

Mackenzie Valley Highway Wrigley to Norman Wells

Mr. Speaker, investments in our transportation system are critical for creating economic and social opportunities for northerners. The Department of Transportation's commitment to securing federal funding to advance the Mackenzie Valley Highway under the mandate of the 18th Legislative Assembly is intended to capture these kinds of opportunities.

We are already seeing the benefits of road construction in the Beaufort Delta, where the northernmost section of the Mackenzie Valley Highway, the Inuvik to Tuktoyaktuk Highway, is nearly complete. Improved access and significant training and employment have positioned residents of Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk to take advantage of future opportunities related to resource development and tourism and will result in a lower cost of living.

Mr. Speaker now is the time to start bringing benefits like these to the residents of the Sahtu. We know that the suspension of oil production in Norman Wells is currently contributing to economic uncertainty for many residents. More than ever, we need to invest in projects that generate employment and reduce the cost of living in this region.

On January 5, the Governments of Canada and the Northwest Territories gave the region some positive news with the announcement of funding for the Canyon Creek All-season Access Road. The Government of Canada is contributing \$15 million, or 75 percent, toward construction costs for this project, while the GNWT is providing

the remaining \$5 million or 25 percent. The project involves the construction of a 14 kilometre access road south of the Town of Norman Wells, providing access to granular resources and traditional Sahtu lands, which may be used for recreation, tourism, and business development.

Construction alone is expected to create 50 jobs, general training opportunities for 12 individuals, and heavy equipment operator training for 16 individuals. The skills and experience gained by Sahtu residents involved in the project will help prepare them to participate fully in the eventual construction of the Mackenzie Valley Highway. Construction will also benefit a host of local and northern suppliers of things like construction equipment, signage, and building materials. Project construction is expected to begin this March and direct employment benefits will be spread over nearly two years, which is when the project is expected to be completed.

The Canyon Creek All-season Access Road represents another step towards replacing the existing Mackenzie Valley Winter Road with an all-weather corridor, which remains the ultimate solution to improving transportation access throughout the Mackenzie Valley.

Mr. Speaker, construction of the Mackenzie Valley Highway from Wrigley to Norman Wells will reduce the impacts of climate change on the NWT transportation system, which are shortening the window of operation for winter roads. A more resilient transportation system will also result in efficiencies in the delivery of essential goods and materials to communities. The savings realized by the trucking industry will be passed on to consumers for household necessities and lower the cost of supplies required for the construction of houses, schools, and medical care facilities.

Improved intercommunity mobility will also allow residents better access to services that may not be immediately available in their own community. Businesses will be connected to other markets, supporting economic growth. The improved access will also reduce costs for industry exploration and development, opening up new areas of mineral potential and increasing the attractiveness of continued petroleum production and development in the Sahtu. The Mackenzie Valley Highway is critical to unlocking much of the still untapped resource potential of the region. Tourism in remote communities throughout the Mackenzie Valley is also expected to increase with the completion of an all-weather highway.

The Department of Transportation continues to build political support for construction of the Mackenzie Valley Highway from Wrigley to Norman Wells. This project is in the mandate approved by the Legislative Assembly and we will work with the Sahtu to see it through.

The Department has submitted a business case requesting \$700 million in federal funding under the National Infrastructure Fund of the New Building Canada Plan. While the federal government's review of this funding submission is currently suspended pending decisions by Canada regarding its long-term infrastructure funding plan, new opportunities for funding may become available with the upcoming Federal Budget. In the meantime, the Department of Transportation continues identify ways to advance critical components of the envisioned highway, including the Great Bear River Bridge.

Mr. Speaker, the construction of the Mackenzie Valley Highway remains a high priority for northerners. The Department of Transportation continues to pursue opportunities to advance the project.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.