



GATEWAY SIGNAGE STUDY

NOVEMBER 2024




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The background is a solid green color. A thin, horizontal yellow line runs across the top. In the bottom-left corner, there are white geometric shapes: a large triangle pointing towards the center and a smaller, lighter green triangle overlapping it.

The Municipality of North Cowichan sits on the traditional, unceded territories of the Quw'utsun First Nation, which includes the Cowichan Tribes, the Halalt First Nation, the Lyackson First Nation, the Penelakut Tribe, and the Stz'uminus First Nation. The Municipality also sits on the traditional, unceded territory of the Snuneymuxw First Nation.

SECTION 1: OVERVIEW & CONTEXT

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The Municipality of North Cowichan Gateway Signage Study aims to identify locations and potential designs that could be considered for gateway signs that aim to recognize and celebrate the full extents of the varied and expansive North Cowichan community. It is an opportunity to improve the visual character of the community with clear, consistent markers that announce arrival to the municipality.

The study is an initial step focused specifically on gateway signs – those that mark the key points of arrival into North Cowichan.

PURPOSE

- Improve the visibility of North Cowichan’s geographic boundaries
- Distinguish the municipality from surrounding communities
- Update the visual look of gateway signage, including improved accessibility and legibility and an attractive character that reflects North Cowichan
- Set the stage for potential further steps to improve consistency of signage within the municipality

OUTCOMES

- Recommend locations for future gateway signs
- Outline initial design ideas and examples for gateways
- Develop preliminary opinion of probable costs to support planning, budgeting, and phasing
- Recommend next steps

PROCESS

Figure 1 illustrates the focus of the Gateway Signage Study and potential future steps.

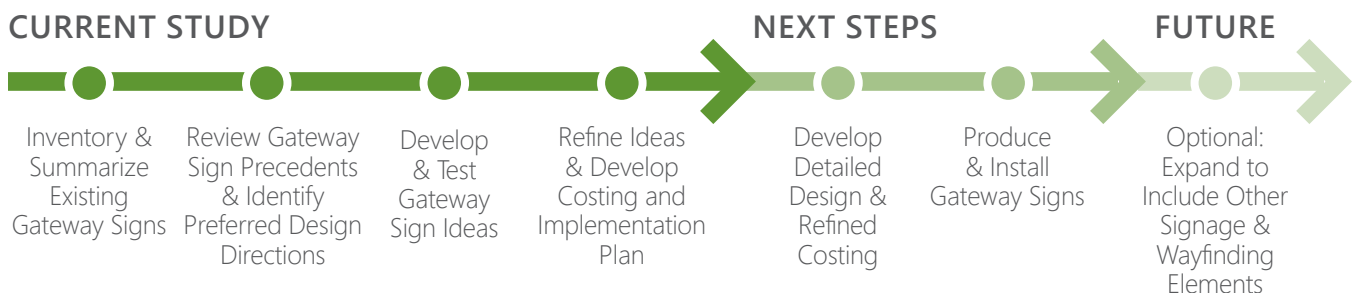


Figure 1: Process Diagram



View looking north over Quamichan Lake. The varied landscapes, communities, and character of North Cowichan, combined with its expansive boundaries create challenges for distinguishing the municipal borders.

1.2 CURRENT STATE

Existing gateway signs in North Cowichan vary, with a range of sizes, materials, and types. In most cases, gateway signage is minimal. Currently, the Municipality of North Cowichan does not have signage guidelines or comprehensive sign branding.

Spanning over 195 square kilometers and with over 32,000 residents, North Cowichan is a unique municipality, blending rural and urban components. Unlike more urban municipalities, North Cowichan is often referred to as a “community of communities” meaning it encompasses several distinct villages including Chemainus, Crofton, Maple Bay, South End Centre/University Village, Berkley’s Corner, Quamichan Lake Area and the developing Bell McKinnon area, as well as the semi-rural and rural lands that surround them. Each unique area has its own history and values, as well as natural and built environments that define its character; yet all the areas come together to create a cohesive, striking municipality known for its tapestry of forests, rivers, lakes, coastline, and farmland.

This composition can make it more challenging for both residents and visitors to identify the extents of the municipality and distinguish it from neighbouring areas.

