



## **A MARKETING ROADMAP FOR AN ALL-AMERICAN ROAD Implementation Strategy**

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Discover Lakes to Locks Passage, "The Great Northeast Journey," your ticket to a unique North American experience! Midway between Manhattan and Montreal, this inter-connected waterway shaped the destiny of the United States and Canada. By bike, foot, boat, train or car, Lakes to Locks Passage provides access to charming small cities, rural landscapes and Adirondack hamlets. Through all four seasons, you can explore numerous historic, natural, cultural and recreational experiences along 234 miles of the scenic waterway that links upstate New York to southern Quebec.

The *Lakes to Locks Passage Marketing Plan* is designed to promote Lakes to Locks Passage as a unified region, and as such, is not intended to market individual attractions or historic sites. The sole focus of the plan is to establish and promote, from a marketing perspective, LAKES TO LOCKS PASSAGE, "The Great Northeast Journey," to visitors and potential visitors via thematic connections and multi-modal tourism opportunities.

The plan is a toolkit with lots of ideas and solutions that can be drawn upon to perform its function. Lakes to Locks Passage is a diverse collection of stakeholders, communities, interpretive themes, resources and opportunities for tourism development. The plan is designed to allow for multiple activities and experiences that when promoted together, create a larger "pie," and contribute to the greater whole. It is through this collaboration that Lakes to Locks Passage will have the greatest impact on community life and economic development of the region.

### **Marketing Plan Overview**

LAKES TO LOCKS PASSAGE, "The Great Northeast Journey" is a designated New York State Byway that recognizes the early nation-building activities of North America. At the core of the Byway is the interconnected waterway consisting of the upper Hudson River, Champlain Canal, Lake George, Lake Champlain, Richelieu River and Chambly Canal. The New York State Scenic Byway Program has supported local planning efforts to ensure that this Byway consists of communities that are a great place to live -- because a great place to live is also a great place to do business, and to visit! Throughout the Byway, history and recreation are connected to our communities. Drive the highway, boat the canal, ride the train, bike the back roads, dive through shipwrecks, sail the lakes, and walk the historic hamlets. This Byway allows residents and visitors to understand, experience and appreciate the diverse character of the region, with increased access to the local businesses and services. Lakes to Locks Passage is designated by the Federal Highway Administration as an "All-American Road." This Federal recognition is the "cream of the crop" of America's historic and recreational Byways, and the FHWA promotes the region to new national and international markets.

Lakes to Locks Passage (LTLP) has enormous potential for growth as a tourism destination. Much of the region is undeveloped and under-promoted, which presents opportunities for both the local economy and for economic development in the region.

The history of humankind and the history of transportation are intertwined, Lakes to Locks Passage is at the nexus of that history. "Lakes" and "Locks" both connote water, and this must be the central element of the region's marketing. The name implies a journey: *Lakes To Locks Passage*. And rightly so; the

journey can happen during one visit or over a lifetime of visits, giving flexibility and a compelling reason for visitors to return. Hence, the full name of the Region: Lakes to Locks Passage, The Great Northeast Journey, or in French: Lacs aux Écluses le Passage, Le Grand Voyage du Nord-Est.

There is an authenticity about LTLP that provides genuine visitor experiences with “real” people in “real” places, which serves to differentiate the region from competitors. More than any other factor, this is what identifies LTLP as a true visitor destination. For several decades much of the region has suffered from an economic downturn. However, this "freeze in time" has allowed many communities and much of the landscape to maintain his historic fabric, it has not been homogenized as "Anywhere, USA." In recent years, the residents and elected officials have come to recognize that they have something special, and have come together to develop revitalization strategies that preserve and promote the authentic communities that comprise the region. LTLP provides a venue to package the unique, and authentic, qualities into thematic experiences for the visitor.

The Baby Boomer/Empty Nester market is one LTLP can latch onto now to sustain regional tourism through the next 20 or 30 years. This market is affluent and it is active...boating, biking, hiking, fishing, what is often called "experiential tourism." LTLP is within a day's drive of more than 30 million households. Recent studies show that among the population at large, disability rates are declining dramatically, and that trend is accelerating. This means the Baby Boomer market will stay healthier and more active later in life, further underlining the importance of this market.

