River Crossing **Heritage Interpretive Plan**

Edmonton

Thematic Framework Validation

What We Heard Report - November 2016

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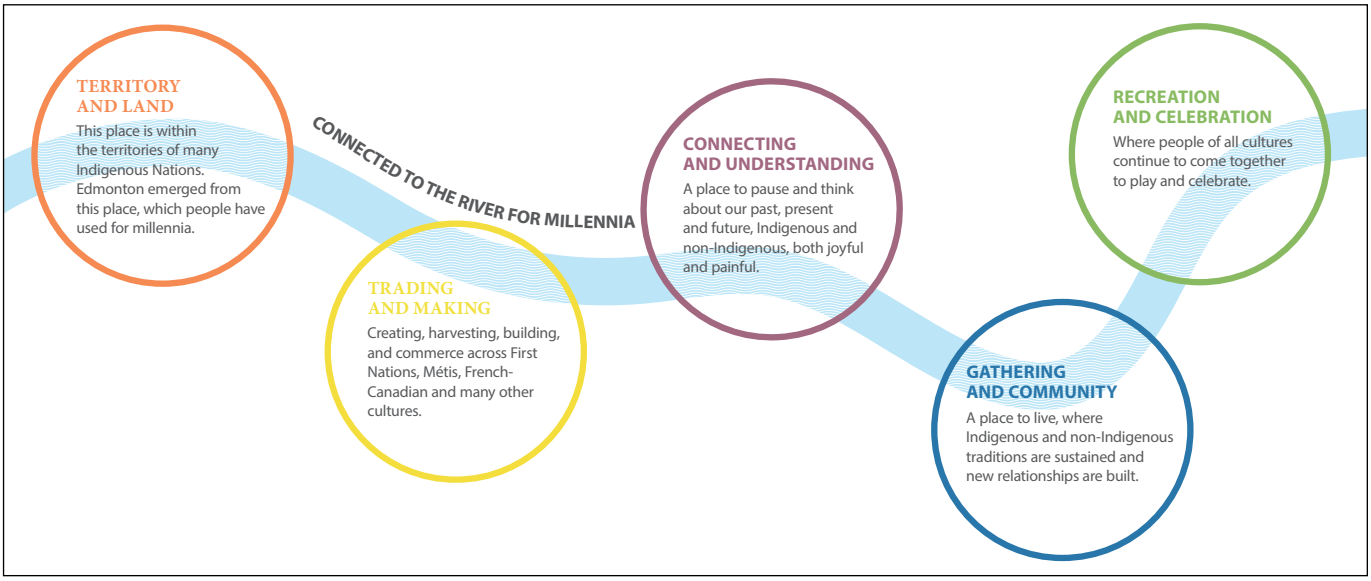
In November 2016, the River Crossing project team held a series of Validation Workshops and a Public Open House to validate the draft thematic framework for the Heritage Interpretive Plan. The thematic framework is central to the Heritage Interpretive Plan and provides a structure to organize the many stories and topics that, together, tell us why the River Crossing area is important.

The draft thematic framework was developed based on the results of preliminary background research as well as previous engagement, including the September Visioning Workshop, workshops with First Nations and Métis communities, and meetings with other researchers and heritage organizations.



Draft thematic framework.

During the workshops and open house, the project team presented the draft thematic framework and engaged participants in conversations about the draft framework as a whole and individual themes. These discussions involved a sorting and grouping activity to test the appropriateness and usefulness of the themes using a variety of stories and topics that had been shared during previous engagement with the public, Indigenous communities and related organizations and other stakeholders.

This What We Heard report summarizes participants' comments and discussions from the workshops and open house.

Overall Impressions

To some, the thematic framework seemed at first glance to be rather vague and generic. However, after discussing and testing the themes, participants largely agreed that the draft thematic framework provided a useful structure for organizing stories associated with different aspects of the history of the River Crossing, including its Indigenous and settler heritage, as well as its history as a fur trade post, active community, recreational area and industrial precinct.

Some aspects that participants felt needed to be addressed or elevated in the thematic framework were:

- Perspectives of women, children and families
- Perspectives on the everyday experiences, not just notable historical events or joyful and painful events
- Ideas of learning and communicating
- Use of the terms Indigenous and non-Indigenous
- The geological and natural history of the area
- Treaty 6
- History of progress and development
- The Legislature
- Flow of people and activities to and from the area from Strathcona and downtown
- St. Joachim church in Fort Edmonton

After testing the themes, participants talked about the sequencing of the themes and noted a large amount of overlap between the "Gathering and Community" theme and almost all the other themes.

Detailed feedback on components of the thematic framework

After a general discussion, the individual components of the framework were looked at in more detail. What follows is a summary of the discussion and comments.

The River

In the draft thematic framework, the North Saskatchewan River was identified as an important actor in the history of the River Crossing area and as a motif that connected to each theme. Participants agreed that the river was central to the story and saw value in elevating the river in all the themes and representing it visually. Participants noted the river's connection to land, its importance to Indigenous culture, its role in providing resources and shaping the landscape, and its historic role in transportation that connected the Rossdale flats to other places. The idea of crossing the river was also identified as important. Some participants thought the river should be its own theme.