A particular challenge for North Cowichan is the indistinct boundary between the South End Centre/University Village area of North Cowichan and the northern edge of the City of Duncan. Both communities are urban neighbourhoods, with very little notable change in community composition when transitioning from one community to the next. This is compounded by existing City of Duncan signage located within the Municipality of North Cowichan.



Existing gateway sign marker at the Highway 1 North Gateway into North Cowichan.



Existing Municipal Hall sign.



Existing City of Duncan sign within the North Cowichan municipal boundary.

1.3 EXISTING GATEWAY SIGNS

The Gateway Signage Study began with an exploration of existing signs and boundaries, and an analysis of how people are moving when they pass through the thresholds – modes of travel, speeds, and likely experiences.

In North Cowichan, gateway experiences include:

■ Primary Gateways

These are the community's busiest gateways, situated along provincial highways, including Highway 1 (north and south) and Highway 18 (west). Currently these thresholds are marked by medium-size metal sign with the North Cowichan logo.

■ Municipal Hall Sign

A landmark custom sign located in front of North Cowichan's Municipal Hall acts as a central identifier within the community. This large, custom sign, while dated, is characteristic of gateway signage.

■ Custom Village Signs

Some village centres have custom designed signs, typically with unique styles that highlight an area's local character.

■ City of Duncan Gateway Signs

The City of Duncan has a number of gateway signs adjacent to North Cowichan.

● Secondary Gateways

In addition to the highways, travelers cross thresholds into North Cowichan along several arterial and collector roads. Secondary gateways with significant activity include Government Street and Canada Avenue (Duncan), Cowichan Lake Road (CVRD), and Chemainus Road (CVRD), though there are many other roadways and trails that traverse boundaries. Currently some, though not all, of these thresholds are marked with the same medium- or small-size metal signs as the highway gateways.

● Village Marker

Within the municipality, several villages have markers that identify the extents of the more urban community core. These are typically the small-size metal North Cowichan sign with the village name added above.

Table 1 and Map A on the following pages provide a snapshot (Fall 2024) of relevant signs that were reviewed during the study.

Table 1: Existing Signage Snapshot

MAP #	TYPE	LOCATIONS	NOTES	PHOTO
A	Primary Gateway (North)	Hwy 1, south of Radford Rd	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Medium-size metal sign with MNC logo » Water restrictions sign incorporated beneath 	
B	Primary Gateway (West)	Hwy 18, west of Mina Dr	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Medium-size metal sign with MNC logo » Water restrictions sign incorporated beneath 	
C	Primary Gateway (South)	Hwy 1, south of Alexander St in street boulevard	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Small-size metal sign with MNC logo » Water restrictions sign incorporated beneath 	
D	Municipal Hall Sign	Hwy 1 at Morton Way	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Older custom wood sign on concrete plinth » Graphic painted onto round from felled tree » Lighting 	
E	Custom Village Sign	Chemainus, Cypress Street/ Waterwheel Square	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Large custom wood carved sign under roof structure » Village name and MNC » Decorative lighting 	
F	Custom Village Sign	Crofton, Crofton Road/Chaplin Street intersection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Painted wood sign » Messaging: 'Welcome to Crofton' » Ornamental plants, split rail fence and small trees framing the sign 	

MAP #	TYPE	LOCATIONS	NOTES	PHOTO
G	Custom Village Sign	Maple Bay, Herd Road, north of Spriggett St	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Wood sign with village name and painted graphic » Ornamental plants, lawn, and boulders surrounding sign 	
H	Duncan Gateway	Hwy 1, south side of Silver Bridge	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Custom wood sign with City name, tagline, and artwork on concrete and rock plinth 	
I	Duncan Gateway	Hwy 1, north of Canada Ave corner, (~2 km into North Cowichan boundary)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Custom wood sign with City name, tagline, and artwork on concrete and rock plinth 	
J	Duncan Gateway	Entry into Cowichan Lake Rd / Gibbins Rd / Government St roundabout	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Newer custom metal sign with City name, logo, tag line, artwork, and wayfinding on concrete plinth 	
●	Secondary Gateway	Chemainus Rd* Victoria Rd* Canada Ave Cowichan Lake Rd Lakes Rd <i>* Also a Village Marker</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Medium- or small-size metal sign with MNC logo » Some have water restrictions and/or speed limit signs incorporated beneath 	 
●	Village Marker	Chemainus Crofton Maple Bay Westholme	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Small metal sign with MNC logo and village name » Some have speed limit signs incorporated beneath 	