The interpretive theme “The Four Lives of Lakes to Locks Passage” captures the inter-relationship between natural and human activities that shaped our nation's history. The marketing theme blends the elements of the name with interpretive theme and the attributes of the region. **Water, Journey, and Exploration/Discovery** are the three legs of the marketing theme for Lakes to Locks Passage. These three elements form the marketing gateway to the brand and experiences of LTLP.

The brand for LTLP addresses four levels:

- **Physical** -- Lakes to Locks Passage is a clean, unspoiled region with a beauty and grandeur that is unique.
- **Functional** -- Throughout LTLP, downtowns are vibrant, there is a wealth of activities for residents and visitors, and heritage centers connect all the parts of LTLP, helping visitors navigate the region.
- **Emotional** – A sense of pride that residents feel about living in LTLP, and the sense of exhilaration that people feel when they visit here.
- **Spiritual** -- Visitor desire for MORE has profound effects, not just on the prospect of their return visit, but the referrals to friends and family.

An analysis of LTLP strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats identified the following issues:

The traditional traveler venues are rapidly changing:

- The motor coach tour market is aging and not being replaced by younger seniors and retiring Baby Boomers. Tour operators are struggling to find ways to attract these replacement customers with little success.
- Travel agents, while still a force in Europe and Japan, have seen their influence in the U.S. wane. The Internet has made it easier for travelers to do their own research and book their own trips.
- Repeat business, once a mainstay of the lodging industry, has dropped to less than a third in New York.
- The world is shrinking -- businesses and individuals are increasing their mobility and worldliness.
- Finally, some recent studies have indicated that the market of travelers motivated to choose destinations based on historic resources alone, may be shrinking. Therefore, Lakes to Locks

Passage is blessed by having potential growth in audiences of the historic, natural, cultural and recreational resources that will come from visitors here for other reasons.

Lakes to Locks Passage can be most effective:

- Tying the region together into a cohesive whole
- Promoting aspects of the region that other marketers are under promoting
- Marketing to audiences that are currently under served
- Promoting the cross-border character to a shrinking world

The market trends and types of trips people are taking is what Lakes to Locks Passage has to offer:

- Local excursions (day trips)
- Touring vacations
- Scenery and Outdoor experiences
- Resort vacations
- Health consciousness & increased spirituality
- An antidote to their fast-paced real life
- Having fun
- Authenticity of experience and place
- International qualities and appeal

The first task is to establish Lakes to Locks Passage with a distinct identity and region, separate and apart from the Adirondacks, Quebec and Vermont. The LTLP brand *is*:

- Entirely **Water** based, by definition – the name and marketing materials are focused exclusively on the water features.
- The **Journey and Exploration/Discovery** of LTLP as North America’s first interconnected waterway, and the only multi-modal (car, boat, rail, bicycle, walking/hiking) Byway in the nation.
- A unique region – few others offer the diversity of experiential tourism, with a multi-national character, that links numerous historic, natural, cultural and recreational themes.

Lakes to Locks Passage currently has no brand and is unknown, but it is made up of components, some of which have very strong brands and are quite well known. LTLP needs to unify a region under a single brand, creating a whole greater than the sum of its parts. Currently, Lake George, Lake Champlain, the Adirondacks, the Upper Hudson River/Champlain Canal, and the Richelieu River/Chambly Canal are disparate brands. But when combined, they encompass a wide spectrum of tourism experiences and infrastructure, offering something for just about everyone. It is critical that Lakes to Locks Passage expend its immediate efforts at the marketing unification of the region.

The “delivery” of the visitor experience is through a network of communities identified as “Waypoint Communities.” These communities are cities, villages or hamlets that have the ability to “meet and greet” the visitor. They all offer lodging, dining and shopping opportunities and are developing infrastructure for visitor information and interpretive centers, as well as multi-modal transportation connections. A Waypoint Community serves as a thematic hub to the surrounding smaller communities or attractions.

