

B.C. on the Move: Engagement Meeting Notes

NOVEMBER 24, 2014

12:30PM

FORT NELSON

ATTENDEES/AFFILIATION	Community Development Officer Mike Gilbert, Northern Rockies Regional Municipality Scott Barry, Northern Rockies Regional Municipality Mayor Bill Streeper, Northern Rockies Regional Municipality George Smith, Public Works and Government Services Canada Bev Vandersteen, Fort Nelson & District Chamber of Commerce
MOTI REPRESENTATIVES	Scott Maxwell, Acting Regional Director, Northern Region, Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MoTI) Bryan Crosby, Acting District Manager, Peace District, MoTI
NOTE TAKER	Selina Bull, Kirk & Co. Consulting
KEY THEMES (3-6)	
1) Bridges: Participants agreed that the Fort Nelson River Bridge needs improvement or replacement.	
2) Highways: Participants agreed that safety on Highway 97 (the Alaska Highway) was critical for their communities.	
3) Rail: Participants agreed that rail freight services were critical for moving goods to and from the town. Participants indicated that Fort Nelson needed increased or more efficient rail service.	
4) Airport: Participants agreed that the airport was key to the connectivity and the economy of the region. Participants noted a need for airport security services and infrastructure improvements.	
5) Commercial Vehicles: Participants expressed frustration at some CVSE (commercial vehicles) regulations and noted that such stringent regulation causes inefficiencies.	
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Mayor of Northern Rockies Regional Municipality felt that the province has ignored Fort Nelson's main concern of the Fort Nelson River Bridge. Participants noted that there was an opportunity for the province to help Fort Nelson work on its rail issues. Participants agreed that safety problems on the Alaska Highway pose challenges to business and tourism in the area. Participants noted concerns that the highway might become notorious for road fatalities like Alberta's Highway 63 to Fort McMurray. Participants noted that heavy traffic south of Bucking Horse will pose a challenge to development, especially if LNG operations go ahead. Participants agreed that the limited airport capacity and infrastructure, as well as the lack of airport security services were a challenge for Fort Nelson. Participants noted an opportunity to stimulate growth in BC by easing commercial vehicle regulation. Participants noted that a major challenge to highway safety was the lack of 911 and mobile phone service on Highway 97. 	
MOVING FORWARD – STRATEGIES	
1) Moving People and Goods Safely and Reliably	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Fort Nelson & District Chamber of Commerce and the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality noted that if fuel is not transported by rail, it has to be transported by truck, which causes safety concerns as it puts more traffic and hazardous materials on the highway. Fort Nelson & District Chamber of Commerce indicated that it would be surprising if there had been a decrease in highway accidents between Fort St John and Fort Nelson. A participant from the Fort Nelson & District Chamber of Commerce noted a need for passing lanes, since getting stuck behind convoys of large trucks can cause frustration and risky passing manoeuvres by other drivers. The Northern Rockies Regional Municipality noted that speed limits should be reassessed in certain spots on the highway, especially those that have been straightened and upgraded. Northern Rockies Regional Municipality also noted safety issues on Highway 97 between Wonowon and Pink Mountain, including unsafe turns, a lack of passing lanes, and unsafe driving by truckers. A participant from Northern Rockies Regional Municipality indicated that heavy traffic on Highway 97 south of Buckinghorse is a concern and that if LNG development goes ahead, north of Buckinghorse will also become very busy. Participants agreed that the lack of cell coverage on highways in the area constituted a safety issue, which will only worsen when traffic increases. The Fort Nelson & District Chamber of Commerce noted that the highway to Fort McMurray is known as the "Highway of Death," and urged action to be taken so that the Alaska Highway does not become BC's "Highway of Death." Fort Nelson & District Chamber of Commerce indicated a concern with the fact that Drive BC does not include information on the federal section of Highway 97. The Chamber noted that tourists who do not know the area simply assume that it is all clear. Participants noted that there should be some interim safety measures, like mandatory pullouts for trucks, while waiting for larger projects. With such a high volume of trucking traffic, participants noted that it is only a matter of time before there is 	

