

Road Safety Initiatives

Mr. Speaker, ensuring Northwest Territories highways are a safe place for all road users is a top priority for the Government of the Northwest Territories. The challenges we face in regards to road safety are constantly evolving, and these challenges must often be met with unique and innovative solutions. In addition to the work undertaken each year to maintain and upgrade the engineering component of our highways, the Department of Infrastructure is also committed to staying up to date on policy and legislative initiatives aimed at making our roads safer. This afternoon I'd like to share with Members a few of the initiatives the Department of Infrastructure is leading on behalf of the GNWT.

With the legalization of recreational cannabis in Canada on October 17, 2018, drug impaired driving has become a top road safety concern for all jurisdictions. To get a better understanding of the issue of impaired driving among the general population of drivers in the Northwest Territories, the Department of Infrastructure conducted a drug and alcohol roadside survey in Yellowknife in September 2018.

The purpose of conducting this survey was to collect data that will allow us to compare the number of drivers under the influence of cannabis before legalization and after legalization. It will also serve as a guide as we develop more targeted drug impaired driving awareness campaigns.

This data will be made available to the public later this year as part of the Canadian Council of Motor Transport Administrators' national report, which will provide a cross jurisdictional comparison of drug impaired driving.

Mr. Speaker, on the same day recreational cannabis use was legalized, the Government of the Northwest Territories implemented strict drug impaired driving laws under the Motor Vehicles Act. In order to send a clear message to our young and new drivers that impaired driving will not be tolerated in the NWT, we have implemented zero tolerance laws and drivers licence suspensions for drugs and alcohol for drivers aged 21 and under, and novice drivers. We have also extended this zero tolerance to drivers of certain commercial vehicles.

In addition, any driver found to be impaired by drugs that fails a Standardized Field Sobriety Test or an evaluation by a Drug Recognition Expert will have their driver's licence suspended for a significant amount of time.

Mr. Speaker, distracted driving is another form of impaired driving that continues to challenge policy makers and enforcement officials. In addition to significant fines, the NWT was one of the first jurisdictions in Canada to suspend drivers for using a restricted electronic device while driving. However, the problem persists. You can see it for yourself while you're waiting at a red light – passing drivers on their cell phones. The GNWT, RCMP, and other partners continue to monitor this issue to determine what additional steps must be taken to deter drivers from this preventable dangerous activity.

Mr. Speaker, as technology evolves, so does our ability to use it to our advantage. Another road safety initiative the Department of Infrastructure is implementing includes a five-year plan for the enhancement of Intelligent Transportation Systems. Intelligent Transportation Systems is the use of communication, computer, and system technologies to make transportation safer, more efficient, and more sustainable.

Three and a half million dollars has been allocated from existing funds over the next five years towards Intelligent Transportation Systems projects. This investment will support the installation of a network of traffic counters and web cameras, improve ferry tracking services and increase the overall capacity of our road weather information system.

Residents will be able to make more informed travel decisions by providing near real-time information on road and weather conditions, including images and current weather available on Infrastructure's public website. The public will also have access to up-to-date status of ferry and ice crossings and imminent road closures due to incidences, poor weather, and wild fires. Industry will benefit from real time information on weight restrictions on highways, winter roads and ice crossings, and on restricted hours of operation on winter roads. The increased data will also allow the GNWT to make better informed decisions regarding operations and maintenance of our transportation infrastructure.

Mr. Speaker, one final road safety initiative I'd like to highlight is part of a national dialogue. Mandatory Entry Level Training for commercial truck drivers is being considered across Canada as a measure to increase road safety for both commercial truck drivers and the public. By spring 2019, three provinces will have implemented this mandatory training.

In order to better understand the concerns and positions of Northwest Territories' residents and businesses in regards to implementation in our jurisdiction, last month the Department of Infrastructure completed several community engagement sessions on the topic. The feedback received will help inform the Government's decision as to whether mandatory training should be implemented here in the NWT.

Mr. Speaker, new road safety challenges emerge across Canada every day. The GNWT continues to work with our partners to make road safety a priority for the benefit of all users of the NWT highway system.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.