However, currently many Waypoint Communities lack either a centralizing force behind, or the technological awareness about, how to optimize the internet as a medium for promotion or establishing an identity. There are often serious discrepancies between a community or region’s holistic physical reality and its online “virtual” identity. In such cases, the rich historical, cultural, social, and commercial offerings are omitted from the overall impressions a Web navigator gains from her or his search. It is mutually beneficial for the byway traveler and the community to have the prospective traveler encounter a seamless, coherent, easily navigable resource of information about a destination when making travel decisions. We need to increase the internet presence of LTLP Waypoint Communities to communicate an

authentic, grassroots identity that unequivocally states: “This is who we are; this is the quality of life you can expect here once you stay in our towns and villages. Pay us a visit and experience our region for yourself.”

The LTLP brand must tie the natural systems, history, recreation, and scenic beauty together into neat and compelling packages. To accomplish this, the brand will use Journey and Discovery, tying together the contemporary landscape with the historic past. Within this position, LTLP will give travelers the modern day equivalent of the sense of exhilaration that the first explorers must have felt.

Systems and resources must in place before LTLP can begin to generate a substantive increase in tourism for the region:

- Real people to add authenticity to the visitor experience through storytelling and other means.
- Improved infrastructure and product for interpretation and experiential tourism.
- Website presence that expresses the unification and authenticity of the thematic experiences and tourism opportunities.
- A travel planner application accessible over the Internet that helps visitors plan itineraries
- A robust network of contributors who can keep the website alive with content and a content management application that can help collect, manage and post the contributions
- Call center and fulfillment house to send information out through the mail to people who request it, and to support direct mail marketing, nationally and internationally
- Commitments from lodging and restaurant providers to support an aggressive FAM (FAMiliarization) tour program for journalists, editors, and writers

To meet the goals of establishing LTLP as a national and international destination for tourism, the following benchmarks for a twenty-year program have been defined:

- Five Year (2005-2009) – expand from a Four to a Five Month Tourism Season
- Six to Ten Years (2010-2014) – expand from a Five to a Six Month Season
- Eleven to Twenty Years (2014 – 2024) – expand from a Six to an Eight Month Season

## **FIVE YEAR BENCHMARK:**

### **Initiate Historic Anniversary Campaigns**

Historic and cultural sites are important assets in the Lakes to Locks Passage region. The historic celebrations surrounding the French and Indian War 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary, 400<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Henry Hudson's and Samuel de Champlain's explorations of the Hudson River and Lake Champlain (2009), and the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Plattsburgh (2014) need to be promoted early, and often. Events that utilize the anniversaries can be used in media campaigns to build Lakes to Locks Passage identity and establish recognition of the region surrounding the anniversaries, thereby tipping the balance for people making a decision for where to go on vacation.

### **Establish the region as a destination for ACTIVE vacations**

The Baby Boomer/Empty Nester market will stay healthier and more active later in life -- and they are looking for vacations that allow them to EXPERIENCE the region. Develop theme-based travel experiences that link the historic, natural, cultural and recreational resources. The multi-modal approach to experiencing Lakes to Locks passage provides many opportunities for programs and events that link the byway themes and resources. Biking has already developed a market in the region, however walking, boating and other experiential-based tourism has been under-served.

## 2005-2007 Tasks:

### The French and Indian War 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

The French and Indian War 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary is a multi-state marketing opportunity to create and implement a comprehensive marketing program that will link the significant sites from the war along the Lakes to Locks Passage. The project will create a thematic French & Indian War Trail, interpret and market the theme through exhibits, audio tour, signage, brochure/map, website content, advertising, local media press campaign, staff and volunteer training and improvements to access of tourism information to heritage centers, sites, and regional transportation hubs along the byway. LTLP is currently working with the NYS 250<sup>th</sup> Commemoration French & Indian War Commission for event coordination, marketing and interpretation.