an accident.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Northern Rockies Regional Municipality noted that the Alaska Highway was built to specifications that are no longer appropriate for the current nature or volume of traffic in the region.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northern Rockies Regional Municipality noted that the airport needs extra capacity just to move people safely.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A participant from Northern Rockies Regional Municipality noted that inefficient or disorganized airport operations could give potential newcomers the wrong impression of Fort Nelson.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants noted that the province should be supporting Fort Nelson Airport, as it is critical to forest firefighting operations.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants pointed out that Highway 97 has some major safety concerns with the mix of professional and unprofessional drivers, with bad weather conditions, and sometimes poor maintenance.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A participant from Northern Rockies Regional Municipality noted a concern with a maintenance differential on Highway 97 between the sections north and south of Sikanni.
2) Growing the Economy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northern Rockies Regional Municipality noted an issue with regulation of commercial vehicles in BC. The Mayor of Northern Rockies Regional Municipality noted concerns with Commercial Vehicle regulations on pilot cars, width of trucks, axle spacing, and trailer configuration. He pointed out that if such regulations were eased to match the regulations of bordering provinces and territories, the province could easily stimulate economic growth without great expenditure.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants agreed that better freight rail services were required to support business in Fort Nelson and in resource development in the region, especially with the anticipated boom in oil and gas industry, as construction will require the transport of large components.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants agreed that a major issue for Fort Nelson was that CN has been closing rail yards or pulling staff and shutting down service, which means that businesses cannot access product even if it is in the rail yard. The Chamber noted that this causes problems for businesses that rely on rail to ship and receive products, as they then have to pay more for last-minute trucking services when rail is not an option.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants agreed that growth in the area will require the airport to have security services and more capacity.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A participant from the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality noted that highway safety is crucial to maintaining tourism, which is an important industry to the area.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northern Rockies Regional Municipality noted that the airport was critical to protecting industrial assets in the area from forest fire.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Northern Rockies Regional Municipality stressed that the Fort Nelson River Bridge was crucial for the oil, gas, and logging industries.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A participant from the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality felt that the high costs associated with transportation in the northeast were unduly burdening local business, especially trucking.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Northern Rockies Regional Municipality noted that Fort Nelson is going to be a major hub and that airport security services are key to accommodating growth.
3) Connecting and Strengthening Communities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A participant from the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality stressed that the Alaska Highway, right up to the Yukon border, is key to Fort Nelson's progress.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Northern Rockies Regional Municipality noted that safety concerns on Highway 97 between Buckinghorse and Fort St John could cause problems for the connectivity of Fort Nelson's community and transport of supplies north of Fort St John.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northern Rockies Regional Municipality pointed out that a strategy for the airport should consider connectivity points in the province and beyond.
4) Maximizing Collaboration and Investment with Partners and Stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Mayor of Northern Rockies Regional Municipality noted that Fort Nelson is trying to obtain federal funding for 50% of the Fort Nelson River Bridge to complement the 50% funding from the province.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants agreed that they would like support from the province in dealing with CN in their push for better and more service, especially as participants have found CN difficult to work with.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants agreed that Highway 97 needs more rest stops, and some suggested that the province should encourage more private rest-stops by offering compensation to existing hotels/motels/restaurants for their facilities.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The participant from Public Works and Government Services Canada noted that construction of a rest stop at Trutch was under consideration with provincial partners.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants agreed that mobile coverage was a key component to highway safety, although it is not specifically a highways problem.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants agreed that Drive BC should be better linked in to information about conditions on the federal section of the highway
TOP THREE PRIORITIES FOR TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS
<u>Northern Rockies Regional Municipality:</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Mayor of the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality noted that the replacement of the Fort Nelson River Bridge was a top priority for his community.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Mayor of the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality noted that improvements to Fort Nelson's arterial route (Highway

97) through Fort Nelson were important to the community.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Mayor of the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality also indicated that it was critical for the government to ease some highway regulations such as speed limits and trucking regulations.
<u>Fort Nelson & District Chamber of Commerce:</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Fort Nelson & District Chamber of Commerce noted that safety on the Alaska Highway was a critical issue. The Fort Nelson & District Chamber of Commerce also indicated a priority to improve rail freight services to help facilitate business in the areas.
<u>Regional/All:</u>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants agreed that the airport needs infrastructure improvements and security services.

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/DISCUSSION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Northern Rockies Regional Municipality noted that CN was difficult to work with and expressed frustration that CN has ignored or refused to sign off on a culvert request for 6 years.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Mayor of the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality pointed out that there should be a rest facility on Highway 97 at Mile 82 near Buckinghorse. The Mayor noted that the lodge in that location is not a public washroom, but that there could be an opportunity for a partnership in which the government could support public facilities at the lodge.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A participant from Public Works and Government Services Canada noted that he was attending to hear comments regarding the federal section of Highway 97, and indicated that his organization is considering a speed limit increase on Highway 97. This participant also noted that other potential upcoming projects on the federal side included paving between Fort Nelson and Highway 77 and straightening some corners on the way to Liard.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Mayor of the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality inquired why there are not flashing amber warning lights heading south through town near Tim Hortons, while there are flashing amber warning lights heading in the other direction. The Mayor also expressed a concern that one of the lights was burnt out. Scott Maxwell noted this concern and indicated that the coming from a 50kmph speed zone usually does not require flashing amber warning lights.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A participant from the Fort Nelson & District Chamber of Commerce noted that Drive BC was a useful tool but pointed out that it does not link into information on the federal section of the highway. This participant also noted a concern that conditions on the federal highway are only available online during office hours.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Northern Rockies Regional Municipality noted that all modes of transportation are connected. For instance, if rail and airlines are not transporting people and goods efficiently, that will push more traffic onto the highways. This participant also pointed out that if there are transportation inefficiencies, these will affect businesses' bottom lines.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A participant from the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality noted a concern that requirements are not being met for the oil and gas industry to function efficiently.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A participant from the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality indicated that Dawson Creek was a good point of reference for Fort Nelson in terms of airports. This participant also noted that in 2012, about 70% of passenger transits in Fort Nelson airport were for industry (charter, primarily), while the remaining 30% were non-industry, but still primarily commercial. This participant indicated that for two months in 2012 passenger movements exceeded those of tier-two airports like Ottawa, Sudbury, and Waterloo.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A participant from the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality pointed out that Fort Nelson could consume all the funding from the Province's Infrastructure Development Contribution Agreement just by making necessary improvements to the airport.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A participant from the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality inquired what the next step after consultation would be.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Mayor of the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality noted that he had been given a new four-year mandate and indicated that he would be continuing to pursue the Fort Nelson River Bridge.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A participant from the Northern Rockies Regional Municipality inquired, given the dual jurisdiction, where the best avenue for the Municipality to make their submission was.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Mayor of Northern Rockies Regional Municipality inquired whether the joint submission for the Fort Nelson River Bridge had gone to Ottawa yet. Scott Maxwell noted that the Build Canada Fund application closes February, so the submission will be in by then.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Mayor of Northern Rockies Regional Municipality noted that easing trucking regulations should be something that can be done quickly. He also noted that often trucking companies need special trucks that fit BC specifications.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Mayor of Northern Rockies Regional Municipality noted that he would like to apply for ownership of every power line from the Alberta border so that he could bury the lines and make over-height trucking more efficient.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northern Rockies Regional Municipality pointed out that people were surprised that the airport does not have security services.