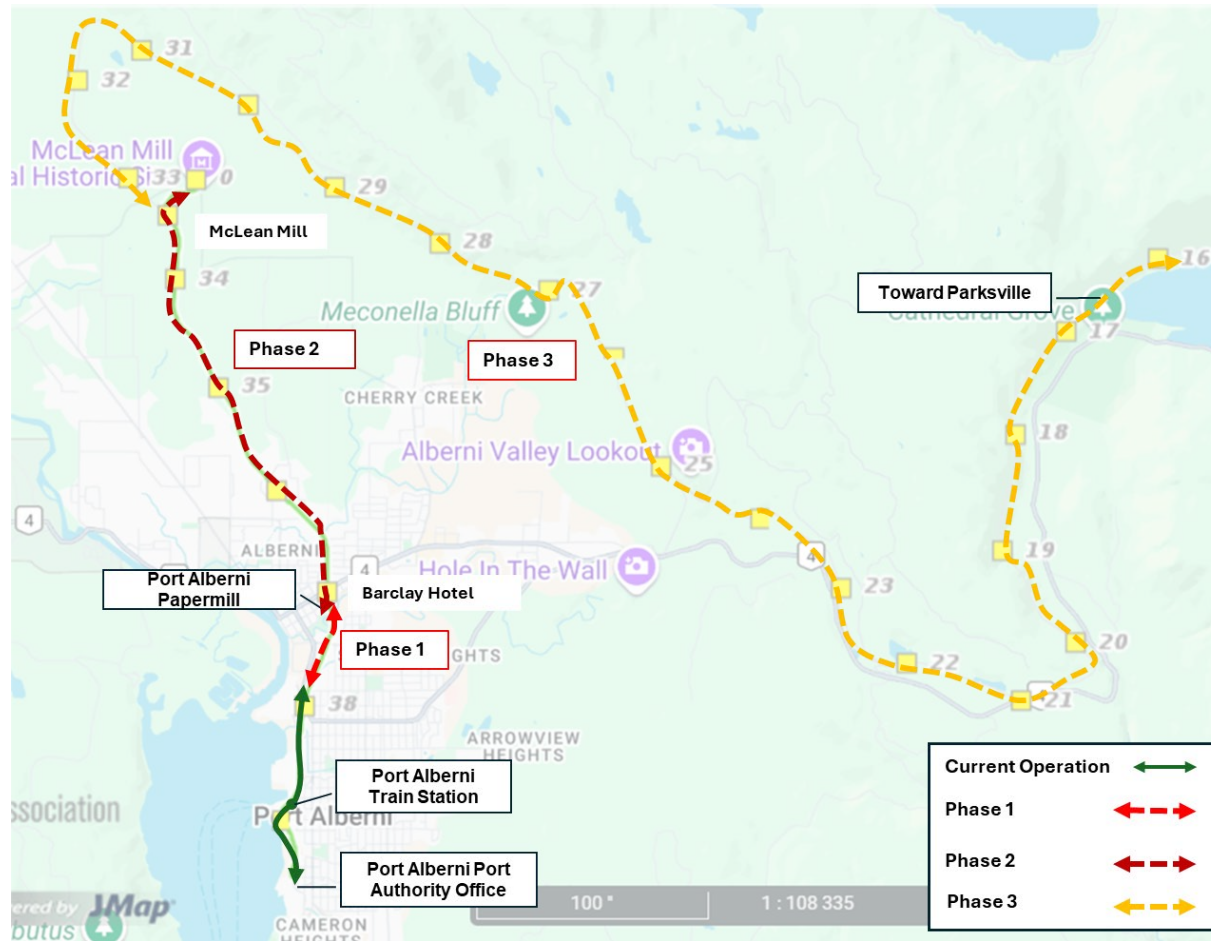
The railway operated as a tourism/heritage railway from 2001 until 2018 and ceased in 2019 due to funding shortages. The railway then re-started operations in 2024, thanks in part to receiving \$60,000 of funding from the City of Port Alberni. It carried an estimated 8,000 riders in 2024 and its re-instatement has been heralded as a success.¹

The current service operates with two locomotives, one diesel and one steam, and fares are typically \$10 for adults and \$6 for children on the diesel train, and \$20 for adults and \$10 for children on the steam train – although rates likely vary based on the season and event type.

