

Update on the Mackenzie Valley Highway Project and Public Engagement

Mr. Speaker, The Government of the Northwest Territories has made it a key priority to advance the development of the all-season Mackenzie Valley Highway.

Mr. Speaker, infrastructure development plays an essential role in the longevity and health of our communities. A key component in the Department of Infrastructure's Transportation Strategy, the proposed 321-km Mackenzie Valley Highway between the communities of Norman Wells and Wrigley will connect several remote communities to the public highway system year-round, make these connections more resilient to the effects of climate change, and create future economic opportunities. Infrastructure projects like the Mackenzie Valley Highway play a significant part in the economic future of the Northwest Territories – not only as we recover from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, but as we advance transformative, nation-building projects like this to the benefit of Northerners and Canadians, alike. This project will inject millions into the economy, create jobs for residents, build capacity in communities and within Indigenous governments, and open the door to future economic development that will positively impact the Northwest Territories.

We have made progress on this project, Mr. Speaker, and I want to provide an update to Members of this House on what the status of the project is currently. In July 2018, \$140 million dollars in funding was secured under Transport Canada's National Trade Corridors Fund for the environmental assessment and planning studies for this portion of the Mackenzie Valley Highway Project; as well as for the planning, engineering and construction of the Great Bear River Bridge and the Mount Gaudet Access Road.

Mr. Speaker, over the last year, work has progressed on addressing information gaps and preparing the Developer's Assessment Report, which is required to advance the environmental assessment. Engagement with Indigenous governments and Indigenous

organizations in the region is progressing and capacity funding has been provided to the Sahtu Secretariat Inc., the Pehdzeh Ki First Nation, the Tulita Renewable Resources Council, and the Norman Wells Renewable Resources Council so they can participate fully in engagement for the project and partner in the completion of traditional knowledge studies.

Public engagement on the proposed project description was carried out in the spring of 2022, and in-person socio-economic impact assessment related interviews are currently underway. In the coming months additional in-person engagement in the Sahtu and Dehcho regions will complete the project description, and discuss potential project impacts and mitigation measures. The information collected through this engagement will be used to finalize the Developer's Assessment Report for submission to the Mackenzie Valley Environmental Review Board in early 2023. The GNWT is also working to advance some short road extensions along the Mackenzie Valley Highway alignment. Intended as capacity-building projects, these projects are advancing separately from the Mackenzie Valley Highway Environmental Assessment.

The Mount Gaudet Access Road is a proposed 15 km all-season road from Hodgson Creek to Mount Gaudet, near Wrigley. The regulatory process for this project was paused in 2020 to provide the GNWT with the opportunity to address concerns raised by the Pehdzeh Ki First Nation. This past August, the Mackenzie Valley Land and Water Board withdrew the project's application. Follow-up discussions with the Board resulted in the application being reactivated. We have committed to taking a collaborative approach with Pehdzeh Ki First Nation and the Land and Water Board to plan for the review of these applications to restart.

The Prohibition Creek Access Road is another capacity-building project and is located near Norman Wells. As explained in my Minister's Statement last week, procurement for Phase 1 construction is underway with construction expected to begin this fall.

The Department of Infrastructure has and will continue to work closely with Indigenous governments and Indigenous organizations as we advance this important project.

Quyanainni, Mr. Speaker.