

Investing in Market Access for Alberta Business (2026)

Issue:

Recent shifts in international trade dynamics, including evolving U.S. trade policies that emphasize domestic priorities and transactional frameworks, and a measured diversification of Canada's trade relationships have highlighted the importance of reducing reliance on any single market and strengthening links to a broader array of global customers. Strategic improvements to transportation and trade-enabling infrastructure will help Alberta businesses navigate this complex global environment, improve resiliency, and fully capitalize on diversified market opportunities.

Background:

Growing international demand for Canadian goods and resources has increased the importance of reliable and efficient market access for Alberta businesses. Alberta exporters serve a wide range of North American and global markets, including agri-food and value-added agricultural products from southern Alberta, energy products such as liquefied natural gas and petrochemicals from northern Alberta, manufactured and processed goods, and emerging technology-enabled and services-based exports across the province.

Alberta's relative economic stability, competitive cost structure, and proximity to key production inputs and logistics networks have made the province an increasingly attractive location for investment, expansion, and trade-oriented business activity.

These conditions present a timely opportunity to strengthen Alberta's role in national and international markets by improving transportation and trade-enabling infrastructure. Strategic investment in market access will help Alberta businesses reach customers more efficiently, support economic diversification, and enhance the province's long-term competitiveness.

Southern Alberta's agricultural heartland is a growing network hub for the export and import of large quantities of goods. Goods flow east and west through the region via Highway 3 and connect to AB-1. Additionally, several major north-south corridors including AB-2, 4 and 6¹⁵⁸, and Interstate 15 move goods through the region, particularly into the United States through the twenty-four-hour Coutts/Sweetgrass border crossing and the Wild Horse border crossing south of Medicine Hat. Furthermore, an extensive rail network exists, with lines moving goods both east/west and north/south.

Road and rail transportation starting from AB-43, following AB-2, 3 and 4, and connecting with I-15 comprise the CANAMEX Corridor¹⁵⁹, a vital transportation route bringing Canadian goods south to the United States and Mexico.

CANAMEX was envisioned as a continuous, multimodal transportation route and while road transportation is consistent to Nogales, AZ and the Mexican border, there are several notable gaps

¹⁵⁸ Government of Alberta, Alberta Numbered Highway Map (<https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/b6df8cad-b7d5-4b7a-a222-0eb014c1a61f/resource/a535e2c4-2dde-48b9-8789-320a7515e03d/download/tec-alberta-numbered-highway-network-map-2025-04.pdf>)

¹⁵⁹ Government of Alberta, CANAMEX Economic Corridor Fact Sheet Summary (<https://open.alberta.ca/dataset/e7abdd22-7ea8-4900-8ab8-6b1e505f9f8e/resource/ca7292f1-04ba-46b8-9288-c58de73559e7/download/tec-economic-corridors-fact-sheet-canamex-corridor-2024.pdf>)

in rail lines necessitating diversions to alternate networks at several points and causing rail cargo to slow. Two such gaps exist between Butte and Helena, MT, and Las Vegas, NV and Phoenix, AZ.

With the CANAMEX Corridor a product of NAFTA, the renegotiation of its successor CUSMA presents an opportunity coordinated review and advocacy.

Additionally, The Government of Alberta has committed to the twinning of AB-3 from Medicine Hat through the British Columbia border¹⁶⁰, however a lack of twinning activity on the highway west of Alberta simply shifts the bottlenecks mere kilometers. It is of vital importance that the Government of Alberta encourage the Government of British Columbia to begin twinning efforts through Hope, BC.

Finally, regional airports such as Lethbridge and Medicine Hat play an important role in Alberta's transportation and economic development systems, yet they face persistent challenges related to limited air service, constrained revenue streams, and difficulty achieving the scale required to attract new commercial opportunities¹⁶¹. While these airports are well positioned geographically and offer available land, existing runway infrastructure, and proximity to key production and distribution centres, they lack a coordinated strategy and targeted investment to support long-term growth.¹⁶²

As global supply chains place increasing value on speed, reliability, and multimodal logistics, there is an opportunity to better integrate regional airports into Alberta's broader trade and transportation network. Developing a clear plan for the sustainable growth of regional airports, including their potential role as specialized air cargo or logistics hubs, would help diversify market access options for Alberta businesses, relieve pressure on major airports, and strengthen regional economic resilience.

Alberta is well positioned to become a major agri-food, manufacturing, and energy hub, and a global leader in the distribution of goods to local, regional and international markets. With access to major highway infrastructure, extensive rail infrastructure, and growth potential to localized airports, Alberta is ready to become a leading economic force in a retooled and refocused global economy.

The Alberta Chambers of Commerce recommends that the Government of Alberta:

1. Complete the twinning of Highway 3, providing regular updates of timelines and progress.
2. Collaborate with the Government of British Columbia to ensure that Highway 3 twinning efforts continue through to Hope, BC to prevent bottlenecks being moved west.
3. Collaborate with counterparts in Montana, Nevada, and Arizona, as well as with the Government of Canada and relevant U.S. federal agencies, to advance a coordinated strategy for the CANAMEX Corridor focused on identifying and addressing rail network gaps that limit the efficiency and competitiveness of north-south freight movement for Alberta exporters.

¹⁶⁰ Government of Alberta, Highway 3 Twinning (Phase 2, End to End) (<https://www.majorprojects.alberta.ca/details/Highway-3-Twinning/11299>)

¹⁶¹ Canadian Airports Council, Keeping Canada Connected: The Challenge of Regional Air Service and Federal Policy (<https://canadasairports.ca/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/2025CACConnectivityReport-Full.pdf/>)

¹⁶² Canadian Airports Council, Cargo Development and Strategies for Airports (<https://blog.aci.aero/safety-and-operations/cargo-development-and-strategies-for-airports/>)

4. Create a plan for sustainable growth in local airports as cargo hubs with the intent to grow international and interprovincial opportunities.
5. Continue to collaborate with the Governments of Canada and British Columbia to remove regulatory and interprovincial barriers and expedite approvals for oil pipeline infrastructure to tidewater in order to strengthen Alberta's access to global energy markets