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Steering Alberta's Tourism Sector

2026 Provincial Pre-Budget Submission

January 2026
For: Government of Alberta

ROOTED IN PLACE. RISING TOGETHER.

BLLHA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Banff & Lake Louise Hospitality Association (BLLHA) represents more than 120 hotels, restaurants, attractions, and ski resorts employing over 5,000 people. With 4.3 million visitors to Banff National Park in 2024, which is over 11% of Alberta's total visitors, our region significantly outperforms most destinations economically while dealing with the challenges that most communities don't face.

The numbers tell a clear story. Tourism generated $14.4 billion in visitor spending in 2024, which translated to $13.6 billion in GDP and $2.8 billion in taxes. As Alberta's fourth largest export, tourism brings in more money than cattle, wheat, and wood combined - $3.5 billion from international visitors alone.

Here's what makes tourism different: Travel Alberta research shows that every extra billion dollars in international visitor spending creates $1.25 billion in GDP, $83 million in exports, and $15 million in foreign direct investment, which improves what we offer, which brings more visitors.

This submission outlines four priorities for the 2026-27 budget to help Alberta hit its $25 billion tourism target by 2035 while ensuring places like Banff and Lake Louise can handle the growth sustainably.

BLLHA is calling for focused investment in four key areas:

- Strengthening the tourism workforce
- Improving regional transit in high-visitation destinations
- Ensuring stable and competitive funding for Travel Alberta
- Coordinating efforts across government to manage growth in high-visitation rural communities.

Taken together, these actions will allow Alberta to grow tourism responsibly, fully capture its economic and tax potential, and stay on track to reach the provinces' $25 billion tourism target by 2035.

We appreciate your consideration of these recommendations and welcome the opportunity to discuss them further.

Sincerely,

Mike Kelly
Executive Director
Banff & Lake Louise Hospitality Association

Jenn Porter
Director, Workforce & Destination Affairs
Banff & Lake Louise Hospitality Association

ABOUT BLLHA

ROOTED IN PLACE. RISING TOGETHER.

Representing more than 120 hotels, restaurants, attractions, and ski resorts employing over 5,000 people, the Banff & Lake Louise Hospitality Association (BLLHA) is the voice of Banff's tourism economy. We champion a balanced, sustainable future for residents, visitors, and businesses, ensuring Canada's first National Park remains a thriving community within a protected landscape.

MISSION

The Banff & Louise Hospitality Association (BLLHA) is a powerful advocate for the accommodation, food & beverage and tourism sectors. Since 1974, BLLHA has been helping the tourism industry work toward common political and economic interests that will benefit the communities of Banff and Lake Louise as a whole.

VISION

The Banff & Lake Louise Hospitality Association is a respected, consensus-building organization that promotes the well-being of the accommodation, food & beverage, and tourism sectors in Banff National Park.

BUDGET PRIORITIES

1

Strengthening Alberta’s Tourism Workforce

Help more young people, students, and workers build careers in tourism through better training programs, post-secondary partnerships, while supporting easier ways to live and work in Alberta.

Context & Perspective:

Tourism supports roughly 260,000 jobs in Alberta, and it is estimated that $848 million was generated in personal income tax and $144 million in corporate income tax for the province in 2024-25. That’s real money flowing into the province.

Banff National Park’s 4.3 million visits in 2024 drive significant employment across the destination. However, labour shortages have become a critical barrier to growth in mountain and resort communities, directly impacting businesses’ ability to meet visitor demand. These shortages have been significantly intensified by tightening federal immigration policies and restrictions on Temporary Foreign Worker permits, which have historically been essential to staffing operations in remote tourism destinations.
Here’s what people get wrong about tourism jobs: this isn’t just entry-level work. The sector includes 245 occupations, ranging from engineers, auditors, and safety officers to managers and directors. In fact, 149 of these jobs pay above the provincial average, and more than half are medium- to high-skill roles.

With Alberta’s visitor economy growing four times faster than the national average in 2024, we urgently need to address workforce development. Without adequate staffing, businesses cannot operate at full capacity regardless of visitor demand.

Why This Matters Economically:

The tourism workforce generates nearly $1 billion in combined tax revenue annually. Solving labour shortages isn’t about helping the industry; it’s about the province capturing its full revenue potential. If we can’t staff hotels, restaurants, and attractions, we can’t hit that $25 billion target, and we leave tax dollars on the table.

