
NEWS RELEASE

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Dec. 14, 2015

Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure

B.C. unveils five point action plan for safe transportation options along Highway 16

VICTORIA – The B.C. government has unveiled a new \$3-million plan to enhance transportation safety along the Highway 16 corridor from Prince Rupert to Prince George.

The plan consists of five actions the government will take to improve access to transportation services along the Highway 16 corridor and enable residents of First Nations communities and municipalities to travel safely to and from rural towns and villages along the corridor.

The five point action plan consists of:

- **\$1.6 million over 2 years for transit expansion:** These new funds will be available on a cost-shared basis with local communities to extend or enhance BC Transit services to better connect communities.
- **\$750,000 over 3 years for a community transportation grant program to purchase and operate vehicles:** These new funds will be available on a cost-shared basis with local communities to support community-based transportation programs operated by First Nations, local governments or non-profit organizations.
- **\$150,000 over 3 years for a First Nations driver education program:** These new funds will build upon the current driver training/education program to increase the number of Class 4 and Class 5 drivers in First Nations communities along the Highway 16 corridor.
- **\$500,000 over 2 years for highway infrastructure safety improvements including webcams and transit shelters:** These new funds will enable the ministry to increase the number of webcams on the highway and the frequency of photographs taken at these spots. New transit shelters will be built in communities that will be receiving new or expanded transit service.
- **Collaboration to increase interconnectivity of services:** The ministry will work to increase coordination of existing transportation services through BC Transit, Northern Health, not for profit organizations and private service providers including efforts to better synchronize schedules and expand user eligibility criteria.

The ministry has appointed a new ten-person Highway 16 Transportation Advisory Group to oversee implementation of the action plan and ensure that the actions address the input received at the transportation symposium. The advisory group will report to the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure and will be meeting over the months of January and February to review the specifics of the action plan and ensure it is implemented consistent with the input the ministry received at a recent transportation symposium held in Smithers.

Over the next couple of months, the ministry will work with the advisory group to develop a process for local communities and organizations to apply for all of the new funding. Once this work is complete, the ministry will reach out to First Nations communities and municipalities to

let them know how they can apply for the grant funding. By partnering with municipalities, First Nations communities and organizations, the ministry is ensuring they are active participants with vested interest in selecting the transportation services that best meet local needs.

On Nov. 24, 2015, the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure and the First Nations Health Authority co-hosted a transportation symposium in Smithers to engage with First Nations leadership, community members and local government representatives to help identify safe, practical and sustainable transportation options for communities along the Highway 16 corridor. Over 90 participants attended the forum, which was a big step forward in creating a safer environment for people living in communities along the nearly 800 km stretch of highway between Prince Rupert and Prince George. The ideas, recommendations and feedback from the transportation symposium were used to develop the foundation of the \$3-million action plan for the Highway 16 corridor.

Today's announcement builds on the \$5.2 million annual investment that the B.C. government makes towards transit services in communities along Highway 16, and is expected to connect communities not currently serviced by local transit service along the corridor.

Quotes:

Todd Stone, Transportation and Infrastructure Minister –

“We have committed to provide safe, practical and sustainable transportation services for communities along the Highway 16 corridor. And today, we are unveiling a five point action plan for safe transportation options along the corridor. There is no one size fits all approach to addressing the challenges along the corridor and this action plan provides flexibility for communities to determine how to best apply new funding to meet their specific needs.”

Shane Gottfriedson, Regional Chief, BC Assembly of First Nations –

“Following the November 24th transportation symposium to engage First Nations and others in developing solutions for those at risk who travel along Highway 16, I am encouraged to hear of the much needed investment into an improved transportation system and an action plan to ensure that there is improved safety and security for our citizens when travelling. As the national lead for murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls, I am heartened to hear of this important first step to take action on the safety and transportation for our brothers and sisters of the north.

“I am pleased that the B.C. government and Minister Todd Stone have finally moved on a central recommendation from the Wally Oppal 2012 Missing Women Commission of Inquiry. It is imperative that indigenous women do not continue to face the fear and the risk of violence when they travel and I look forward to working in partnership with the advisory group, and the Government of B.C. to ensure that First Nations are fully engaged and supported as the action plan is implemented.”