MAP A: EXISTING SIGN LOCATIONS





SECTION 2: FUTURE SIGNAGE

2.1 WHY UPDATE GATEWAY SIGNS?

While existing gateway signs in North Cowichan serve the practical purpose of marking community boundaries, they fail to capitalize on other benefits that updated gateway signs can provide. Gateway signs provide a number of benefits to communities.

SET THE TONE

Gateway signage provides a first impression when entering a community. These signs can allow a glimpse into the area's character and welcome people to experience the area.

COMMUNITY PRIDE

When done well, gateway signage signals community pride – wanting people to know when they have entered the community and the experience to expect. Gateway signage that is cohesive with other corporate branding provides a sense of unity across the community that is easily identifiable by resident and visitor alike.

SUPPORT THE ECONOMY

Understanding community boundaries can help support businesses and invite them to consider North Cowichan for their home. Helping people understand the extents of a community and what it offers within its boundaries can support existing businesses and invite new ones.

WAYFINDING

Whether it is a destination visit, a drive home from work, or passing through, gateway signage acts as a landmark for travelers on their journey. It equips residents and visitors with easy to read information that helps them explore the local area. Effective gateways are important as residents and visitors experience arrival into North Cowichan through different entry points. It can set the basis for future wayfinding development throughout the community.

2.2 PRECEDENT REVIEW

A precedent review of community gateway signage from across BC, Canada, and beyond was completed to identify themes and elements that may warrant consideration in North Cowichan gateway signage. A wide range of signs were reviewed and four common qualities were identified as illustrated in the precedents below.

SIMPLICITY

A limited palette of materials with a focus on gateway identification.



LEGIBILITY

Contrasting materials, lighting, and scale that is easy to read and understand at a glance.



DIMENSIONALITY

Layering of materials and three-dimensional elements to provide depth and animation.



PERMANENCE

Use of materials, finishes, and lighting that communicate a high quality and long-lasting character.



2.3 GUIDING PRINCIPLES

Following from the precedent review, the following guiding principles were identified.

VISIBLE & ACCESSIBLE

- Use wording and graphics that are clear and legible
- Select sign size, height, and level of information to be visible when traveling in a vehicle at highway speeds
- Include lighting and contrasting colours to allow visibility in both day and night conditions
- Consider complementary elements like banners to extend the gateway presence

LONG LASTING

- Select materials that will be durable in coastal conditions
- Use components and modular construction techniques so signs can be added or updated over time
- Use design elements and styles that are timeless, avoiding overly trendy approaches that could become dated
- Consider how gateway sign elements could be building blocks for future signage and wayfinding elements that follow a consistent design language

ATTRACTIVE & RELATABLE

- Prominently feature the Municipality of North Cowichan logo
- Keep information and styles simple, presenting information in a clear and logical manner
- Carefully consider how signs are integrated and connected with surrounding site conditions
- Seek opportunities to incorporate Indigenous language or art features to promote awareness of local Indigenous communities

2.4 GATEWAY SIGNAGE ELEMENTS

LOGO & COLOURS

North Cowichan has a diversity of places within its boundaries. Each village and rural area has unique characteristics, making it challenging to define a singular character or style that suits all corners of the municipality. To that end, gateway sign directions focus on simple elements that emphasize the municipality's established logo and colour palette, supporting a clear, consistent, and recognizable approach.

The Municipality of North Cowichan has an existing suite of identifiers, including a logo and brand colours. These elements represent the location and place. Figure 2 below summarizes the key elements and colours of the North Cowichan identity.