### Complete Brand Manual

A brand manual helps explain the brand, and describe uses that are appropriate for the brand and its representations such as logos, taglines, and the name itself. It dictates how the brand should be applied to everything from signage to the website. Elements of the manual include:

- Design standards guide that facilitates a consistent delivery of the brand identity and message
- Dedicated use of the brand in LTLP materials ranging from signage to brochure.
- Acceptable multi-color and one color applications of the logo, and details on acceptable and unacceptable usages
- Inclusion of the brand by others -- from lodging websites, attractions advertising (print and television) and town signage to collateral materials and other marketing applications

### Revamping the LTLP website

The LTLP website does not have to be complicated and filled with the latest technology, but it does need to be content rich, and it does need to improve the promotion of the thematic experiences and unique qualities of the communities. Develop the “Plan A Trip” application that attracts visitors and helps people find lodging, restaurants and attractions. The website needs to support visitors using web-based tools, and the two types of visitors are coming to the site -- people new to the region, and people with some experience here.

The Home Page needs to provide an overview of the region while promoting the unique thematic experiences and community qualities in a lively and engaging manner. The “Travel Planner” includes an information request form, decision support tools (like special events, a real time foliage report or five day weather forecast), and links to the appropriate county based Tourism Promotion Agency (TPA) or Chamber of Commerce for those who are looking for lodging and dining options. The site needs to provide information for people who want to familiarize themselves with the region. Narrative should be provided in story form, using suspense and humor as vehicles. Furthermore, it must reinforce the brand and take on a theme based on **Water, Journey and Discovery**.

Website components can include:

- Thematic connections of the natural, historical, recreational and cultural resources Lakes to Locks Passage.
- Current events, programs and activities that support the thematic experiences in the region for “things to do”
- Lakes to Locks Passage Waypoint Communities
- Folk Lore – tall and true stories from the region
- Lakes to Locks Passage as told by the boaters who know it best
- Visitor favorites on water and on land, submitted by visitors and locals

- Links to TPAs, Chambers, I Love NY and related sites such as the French & Indian War and Hudson/Champlain Commemorations.
- Virtual Tour – a visual tour of LTLP
- A LTLP Store selling LTLP items, local foods, arts & crafts, and other value added products.

### **Identify LTLP on the ground**

Visitors and locals will need to have LTLP defined for them geographically, over time becoming aware of the scope and boundaries of the region. To facilitate this awareness building, the *Lakes to Locks Passage Visitor Information and Interpretation Plan* defines the themes and methods to disseminate information to visitors. Navigational aids need to be implemented at strategic points:

1. LTLP route signage, Waypoint Community and Heritage Center identifiers.
2. Design and install banners, landscaping, pocket parks, visitor information and interpretation signs.
3. Develop partnerships with business community to share in identifying attractions and businesses as part of LTLP.
4. Conduct a study of Lakes to Locks Passage’s Waypoint Communities’ physical versus digital presence and identity, for tangible recommendations to implement. The recommendations will address the critical need to create a unified, cohesive, and accurate story of the Lakes to Locks Passage for the global audience of web users and potential byway travelers. Simply stated, the proposed project will create a *Digital Scenic Byway* to greatly enhance access to, awareness of, the authenticity of Lakes to Locks Passage that reflects the intrinsic qualities of the physical one.

### **Establish Community Heritage Centers**

The Community Heritage Centers (see *Lakes to Locks Passage Visitor Information and Interpretation Plan*) are one of the first physical stops people will make coming into the region. The Heritage Centers display and promote the entire region -- the history, artifacts, stories, culture, businesses, attractions, events, and arts. In order to fulfill the visitor’s expectation of LTLP as a destination, it will be necessary to develop the Heritage Centers as a “gateway” to the LTLP experience. LTLP Heritage Centers will go beyond information and offer visitors access to the community surrounding the Centers, tourism venues, and businesses. Identify Gateway and Waypoint Heritage Center sites and managing partners, develop plans for sustainable management of centers:

1. Create a highly effective suite of marketing tools designed to encourage visitors to expand their experiences and/or extend their visits -- LTLP resources and materials that people can take with them as they explore the region on their own.
2. Team up with industry and other partners to promote commerce and sustainability -- LTLP visitors with travel related businesses, attractions, “off the beaten path” destinations, and opportunities for shopping, dining, and recreation.
3. Develop a “Knowledge Base” -- travel counseling, marketing tool development, and the building of relationships with the private sector.

