

B.C. on the Move: Engagement Meeting Notes

NOVEMBER 13, 2014

1:30 PM

BELLA COOLA

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| ATTENDEES/AFFILIATION | Archie Pootlass, Nuxhalk Nation |
| MOTI REPRESENTATIVES | Paula Cousins, District Manager, Transportation, Thompson Nicola District, Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MoTI) Leanna Ilnicki, Area Manager, Roads, Bella Coola Area, MoTI |
| NOTE TAKER | Carrie Peacock, Kirk & Co. Consulting Ltd. |
| KEY THEMES: | |
| 1) | Airports: Participants supported the need for airport runway enhancements. They stated that there are currently runway challenges that prohibit Pacific Coastal from filling larger planes, even though is demand. |
| 2) | Highways and side roads: Participants encouraged the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure to consider ways to engage and employ First Nations community members in its next round of maintenance contracts. |
| 3) | Highways: Participants requested upgrades to Highway 20 between Anahim Lake and Tweedsmuir Park. Work was started around 15 years ago but was never completed. Efforts are needed to deal with (and straighten) the narrow sections of road, where it bottlenecks after the wide sections of road. |
| 4) | Port: Participants requested provincial support for a study to look at the feasibility of a establishing a port in Bella Coola to support future industrial growth, specifically logging. |
| 5) | Ferries: Participants expressed strong concerns on behalf of the community regarding the significant impacts to tourism resulting from the BC Ferry cuts. Participants noted that First Nations are looking to expand tourism opportunities in the area and need a ferry system that supports the tourism industry. |
| CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nuxhalk Nation noted limitations to access, due to the airport runway size. Nuxhalk Nation noted that significant changes to the BC Ferry system were a challenge for the region. |
| MOVING FORWARD – STRATEGIES | |
| 1) Moving People and Goods Safely and Reliably | |
| Road Improvements: | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nuxhalk Nation indicated that “The Hill” from Heckman Pass to Anahim Lake needs to be paved. Some work was done 15 years ago on “The Hill”, however Ministry of Environment issues brought the work to a halt. Nuxhalk Nation pointed out that logging in the area diminished when Canfor closed down, so there hasn’t been industry here to push the paving improvements along. Nuxhalk Nation noted that some areas between Heckman Pass and Anahim Lake (just past Louie Creek) are very narrow and need to be widened (i.e. traffic bottlenecks from four lanes down to two), and that the two roads could be straightened in some places. The participant added that prior plans to expand Green River Bridge did not go through as hoped. Nuxhalk Nation indicated that any increase in industrial traffic will prompt greater support for road improvements. If industry traffic starts coming down “The Hill”, changes will be demanded. The participant noted that logging could pick up again. |
| 2) Growing the Economy | |
| Tourism: | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nuxhalk Nation pointed out that cultural tourism is a growing opportunity, and returning customers are now facing significantly less affordable and less appealing ferry service. The tourism industry may go into a tailspin due to changes to the ferry service. Nuxhalk Nation noted that Europeans and Americans would be interested in the ultimate opportunity to golf in a wilderness setting with the support of trained personnel, and that ferries would need to support this. Nuxhalk Nation further noted that a lot of tourists to the area have cancelled their vacations here, due to a lack of access. Nuxhalk Nation noted that, in terms of tourism , it is starting to move forwards in terms of economic opportunities, primarily in the forest industry. The participant noted that the Nation has a forestry license and will likely move into full operations in a few years, with a small operation. The participant added that the economy could turn around for the Nation. The participant from Nuxhalk Nation pointed out that, although it is considering businesses to buy (i.e. motels) to start expanding on tourism opportunities, the infrastructure to support tourism just isn’t currently there. Nuxhalk Nation indicated that the Nation is considering buying a motel and doing some major improvements to the business, but that the key issue remains how to get people here (particularly from Europe or the US). |
| Port: | |
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nuxhalk Nation noted that efforts are needed on a design to get the port up and running for log transport to the Asian markets. The volume of timber wasn’t there before; however, with second growth on its way, industry will soon open up. Nuxhalk Nation would like to see greater support for the port. A feasibility study is needed to confirm the important of the port. The participant from Nuxhalk Nation emphasized that port development needs to be considered, and that resources are needed. Extensive planning and feasibility studies are needed to consider the potential in the area. The participant noted that are three ports on the coast, but there is room for a fourth. The participant indicated that his role as coordinator in the community involves |

