



AUG - 7 2020

MR. STEVE NORN
MLA, TU NEDHÉ - WIILIDEH

Oral Question 279-19(2) Home Internet Connectivity

This letter is in follow-up to the Oral Question you raised on June 2, 2020 regarding home internet connectivity, current Northwestel projects and initiatives, and Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) applications, to improve Internet access in satellite-served communities in the Northwest Territories (NWT).

The Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) advocates for broadband and telecommunications matters with the CRTC, and the Department of Finance is actively involved in CRTC proceedings that look at extending broadband across the North, as well as creating federally funded programs to support development. The GNWT also flags the need for enhanced broadband with the Federal Government and the CRTC at every opportunity in order to support education and health sectors.

CRTC and Satellite-Served Communities

While eight communities still rely on low-speed (5 Mbps) satellite services (Sambaa K'e, Sachs Harbour, Ulukhaktok, Gamètì, Wekweètì, Łutselk'e, Paulatuk, and Colville Lake), the latest round of 'Connecting Canada' funding in 2018 saw the price for 5 Mbps service drop 65% from over \$200/month to approximately \$80/month. The GNWT supported Northwestel's submission for this drop-in price.

Prior to this, the GNWT also supported Northwestel in the initial round of Connecting Canada funding in 2014 to support the continuation of services to the satellite-served communities. Northwestel has also successfully reduced the number of satellite served communities from ten to eight. Presently, all the satellite served communities also receive 4G services, along with the rest of the NWT.

The best news for satellite served communities is the CRTC's Broadband Fund. Northwestel is interested in upgrading satellite community technology/bandwidth to take advantage of a low earth orbiting satellite network (LEO) once the technology is proven and available. LEO networks do not exist yet. The current estimate for deployment is late 2022. The GNWT supports Northwestel in its pursuit of this technology and the appropriate federal funding for this project.

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Broadband Availability and Affordability

While not specific to the satellite served communities, the GNWT is engaged in, or monitoring, over seven different CRTC proceedings that may directly impact the quality or the affordability of services to all Northerners. In 2019, the Department of Finance represented the GNWT before the Broadcasting and Telecommunications Review Panel to advocate for equivalent services and prices, and affordability of broadband services. The Panel's final report has not yet been released.

Federal Funding Opportunities for Broadband Projects

The GNWT, through the Department of Finance, works with the Federal Government – specifically, the CRTC and Innovation, Science and Economic Development (ISED) Canada – to ensure funding criteria and regulations suit the needs of Northern communities. There are several Federal funding opportunities for which the GNWT has supported Northwestel's proposals. The GNWT is currently waiting to hear if any of them have been successful.

Funding sources include:

- ISED High-Speed Access for All

This funding was announced in June 2019 as Canada's Connectivity Strategy which provides more funding sources to support broadband projects and infrastructure development. It includes:

- \$1.7 billion in new funding for broadband infrastructure which includes the Universal Broadband Fund to support projects across Canada and support for LEO satellite capacity, and
 - \$2 billion to support broadband projects via the Rural and Northern Stream of the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program.
- \$750 million in a CRTC Broadband Fund to extend broadband infrastructure

The CRTC recently concluded the Round 1 proposal assessments under the Broadband Fund and called for a second round of applications. Information about successful first applications is pending. The Department of Finance is aware that Northwestel has submitted a Round 1 application.

If you have any further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.



Caroline Wawzonek
Minister of Finance

- c. Clerk of the Legislative Assembly
Legislative Coordinator, Executive