### **Establish Gateway Visitor Centers**

The LTLP Gateway Heritage Center is an opportunity to exhibit the unique features the sub-region, and tie it to the entire corridor. For example, the recently completed Lake George Village Visitor Center is an opportunity for promoting the entire LTLP with an emphasis on the Lake George region local communities, and their delivery of the historic, natural, cultural and recreational experiences of LTLP. Seasonal displays in Heritage Centers can rotate exhibits featuring thematic experiences that unify the region. Local attractions can loan materials for temporary exhibits. Display space can be sold to businesses and attractions in predetermined blocks of time to support the Visitor Center operations.

### **Waterway Capacity Study**

Before the region looks to build expand water-based tourism markets, the issue of infrastructure development must be addressed so that LTLP can fully realize the potential markets. A seamless connection for the boater between New York and Quebec would stimulate the cross-border boating

market. Demand for lodging, restaurants, retail, transportation and other tourism support services cannot outstrip supply, and each must be built at pace with the other.

Tasks of a Capacity Study include:

- Identify growth benchmarks to establish seasonal targets (lodging, dining, marina & boating facilities)
- Identify new related markets (Ice Fishing, Para-sailing, etc.)
- Identify infrastructure needs -- transportation, marina services, launches, maritime customs, broadband and technology, etc.
- Identify private investment opportunities

## **2007 – 2010 Projects:**

### **400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Henry Hudson's and Samuel Champlain's explorations of the Hudson River and Lake Champlain (2009),**

The 400<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Champlain and Hudson explorations of Lakes to Locks Passage is a multi-national marketing opportunity to create and implement a comprehensive marketing program that will link the communities along the Lakes to Locks Passage. The NYS Hudson-Fulton-Champlain Quadricentennial Commission is developing programs and events to commemorate the anniversary. Many infrastructure improvements, regional programs and events have been identified in Lakes to Locks Passage communities and the LTLP is working with the Commission to help implement the strategies and events.

### **Cross-border Collaborations**

Lakes to Locks Passage has entered into an agreement with the Conférence régionale des élus de la Montérégie Est (CRE) to develop a tourism partnership along the bi-national, interconnected waterway in Québec and New York, consisting of the Richelieu River, Lake Champlain, Lake George and Champlain Canal regions. The goals of the agreement include:

- Connect the historic, natural, recreational and cultural sites as the basis for marketing initiatives;
- Develop interpretative programming to attract visitors and educate a wide public;
- Develop events that can attract national and international audiences and commemorate historic anniversaries;
- Elevate the visibility and significance of the shared heritage by creating a collaborative marketing program.

To this end, collaborative actions need to be defined and initiated, as the international aspect of the waterway is the future marketing "catalyst" for Lakes to Locks Passage. Actions for infrastructure improvements and marketing initiatives are necessary to build identity and capacity.

### **Multi-modal Self –guided Tours**

A multi-year project to create audio self-guided tours of the region will create a powerful marketing tool for LTLP. The Blueway Guides and Itineraries provide multi-modal connections between water and land. The region has many great storytellers, actors, narrators, and radio personalities to tell the Lakes to Locks Passage story to millions of visitors. The creation of a series of CDs for the traveler utilizing the *Lakes to Locks Passage Visitor Information and Interpretive Plan* theme and storylines will form the basis of these thematic tours. LTLP is currently working on an audio guide to the Lake Champlain region, additional thematic and sub-regional audio guides are in development.

Travelling and GPS devices go hand in hand these days, and the development of theme-based maps with GPS coordinates would be a big attraction. The theme-based trails, locations of attractions and "LTLP secrets" could all be geo-coded and made available to LTLP visitors. As interactive features on

the website are implemented, and visitors are able to post their favorite places within LTLP, GPS coordinates will help others find and enjoy those same popular places, especially those that are "off the beaten track."

### **Certification Program for Tourism Partners**

LTLP will build a series of training programs, primarily on hospitality and storytelling, and develop a schedule of ongoing education for the staff and community partners. LTLP will coordinate with TPAs, Chambers and other organizations to bring information and other resources to the Heritage Centers, and develop training programs ensure continuity in the event of staff and volunteer turnover. Training includes:

1. The marketing purposes of the work done by staff members -- the value of exceeding the expectations of the visitor, the power of storytelling, and the importance of customized fulfillment.
2. Hospitality training, followed by some tools that help staff members profile visitors and adapt themselves to the visitor's perspective.
3. Education on the region, with visits to the sites and attractions for hands on training.
4. Specialized training with modules on storytelling, travel counseling, use of the Internet/kiosks.
5. Training materials will be available to staff (in binders and on video) to facilitate self directed training when their schedules permit.

