

**Tłıchq All-Season Road**

Mr. Speaker, early in the New Year, an important milestone was achieved with the announcement of conditional federal funding to construct the Tłıchq All-season Road. This represents a critical step towards fulfilling the mandate of the 18<sup>th</sup> Legislative Assembly to capture opportunities for investment in transportation infrastructure in the Northwest Territories.

This milestone was achieved through the strength of our partnerships with Canada and the Tłıchq Government. Together, we recognize the importance of strategic infrastructure investments for improving the standard of living in remote northern communities.

With the construction of the Tłıchq All-season Road many of the opportunities that those of us living in connected communities take for granted will become available to the residents of Whatì. The project will help build economic stability across the region and contribute to sustainable and self-sufficient communities.

Mr. Speaker, transportation affects the cost of every component of household expenditure, meaning that any improvements to the transportation system help reduce the cost of living. An all-season connection to Whatì will eliminate the community's dependence on the existing winter road, which is increasingly challenged by the impacts of climate change. Replacing the southern section of the winter road will also increase the window of access to Gameti and Wekweeti, improving the resiliency and reliability of the transportation system for all Tłıchq communities.

All-season access results in efficiencies, including lower travel time and shipping costs, which will translate into savings for consumers. Reducing the cost of freight helps to improve the standard of life in communities by making it more affordable to deliver a diverse range of essential goods from food and fuel to building materials for houses and construction projects. Lower operating costs for local businesses will allow them to be more competitive in territorial markets. In addition, the road will connect Tłıchǫ residents to a larger selection of services such as education and healthcare, which may become more affordable with improved access.

The project will also contribute to new employment opportunities for residents in a variety of sectors. Job creation helps support the self-sufficiency of all northerners by providing the resources necessary to access the amenities we need.

Construction of the Tłıchǫ All-season Road will result in significant employment and allow northerners to benefit from the kind of training and experience that forge life-long skills. Through the development of a strong northern workforce, residents will also be better positioned to take advantage of future economic opportunities when they arise.

All-season access will also support key industries operating in the Tłıchǫ region. Improved access will likely attract increased numbers of tourists interested in exploring this culturally unique region of our territory. Lands for recreational and cultural purposes will become more readily accessible, creating opportunities for businesses interested in promoting the natural beauty of the region.

Year-round access will also result in further interest from industry to develop and explore for natural resources in the area. Enabling such development is critical, not only because the resource industry remains the top contributor to territorial GDP, but also because it is responsible for providing a significant amount of employment, education, and training opportunities in the NWT. By increasing access into the Tłıchǫ region, there is the potential to continue resource development and consequently provide jobs and training to residents for generations.

Improved transportation infrastructure gives people the tools to live strong, healthy, and successful lives. The Tłıchǫ All-season Road will contribute to vibrant communities and help capture opportunities that support economic prosperity in the NWT.

The Department of Transportation will continue to work closely with the Tłıchǫ Government to advance the project through the environmental assessment and construction phases.

Finally, the Department of Transportation continues to work with the Department of Finance on preparing project procurement. The Departments anticipate the release of a Request for Qualifications in the very near future, which will position us for the development of a Request for Proposals pending a decision on the Environmental Assessment for the project. We look forward to hearing from bidders and working together on a successful plan for construction at that time.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.