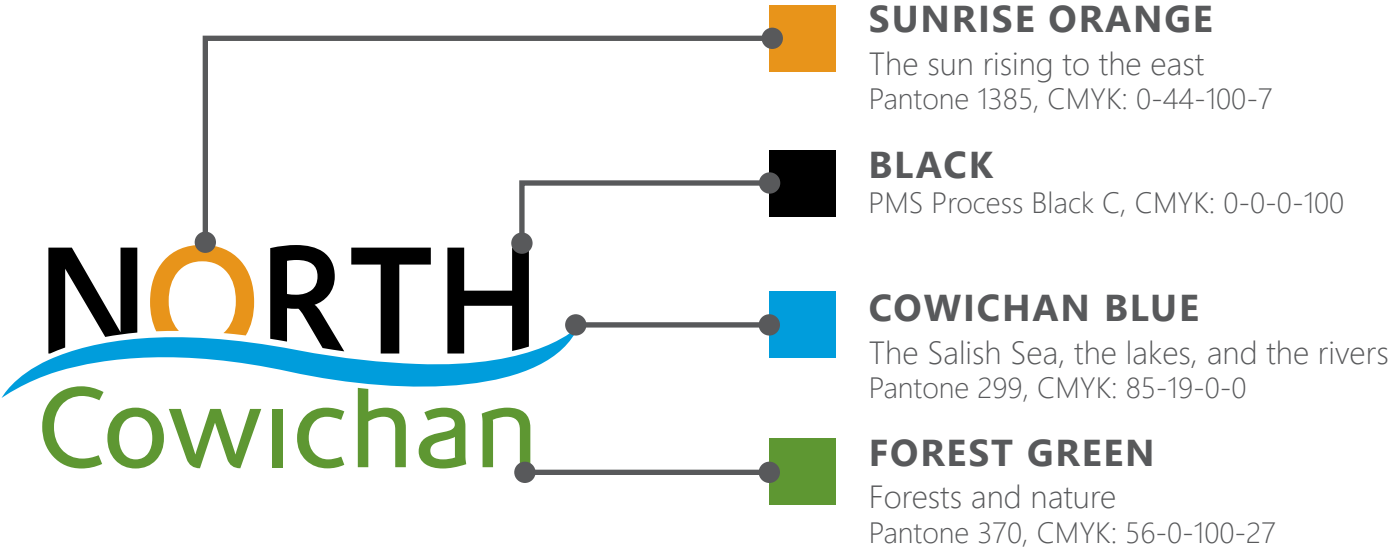


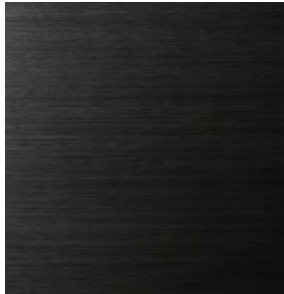
Figure 2: North Cowichan Municipal Logo & Colours

MATERIALS

A focused palette of materials is recommended with a focus on durable and warm materials that integrate well into the landscapes of North Cowichan.

Metal - Backgrounds & Lettering

Aluminum, stainless steel, or corten steel elements to provide durable, modern, and high quality finish. Options for laser cut patterns and dimensional lettering.



Black brushed aluminum



Corten steel



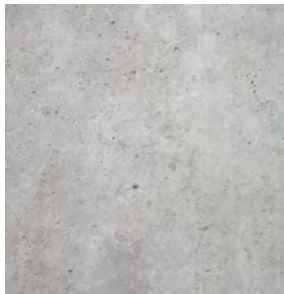
Laser-cut aluminum art pattern



Corten laser-cut steel backdrop with dimensional metal lettering

Concrete - Base/Plinth

Solid concrete base to ground sign and provide long-term stability.



Concrete



Concrete plinth



Concrete plinth

Wood - Optional Accents

Optional wood accents with natural stain and clear top coat finish to strengthen connection to the forest character of North Cowichan.



Douglas-fir timber



Timber supporting posts



Large glu-lam wood framing posts

Lighting

Warm up-lighting to cast light over key signage elements and/or internal lighting to bring focus to lettering and select elements.



Front up-lighting



LED face-lit lettering



Internal LED lighting

2.5 GATEWAY SIGN CONCEPT OPTIONS

OPTIONS OVERVIEW

The following pages summarize initial concept ideas for gateway signs in North Cowichan. These designs are concepts intended for planning only and require further design development which may include detailed sign design, lighting design/electrical engineering, structural engineering, and/or landscape design prior to fabrication and installation.