APR is considering opportunities to extend their service further north. Figure 1 shows potential extension phases that HDR has identified for consideration, along with the current operation route. In 2026, APR plans to extend the service northward to the Best Western Plus Barclay Hotel near Stamp Avenue as part of Phase 1, and to McLean Mill (~six miles away) for Phase 2. There could be an opportunity to extend the service further towards Cameron Lake as part of a Phase 3 future state. The City of Port Alberni owns some of the trackage within the City, with the Island Corridor Foundation (ICF) being the primary corridor owner.

¹ Short track train passenger service coming back for 2024 | City of Port Alberni

Figure 1. Potential Extension Phases



1.1 Comparable Tourism Railway Case Studies

Tourism railways are growing in popularity and provide unique tourism and historical preservation opportunities for communities. A few similar tourism railways have been reviewed and are summarized below, and they may provide lessons and inspiration for APR and the Alberni Valley.

Aspen Crossing Railway

Aspen Crossing Railway is a prairie tourist railway offering themed excursions, some up to 2.5-hours in duration. The route operates near Mossleigh, AB, and the railway operates approximately 14 miles / 23 km in trackage. Features of the route and services can include live entertainment, staged robberies, special event trains (Polar Express™, brunch, dinner) and private functions. The station area also includes on-site caboose lodging, giftshop, seasonal tavern and garden centre, restaurant, and a campground.²

Following the concept of Aspen Crossing Railway, APR could consider expanding their themed service offerings including children’s tours, fantasy rides, holidays focused excursions, western

² Home - Aspen Crossing

or music-themed journeys, or local culture and BBQ/champagne trains to attract diverse tourist groups and meet varying community interests. Also, adding offerings such as a gift shop, garden centre, tavern, or bike rentals could enhance site activity and vibrancy to support both ridership and local liveliness.

The following Aspen Crossing Railway excursion trains, along with their offerings, schedules, and pricing, are being offered in 2026:

- Mother's Day Trains – 3-course dinner or brunch and a gift for mom (2.5 hours)
 - Offered on the Saturday and Sunday of Mother's Day weekend
 - Pricing: \$120 for adults and \$65 for children
- Father's Day Celebration -3-course BBQ meal and train robbery (2.5 hours)
 - Offered on the Saturday and Sunday of Father's Day weekend
 - Pricing: \$120 for adults and \$65 for children
- Mexican Fiesta Train – 3-course dinner with music and train robbery (2.5 hours)
 - Offered on a Saturday in June
 - Pricing: \$120 for adults and \$65 for children
- The Great Alberta Prairie Tour – 3-course lunch and grain elevator tour (3 hours)
 - Offered on six days in May, June, July, August, and September
 - Pricing: \$120 for adults and \$65 for children
- High Tea – Eat delicacies and sip tea (2.5 hours)
 - Offered on a Friday in July and a Wednesday in August
 - Pricing: \$99 per ticket
- Western Train – 3-course BBQ meal, train robbery, and dancing (2.5 hours)
 - Offered on a Saturday in July and a Friday in August
 - Pricing: \$120 for adults and \$65 for children
- Murder Mystery Train – 3-course meal and interactive show
 - Offered on a Saturday in August
 - Pricing: \$173 for adults
- Christmas in July – Turkey dinner, holiday activities, and special guest (2.5 hours)
 - Offered on a Saturday in July
 - Pricing: \$120 for adults and \$65 for children
- Princess and Superhero – Lunch + family activities
 - Offered on a Wednesday and Saturday in July
 - Pricing: \$89 for adults and \$65 for children
- Twilight Tour – Cocktails, Charcuterie, and live music (2.5 hours)
 - Offered on a Friday evening in August
 - Pricing: \$120 for adults and \$65 for children
- Champagne Brunch – 3-course brunch, mimosa, and train robbery (2.5 hours)
 - Offered on 5 days in May, June, and July
 - Pricing: \$120 for adults and \$65 for children
- 80's Flashback – Pub food and train robbery (2.5 hours)
 - Offered on a Saturday in September
 - Pricing: \$120 for adults and \$65 for children

