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**General**

**What is the North-South Interconnector (AR-1), as referenced in the 2018 Quesnel Planning Study?**

- A four-lane highway that is intended to bypass the downtown core of Quesnel. It includes two new structures that would replace the Quesnel River Bridge and the Quesnel Rail Crossing Bridge. The proposed plan includes two new signalized intersections that would provide connections onto the existing Highway 97, including Front St. and the Moffat Bridge Approach.

**What are the project limits?**

- The proposed project starts at the tie in to Front St. between Gordon Ave and River Park Rd. at the north end and north of Nadeau / Nelson St. to tie back into Highway 97 at the south end of the project. The length of the proposed interconnector is approximately 1.7 kms.

**What is the status of this project?**

- The Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (the ministry) is moving forward with preliminary design of the proposed North-South Interconnector. Engineering work is underway with preliminary design anticipated to be completed in late 2019. At this stage, the project does not have funding to move forward with detailed engineering or construction. This preliminary work will help enable the ministry to refine the alignment and build a business case for future funding.

**Why is the ministry doing this?**

- The North-South Interconnector was recommended as a long-term priority in the Quesnel Transportation Study. The Interconnector would increase safety and significantly reduce congestion, as commercial vehicles traveling through the region would be able to bypass the downtown core. The project is supported by the City of Quesnel and was the preferred option of the community during the ministry’s public engagement. The ministry committed to work with the City of Quesnel to undertake future projects that will improve traffic flow through the downtown core.

- Phase 1 of the study examined existing issues for the Highway 97 corridor through Quesnel including: high-collision locations, intersections with long delays (traffic congestion), constrained segments of highway and other technical components. It was found that daily traffic volumes are highest through Highway 97 / Front Street. Safety concerns were also identified through south Quesnel area and downtown.
- Phase 2 of the study explored improvement options which addressed the existing and future needs of the corridor.

### **How much is this going to cost?**

- Currently, the project does not have funding to move forward to construction, however the ministry will continue to monitor the existing structures' condition and develop both a short-term maintenance and medium-term rehabilitation plan accordingly as time progresses, to keep them safe and passable.
- The transportation planning study indicated that the project costs of the North-South Interconnector could be upward of \$275M.

### **What work has been done?**

- In May 2018, the ministry completed the Quesnel Transportation Plan Study (the study). The study assessed highway safety and traffic flow through the community. The study identified a wide range of transportation improvement options including upgrades to the existing highway corridor, alternate routes in and around Quesnel, as well as new crossings of the Quesnel River and BC Rail Overhead Bridge. The study provided the ministry with short, medium and long-term solutions to move forward with.
- The ministry has completed the short-term priority improvement that was recommended in the study. This included the reconfiguration of the lanes on Highway 97 at Front St in downtown Quesnel. This project was a commitment made by the Ministry to improve the traffic flow and pedestrian safety along Front St. The project also included upgrading to LED lighting at the intersections of Carson, Shepherd, McNaughton and St. Laurent Avenues.
- For the medium-term priority improvement option, Racing Road – the ministry has completed environmental assessments, First Nations consultation, field investigations in survey, geotechnical and archeology. Conceptual and preliminary design has been completed and the Racing Road project is currently working on detailed design.
- For long-term, North-South Interconnector, a preliminary geotechnical drilling investigation has been completed for assistance in the preliminary design. Instrumentation has been installed at select locations and will be monitored on a periodic basis throughout the year.

### **How was the North-South Interconnector design chosen?**

- The ultimate decision maker is the ministry, which based the decision on the factors listed below.
- Improvement options identified in the study were developed based upon guiding principles. The options were screened and evaluated to determine short, medium and long-term investment recommendations. The six guiding principles were:
  - Support local and regional travel demands
  - Improve intersection and highway safety

- Support active transportation
  - Improve intersection and corridor mobility
  - Improve access and connectivity with the local road network
  - Mitigate heavy vehicle impacts
- The North-South Interconnector solves many existing performance needs through Quesnel and was recommended as a long-term priority.
  - This option demonstrated strong technical support, as well as support from the City of Quesnel and community members which resulted in moving forward to preliminary design.
  - This preliminary design exercise is the first step in the project development process to better define scope, schedule, budget, risks and trade-offs associated with this potential investment.

