

Feds stall Mackenzie Valley Highway

Project 'put on hold,' according to GNWT Department of Transportation

by April Hudson
Northern News Services
Pehdzh Kl/Wrigley

A highway that would extend from Wrigley up to Tulita, Norman Wells and Fort Good Hope, finally connecting to the Dempster Highway by Inuvik, has hit another road block.

The proposed highway has for years been advocated for by MLAs in the Nahendeh region.

Russell Neudorf, deputy minister for the territorial Department of Transportation, revealed to Yellowknife's city council on Sept. 12 that the highway has been "put on hold" by the federal government.

Nahendeh MLA Shane Thompson said the first he heard of the delay was from a social media post, and subsequent article, from CBC News. Neither he nor his fellow MLAs had been told about the delay, he said.

"It's very disappointing that the information we receive is after the fact," Thompson said.

"Probably the biggest disappointment was not getting the information from the Department (of Transportation). The City of Yellowknife gets the information before we do - we have other communities we should have been able to inform, seven or eight communities that should have been informed before the City of Yellowknife."

Thompson said he e-mailed Transportation Minister Wally Schumann after he heard about the delay but



Transportation Minister Wally Schumann gave a speech to Fort Simpson's business crowd during the local Chamber of Commerce's annual general meeting on May 12 in the Icebreaker Lounge. The meeting touched on the Mackenzie Valley Highway.

has yet to receive an explanation for why MLAs weren't informed as of Sept. 18.

"(Schumann) basically said there will be a letter coming to all the members in the near future explaining what's going on," he said.

For the past couple years, the territorial government has been advo-

cating to the federal government for the highway project to receive funding. The project is the source of a \$700-million proposal to Infrastructure Canada, under the national infrastructure component of the department's New Building Canada Plan.

Neudorf presented to Yellowknife's municipal services committee

on Sept. 12, where he told city councillors the project was initially stalled due to the federal election.

"There were lots of questions back and forth with the federal government about (the proposal) to see where that might go, and then the election came ... so everything was put on hold," Neudorf said.

"We have had some discussions with the new Liberal government ... but we hear the project has been basically put on hold while they do more consultations, more definitions around the federal infrastructure programs."

The first phase of the national infrastructure fund has already been rolled out. The second phase, Neudorf said, is earmarked at around \$48 billion in funding.

"We will continue to work to promote this and other corridors to the federal government as part of that Phase 2 announcement," he said.

Thompson said while he still holds out hope for seeing the project put into next year's federal budget, he is "not too convinced that is going to happen."

"For me, the Mackenzie Valley Highway is about the people and making it more efficient, more cost-effective, providing income for people, and by having that road it opens up opportunities for tourism and things like that," he said.

"Promote our culture, promote the territory - open it up."

He added the delay is a setback for the Deh Cho as well as the territory as a whole.

"That road would just open up so much potential for the people and residents, which would have a better impact ... for GDP," he said. "It (would be) a huge return on investment."

Aboriginal, metis leaders meet with RCMP

'We all put our two cents in. I don't know if anything's going to come of it'

by April Hudson
Northern News Services
Lilidli Kue/Fort Simpson

More than a week after meeting with acting detachment commander RCMP Cpl. Mark Phillips, and a sergeant out of Yellowknife, local leaders said they are still waiting for a followup from the Mounties.

The meeting included Fort Simpson Metis President Danny Peterson, village Mayor Darlene Sibbeston, Lilidli Kue Chief Jerry Antoine and elder David Moses.

Peterson says there has been no followup from RCMP after the meeting, something he says is necessary in order for leaders to feel that their concerns were heard.

"We haven't heard anything back from them - we don't know what's going to happen," he said.

The subject of the meeting was the Sept. 9 lunch-hour arrest of Daryl Sibbeston. The man was reportedly intoxicated at the time but witnesses allege arresting officer Const. Akira Currier used excessive force during the arrest, tripping Sibbeston and causing his head to "bounce (off the pavement)," according to witness Josanne Tanche.

Sibbeston suffered a black eye and a cut above his eye that required stitches. He is a brother to Darlene Sibbeston and a cousin to Peterson.

Antoine said on Sept. 14 that he was disappointed in the meeting.

"People in positions of trust need to do better," he said.

While Peterson said he personally felt the meeting went well, he said the lack of followup makes him wonder if leaders' concerns were really heard.

"We all put our two cents in. I don't know if anything's going to come of it," he said.

"I hope something does come of it, because I don't want to see stuff like that."

Peterson said he wants to see RCMP officers engage in on-the-land training, similar to what schoolteachers currently participate in at Fort Simpson. That includes involvement in cultural activities.

He said he had been informed that cultural training is optional for RCMP officers. However, RCMP spokesperson Marie York-Condon stated in an e-mail the RCMP run a mandatory online Aboriginal Awareness course for officers serving in the Northwest Territories.

That course is delivered through the RCMP's internal education system, she added.

"If there is cross-cultural training offered in the local community, Supt. Mike LeSage, acting division commanding officer, advises he would fully support all members to take this in addition

to the Aboriginal Awareness training," she stated.

"Cross-cultural training would be specific to local communities and offered by the host community.

Peterson said he also wants to see officers take more of an interest in the commu-

nity. Not all the relationships are bad, he noted, recalling a summer luncheon the Fort Simpson Metis Nation put on where he had the chance to meet two officers he had never met before.

"The one member I met was actually into stuff like I

do - fishing, hunting, boating. He loves the land," he said.

But given the altercation with Sibbeston, he said, he wants to see the officer responsible removed from the community. RCMP have since opened an internal investigation into the incident.

"It's not right to be doing stuff like that," he said.

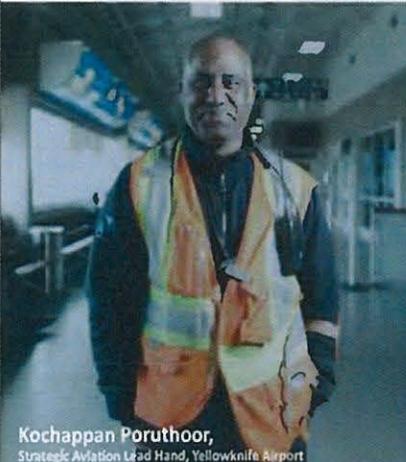
"I'm hoping some recommendations come out of Yellowknife."

As she was travelling, Mayor Sibbeston could not respond to an interview request by press time.



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