Three sign options are identified:

- **SIGN 1: Gateway Sign Concept Idea A** - One option for a free-standing podium sign at highway entrances and municipal hall.
- **SIGN 2: Gateway Sign Concept Idea B** - A second option for a free-standing podium sign at highway entrances and municipal hall.
- **SIGN 3: Gateway Overpass Sign** - Entry identification signage incorporated into the proposed North Cowichan Active Transportation Overpass.

Sign styles and locations would be confirmed with the Municipality of North Cowichan. Sign placement in highway rights-of-way may require coordination with the Ministry of Transportation & Infrastructure. Site survey may be required in some locations to confirm property lines, ownership, and setbacks.

Budget range estimates for signs types are included for planning purposes. Costs for signs at conceptual design stage are provided as an allowance based on similar precedents. Updated cost estimating to be completed once final detailed design, material selection, lighting, and engineering are confirmed. All budget figures are estimates in 2024 dollars based on historical cost data. Actual costs can vary depending on industry labour, schedule, and availability. Taxes are not included.

SIGN 1: GATEWAY SIGN CONCEPT IDEA A

Description: Podium sign with a corten steel or copper-finish aluminum panel with custom laser cut art feature framed in heavy timber and mounted on a clean concrete base. Dimensional lettering for the MNC logo in brushed aluminum finish. Front lit illumination cast from updated in-ground lights.

PRELIMINARY IDEA SKETCH



Inspiration Precedent



Timber Posts & Beam - Large dimension timber Douglas-fir posts and beam framing sign

Small Lettering - Small metal brushed steel letters. Text: "MUNICIPALITY OF" (shown) or "WELCOME/MI NUW' ILUM"

Face Panel - Corten steel or copper-finish aluminum panel

MNC Logo - Brushed steel dimensional letters attached to face panel

Optional Art Panel - Laser cut pattern or custom art within lower section of face panel (design TBD)

Address - Black dimensional letters attached to plinth (Municipal Hall Location only)

Concrete Plinth - Angled concrete plinth, height as needed to elevate sign to viewing position

PRELIMINARY BUDGET ESTIMATE

Location A: Highway Entrances

Key Cost Assumptions: Single-sided design, new lighting connection, naturalized landscape

ITEM	ESTIMATE RANGE
Custom Sign - steel face with laser cut art, logo and lettering one side, timber frame and fastenings, concrete plinth/footing	\$33,000 - \$40,000
Design + Engineering - civil, structural, electrical, artist	\$21,000 - \$25,000
Lighting - new supply distribution, front-lit one side	\$7,000 - \$8,000
Site Development - site prep, installation, native shrub landscape (no irrigation), water restriction sign	\$21,000 - \$25,000
TOTAL	\$82,000 - \$98,000 / sign

Location B: Municipal Hall

Key Cost Assumptions: Two-sided design, existing lighting connection, manicured landscape, existing sign removed

ITEM	ESTIMATE RANGE
Custom Sign - steel face with laser cut art, logo and lettering both sides, timber frame and fastenings, concrete plinth/footing	\$42,000 - \$50,000
Design + Engineering - civil, structural, electrical, artist	\$21,000 - \$25,000
Lighting - existing supply updated, front-lit two sides	\$4,000 - \$5,000
Site Development - site prep, installation, manicured shrub and boulder landscape, irrigation	\$22,000 - \$27,000
TOTAL	\$89,000 - \$107,000 / sign

ILLUSTRATIVE VIEWS



Location A: Highway Entrances

- In front of forested backdrop on Hwy 1 and Hwy 18 entrances
- Single-sided
- Native planting / cobble landscape improvements
- Optional lighting (if electrical available)



Location B: Municipal Hall (Daylight)

- In location of existing Municipal Hall sign
- Double-sided
- Decorative planting/ boulder landscape surround



Location B: Municipal Hall (Evening)

- Front lit illumination cast from updated in-ground lights (similar to existing)

SIGN 2: GATEWAY SIGN CONCEPT IDEA B

Description: Podium sign with a black or dark-finish aluminum plate with angled top set into a concrete frame. Potential for a cast art in the concrete and welcome lettering attached. White acrylic logo lettering with blue Cowichan wave with a combination of internal LED lighting and front lit illumination cast from updated in-ground lights.