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| planning and advising leaders. | |
| Ferries: | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nuxhalk Nation noted that even Canadians complain about the ferry system and the significantly high fees. The participant indicated that when the ferry was first introduced, the community used the ferry to support it; however, it's difficult to continue to support it now, given the costs. Nuxhalk Nation noted that the Queen of Chilliwack ferry is too big. Nuxhalk Nation noted a need for something a little smaller that offers better service to Bella Bella. The current ferry needs to be reconsidered. The participant from Nuxhalk Nation indicated that tourism between Bella Coola and Williams Lake has been devastated, and tourism to Bella Coola has significantly declined. Nuxhalk Nation urged that changes to the ferry service need to be revisited. | |
| 3) Connecting and Strengthening Communities | |
| Airport Improvements: | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nuxhalk Nation noted that the Bella Coola Airport is an excellent access point to the Lower Mainland, but there is a need for an improvement plan to extend the airport's runway. The current length of the runway prohibits access to planes larger than 19-seaters. Some private property issues on the west end of the runway would need to be resolved before the runway could be expanded. The participant expressed that this is the community's key transportation concern. Nuxhalk Nation noted that Anahim Lake's airport may also have runway length issues. The participant from Nuxhalk Nation reported that residents needing to fly out of town often have to be added to a wait list to fly out. Nuxhalk Nation indicated a concern with flight wait lists for people needing access to medical treatment in Vancouver. The participant noted that only small air ambulances can access the Bella Coola runway. As Bella Coola has an aging population, the need for improved air access to Vancouver will only increase. Nuxhalk Nation noted that some residents will fly out a few days before medical appointments in Vancouver, to ensure they don't miss their appointments. Nuxhalk Nation noted that it has asked Pacific Coastal Air and the regional district to make improvements to the airport. | |
| 4) Maximizing Collaboration and Investment with Partners and Stakeholders | |
| Strength in Partnerships: | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nuxhalk Nation would like to see greater support for the port. A partnership could enable a feasibility study to confirm the importance of the port. Nuxhalk Nation indicated that First Nations communities could partner with others to convey a strong and collective message to Ottawa about challenges in getting people to the area. | |
| TOP THREE PRIORITIES FOR TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expanding the airport runway at Bella Coola is the top priority for the Nuxhalk Nation. Nuxhalk Nation urged changes to the BC Ferry service to better meet the economic (and other) needs of the community. Nuxhalk Nation noted a need to improve and maintain Highway 20. | |
| ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/DISCUSSION | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The participant from Nuxhalk Nation noted that when someone was mauled by a grizzly bear in the brush, brushing crews arrived within the week. The participant noted that the Nation will confirm the date when that incident occurred, so the brushing program can be scheduled to reoccur in future years. Nuxhalk Nation added that it has had 12 grizzlies in the community, and they have brushed the laneways into the community, as the bears were starting to sleep wherever salmon was being processed (or where there were fruit trees). Nuxhalk Nation indicated that BC Hydro does brushing and involves the local communities in the process, which is appreciated. The participant from Nuxhalk Nation noted that the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure should be commended – by 7:00 a.m., they will have "The Hill" swept and they will be on their way back down. The participant expressed that MoTI seems committed to maintaining it. Nuxhalk Nation requested that, in future, consideration be given to training and contracting local First Nations people to do brushing work. The participant from Nuxhalk Nation noted that there isn't one First Nations person working on the highways between Bella Coola and Williams Lake. While the maintenance program is likely tendered out to private contractors, there needs to be a plan to provide training at the community level to young First Nations people aspiring to participate at the Ministry. The participant indicated that there should be a First Nations Manager involved in the highways program. Nuxhalk Nation noted that the community has been focused on rejuvenation, with a school expansion a few years ago to accommodate 190 students. The participant noted that students are graduating with honours and moving on successfully. | |
| Environmental Impacts: | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Nuxhalk Nation indicated that environmental damage could occur to the estuary as a result of road construction. The salmon, trout and steelhead, should be allowed to carry on in their natural life cycle as they reach their destination, without impacts from | |

road construction.

- Nuxhalk Nation noted that it does not want any further environmental damage to this pristine area.