- Train of Terror – Haunted rail cars and disturbing entertainment
 - Offered in October
 - Pricing: Varies depending on time and date selection
- Polar Express™ Train Ride – Cookies and hot chocolate in a collector’s mug and a silver sleigh bell gift (1 hour)
 - Offered in November and December
 - Pricing: Ticket prices vary by car class

Alberta Prairie Railway

The Alberta Prairie Railway offers heritage steam and diesel train excursions on vintage 1920s-era railcars. The service runs from Stettler to Big Valley (or Country Hideaway), and is approximately 5–6 hours round-trip, covering around 40 miles. Features and unique services include a Polar Express™ train ride during Christmas, buffet meals, live entertainment, and staged train robberies in heritage prairie towns.³

The Santa Steam Express is already a successful concept for the Alberni Pacific Railway and has strong potential for enhancement. This feature could be expanded with immersive storytelling, interactive performances with local actors, commemorative gifts including mugs and silver sleigh bells, themed activities, and family-focused offerings such as crafts, photo booths, or letters to Santa to create a richer and more memorable holiday experience. The opportunity also exists to provide branded Polar Express™ train rides locally, similar to those offered by Aspen Crossing and Alberta Prairie, but that would require a license agreement with Rail Events Inc.⁴

Special event trains, along with pricing and offerings, from the 2025 Alberta Prairie Railway schedule included the following:

- Adults Only Train to Big Valley – Baked Ham and Scalloped Potato Meal, live entertainment, and train robbery
 - Pricing: \$135 for adults
- Country Dinner Excursion to the Country Hideaway – Buffet meal, kids’ activities at destination, and train robbery (3 hours)
 - Pricing: \$150 for adults and \$85 for children
- Special Event Excursions to the Country Hideaway – Buffet steak meal, kids’ activities at destination, and train robbery
 - Pricing: \$150 for adults and \$85 for children
- BBQ Steak Dinner & Fireworks End of Season – BBQ steak meal, live entertainment, train robbery, and professional fireworks show (7 hours)
 - Pricing: \$160 for adults and \$120 for children
- All You Can Eat Special to Hideaway – Buffet meal including hamburgers, hot dogs, and baked beans, kids’ activities at destination, and train robbery (4 hours)

³ THE POLAR EXPRESS™ Train Ride | Alberta Prairie Railway

⁴ [Become a Licensee | Rail Events, Inc.](#)

- Pricing \$125 for adults and no charge for children travelling with their immediate family
- Teddy Bear Special to Country Hideaway – Buffet meal, kids’ activities, prize for all kids, and live entertainment and petting Zoo at destination (4 hours)
 - Pricing \$135 for adults and no charge for children travelling with their immediate family
- Steak Dinner to the Village of Big Valley – Buffet meal, on-board entertainment, time to visit attractions at destination, and train robbery (5 – 5.5 hours)
 - Pricing: \$150 for adults and \$85 for children
- Barbeque Pork Side Ribs Special to Big Valley – BBQ ribs meal, on-board entertainment, and train robbery (5.5 – 6 hours)
 - Pricing: \$160 for adults and \$100 for children
- APST Limited Special to Big Valley – Prime rib buffet, live music, and train robbery (6 hours)
 - Pricing: \$175 for adults and \$125 for children
- Newfoundlander Special to Big Valley – Steak and lobster meal, live music, and train robbery
 - Pricing: \$190 for adults and \$130 for children
- Murder Mysteries – Buffet meal and an interactive murder mystery presented by a theater company (6.5 hours)
 - Pricing: \$175 for adults and \$125 for children
- Harvest Pumpkin Fest – Select a pumpkin from the pumpkin patch, hot chocolate and cookies, and family friendly activities
 - Pricing: \$75 for adults and \$55 for children
- School Special to Big Valley – Learn about Canadian heritage and geography of the region
 - Pricing: \$65 for adults and children
- Polar Express™ Train Ride – Hot chocolate, cookie, souvenir mug. and a silver sleigh bell gift
 - Pricing: \$105 for adults and \$75 for children