### **LTLP Ambassadors**

In most cases, LTLP Heritage Centers will be existing local attractions that have an established base of volunteers with a commitment to the community, and an ability to provide "authenticity" to the visitor experience through storytelling. These "Real People" have a special affinity for the area, and can serve as "ambassadors." The ambassadors help with a wide range of activities, from staffing heritage centers to setting up and running events. LTLP needs to assist Heritage centers develop a strategy to recruit and retain LTLP Ambassadors.

### **2010 – 2014 Projects:**

#### **200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the War of 1812 and Battle of Plattsburgh (2014)**

200<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the War of 1812 and the Battle of Plattsburgh (2014) is a multi-state marketing opportunity to create and implement a comprehensive marketing program that will link the communities along the Lakes to Locks Passage. Many infrastructure improvements, regional programs and events have been identified in the local waterfront revitalization plans. Lakes to Locks Passage can work to help implement the strategies, events needs to be promoted early, and often.

### **LTLP Products**

All sorts of LTLP "products" need to be created and made available through the heritage centers and the website. These products not only provide an income stream to the organization, they are also a critical component to establishing the LTLP identity.

### **Marketing to Boaters**

As noted above, the boater market has been identified as the largest "growth area" for tourism promotion of the entire LTLP region. The interconnected waterway is a perfect venue, as it not only provides a terrific destination, travel to the destination is part of the attraction. The market needs to address the interests and needs of those who will boat to the region, as well as those who will rent boats once they arrive in LTLP. Tactics and tools to develop the market include:

1. Public Relations – the main tool for reaching the boating public must be a concerted public relations effort, professional services will be needed to assist LTLP with the PR effort.
2. Press Releases -- frequent enough to be newsworthy and become familiar to the recipient, but not so frequent as to inundate the media. These need to be provided in a variety of formats, including email, CD-ROM and Video News Releases (VNRs).



3. Press Packet -- the packaging of the release and any other materials destined for a writer's desk is critical. four-color folders printed inside and out, with plenty of room for support materials and a CD-ROM case, cover and envelope that showcases the region and compels the recipient to open it. It is recommended that three seasonal versions be created, along with a general LTLP version that is multi-seasonal.

### **Special Promotions**

The last gap in LTLP marketing is the one between public relations and advertising. Advertising is easy to target and predictable, but is the most expensive marketing you can do. Public relations is far more cost effective, but it is unpredictable, and your control over the audience is marginal, especially if stories are syndicated. Special promotions fill the gap with cost effective marketing efforts that are also targetable and predictable – the best of both worlds.

1. The PassagePort™ -- entitles holders to discounts, special offers and added value offers. While the concept could be as simple as a coupon booklet, the ideal vehicle is a swipe-card that helps LTLP track usage across the region. The swipe card comes with a special website URL that has the most recently updated list of offers for download.
2. “Keep On Driving” -- a radio promotion that runs on one station per market at little or no media cost. It requires the passive participation of both lodging providers and consumer products manufacturers in return for promotional mentions. The value of this promotion, running on the right stations and in the right markets is enormous, and the cost to LTLP is minimal once the contacts have been made and the promotion set up. As part of the radio promotion, the “on air personality” will mention and describe the lodging properties and the amenities included in the package, including restaurants, events, attractions, and recreation.
3. LTLP Boater/Auto Decals -- As motorists and boaters complete a theme-based trail they receive a decal, a complete set earns travellers special privileges at marinas, restaurants, and other LTLP businesses. Travellers would utilize a web-based log-book to certify completion of each trail by noting landmarks along each with their GPS coordinates, and making log entries about the landmark they chose. Over time, this will give LTLP a wealth of information about the habits and behaviors of travellers, helping fine tune the lure piece and other materials directed at the visitor.