BLLHA Recommendations:

- Expand youth employment initiatives and work-integrated learning programs tied to actual tourism careers, creating clear pathways from school into well-paying jobs.
- Strengthen partnerships between post-secondary institutions and industry so that training aligns with employers’ needs across those 245 occupations.
- Invest in retention supports, such as mental health resources, help with workforce housing, and flexible training that recognizes experience and enables career advancement.
- Advocate for labour mobility and immigration pathways that reflect the realities of seasonal and rural tourism employees.
- Run career awareness campaigns that change perceptions by highlighting professional roles, competitive wages, and advancement opportunities.

BUDGET PRIORITIES

2

Supporting Sustainable Visitor Mobility & Regional Transit

Make it easier for visitors and workers to get around by investing in options like ROAM and other regional transit that will reduce traffic and protect the environment.

Context & Perspective:

Banff National Park is one of Canada's most visited protected areas. Domestic visits jumped 11.4% in 2024, adding to the 4.3 million total visits. This growth is straining transportation infrastructure and the communities supporting both visitors and workers.

Here's the problem: tourism workers need to commute between Banff, Canmore, and Lake Louise using the same congested roads as visitors. These workers staff the businesses that generate $848 million in personal income tax for the province, but they can't get to work reliably.

Transportation isn't just about visitor convenience anymore. It's about workforce access, environmental protection, and whether we can manage growth. Without better regional transit, congestion will eventually limit the region's economic contribution.

Why Investment Makes Sense:

Transportation infrastructure directly impacts economic capacity. When visitors cannot access attractions efficiently. If workers cannot reliably reach their jobs, the province loses potential spending, productivity, and tax revenue. Regional transit is economic infrastructure that enables growth.

The Bow Valley already demonstrates what effective, fiscally responsible transit investment can deliver. ROAM Transit is Alberta's third-largest transit system and one of the strongest performers in the province, achieving approximately 40% cost recovery in 2024, among the highest comparable systems. This performance reflects strong governance, prudent financial management, and high customer utilization.

Demand for service continues to grow:

- 2.4 million riders system-wide in 2024, a 4% increase year over year
- 1.5 million riders on Banff local services, up 3%, underscoring daily reliance by workers and residents
- 300,000 riders on Route 3 (Canmore-Banff), up 5%, highlighting the importance of regional commuter connectivity

Look at the countries outperforming us—New Zealand and Ireland have tourism contributing 4.4% of GDP, compared with Canada's 1.8%. They've embedded tourism into coordinated, whole-of-government strategies with sustained investment and policy alignment across sectors.

BLLHA Recommendations:

- Invest in ROAM Transit and other regional transit networks that serve both visitors and workers, treating transit as essential economic infrastructure.
- Prioritize multi-modal solutions, including improved bus service, shuttles, micro-transit, and ride-sharing partnerships, to reduce car dependency.
- Coordinate transit planning with housing and workforce strategies so transportation investments help workers access jobs across the Bow Valley.
- Create dedicated provincial funding for resort community transit, recognizing that these systems serve provincial and economic goals and that general tax revenue benefits all Albertans.
- Support pilot programs for innovative solutions like demand-responsive transit, EV infrastructure, and seasonal service expansion during peak periods.

BUDGET PRIORITIES

3

Ensure Stable, Competitive Provincial funding for Travel Alberta

Making sure Travel Alberta has reliable funding, including reinvestment of the Tourism Levy, so the province can keep growing tourism, developing new experiences, and supportin grural and regional communities.

Our Position:

BLLHA strongly supports Tourism Industry Association of Alberta's (TIAA) recommendation for full Alberta Tourism Levy reinvestment to Travel Alberta, along with an additional $60 million per year over five years to support destination marketing, route development, and product development initiatives.

Why This Matters for Banff and Lake Louise:

Travel Alberta's international marketing drives visitation to flagship destinations like Banff and Lake Louise. The organization's documented return on investment, $33 in visitor spending for every dollar invested in international marketing, directly benefits our region as a primary draw for international visitors.

International visitation is critical to our local economy. These visitors stay longer, spend more, and visit during shoulder seasons, helping to stabilize year-round employment in our communities. Without sustained marketing investment, we risk losing market share to competing mountain destinations globally.