Territory and Land

The Territory and Land theme was thought to nicely sum up the discussion from the visioning workshop in September and to recognize First Nations and Métis people.

Suggestions of stories/topics to be told through this theme include:

- Edmonton as a factor in opening up the west to settlement.
- Agriculture and early crops that were harvested for sustenance.
- River as the border between Cree and Blackfoot, between Edmonton and Strathcona.
- Different First Nations used the area. Who were they?
- What was the area like before the presence of Indigenous people?
- History of First Nations in the area.

Draft theme description for the "Territory and Land" theme.

Trading and Making

The Trading and Making theme was seen as essential to understanding the area. There was a lot of discussion around the term "Making", and most participants were in favour of using "Making" because it captures aspects of the fur trade and industrial activity, as well as domestic work (e.g., harvesting, sewing, cooking, setting up camp), creating kinship ties and building relationships. Participants proposed changing the theme to "Making and Trading" to better reflect the sequence in which these activities are often conducted.

Suggestions of stories/topics to be told through this theme include:

- Indigenous trade networks
- Horse-trading up through Mexico
- Impacts of the fur trade, commerce and the construction of the Legislature on Indigenous communities
- The cemetery associated with the fort
- Ceremony, religious rites and burials among First Nations and Métis people
- Smallpox epidemics resulting from trade
- Agricultural activities
- The flats/Rossdale as a business and commerce incubator
- The importance of bison and beaver
- The fort as a transportation hub for other forts
- The fort's meat haul vs. its pelt haul
- Deforestation of the area due to logging for building and fuel
- Changes to the landscape
- Building the ballpark

Draft theme description for the "Trading and Making" theme.

Draft theme description for the "Gathering and Community" theme.

Gathering and Community

Feedback on the "Gathering and Community" theme was mixed. Some people felt the theme does not tell a strong story. Other participants said it is useful for talking about the history of gathering at the site by Indigenous people; however, the theme description should emphasize the cultural and spiritual aspects of gathering more clearly, not just the social aspects. Some participants focused on the existing Rossdale neighbourhood, stating that the theme was necessary to recognize the existing neighbourhood as an active and engaged community. People also said that the theme could set the stage for future community development in the area as well as events.

Suggestions of stories/topics to be told through this theme include:

- Reasons behind First Nations gathering at the site
- Family and kinship
- Trails that connected this place to other places
- Dances
- Burials
- Spirituality tied to Indigenous ceremonies and gatherings
- Edmonton as a meeting place for Métis bison hunters
- Spiritual importance of the area
- Personal and family connections to the area
- The drivers behind settlement patterns in Edmonton and in Rossdale (e.g., HBC reserve lands, MacDougall and Groat properties)

Draft theme description for the "Recreation and Celebration" theme.

Recreation and Celebration

Response to this theme was highly divided. Some people felt that "Recreation and Celebration" is at odds with the painful, sacred and sensitive history of the area, and that it could open the door to large celebrations and events that would not be appropriate for the area. Others felt that the recreation history is the least interesting aspect of the area's heritage. On the other hand, some participants told us that the theme is essential to understanding many Edmontonian's attachment to the area (i.e., through the river valley parks or baseball) and that it could draw visitors unfamiliar with history to the area.

Several participants said that the recreation aspect could fit under other themes and wondered whether this theme was at all necessary. Several people proposed changes to wording in the theme description, such as changing "celebrating" to "honouring", or "play" to "enjoy".

Suggestions of stories/topics to be told through this theme include:

- Fireworks on Canada Day
- Frederick Todd report and the river valley park system
- Diamond Park
- Contemporary celebration
- Forms of play and celebration specific to different cultures
- Pow wows
- River valley as a unique place, conservation corridor and a place at risk

Connecting and Understanding

Overwhelming response to this theme was that it was the most important theme in the framework, especially in the context of Truth and Reconciliation, and that the stories attached to this theme were critical to understanding Rossdale and Edmonton. We heard that interpretation will not be successful if the painful past is not acknowledged and we also heard that there is a need to recognize that Indigenous cultures are alive and well and evolving and this should be reflected in the theme, along with aspirations for the future. A few participants suggested expanding the focus from cultural aspects and Indigenous/non-Indigenous relations to natural aspects and environmental stewardship or using "Connecting and Understanding" as a lens to look at all the other themes.

Some participants noted that the theme name is too vague or does not quite capture the important stories associated with the theme, suggesting alternative wording such as "sharing", "respecting" and "honouring".

Suggestions of stories/topics to be told through this theme include:

- The complex and fraught impacts of the fur trade and colonialism
- Evolving traditions
- The history of the cemetery
- Indigenous cultures today and their resilience
- Reasons why Indigenous people gathered at the site
- Distinct and rich cultures of different First Nations and Métis communities (languages, religions, spirituality, symbols, histories)
- The contributions of First Nations and Métis communities to Edmonton

Draft theme description for the "Connecting and Understanding" theme.