Wheatland Express Excursion Train

The Wheatland Express Excursion Train is a heritage rail experience through the Saskatchewan prairies. The train runs between the rural communities of Cudworth to Wakaw (47 miles of track between St. Louis, SK and the Totzke junction, where the line interchanges with CN), and round trips can take up to 3.5–4 hours. The service focuses on western heritage through the introduction of “Little Big Town,” featuring 1900s-era characters and atmosphere, local cuisine, a railway workers’ museum, and live entertainment. On board, passengers are entertained by actors, musicians, and guides who bring the regional history to life. Themed events include train heists, Halloween and Christmas experiences, and summer fantasy programs⁵.

⁵ Wheatland Express Excursion Train | Saskatchewan

While restoration projects such as historical machinery and vehicles from the Western Vancouver Island Industrial Heritage Society and the Alberni Valley Museum are already present in Port Alberni⁶, APR has the opportunity to expand this concept by creating a living-history experience. This could be done by introducing interactive historical activities, outdoor exhibits, particularly during the summer months, and leveraging the scenic waterfront. This opportunity could help APR to draw more visitors, extend stays, and increase economic value through the tourism season by focusing on local business engagement and cultural programming.

The following Wheatland Express excursion trains, along with their offerings, schedules, and pricing, are being offered in 2026:

- Train Heist – Wild west characters and musical entertainment (3.5 hours)
 - Offered on seven days in May, July, August, and September
 - Pricing: \$123 for adults and \$110 for children
 - Lunch is available for pre-order
- Murder on the Wheatland Express – Solve the murder mystery with engaging characters and musical entertainment (2.5 – 3 hours)
 - Offered on nine days in June, July, August, and September
 - Pricing: \$123 for adults and \$110 for children
 - Lunch is available for pre-order
- Family Summer Express – Family friendly adventure with entertainment for children 10 and under (2 – 3 hours)
 - Offered on two days in July and August
 - Pricing: \$123 for adults and \$110 for children
 - Lunch is available for pre-order
- The Nightmare Express – Haunted escape room themed excursion (2.5 – 3 hours)
 - Offered on four dates in October
 - Pricing: \$133 for adults
 - Food is available for pre-order
- Magical Christmas Express – Hot chocolate bar and onboard entertainment including carolers and elves (3 hours)
 - Offered on four days in November and December
 - Pricing: \$123 for adults and \$110 for children
 - Food is available for pre-order

White Pass & Yukon

The White Pass & Yukon railway offers some of the most scenic excursions in North America, from the popular 40-mile Summit Excursion (2.5–3 hours round-trip from Skagway) to the full-day Premier Bennett Scenic Journey covering 120 miles between Alaska and British Columbia. Excursions include a range of themes including gold rush history, and flexible ticket options such as hiker drop-offs, one-way trips, and overnight camping are available. The service

⁶ Services

operates seasonally (May–September) and train-motorcoach combinations further enhance the transportation utility of the service⁷.

As the current operation of APR already provides three main stops, the excursion could be enhanced by drawing inspiration from the White Pass & Yukon Route’s Bennett Scenic Journey, which combines heritage storytelling with immersive waterfront scenery and flexible travel options. A similar full-day excursion for APR could feature a round-trip ride, offering visitors views of the Alberni waterfront and heritage sites. The experience could include local food service, and an extended stop at either a restored historic village, with an option for hiking, or at a museum site with live historical demonstrations to create attractions that support tourism, local business, and cultural preservation.

