

Inuvik to Tuktoyaktuk Highway

Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report that the Department of Transportation's contractor has started its fourth and final winter of construction on the Inuvik to Tuktoyaktuk Highway. As we come nearer to completing construction, I want to talk about the significance of this project to the communities of Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk and residents of the Beaufort Delta.

The project has already significantly contributed to local employment. At the peak of construction last winter, more than 430 individuals were employed on the project, with 74 percent of these coming from the Beaufort Delta Region or other NWT communities. Additionally, approximately 185 people have benefitted from training and educational experiences like learning how to operate heavy equipment to wildlife monitoring. These are skills that can be transferred to a variety of industries and support the development of a strong northern workforce.

Improved access to natural resources resulting from the new highway will create economic development and employment opportunities in the future by attracting development from industry.

Further employment opportunities will become available through future operations and maintenance contracts for the highway. While the Government of the Northwest Territories continues to reviews its procurement options, we expect to make a decision on the operations and maintenance contract by Spring 2017.

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Transportation is working with the communities of Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk, the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, and other GNWT departments to celebrate the opening of the highway and prepare residents to take advantage of the resulting benefits.

Two multi-stakeholder Inuvik to Tuktoyaktuk Highway Committees have been meeting monthly to organize three separate celebrations.

The first celebration will be held in Spring 2017 to celebrate the last winter road between the two communities. The winter road has long served as an important link for residents of Tuktoyaktuk, supporting intercommunity travel and the delivery of essential goods. Once the highway is done, residents of Tuktoyaktuk will be able to realize savings from the more cost-efficient year-round delivery of these goods.

The official opening of the highway will take place on November 15, 2017. This event will be a full celebration with all stakeholders, including dignitaries from the communities of Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk, Aboriginal governments, the federal government, and Members of the 18th Legislative Assembly. The official opening will be a celebration of national significance, marking the first time Canada has been connected by highway from coast to coast to coast, and has been designated one of four Canada 150 infrastructure projects by the federal government.

These celebrations are being planned in both Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk to ensure maximum participation of community members from both communities.

Finally, a celebration led by the Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment will be held in June 2018 with a special focus on promoting tourism-related opportunities around the Inuvik to Tuktoyaktuk Highway. The opening of the highway will help attract a host of visitors from across Canada and around the world who are interested in visiting the Arctic Ocean and exploring the natural beauty of the Beaufort Delta.

The Government of the Northwest Territories will help support the communities of Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk take advantage of business opportunities promoting tourism. More attractions will enhance tourism, promote economic spinoffs and encourage return visits. The GNWT is investigating the development of wayside pull-outs and rest areas along the new highway. Investing in and supporting projects such as the development of a Recreational Vehicle Park in Tuktoyaktuk will help enhance the availability of tourism products and services in the region.

In the meantime, Mr. Speaker, the Department of Transportation's contractor continues to work hard to complete this historic infrastructure project in the NWT and we remain fully engaged with all stakeholders on properly recognizing this important achievement.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.