

Squamish Access Society  
Kevin McLane, Chair  
Box 370, Squamish, BC. V0N 3G0  
604 892-9797 stone@elaho.ca

---

The Honourable Bill Barisoff  
Minister of Land, Water and Air Protection,  
Victoria, BC

May 28th, 2004

**Regarding the proposed Gondola on the Stawamus Chief**

Dear Minister,

Our organization was recently invited to a private presentation by Peter Alder, one of the principals involved in the above Gondola proposal. Mr Alder appeared quite candid about his proposition, provided us with considerable detail and asked for our input. During the last couple weeks we have considered what we learned, and after consideration of all aspects, wish to make comment on the matter direct to your office.

**We ask that this proposal be rejected promptly**, and that your ministry make a formal announcement to that effect. Our reasons for asking the proposal be rejected are as follows.

1. Mechanized access of this nature would be unequivocally damaging to the status of the Chief as an international centre of adventure recreation. The Chief in its natural state, and with little or no effort expended to promote it, has become an international icon over the last half century for the outstanding opportunities for adventure it offers climbers and hikers close to an urban setting. It is now the most popular hiking peak in British Columbia and Canada's most famous rockclimbing centre, and simply unacceptable to suggest such a radically different paradigm. There is no improved public benefit to be gained by imposing a Gondola on the Chief. Such initiatives have their place in this region, but at the Chief is not one of them.

2. We believe the proponents have considerably underestimated the vast scale of objection that their proposition would stir up in British Columbia and abroad if your government should bring it forward. There are, conservatively, tens of thousands of people who hold very high regard for the Chief in its present natural state, and the dramatic clash of values presented by the industrial tourism of a Gondola would ignite a very public and damaging controversy. From what is now being voiced across a wide range of interests, there is little or no chance of a Gondola proposition gaining even a moderate level of committed public support. It would be akin to proposing a shopping centre for the middle of Stanley Park.

3. The economic gains projected from a Gondola will be outweighed by the erosion of tourism equity built around Squamish's trademark: the Outdoor Recreation Capital of Canada. A recent report from the District of Squamish placed rockclimbing in this area and hiking the Chief, conservatively, at an annual value of \$20 million. Some portion of that would be permanently lost as a result of interest in the Chief declining due to the objectionable presence of such an incompatible set of values.

4. For the Chief to become a centre of industrial tourism; branded, marketed and sold, would change the nature of the experience on the Chief and the self-identity of Squamish so radically and distastefully for hundreds of thousands of outdoor recreation visitors and residents, that the Municipality's trademarked title of 'Outdoor Recreation Capital of Canada'

would run serious risk of no longer being sustainable. That is not an exaggeration. Squamish can have one or the other, but it can't have what would be in essence a type of "mini-Grouse Mountain" on the top of the Chief, and also expect the same place to be an international centre of adventure in a natural setting for rockclimbers and hikers. Squamish's title of ORCC is authentic because it is given international legitimacy by tens of thousands of mountainbikers, climbers, windsurfers, hikers, and river users. A Gondola on the Chief would severely erode that legitimacy.

5. In respect of the Sea to Sky Highway Rebuild, the possibility of your government bringing this proposition forward further complicates the balance of considerations for the new intersection to the Chief. Mr Alder stated the Gondola would require a new road entrance direct from Shannon Falls. This raises the real concern of intersection-consolidation for the sake of economy. That would lead in one way or another, sooner or later, to all Chief users becoming subject to the hegemony of a defacto private branding of the peak. As long as a Gondola appears to be under consideration, under no circumstances can we give consideration to a consolidated single entrance to the Chief from Shannon Falls.

In closing, we believe there is high potential for broad public support for new economic development initiatives for outdoor recreation and provincial parks, if they are centred on leveraging and enhancing popular existing usages and interests more effectively. In other words, giving people more of what they have demonstrated they want.

We thank you for taking the time to read our comments, and we welcome the opportunity to discuss this, and any other matters relating to the Chief at your earliest convenience.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours Sincerely



Kevin McLane

Chair, Squamish Access Society.

604 892-9797 stone@elaho.ca

*The SAS represents the interests of climbers in the Squamish region, and is directly affiliated with the Climbers Access Society of BC. We are presently engaged with MOT on matters relating to rockclimbing and the Highway 99 rebuild, and with MSRM at the recent LRMP process for Sea to Sky.*

CC List:

Mayor Ian Sutherland, District of Squamish.

Premier Gordon Campbell

The Honourable Kevin Falcon, Minister of Transportation.

Peter Milburn, Executive Director, Sea to Sky Highway Project, Ministry of Transportation.

John Cavanagh, Squamish Director, Sea to Sky Highway Project, Ministry of Transportation.

Lee Malleau, Economic Development Officer, District of Squamish.

Bob Kusch, Director of Parks, Recreation and Tourism, District of Squamish.

Ted Nebbeling, MLA, West Vancouver–Garibaldi.

Peter Alder, Gondola proponent.