Inspiration Precedent



PRELIMINARY IDEA SKETCH



Face Panel - Hollow black aluminum inset panel set into concrete frame, top angled

Concrete frame - Smooth sandblast finish concrete frame, tops offset and angled to match face panel

MNC Logo - Metal dimensional MNC logo with acrylic fronts and internal LED lighting (white lettering with blue wave) attached to face panel

Welcome Lettering - Black metal dimensional lettering in English/Hul'q'umi'num

Concrete Plinth with Optional Art - Rectangular concrete plinth, height as needed to elevate sign to viewing position, option for cast pattern or custom art (design TBD)

PRELIMINARY BUDGET ESTIMATE

Location A: Highway Entrances

Key Cost Assumptions: Single-sided design, new lighting connection, naturalized landscape

ITEM	ESTIMATE RANGE
Custom Sign - aluminum face, logo and lettering one side, concrete frame and plinth with optional art casting in concrete	\$33,000 - \$39,000
Design + Engineering - civil, structural, electrical, artist	\$21,000 - \$25,000
Lighting - new supply distribution, combo internal LED lighting and front lighting	\$10,000 - \$12,000
Site Development - site prep, installation, native shrub landscape (no irrigation), water restriction sign	\$22,000 - \$26,000
TOTAL	\$86,000 - \$102,000 / sign

Location B: Municipal Hall

Key Cost Assumptions: Two-sided design, existing lighting connection, manicured landscape, existing sign removed

ITEM	ESTIMATE RANGE
Custom Sign - aluminum face, logo and lettering both sides, concrete frame and plinth with optional art casting in concrete	\$43,000 - \$52,000
Design + Engineering - civil, structural, electrical, artist	\$21,000 - \$25,000
Lighting - existing supply updated, combo internal LED lighting and front lighting	\$10,000 - \$12,000
Site Development - site prep, installation, manicured shrub and boulder landscape, irrigation	\$22,000 - \$27,000
TOTAL	\$96,000 - \$116,000 / sign

ILLUSTRATIVE VIEWS



Location A: Highway Entrances

- In front of forested backdrop on Hwy 1 and Hwy 18 entrances
- Single-sided
- Native planting / cobble landscape improvements
- Optional lighting (if electrical available)



Location B: Municipal Hall (Daylight)

- In location of existing Municipal Hall sign
- Double-sided
- Decorative planting/ boulder landscape surround



Location B: Municipal Hall (Evening)

- Potential for front lit illumination cast from updated in-ground lights (similar to existing) and/or internally lit lettering

SIGN 3: GATEWAY OVERPASS SIGN

Description: North Cowichan logo in acrylic, internally-lit LED lettering, extended horizontally across proposed North Cowichan Active Transportation Overpass.

MNC Logo - MNC logo stretched across centre of overpass with blue Cowichan wave. Large metal dimensional letters with acrylic face (white lettering, blue wave) and internal LED lighting. Letters attached to concrete overpass base. Attachments to be designed in coordination with overpass design

Inspiration Precedent



PRELIMINARY BUDGET ESTIMATE

Key Cost Assumptions: Integration into overpass design

ITEM	ESTIMATE RANGE
Custom Lettering - dimensional letters with acrylic face, attachments to overpass	\$52,000 - \$62,000
Design + Engineering - structural, electrical, coordination with overpass design	\$20,000 - \$24,000
Lighting - new supply distribution, LED internal lighting for letters	\$17,000 - \$20,000
TOTAL	\$113,000 - \$136,000 / sign

ILLUSTRATIVE VIEWS



Daytime

- Overpass design coordination to locate signage in center of overpass



Evening

- Internal LED lighting within lettering and wave

2.6 COMPLEMENTARY FEATURES

This study focuses on signage for main municipal gateways; however, through the course of the process, two additional gateway opportunities were identified as potential complements to main gateway signage. Design directions for these components are not included in this study, but opportunities are identified for future consideration.