Mike Morris, Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General –

“These changes are all focused on bringing safety benefits to the people living in northern towns and First Nations communities located along the Highway 16 corridor. As a former police officer, I have spent my career focused on preventing crime and enhancing public safety. This

action plan will help those efforts by creating new, safe and accessible transport services, increasing safety for people living in the north, and in particular, for women and teenage girls.”

John Rustad, Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation –

“I attended the transportation symposium on November 24th, and many great ideas were put forward and discussed during that forum, by members from First Nations communities and municipalities along the corridor. The main thing that we heard was the need for a more cohesive, inter-connected transportation system, to enhance safety along Highway 16, and to enable people to travel safely between communities. This new transportation action plan is responding to this need. The five actions will address the transportation challenges by introducing practical, safe transportation solutions for those living in communities along the corridor.”

Richard Jock, chief operating officer, First Nations Health Authority –

“We are encouraged by the action taken so quickly after the forum and by the substantial investment announced today. The FNHA looks forward to working with First Nations communities along the Highway 16 corridor and the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure to enact this action plan and remove barriers to reliable and safe transportation options along the Highway 16 corridor.”

Luke Strimbold, mayor of Burns Lake –

“I am honoured to be a part of the ten person advisory group, and I will be happy to work on this council to ensure that the transportation services reflect what was recommended at the recent transportation symposium in Smithers. Highway 16 is an extremely important corridor and it links many rural communities in Northern B.C., including Burns Lake. I believe that the five transportation actions outlined today will help to create safer connections for people living in rural communities along the corridor, connecting them to their families, friends, and local services.”

Chastity Davis, chair of Minister’s Advisory Council on Aboriginal Women –

“The Minister's Advisory Council on Aboriginal Women is committed to working in partnership with the B.C. government on our collective goals to develop the necessary support systems to address the risks and violence that many Aboriginal women and their children are exposed to, and this includes the risks for women hitchhiking along Highway 16. Today’s transportation action plan for the Highway 16 corridor outlines five steps that were informed by First Nation communities through consultation efforts of the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure in partnership with the First Nations Health Authority. Our hope is that the five steps that are outlined today will directly benefit Aboriginal women and girls in the north, by creating safe and accessible transportation systems such as expanded transit and community-based transportation.”

Shirley Bond, MLA Prince George-Valemount –

“This action plan will help improve safety and transportation options for those who live along the Highway 16 corridor, helping provide them with practical and sustainable services. It is built on a foundation of collaboration, using the input received from the recent Highway 16

Transportation Symposium to ensure that the voices of municipalities, First Nations communities and organizations are heard.”

Learn More:

For a summary of proceedings from the transportation symposium, go to:

<http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/driving-and-transportation/passenger-travel/highway-16-corridor-transportation-services/pdfs/151124-northern-transportation-symposium-summary.pdf>

A backgrounder follows.

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BACKGROUND

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Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure

New advisory group established

The new ten-member advisory group has been established.

The members of the advisory group are:

1. **Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (chair):** Deborah Bowman, assistant deputy minister, Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure
2. **First Nations representative:** Wanda Good, Deputy Chief Council, Gitanyow
3. **First Nations representative:** Reg Mueller, Saik'uz First Nation
4. **First Nations Health Authority:** Richard Jock, chief operating officer, First Nations Health Authority
5. **Highway of Tears Initiative:** Mary Teegee, Highway of Tears Initiative and executive director of child and family services at Carrier Sekani Family Services
6. **Local government representative:** Rob MacDougall, mayor of District of Fort St. James
7. **Local government representative:** Luke Strimbold, mayor of Burns Lake
8. **Local government representative:** Shane Brienen, mayor of Houston
9. **Local government representative:** Carol Leclerc, mayor of Terrace.
10. **Northern Health Authority:** Penny Anguish, chief operating officer, North West and chief nurse executive

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