

Inuvik to Tuktoyaktuk Highway

Mr. Speaker, more than 50 years ago Prime Minister John Diefenbaker announced his goal to connect Canada coast to coast to coast.

Today, I am pleased to announce the official opening of the Inuvik to Tuktoyaktuk Highway will be held on November 15, 2017. Canada's first highway to the Arctic Ocean will finally connect the Hamlet of Tuktoyaktuk to our all-season highway system, while allowing for new economic opportunities, increased tourism, improved accessibility to health care, and a lower cost of living for residents.

The success of this project can only be attributed to the dedicated crews who have put in long days and nights during some of the coldest and darkest times of winter. Their dedication has allowed the project to proceed as planned. Before I get into the details of the official opening, I'd first like to reflect on the immense benefits the project has already brought to the Beaufort Delta region.

Mr. Speaker, throughout the project up to 600 people have been employed, and 74 per cent of that total have been residents of the Northwest Territories, with an estimated 10 percent of the total people employed being women. Not only were we committed to hiring locally, we've also trained local. Roughly 185 people have received training and educational opportunities throughout the project, such as wildlife monitoring and heavy equipment operation. These training opportunities underscore our government's commitment toward developing a strong Northern workforce.

In total, there have been over 136,000 person days of employment since the start of construction, 98,000 of which were for NWT residents. This does not include employees who have worked for the 41 subcontractors, of which 83 percent were awarded to Northern companies.

While construction of the highway has already benefited the region's economy, this is only the beginning, Mr. Speaker. Through the Department of Industry, Tourism, and Investment our government is working to position residents and businesses in the Beaufort Delta region to capitalize on economic opportunities from year-round road access.

The new highway will make exploration of oil and gas more feasible. In fact, the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation is currently seeking federal funding to study the possibility of developing gas fields along the new route.

From a tourism perspective, this new connection to the Arctic Ocean will attract visitors interested in exploring the natural beauty of the Beaufort Delta. The Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment is already planning to promote this spectacular experience, and is working with the community of Tuktoyaktuk on a proposed tourism-focused celebration of the opening of the highway during the summer of 2018, as well as to identify and fund tourism products and infrastructure needed to meet the increased demand and opportunity that more visitors will bring.

Mr. Speaker, the opening celebrations this fall will be of national significance, as we mark the first time Canada will be connected by highway from coast to coast to coast. Significantly, the project has been designated as one of four Canada 150 signature infrastructure projects by the federal Government. As we approach the official opening on November 15th, the Department of Infrastructure is working

closely with the Town of Inuvik and the Hamlet of Tuktoyaktuk, the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, other GNWT departments and the federal government to prepare for this historic day.

A multi-stakeholder committee has been meeting on a monthly basis to organize and prepare for the official opening of the highway. Celebrations will start with opening ceremonies and a ribbon cutting, followed by a reception in Inuvik. Those activities will be followed by a historic symbolic drive along the new highway to opening ceremonies, fireworks and a feast in Tuktoyaktuk. Our government is also proud to support a local documentary that will be screened at the opening celebrations. The film focuses on the history of the former ice road and the importance of the new all-season road. These celebrations in Inuvik and Tuktoyaktuk will ensure maximum participation from both communities. A separate ceremony will take place in the summer of 2018 to celebrate the tourism opportunities the road will provide.

Mr. Speaker, expanding our transportation system will help us connect residents to new social and employment opportunities, stabilize the cost of living in the territory, increase our resiliency and adapt to the impacts of climate change, and provide better access to natural resources. We hope everyone will join us on November 15 in celebrating this national infrastructure achievement.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.