### What other options were considered?

- Four other options were considered and included: North-South Interconnector (2-lane), North-South Industrial Connector, East-West Connector and North-South Bypass.
- **North-South Interconnector (2-lane).** Technical rationale: The cost of constructing this option is not significantly less than the cost to construct the North-South Interconnector (4-lane), therefore this option was screened out.
- **North-South Industrial Connector.** Technical Rationale: This option utilizes the existing North Star Interchange and runs along North Star and Sword Avenue. Significant property acquisitions would be required as this route follows an alignment through the industrial site of Cariboo Pulp and Paper and through industrial lands on the north side of the Quesnel River. This option does not provide a solution to remove all pass-through heavy vehicles from Front Street as heavy trucks from West Quesnel are unlikely to use this route. This option has major geotechnical challenges. In addition, this option does not consider the replacement or rehabilitation of the bridge structures, which would still require attention and have major financial implications to the Province, thus this option has been screened out.
- **East-West Connector.** Technical Rationale: This option is a 2-lane highway that runs from Highway 97 south of Lear Road / Keis Road intersection west through the industrial area, dropping down into the agricultural area and across the Fraser River. The road then rises up on the bend above the river and ties to Blackwater Road, near its intersection with Yargeau Road. This option provides few benefits to highway users and would be used by a small volume of local users. Thus, this option does not address the need to replace the Quesnel River Bridge and the Quesnel Overhead bridge, nor does it address the safety issues through downtown Quesnel.
- **North-South Bypass.** Technical Rationale: This option by-passes the city with a 4-lane highway from the North Star Interchange to the Highway 26 intersection. This option would replace the North Star interchange with a roundabout interchange that allows for the highway to have free flow movement. The North-South Bypass has been explored prior to the Quesnel Transportation Planning Study. Thus, this option does not provide a solution to reducing all pass-through heavy vehicles from Front Street as heavy trucks from West Quesnel are unlikely to use this route. This option also has major geotechnical issues. The City of Quesnel does not support this option.

### What are the mobility and safety benefits of the North-South Interconnector?

- Local and regional road network connectivity would be improved with the addition of a parallel route to Highway 97 in the downtown.
- Heavy vehicle and dangerous goods traffic currently using Carson Avenue and Front Street sections of Highway 97 would be directed to use the new route.
- The project will enhance the safety of motorists, cyclists and pedestrians by reducing heavy truck traffic from the downtown core. The project will also relieve traffic congestion.
- Highway 97 through the downtown including the sections on Carson Avenue and Front Street could be returned to the City of Quesnel and repurposed as part of a revitalized downtown road network.

**Will the provincial government be engaging with the municipal and affected indigenous governments as well as the public?**

- Yes, the ministry will be working with the staff and elected officials from the City of Quesnel, the Cariboo Regional District and from affected Indigenous groups. The ministry will also be meeting with key stakeholders and organizations that are vitally linked to the project limits, to understand local viewpoints, knowledge and opportunities.

**How will the Ministry address potential business impacts?**

- The ministry will make its best efforts to mitigate business impacts during the design phases. Consultation with business owners may be required during design phases to address temporary impacts that may be necessary

**Was there any community consultation?**

- Yes, during the study, ministry engaged and held meetings with the City of Quesnel, local elected officials and affected indigenous groups, and held meetings with a technical advisory group. In addition, two open houses, stakeholder meetings and meetings with individual property owners also occurred.
- The two open houses enabled the public to provide input on the study's conceptual improvement options, which included the North-South Interconnector (AR-1) Participants were asked to provide their input by completing a feedback form survey that was available in hardcopy and web-based formats, and by submitting any additional feedback by email to the project team. From the feedback forms that were collected, it was determined that the responses favoured the North-South Interconnector as the most important improvement option.
- A summary of the community engagement is posted on the study's website.

**How does the ministry incorporate the community's feedback?**

- Community feedback is considered along with engineering, environmental and financial information, as well as feedback from local government and Indigenous communities.

**Technical**

**A. Archaeology**

**What assessments will be undertaken?**

- Initial archaeological assessments will be incorporated in part of the preliminary design. This work will include additional engagement with Indigenous communities.

## B. Design

### **Would the North-South Interconnector accommodate transit, pedestrian and bicycle traffic?**

- Yes, during the design, multi-modal transportation will be considered.

### **What is the highway footprint of the North-South Interconnector?**

- The alignment of the project will be in accordance to MoTI's highway standards.

## C. Environment

### **How will the impacts to wildlife be mitigated?**

- Initial assessments have been completed and detailed environmental assessments will be completed during the preliminary design phase to confirm existing conditions and identify potential mitigation opportunities.

### **How will the noise of the new alignment impact residences?**

- Noise baseline testing will be conducted in the preliminary design stages. The ministry plans to complete a test to determine what a baseline noise level is at the proposed location in order to determine potential noise implications.

### **Will there be an increase of pollution and green house gas emissions?**

- No, pollution and green house gas emissions will be potentially reduced as a result of a reduction in idling and fuel consumption.

### **What will happen to the greenspace with the proposed footprint?**

- If the project receives funding and proceeds to detailed design and construction, unfortunately, the interconnector will impact the greenspace. However, prior and during tree removal, environmental assessments and monitoring will be conducted.
- Opportunities will be looked at for offsetting the loss of green space.

### **What will happen to the monument?**

- The ministry will be working with the local indigenous groups to determine the appropriate location of relocation of the monument.

