

Transportation Corridors

Mr. Speaker, as per the Mandate of the Government of the Northwest Territories and the commitments made in the 25-year Transportation Strategy, the Government of the Northwest Territories has been working to secure funding to advance planning and construction of critical transportation corridors in the Northwest Territories.

The Government of the Northwest Territories' three proposed transportation corridors, the Tłı̄cho All-Season Road, the Slave Geological Province Access Corridor, and the Mackenzie Valley Highway, will bring great benefits to the NWT. These corridors will connect residents to the services they rely on, stabilize the cost of living, provide well-paying jobs and training opportunities, and increase our resiliency to the effects of climate change. The corridors will also support northern industry and business by providing a gateway for increased trade and development.

We are getting closer to improving access for residents of the Tłı̄cho region. The Tłı̄cho All-Season Road project will be funded using a P3 model, with the Government of Canada covering 25% of the costs. In December 2017, the GNWT signed the Final Financial Agreement for the project with Canada and issued a Request for Proposals for construction. Three preferred proponents identified through the Request for Qualifications stage were invited to submit proposals. The RFP was released in alignment with the environmental regulatory schedule, and will allow ample time for the proponents to prepare the required documents. A Report of Environmental Assessment is expected to be released by the Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board later this month.

Mr. Speaker, as we await critical decisions regarding the Tł̨cho All-Season Road, the GNWT continues to work with the federal government to deliver meaningful investment in the two other transportation corridors. In November of last year, the GNWT submitted comprehensive project proposals for the Slave Geological Province Access Corridor and Mackenzie Valley Highway to Transport Canada for funding consideration under the National Trade Corridors Fund. Up to \$400 million in funding is being dedicated to transportation projects in the three territories under this program. The funding allocated to projects will be based on merit, with a focus on trade corridor efficiency and reliability.

Construction of an all-weather road into the Slave Geological Province Access Corridor would address the lack of access to this mineral-rich part of Canada. The project would increase our resiliency to the impacts of climate change while significantly reducing associated additional costs and operational difficulties for the mining industry. All-weather road access would also support the delivery of green energy projects, such as the Taltson Hydro Expansion Project, which would ensure a more sustainable energy system for the NWT and Canada.

Extension of the all-weather Mackenzie Valley Highway would increase intercommunity mobility in the Sahtu Region. The GNWT is working closely with the Sahtu Secretariat Incorporated to advance the project. The highway would replace the existing winter road into the region, which is currently affected by the impacts of climate change, resulting in increased maintenance costs, travel and resupply delays, and potential safety risks. It would allow for increased traffic volumes and weights along this corridor, resulting in efficiencies in the delivery of essential goods and lowering the cost of living in communities. Increased economic development could be enabled by providing increased access to mineral and petroleum resources in the region and reducing costs of production and exploration.

The GNWT's proposals under the National Trade Corridors Fund identified funding for all project phases, with a focus on next priority phases. This includes replacement of the Frank Channel Bridge for the Slave Geological Province Access Corridor, construction of the Great Bear River Bridge for the Mackenzie Valley Highway, and undertaking environmental assessment and planning activities for both projects. It is anticipated that decisions around this first round of proposals will be announced in April.

These project proposals will also be shared with the Canada Infrastructure Bank, as there is significant opportunity to fund other phases of both projects under the Bank. The Infrastructure Bank will provide \$35 billion dollars over 11 years using loans, loan guarantees, and equity investments. The Bank will focus its investments on large, transformative, revenue-generating projects, including transportation networks. At this time, we are still awaiting additional details about the operations of the Bank.

Mr. Speaker, we are in the early days with regards to the extension of the all-weather Mackenzie Valley Highway and the Slave Geological Province Access Corridor. As we move towards securing funding for the projects, we will continue to engage Indigenous groups and work with them to take advantage of the benefits that the projects will bring. We will also work closely with these groups and our counterparts in the Department of Environment and Natural Resources to ensure ongoing protection of wildlife and the natural environment.

Mr. Speaker, strong and effective partnerships with the federal government and Indigenous governments are essential to the success of these projects. Together, we can improve transportation connectivity across the territory, helping achieve our social and economic goals and improve the quality of life in the North.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.