MINOR MUNICIPAL GATEWAYS

A smaller-scale version of main gateway signs could be developed to enhance visibility of the municipal boundary along arterial and collector roadways. Sign design would be scaled to suit slower vehicle speeds (e.g., 50 km/hr to 80 km/hr) as well as pedestrian and cycling traffic.

GATEWAY BANNERS

A gateway banner program could complement gateway signage, enhancing recognition of North Cowichan along key corridors in more urban areas of the community.

2.7 PLACEMENT

Map B identifies candidate locations for new gateway signs, as well as select complementary features identified in Section 2.6 above.

MAIN MUNICIPAL GATEWAYS

A HWY 1 SOUTH GATEWAY (OVERPASS)

Sign attached to the northbound side of the proposed North Cowichan Active Transportation Overpass. Alternate location for podium sign would be Highway 1 southbound side.

B HWY 1 NORTH GATEWAY & HWY 18 WEST GATEWAY

Single-sided podium signs on highway edges, near locations of existing boundary signs. Forest background with minor grading and natural landscape improvements.

C MUNICIPAL HALL SIGN

Replacement of existing municipal hall sign. Two-sided design to be visible to both north- and south-bound traffic. Potential for improved landscaping.

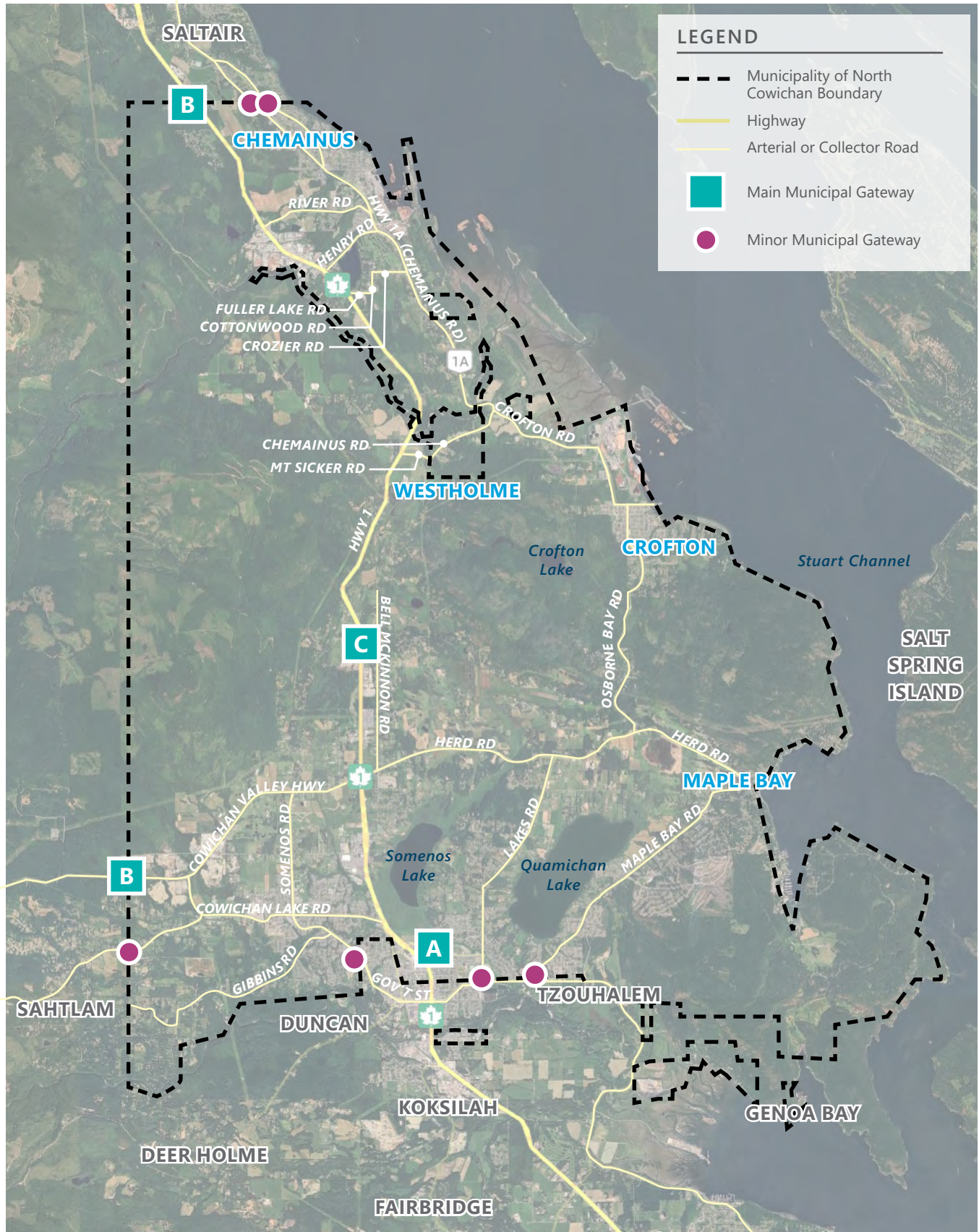
MINOR MUNICIPAL GATEWAYS

- » Roundabout at Cowichan Lake Rd/Gibbins Rd/Government St
- » Chemainus Rd, southbound. Potential to integrate/replace the standard municipal sign and custom "Chemainus Welcomes You" sign
- » Victoria Road, southbound
- » Lake Cowichan Road, westbound
- » Lakes Road, northbound
- » Maple Bay Road, northbound

GATEWAY BANNERS (not on map)

- » **Focal Area:** Highway 1 in the South End Centre/University Village area between the south border and Highway 18 intersection where light standards exist
- » **Future Areas:** Village centres/commercial areas across the municipality

MAP B: GATEWAY SIGN PLACEMENT



2.8 IMPLEMENTATION

Recommended next steps in implementing North Cowichan gateway signage include:

- Selection of preferred design directions and development of refined design and costing. This may include coordination with MOTI to confirm design and lighting requirements for signage in highway rights-of-way/overpass signage, development of specification drawings, detailed site plans for locating new signs, engineering design including electrical, civil, and structural design (as required), art commissioning, and updated costing details.