The following White Pass & Yukon excursion trains, along with their schedules and pricing, are being offered in 2026:

- White Pass Summit Excursion – Follow the original route to the White Pass Summit from Skagway enjoying scenic views (2.5 – 2.75 hours)
 - Offered April 30 – October 7
 - Pricing: \$155 for adults and \$77.50 for children (Pricing is in USD)
- Bennett Scenic Journey – A 108.60-kilometre journey from Skagway, AK to Carcross, YT with a boxed lunch (8 hours)
 - Offered May 26th – September 12th
 - Pricing: \$289 for adults and \$144.50 for children (Pricing is in USD)
 - Pricing is in USD
- Lake Bennett Steam Excursion – A 130 kilometre round trip steam train and motor coach excursion traveling from Skagway, AK to Bennett, BC with a snack (5 hours)
 - 2026 dates are not yet announced
 - Pricing: TBD
- Steam Summit Loop – A 64-kilometre journey from Skagway, AK to White Pass Summit, pulled by a steam locomotive from 1947
 - 2026 dates are not yet announced
 - Pricing: TBD

Annual ridership on the White Pass & Yukon totaled nearly 402,000 in 2015, much of it driven by cruise ship tours. In 2014, railroad revenues were \$29.4 million.⁸

Agawa Canyon Tour Train

The Agawa Canyon Tour Train in northern Ontario provides an immersive wilderness rail tour into Ontario’s Agawa Canyon Park. The train runs from Sault Ste. Marie to Agawa Canyon (~183 km/114 miles one-way), and the travel time is approximately 4.5 hours in each direction. This train and service feature panoramic windows, canyon hikes, waterfalls, and boreal forest

⁷ White Pass & Yukon Route Railway | Scenic Railway of the World

⁸ Alaska State Rail Plan | Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities

scenery along, and their tours are offered to enable riders to experience indigenous culture through different activities⁹.

The APR could draw inspiration from the Agawa Canyon experience by partnering with local Indigenous communities to incorporate culturally rich storytelling, traditions, and activities into its excursions. By offering live indigenous music and highlighting Indigenous history related to the rail, the APR could create an immersive, educational, and cultural journey during summer excursions along the Alberni waterfront.

The following Agawa Canyon Tour excursion trains, along with their schedules and pricing, are being offered in 2026:

- One-Day Scenic Rail Adventure – A 183-kilometre excursion from Sault Ste. Marie to Agawa Canyon Park that includes an hour and a half stop at Agawa Canyon Park for picnics and hiking (10 hours)
 - Pricing: \$150 for adults, \$120 for seniors, and \$75 for children and \$166 per person during peak season (September 15 – October 19)
- Sacred Pathways: An Indigenous Experience in Agawa Canyon – Experience indigenous culture on this journey through Agawa Canyon (4 hours)
 - 2026 dates are not yet announced
 - Pricing: \$255 for adults and \$117.50 for children

1.2 Transferable Practices for Alberni Pacific Railway Tourism Plan

The Alberni Pacific Railway could learn from and adopt successful practices from the comparable tourism railways, including:

- **Expanding themed train offerings**

The case studies highlight the potential and importance of adding multiple themed excursions such as children’s adventures, fantasy rides, western or music-themed journeys, train heist, and local culture or BBQ/champagne trains to attract a wide range of visitors and reflect diverse community interests.
- **Adding seasonal activities**

Introducing seasonal offerings such as a gift shop or garden centre could enhance site activity and vibrancy to support both ridership and local liveliness.
- **Enhancing Santa Steam Express service**

Services such as the Santa Steam Express could be enhanced by incorporating storytelling, interactive performances, and family-focused activities such as crafts, photo booths, and letter-writing to Santa, creating a more engaging and memorable holiday experience, and potentially supporting higher ridership and ticket prices.

⁹ Agawa Canyon Tour Train | Train Rides through Northern Ontario

- **Offering flexible trip lengths and increasing stops**
Many of the services reviewed offered flexible trip lengths and additional stops. As APR expands it could consider offering multiple different route combinations and service choices.
- **Incorporating education and cultural journey by partnering with local Indigenous communities**
APR can learn from services like the Agawa Canyon railway and partner with local Indigenous communities to integrate culturally rich storytelling and activities into its excursions. By offering indigenous music and noting Indigenous history related to the rail, the APR could be an active partner in reconciliation and create an immersive, educational cultural experience.

These adaptations would allow APR to maintain its core industrial-heritage identity while diversifying its tourism value and attracting a wider range of visitors. They could also help support the business case for the railway, including driving increased ridership and sustainable ticket prices.