

Federal Investment in NWT Highways

Mr. Speaker, the Department of Infrastructure is committed to working in partnership with Canada to make strategic investments in highway infrastructure. Today, I am pleased to provide an update on our efforts to secure funding for various highway projects across the territory.

In 2015 the Government of the Northwest Territories received federal approval for its first bundle of highway capacity improvement projects submitted under the New Building Canada Plan. The bundle was cost-shared with the federal government who provided \$72 million or 75 percent, while the Government of the Northwest Territories provided the remaining \$24 million or 25 percent of the total \$96 million investment. As a result, significant upgrades to every highway across the territory and to the Dettah Access Road were achieved.

A second bundle of highway capacity improvements projects was approved last June. This time the federal government provided \$60.7 million, while the Government of the Northwest Territories provided \$20.2 million. The total investment of \$80.9 million in funding will allow the Department of Infrastructure to enhance several access roads and bridges that are critical components of the NWT highway system. Projects include upgrades to the Jean Marie River and Nahanni Butte access roads, and the replacement of the James Creek Highway Maintenance Camp.

Going forward, a third bundle of projects is being developed and will focus on a second phase of work on NWT highways and major roads in 2018 and 2019. Planning for the third bundle will be done as part of the capital planning process.

Mr. Speaker, these important investments in our transportation infrastructure help us connect communities to new social and employment opportunities, reduce the cost of living in the territory, improve the resiliency of our transportation system to climate change, and increase access to natural resources.

In addition to improving the existing highway system, the Government of the Northwest Territories has identified three new NWT transportation corridors projects with strategic significance in its 25-year Transportation Strategy and mandate: the Mackenzie Valley Highway, Tlicho All-season Road, and Slave Geological Province Access Corridor. That is why I am proud to say that last month two federal funding announcements were made supporting the development of new highway infrastructure in the NWT.

The first is for the construction of the Canyon Creek Access Road in the Sahtu region, which represents another step toward replacing the existing Mackenzie Valley Winter Road with an all-weather corridor. The project will provide access to granular resources and traditional Sahtu lands, which may be used for recreation, tourism, and business development.

Mr. Speaker, another important milestone was realized earlier this year when the federal government announced conditional funding for the Tłı̄chǫ All-Season Road to Whatı̄. The 97 kilometre road will provide year-round access to residents of that community and will also benefit nearby communities by significantly increasing the length of operation of the winter roads to Wekweèı̄ and Gamèı̄ and helping to address a key impact of climate change in this region. The all-season road will also help reduce the cost of living for residents and support economic development in the region by increasing access to mineral resources and boosting investor confidence.

The Department of Infrastructure will continue to look for new opportunities to increase investment in the NWT transportation system in collaboration with our federal counterparts. We expect additional details regarding funding opportunities for trade and transportation corridors may become available with the upcoming Federal Budget. We are prepared to make the most of these opportunities to address our infrastructure deficit and improve transportation services in every region of the territory.

Transportation infrastructure improvements result in a variety of economic and social benefits for northerners and all Canadians. Ensuring proper maintenance and upgrades to our highway system increases driver safety and improves our resiliency to climate change. Enhanced intercommunity mobility means new business, employment, educational, and health care opportunities for residents. Finally, improved road access will enable us to unlock the North's full economic potential by providing better access to natural resources.

The Government of the Northwest Territories has made a commitment in its mandate to capture opportunities for investment in transportation infrastructure. We are working to secure funding to advance the Mackenzie Valley Highway and we continue to undertake work to prove up the business case to advance a project that would see improved access into the Slave Geological Province. Our government will stay engaged with Canada on the status of our submissions and on any new developments in funding programs.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.