- Scheduling of high priority installations within annual municipal budgets.
- Installation of gateway signs at four locations:
 - » Highway 1 South Gateway (overpass sign)
 - » Highway 1 North Gateway
 - » Highway 18 West Gateway
 - » Municipal Hall
- Consideration for future complementary programs, including:
 - » An annual gateway banner program.
 - » Design and installation of minor gateway signs at arterial and collector roads that cross the North Cowichan boundary.
 - » Development of a complementary North Cowichan wayfinding strategy that builds on gateway signage elements to create a full family of sign types that could include: village identification signs, facility signs, parks signs, trails signs, map and information kiosks, directional markers, interpretive signs, and other signs that support comprehensive and consistent wayfinding throughout the municipality.

Table 2 summarizes potential actions, timelines, and budget allowances for consideration.

Table 2: Implementation Summary Table

#	ACTION	TIMELINE	BUDGET RANGE
1	Coordinate with the North Cowichan Active Transportation Overpass design team to confirm integration of a signage feature within the overpass (Sign 3). Advance design installation as part of the overpass design process.	Short	\$113,000 - \$136,000
2	Develop an annual banner program, along with a banner design for the first year to add gateway banners in select locations.	Short	\$8,000 - \$12,000
3	Identify preferred gateway design concept (Sign 1 or Sign 2) and develop detailed designs, including coordination with MOTI, site design and engineering, art components, and final costing.	Short	\$21,000 - \$25,000
4	Review the banner program and, if successful, consider expansions, and implement new banners with changing designs annually.	Short / Ongoing	\$10,000 - \$15,000/ year
5	Produce and install the Highway 1 North Gateway and Highway 18 West Gateway signs.	Medium	\$122,000 - \$154,000
6	Remove the existing North Cowichan Municipal Hall sign and produce and install a new gateway sign	Medium	\$68,000 - \$91,000
7	Develop a minor municipal gateway sign design that complements the major gateway signs to be placed at key border points and/or as markers to village boundaries.	Long	\$15,000 - \$25,000
8	Undertake minor municipal gateway sign installations as funding permits.	Long	\$25,000 - \$40,000 / sign
9	Consider developing an expanded North Cowichan wayfinding strategy.	Long	\$75,000 - \$95,000

MUNICIPALITY OF
NORTH
Cowichan