Travel Alberta's air access development work is particularly important for Banff and Lake Louise. Direct international flights to Calgary enable visitors to access our region efficiently. Route development support helps secure and maintain these connections, which are essential to our competitiveness.

The proposed reinvestment would allow Travel Alberta to:

- Maintain competitive marketing presence in key international markets
- Support new air route development and existing route sustainability
- Invest in product development that enhances Alberta's mountain tourism offerings
- Fund strategic initiatives that extend visitation beyond peak summer months

BLLHA views this investment not as industry support, but as economic infrastructure that generates measurable returns for the province while enabling gateway communities like ours to contribute fully to Alberta's $25 billion in tourism expenditure by 2035.

4

Advancing a Coordinated Provincial Approach for High-Visitation Rural Communities

Bring the province, municipalities, Parks Canada, and industry partners together to tackle hard challenges in housing, labour, transportation, sustainability, and emergency preparedness.

Context & Perspective

Record visitation creates impacts across multiple areas: labour, housing, transportation, environment, emergency services, and community infrastructure. Growth is happening across all visitor segments, domestic, U.S., and international.

With destinations like Banff and Lake Louise drawing millions annually, we need better coordination across jurisdictions. Right now, Alberta doesn't have a multi-ministry table coordinating tourism decisions across government, unlike OECD best practices.

Countries that coordinate tourism across government, such as Ireland and New Zealand, where tourism contributes 4.4% of GDP compared to our lower levels, use inter-ministerial committees to align policy, investment, and planning.

TIAA has recommended that Alberta create an Inter-Ministerial Committee on Tourism (IMCT) reporting to the Premier, chaired by the Tourism Minister, with deputy-level participation from all ministries that affect tourism, including trade, transportation, labour, rural development, environment, and finance.

What Makes High-Visitation Rural Communities Different:

High-visitation communities like Banff and Lake Louise face pressures that most places don't.

- Housing constraints are limiting workforce availability and affordability.
- Transportation serves both residents and millions of visitors.
- Balancing environmental stewardship with economic activity and national park conservation.
- Emergency Preparedness requires surge capacity for wildfires, medical services, and evacuations.
- Regulatory complexity involving municipal, provincial, federal, and Parks Canada jurisdictions.

No single ministry or government can solve these alone. They need sustained collaboration, shared data, aligned investments, and integrated planning.

What We Are Asking For:

- Establish an Inter-Ministerial Committee on Tourism reporting to the Premier, chaired by the Tourism Minister, with deputy representation from Municipal Affairs, Transportation, Jobs and Trade, Advanced Education, Immigration, Environment, Forestry and Parks, and Finance.

- Create a Resort Communities Working Group within the IMCT focused specifically on high-visitation rural communities, including Banff, Lake Louise, Canmore, Jasper and similar destinations.

- Align strategies and investments across workforce, housing, regional transportation, labour planning, environmental stewardship, emergency preparedness, and community infrastructure.

- Use shared data to guide decisions, tracking visitation, workforce availability, housing vacancy, transportation congestion, and visitor satisfaction to inform evidence-based policy.

- Establish regular consultation with industry associations, including BLLHA, Alberta Hotel & Lodging Association (AHLA), and TIAA, to ensure alignment between government priorities and industry needs.

- Develop multi-year strategic plans for high-visitation rural communities, coordinating capital investments, regulatory changes, and programs across ministries for coherent long-term growth management.

CONCLUSION

Rooted in Banff
Rising Together

The Banff & Lake Louise Hospitality Association is committed to collaboration and accountability.

Banff and Lake Louise aren't just benefiting from Alberta's tourism success; we're driving it. As the province's most internationally recognized destination, we're the destination through which millions experience Alberta, generating significant economic returns while managing pressures unique to high-visitation communities.

These recommendations are not a request for special treatment. They are strategic, evidence-based investments in Alberta's fourth-largest export sector, and investments that deliver measurable returns in GDP, tax revenue, jobs, and foreign direct investment.

The path forward is clear. Reaching Alberta's $25 billion tourism target by 2035 will require a strong and stable workforce, transportation infrastructure that supports sustainable growth, competitive destination marketing, and coordinated governance that aligns policy and investment across government.

BLLHA is ready to be an active partner in this work. We urge the Government of Alberta to prioritize these investments in the 2026-27 budget and to work collaboratively with industry to ensure tourism continues to strengthen Alberta's economy, resilience, and global competitiveness.