

Slave Geological Province Access Corridor

Mr. Speaker, the Government of the Northwest Territories has made a commitment in its mandate to capture opportunities for investment in transportation infrastructure by working to secure funding to improve access into the Slave Geological Province. Today I would like to provide an update on the Department's progress on this project.

Improving road access into the Slave Geological Province has been a long-term objective of the Governments of Canada and the Northwest Territories. This long-term vision includes connecting to an all-weather road and deep-water Arctic port in western Nunavut. Partnership with the Governments of Canada and Nunavut, as well as with Aboriginal governments and industry, will better enable us to achieve this vision.

Climate change is increasingly affecting the NWT's transportation system and investment in all-weather roads is one of the ways we can address those impacts. There is increased uncertainty regarding the feasibility and capacity of the existing winter road into the Slave Geological Province. This is due to warmer temperatures, more unpredictable weather, and the increased traffic projected to resupply the region's mining industry. Already, recent shortened operating seasons for winter roads have resulted in significant additional transportation costs and operational difficulties for mining developments in the Slave Geological Province.

The development of the Slave Geological Province Access Corridor provides an opportunity to boost mineral exploration and development in this resource rich region, and support our mining industry, which continues to directly contribute more than 30 percent to the territorial economy.

An all-weather road to the Slave Geological Province will stabilize the resupply system to existing mines in the area making it feasible to extend mine life. It will also enable new mineral exploration and development opportunities by increasing reliable access to resources.

Mr. Speaker, there are significant base and precious metal prospects in the Slave Geological Province that require all-weather access for exploration and development. By increasing access to the Slave Geological Province, the Government of the Northwest Territories will increase investor confidence and enable our territory to reach its full economic potential.

In addition to collaboration with the Governments of Canada, Nunavut and Aboriginal governments, the development of an access corridor into the Slave Geological Province requires significant inter-departmental collaboration within the GNWT.

The Department of Transportation has conducted numerous studies on this Corridor over the last two decades. Based on the results of mineral potential and route option studies conducted by the Departments of Transportation and Industry, Tourism and Investment, a corridor has been identified that will provide the greatest economic benefit to the region and the NWT. The Departments of Transportation, Finance and Industry, Tourism and Investment are jointly conducting a P3 business case assessment of the chosen corridor. This business case

is expected to be completed in mid-2017 and will allow the GNWT to make a better estimate of construction costs for this road, as well as determine an appropriate funding model.

In the meantime, the Department of Transportation continues to focus on next steps, including undertaking environmental studies and finalizing engineering and design work for the road.

The Department of Transportation is also working with caribou subject experts from the Department of Environment and Natural Resources to identify any gaps in knowledge and opportunities to support the mandates of both departments.

The Government of the Northwest Territories and the Government of Nunavut have set up a joint working group to collaborate in advancing the project from both territories. Both of our governments look forward to new opportunities to fund further planning and construction of the access corridor.

Improving territorial transportation infrastructure will remain one of the priorities of this government. This supports our commitment to improve the quality of life and lower the cost of living of our residents, support business and employment opportunities, adapt to the impacts of climate change, and maximize opportunities to realize our economic potential.

Thank you, Mr. Speaker.