

MOTION – MACKENZIE VALLEY HIGHWAY

February 25, 2009

Thank you Mr. Speaker. Today I rise in support of this motion.

The Mackenzie Valley Highway has been in the thoughts and dreams of many northerners for decades; definitely since 1958 when the Prime Minister of Canada, at the time, John Diefenbaker, and his Conservative government implemented his northern resource policies and coined the phrase “Road to Resources”. Yet today there is still no road.

In our motion we identified that the Mackenzie Valley Highway would provide opportunities to diversify the NWT’s economy through expanded renewable and non-renewable resource development and tourism opportunities.

There are clearly resources, both renewable and non-renewable throughout the Northwest Territories. Unfortunately, where they are located determines how they can best be utilized. Many of our Northern resources are a long way away from southern markets or even communities within the NWT themselves, which makes it incredibly difficult to justify the creation of secondary industries that bring more jobs into the NWT. For the most part, any resources that are extracted from northern soil are exported south to be processed, as it has proven to be more economical to do so.

The Mackenzie Valley Highway will open up the Mackenzie Valley and increase our ability to access renewable and non-renewable resources.

Further, it will ensure a reliable method of transportation to get NWT resources out of the NWT, but also it makes it more affordable for some forms of processing within the NWT as we'll be able to get processing and secondary materials to remote locations with greater ease and regularity. Either way, it creates significant opportunities through easier access to resources. Suitable transportation infrastructure will encourage economic expansion, production and highlight the northern resources as a reasonable alternative to other locations throughout the world.

In his report titled "the Mackenzie Valley Highway: Should it be Completed", Mr. Alan Windhorst said:

"The report on Canada's National Highway Policy (Infrastructure Canada, 2004) notes that investing in highways can lead to improvement in productivity by reducing costs, securing inputs and reaching markets. The Mackenzie Valley Highway extension would perform all three of these."

I agree with his comments, however, as a note, recognizing the importance of the economic opportunities that the Mackenzie Valley Highway offers does not suggest that I believe that we should blindly open ourselves to all development. As Northerners we have a duty and a responsibility to protect our land and resources. Any resource extraction and development must go through a thorough socio-economic and environmental assessment to ensure that our best interests are maintained.

Also in our motion we identified that the Mackenzie Valley Highway would help lower the cost of living in the northern communities and contribute to their sustainability. One of the priorities of the 16th Legislative Assembly is to reduce the cost of living for Northern residents.

Individuals living in small, remote communities with no all-season access clearly pay more than individuals on highway systems. Today, winter roads are the only way for many communities to get resupplied in bulk.

Construction materials and other large items can only be supplied or delivered in short blocks of time, specifically when the winter roads are open. In the future it's safe to assume that this will become increasingly difficult as the winter road season gets shorter and shorter due to global warming. To ensure that northern communities can survive we need to ensure that we can get materials to them in a reliable and affordable way; specifically roads. The Mackenzie Valley Highway ensures that our remote communities have consistent access to southern markets which will make the cost of goods like milk and fresh vegetables cheaper and increase their availability. This is a good thing.

Also in our motion it indicates that a Mackenzie Valley Highway would enhance Canada's national security and emergency response, contributing to asserting Canada's sovereignty over the Arctic. In Mr. Windhorst's document, he states that:

“Although it is not yet completed, the Mackenzie Valley Highway extension would ascertain Canada’s sovereignty in the Arctic. These facts alone justify consideration for the addition of the Mackenzie Valley Highway.”

Further, on October 17th, 2007, Prime Minister Harper responded to the Speech from the Throne supporting sovereignty and security. Within his speech he said:

“For the federal government, there is nothing more fundamental than the protection of this country’s sovereignty.

Our most important potential sovereignty challenge today is on our arctic doorstep, where retreating polar ice, rising global demand for resources and the prospect of year-round shipping are creating new challenges and exciting opportunities for the North.”

This is an important statement. It is clearly obvious to Northerners. It also highlights the importance of the north to the sovereignty of our country. Mr. Harper went further to say:

“Protecting and asserting our sovereignty, in the Arctic and elsewhere, requires real effort, sacrifice and expense.”

I couldn’t agree more. The Mackenzie Valley Highway will cost, but in the end, it’s the right thing to do for both the Country and the Northwest Territories.

Later in his speech Prime Minister Harper went further and stated:

“We have to use the North or we will risk losing it. Half a century ago Prime Minister John Diefenbaker extolled his Northern vision. He foresaw that Canada’s future development and prosperity would depend on efficient transportation networks linking Northern resources to Southern markets. “Roads to resources,” he called them. So he built, among others, our northernmost road – the 700-kilometre Dempster highway from Yukon to the Mackenzie River delta. The opposition of the day has always dismissed such initiatives as unnecessary, fanciful and wasteful. History has always proven them wrong.”

The Prime Minister of Canada is right. Now, I encourage him to listen to and listen to his own words. Build the Mackenzie Valley Highway. It is not unnecessary, fanciful or wasteful.

The government of the NWT has demonstrated commitment to this project. As outlined in my Member’s statement, this government prepared and submitted a funding proposal entitled Connecting Canada Coast to Coast to Coast in November 2005. It outlines the GNWT’s position and how the Mackenzie Valley highway will enhance northern and Canadian security and sovereignty and improve the GNWTs ability to respond and adapt to changing climatic conditions.

The highway will support the renewable and non-renewable resource industry, facilitate the diversification of the NWT economy and improve the quality of life of its citizens who will gain better access to essential services, increased mobility and a lower cost of living. These benefits will help us

experience safer and healthier communities which is consistent with the 16th Assembly's strategic vision.

Regardless of the significant benefits this highway will have for Northerners, it should be a national project. It can and will benefit all Canadians. It will be part of a national highway system which links all three of our Coasts which is crucial to the socio-economic future of Canada. Building it will create significant economic stimulus in Canada, and the Northwest Territories which is good for all Canadians. At the end of the day we'll have something permanent rather than temporary, as I fear many of the stimulus projects supported by the Federal Government will be.

I encourage Prime Minister Harper to listen to us today, to put some of his stimulus dollars into long term Canadian projects; a project that will increase employment across the country, employment opportunities for Canadians from every province and territory, a national project. Let's connect Canada from Coast to Coast to Coast. The Federal Government should advance the funding required and proceed with the planning and construction for the Mackenzie Valley Highway and make this project a priority as part of the Conservative government's stimulus initiatives.

I support this motion. Cece McCauley has said it a thousand times if not more: the Mackenzie Valley Highway is needed and now is the time.