

**New Transportation Corridors**

Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories has been working hard to fulfill its mandate commitment to secure funding to advance planning and construction of new priority transportation corridors in the Northwest Territories, including the extension of the all-weather Mackenzie Valley Road, the Slave Geological Province Access Corridor, and the Tłı̨chʼo All-Season Road.

Last fall, the Department of Infrastructure submitted two comprehensive proposals for funding to the federal government under the National Trade Corridors Fund. In March, I provided an update in the House on the status of our application for the development of the Slave Geological Province Access Corridor. Unfortunately, that project was not selected in the first round of approved submissions; however we are continuing to pursue opportunities for funding for all phases of the project. It is expected that there will be an opportunity to resubmit an application for the project under a Northern-specific call for proposals under the National Trade Corridors Fund, to be issued in fall 2018.

Mr. Speaker, my colleagues on this side of the House and I have urged the federal government to issue the next call for submissions as soon as possible, in recognition that it is critical that we address the North's infrastructure gap, and a timely decision would allow us to make the best use of our short construction season.

As I have said before, the development of the Slave Geological Province Access Corridor will address the lack of access to this mineral-rich part of Canada. The project will also increase our resiliency to the impacts of climate change while significantly reducing associated additional costs and operational difficulties for the mining industry.

Once federal funding is secured, next steps would include the application of the Land Use and Sustainability Framework, as well as planning for the protection of wildlife, economic opportunities, and the involvement of Indigenous groups.

Mr. Speaker, work to advance the next steps for construction of the all-weather Mackenzie Valley Highway would also bring important benefits to residents throughout the Mackenzie Valley, including employment and training opportunities that build local capacity. The Canyon Creek All-Season Access Road outside of Norman Wells, which is currently under construction and scheduled to be completed this fall, is already seeing increased employment to local Indigenous and non-Indigenous residents as well as skill development that will prepare residents to take advantage of the opportunities that would come with the extension of the Mackenzie Valley Highway.

Increased traffic volumes and weights supported by an all-weather highway would result in efficiencies in the delivery of essential goods that contribute to stabilizing the cost of living in communities. Economic development would be enabled by increased access to mineral and petroleum resources in the region and reducing costs of production and exploration for industry. In terms of social benefits, we only need look to the Inuvik to Tuktoyaktuk Highway to see how enhanced intercommunity mobility has increased access to health care, education, sporting events, and more.

Mr. Speaker, it is anticipated that the GNWT will soon receive an update from the federal government on its application under the National Trade Corridors Fund for the extension of the Mackenzie Valley Highway. In the meantime, the Department of Infrastructure is continuing to pursue other federal funding opportunities for the remaining components of the Mackenzie Valley Highway, as well as the Slave Geological Province Access Corridor. Discussions have been ongoing with the Canada Infrastructure Bank to determine how the two transportation corridors could fit within their program. It is expected that the Slave Geological Province Access Corridor will be viewed favourably as it is a large transformative project, a matter of public interest and has revenue-generating potential.

Mr. Speaker, lastly, we are nearing a decision on the future of the proposed Tłı̄chǫ All-Season Road. The Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board has issued its report of environmental assessment, and a decision from the responsible ministers is anticipated in the coming months. On December 4, 2017, a Request for Proposals was issued and the three proponents that were identified through the Request for Qualifications were invited to submit proposals. Should the project be approved, the procurement process is expected to be finalized in the fall of 2018, which would allow for construction to begin as early as next winter.

Partnerships with our Indigenous organizations will be critical to ensuring the success of these projects. The Tłı̄chǫ Government has been an active partner on the Tłı̄chǫ All-Season Road project since 2012 and has played a key role in managing elements of the project description report. Our government has also been working closely with the Sahtu Secretariat Incorporated on the Mackenzie Valley Highway. The Sahtu Secretariat's efforts to help lobby for the advancement of the project through the Mackenzie Valley Highway Working Group has strengthened our case with the federal government. With regards to the Slave Geological Province Access Corridor, we look forward to continued discussions with Indigenous groups who have an interest in the project on the various partnership models available to us.

Mr. Speaker, the hard work of the Government of the Northwest Territories has paid off so far, but there is still work to be done. As we wait for important decisions to be made, we will continue to work with its partners to ensure the people of the Northwest Territories are in the best position to realize the benefits that these strategic transportation corridors will bring.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.