Ideas for interpretation

During the workshop and open house, we asked people to contribute ideas for ways the various themes, stories and topics might be interpreted in the future. Suggestions from participants varied in terms of specificity, but generally related to three main categories: programming, built interventions or technology-based media. Sometimes the ideas combined several categories.

Programming	• Activities related to water (e.g., canoe trips, river boat tours, races) • Events related to music, culture and food • Festivities • Ceremonies • Pow wows • Cultural demonstrations led by Indigenous people • Short films • Tours led by Indigenous people • Storytelling in different languages • Experiential learning • Activities that recreate a feeling of community • Fiddle music • Self-guided tour of the Rossdale Generating Station • Foraging urban forests and plants
Built	• Naming to reflect history and Indigenous culture • Audio recordings of stories and soundscapes to tell about the past • Public art, sculpture and art walks • Space to host events • Spaces where interpretation can evolve organically • Gathering spaces • Representations of First Nation culture (e.g., tipis, sweat lodges) • Representations of Métis culture (e.g., trappers' tents, york boats, Red River carts) • Marks/representations of historical figures (e.g., a statue of Louis Riel, footprints of Wilfrid Laurier) • Boat dock on the river alluding to the fur trade • Interpretive panels and plaques • Bike rentals • Horseback riding trails • Show Paul Kane painting • Signage acknowledging the significance of this place • Lighting of historical architecture • Landscape
Technology-based Media	• Mobile applications • Online platforms • Podcasts and brief audio stories • Augmented reality • Audio guides

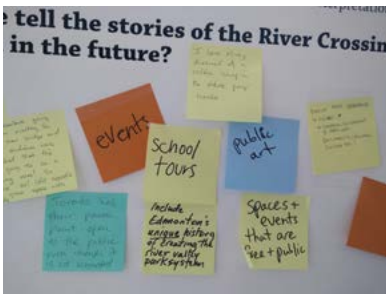
Goals and principles for interpretation

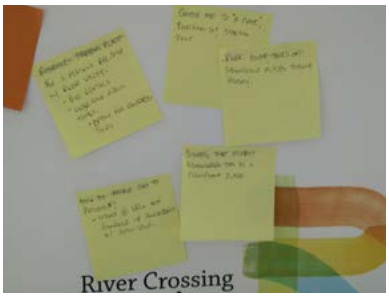
Participants provided thoughtful advice for what to consider when developing interpretation for the area in the future. There was some tension surrounding the degree to which interpretation should educate future visitors on specific topics versus sparking visitor curiosity and inspiring them to reflect and seek out information. As a whole, these considerations start to suggest some principles and goals for interpretation. We heard that interpretation should:

- Get specific stories across and inform people about the themes
- Be evocative, attention-grabbing, dynamic and intriguing
- Spark curiosity and reflection
- Be based on correct facts
- Be barrier-free at every level (cost, mobility, language, culture, technology)
- Allow people and communities to tell stories in their own voices
- Include something for everyone
- Focus on placemaking
- Foster relationships between people and communities, and between people and the river valley
- Be supported by spaces that encourage mingling and evolve organically over time
- Be used to create spaces to be explored
- Consider language carefully
- Offer a multi-sensorial experience
- Include spaces for First Nations and Métis people to gather
- Link stories to existing buildings (e.g., Rossdale Generating Station, Legislature)
- Incorporate symbols in the landscape
- Be layered and mix different types of media, yet care should be taken to avoid over-interpreting or cluttering the area with too much interpretation
- Avoid competing with other interpretive sites in the city (e.g., Fort Edmonton Park)
- Strive for authenticity and continuity with the past, yet avoid re-creation
- Consider views and use of public space so as not to obstruct people's enjoyment of them
- Consider context
- Make use of technology to some extent, but include interpretive elements that do not rely on technology
- Build continuity with the past through uses
- Occur before redevelopment occurs (e.g., opening the Rossdale Generating Station to the public before it is formally repurposed)
- Include passive, quiet and reflective engagement with the themes in peaceful places, such as by the river

Theme testing activity using sample stories.

Examples of ideas shared during the Open House.





Questions about data collection

Participants had questions related to who we had been engaging as part of data collection. Some people requested a list of documents that were consulted.

Comments about future change

Participants also provided comments related to changes in the River Crossing area. Some people talked about how the "Gathering and Community" and "Recreation and Celebration" themes could impact future development by encouraging certain types of development such as residences, cafes, restaurants and other facilities. Some people viewed these impacts negatively and others positively.

Others expressed general concerns about redevelopment in the area related to road infrastructure, fragmentation of green space, equitable access to services in the area and trail closures during construction.

Thank You

The project team wishes to thank everyone who has been involved to date and all those who contributed their feedback on the draft thematic framework.

Next Steps

Input from the validation workshops and public open house will help revise the themes and build out the draft plan.