

Update on Strategic Infrastructure Projects

Mr. Speaker, the 19th Legislative Assembly has identified making strategic infrastructure investments that connect communities, expand the economy or reduce the cost of living as one of its priorities. This includes a focus on the Mackenzie Valley Highway, the Slave Geological Province Corridor, and the Taltson Hydro Expansion Project. It is important that these development projects are advanced in a balanced and sustainable way that supports our government's goal to manage and conserve wildlife, and protect and provide for the health and well-being of the people of the Northwest Territories.

The establishment of strong relationships with Indigenous governments and organizations is imperative to the successful advancement of these important projects. We are achieving this by working closely with affected groups from project initiation through to the construction and operations phases.

The Government of the Northwest Territories has four major initiatives currently progressing along the Mackenzie Valley Highway alignment from Wrigley to Norman Wells. These are: the Prohibition Creek Access Road, the Mount Gaudet Access Road, the Great Bear River Bridge, and the Mackenzie Valley Highway Environmental Assessment.

The Department of Infrastructure has been working closely with Indigenous governments and communities with multiple visits to the Sahtu Settlement Area and the Dehcho Region. We have signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the Sahtu Secretariat, and are working closely with the Pehdzeh Ki First Nation, including the establishment of a training committee.

Mr. Speaker, regulatory applications have been filed for the construction of both the Prohibition Creek Access Road and the Mount Gaudet Access Road, with the plan to start construction in 2021. The next major step in the Mackenzie Valley Highway Environmental

Assessment is filing the Developer's Assessment Report. The Department is gathering data and completing studies with the target of submitting the report to the Mackenzie Valley Review Board before the end of the 2021-2022 fiscal year.

The construction of the Great Bear River Bridge will increase our infrastructure's resilience to climate change by providing an all-season alternative to the ice road crossing at the Mackenzie River and the Great Bear River. In 2018, engagement and consultation for this project began with public engagement sessions in all five Sahtu communities on the route selection and design of the bridge. The Tulita Renewable Resource Council has completed a Traditional Knowledge Study on the area, and we will continue to work closely with the Hamlet Mayor and Council moving forward. The project team is considering all options for the tendering process so that we maximize local and northern content.

Mr. Speaker, our next large strategic infrastructure project is the Slave Geological Province Corridor, which will enable future mineral exploration and development in a region with significant resource potential, and assisting with reclamation of mines in the region upon closure.

The long-term vision includes a corridor that supports road, communications, and hydroelectric transmission line infrastructure. In the near term, the GNWT will be focusing on advancing the Lockhart All-Season Road, an all-season road from Tibbitt Lake at the end of Highway No. 4, the Ingraham Trail, all the way to Lockhart Lake.

Building partnerships with Indigenous governments is crucial to the success of this important project. Establishing a Memorandum of Understanding with Indigenous governments and organizations would set the stage to begin the collective development of a project plan that will not only chart a path forward, but will also help Indigenous partners to identify and prepare in advance for opportunities the project will present for contracts, jobs, and training.

Mr. Speaker, finally, the Taltson hydro expansion is the most promising option to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and provide renewable energy to the territory. The new generation and transmission infrastructure will provide a stable, drought-resistant and accessible combined system for 10 NWT communities. It will also position existing and future resource development projects to use clean energy to support more sustainable economic growth while reducing fossil fuel use and meeting the NWT's environmental commitments under the Pan Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change.

Transmission from the 60-megawatt Hydro Expansion could head north and connect Yellowknife's Snare and Bluefish hydro systems and set the stage for new and existing industrial customers to access clean hydro power north and south of Great Slave Lake. The Government of the Northwest Territories is working with NWT-based Indigenous governments and stakeholders to create a collaborative partnership approach to project development.

To assist with that work, the federal government allocated \$18 million over three years from Crown-Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada to advance the Taltson Expansion project. Part of that funding was provided in grants to each of the Indigenous government partners including the Northwest Territory Métis Nation, the Salt River First Nation, and the Akaitcho Dene First Nations, to support their participation in project development, which includes defining the structure and business case, guiding upcoming field work, and development of a Memorandum of Understanding to define our working relationship. We continue to work with other affected parties to address their concerns and find a way forward on the project.

Mr. Speaker, in summary, the Department of Infrastructure has and will continue to work closely with Indigenous governments and organizations as we advance our many projects to connect communities. While we do sometimes have tough issues to discuss and resolve, we are working with our partners to ensure that as much of the benefits on industrial development stay right here at home and benefit northerners.

Quana, Mr. Speaker.