## D. Properties

### **How were impacted property owners informed that their property may potentially be impacted by the North-South Interconnector?**

- The ministry held meetings with several individual property owners whose properties may be impacted by the proposed alignment. The ministry also held two public open houses where the public and potentially impacted property owners were able to provide their input on the conceptual improvement options. Participants were asked to provide their input by completing feedback form survey that was available in hardcopy and web-based formats, and by submitting any additional feedback by email to the project team.

### **How will the North-South Interconnector affect my property value?**

- It is unknown if property values will be affected as a result of the project. While property impacts cannot be fully determined until design has identified right of way requirements, the ministry is committed to working with each of the potentially affected property owners to keep them informed of the project status.
- If the project receives funding to move forward with detailed design and construction, then the ministry will work closely with each affected property owner to reach fair and consensual agreement once design has progressed to identify the actual impacts.

**Will the ministry expropriate my property?**

- If the project receives funding to proceed to detailed design and construction, the ministry will make every effort to consensually negotiate fair settlements with land owners. Expropriation of property is used only as a last resort if the ministry and the land owner cannot agree on overall compensation.

**E. Structures**

**Why replace the Quesnel River Bridge and the Quesnel Overhead (rail crossing) instead of rehabilitating them?**

- The Quesnel River Bridge and the Quesnel Rail Crossing Bridge need replacement as they are both coming to the end of their service life. Rehabilitation is not viable because the structures are too narrow, do not meet height and width restrictions for overloaded trucks. Our ability to widen and rehabilitate the existing structures would be challenging and extremely costly due to their structural configuration and age. Replacing the structures would meet the long-term vision of Highway 97 for the passing of extraordinary loads and would also provide better safety for cyclists and pedestrians.

**What is the maintenance cost of current bridges?**

- As the structures are aging and ending their service life, the maintenance costs will increase over time.
- If the project receives funding to construct a new structure, it will significantly reduce the cost of continual maintenance and accommodate the passage of wide loads, create safe passage for pedestrians and cyclists.

**F. Traffic**

**How much traffic on Highway 97 in Quesnel is passing straight through the city?**

- As part of the Quesnel Transportation Planning Study Phase 1 – Existing Conditions work in 2015, extensive “Origin-Destination” (O-D) surveys were completed to understand local traffic patterns. Based on the data, 8% of highway traffic entering Quesnel was found to pass straight through the City.

**How was the data collected and used?**

- The O-D survey was conducted by collecting anonymous data using eleven Bluetooth Traffic Monitor (BTM) units. The BTM units were deployed for two weeks in 2015 and collected data for 24 hours/day. The data helped establish traffic behaviours through the study’s limits.

**What are the mobility and safety benefits of the North-South Interconnector?**

- Local and regional road network connectivity would be improved with the addition of a parallel route to Highway 97 in the downtown.

- Most heavy vehicle and dangerous goods traffic currently using Carson Avenue and Front Street sections of Highway 97 would be directed to use the new route.
- The high collision rate and severity issues at the intersections of Highway 97 and Kinchant Street, McLean Street, Front Street, St. Laurent Avenue and McNaughton Avenue are likely to be mitigated by the redistribution of regional trips and many local trips to use new route.
- Highway 97 through the downtown including the sections on Carson Avenue and Front Street could be returned to the City of Quesnel and repurposed as part of a revitalized downtown road network.

**How will the North-South Interconnector benefit the trucking industry?**

- The proposed route would improve mobility for the trucks due to better access management, less mix-up with the local traffic and fewer traffic controls. Overall travel time is expected to be reduced by 50% through downtown Quesnel.

**How will the North-South Interconnector be connected to the existing highway?**

- The preliminary design will evaluate options to tie-in to the existing highway by means of at-grade intersection controls such as traffic signals or roundabouts. There are no interchanges or new accesses planned. The existing grade separation with the railway will be maintained.

**G. Geotechnical**

**Will the historic slope instability concerns within the project limits be looked at?**

- Yes, the ministry is aware of areas of historic instability. Suitable geotechnical drilling investigations have been completed, including instrumentation to monitor for movements, and preliminary design will accommodate these concerned areas.

**Are impacts to property significant enough to halt the project?**

- There will be costs associated for mitigating the current geotechnical concerns. The ministry is hopeful that mitigation strategies can be utilized to help stabilize current instability while also reducing property impacts and project costs.

**For More Information**

**Where can we find more information?**

- General information on the proposed Quesnel North-South Interconnector or the Quesnel Transportation Planning Study are available on the project's webpage ([gov.bc.ca/quenseltransportationstudy](http://gov.bc.ca/quenseltransportationstudy)).

**Who do I contact for more information?**

Please contact the Ministry of Transportation & Infrastructure at [97qtp@gov.bc.ca](mailto:97qtp@gov.bc.ca)