

B.C. on the Move: Engagement Meeting Notes

NOVEMBER 25, 2014

9:30AM

FORT ST. JOHN

ATTENDEES/AFFILIATION	Gary McLeod, Northern BC Trucking Association Mike Whalley, North Peace Regional Airport Kathleen Connolly, Dawson Creek Chamber of Commerce
MOTI REPRESENTATIVES	Scott Maxwell, Acting Regional Director, Northern Region, Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MoTI) Bryan Crosby, Acting District Manager, Transportation, Peace District, MoTI
NOTE TAKER	Selina Bull, Kirk & Co. Consulting Ltd.
KEY THEMES (3-6)	
1)	Highways: Participants agreed that there was a need for highway improvements and expansion between the Alberta border and Pink Mountain to address safety and increasing congestion. Participants especially noted problems with the South Taylor Hill.
2)	Airport: Participants agreed that the North Peace Regional Airport needs more funding to keep up with safety regulations and to expand facilities to accommodate dramatic growth in the region.
3)	Commercial Vehicles: Participants agreed that there was a need for commercial driver training programs better safety regulation for commercial vehicles to ensure the safety of all road users.
4)	Rail: Participants noted that there was a need for rail to serve industries other than oil and gas.
5)	Commercial Vehicles: Participants noted that there was a need for Commercial Vehicle regulations to focus on safety.
6)	Transportation planning: Participants noted that the government should not forget wildlife, tourism and other industries, not necessarily related to oil and gas, in transportation planning.
CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants agreed that a major challenge for the region was that transportation infrastructure is already many years behind current needs. Participants agreed that another challenge for the region was that the heads of ministries and other organizations do not appreciate the issues in the area because they do not visit the region. Participants agreed that a great challenge for their region was the high demand for labour, which can lead to unsafe driving because businesses hire drivers who do not have much experience driving in the area, or do not give their drivers proper equipment. Participants noted that there was an opportunity for the province to increase its revenues, but that this would take some concentrated investment in the Peace. Participants agreed that it was challenging to plan for infrastructure improvements because of the unpredictable nature of growth in the oil and gas industry, especially since these industries attract a "shadow population" which is difficult to account for.
MOVING FORWARD – STRATEGIES	
1)	Moving People and Goods Safely and Reliably
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants agreed that there were highway safety issues between Dawson Creek and Pink Mountain. Participants agreed that the extreme demand for labour in the region meant that employees are not always properly trained or experienced, especially when it comes to driving in the north. Participants noted that it would be useful for industry to ensure that their employees went through a training course to equip them with the knowledge and skills necessary for safe driving in this region. The Dawson Creek and District Chamber of Commerce noted that industry speed limits can cause back-ups and create frustration on the part of other road users, which can lead to risky manoeuvres. Participants noted that this indicated a need for more pull-outs and rest-areas. Participants agreed that CVSE regulations should focus on safety equipment (e.g. tires) and skills, as well as driver behavior, not on paperwork, as regulations are currently focused. Participants expressed concerns about dangerous goods coming through towns, especially if trucks carrying dangerous goods have to navigate traffic circles. Participants noted that drivers carrying dangerous goods often come through town instead of staying on the Dangerous Goods Routes for amenities like food, coffee, and washrooms. The North Peace Regional Airport noted that access to the airport is bad: the 100th Avenue corridor needs widening and the traffic Ministry should get rid of the traffic circle. The North Peace Regional Airport noted a concern with first responders getting to the airport, especially if a train or truck accident at the traffic circle blocks access. The Dawson Creek and District Chamber of Commerce indicated that industry-based road monitors are having a positive impact on safety in the area, and pointed out that road monitors should ensure not just speed limits but also the use of proper equipment.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Northern BC Trucking Association noted that occasionally road monitors and can cause congestion.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Dawson Creek and District Chamber of Commerce indicated that the tourism sector was particularly concerned with the section of highway between Fort St. John and the Yukon, because there are not enough pull-outs and passing lanes. This participant also noted that there is competition for highway space between American RV tourists and commercial trucks. Since neither knows the road well, there are increased safety concerns.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Dawson Creek and District Chamber of Commerce pointed out that very bright stadium lights at near the highway can be a hazard to drivers at night.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Northern BC Trucking Association reported that Safety Canada had been investigating whether there was the potential for 500-700 more trucks to move through the region in the case of an earthquake, but noted that the region can barely manage the current level of traffic.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Northern BC Trucking Association noted that at the intersection of the Alaska Highway and Braden Road (between Fort St John and Dawson Creek), the grade is steep for trucks turning north onto the Alaska Highway. The Dawson Creek and District Chamber of Commerce noted that the congestion in this area is bad. Northern BC Trucking Association added that convoying in this area causes further back-up.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Northern BC Trucking Association noted a need for traffic lights at points where the Dangerous Goods Route connects with the highway
2) Growing the Economy
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Dawson Creek Chamber of Commerce indicated that issues with the South and North Taylor Hill cause road closures, which are very costly to local business as well as industry. The Dawson Creek Chamber of Commerce noted a need for more pull outs, rest stops, and passing lanes to move through congestion more efficiently. This participant also indicated that this pressure is going to increase with industrial growth and that the government needs to be pro-active rather than reactive in planning for this growth.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Dawson Creek Chamber of Commerce noted that if the government wants to capitalize on business in this region, the government needs to help grow local business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Dawson Creek Chamber of Commerce pointed out that the government should be more responsible in ensuring that wildlife populations are sustained to maintain economic activity in hunting and tourism sectors. The Chamber urged the Ministry to consider all sectors that are affected by the growth of industry in the region.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The North Peace Regional Airport noted that it was difficult, as a user pay facility, to attract business to the airport. This issue is now even more serious as the airport is now obliged by Transport Canada to have a safety management system without any governmental funding. This participant indicated that the simplest way to deal with the lack of funds for safety requirements would be to shorten the runway, but then the airport could not support larger planes like Q400s or 737s, which would then reduce business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants from the North Peace Regional Airport and the Northern BC Trucking Association noted a labour issue because they could not afford to pay as much as the oil and gas industry to attract workers. Further, it is costly to train workers who then move elsewhere when offered better pay.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Dawson Creek Chamber of Commerce noted a concern that tourism in the region could dwindle because of the competition on the roads from commercial trucking traffic. This participant stressed that the government needs to ensure that all industries can be successful, not just one.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Dawson Creek Chamber of Commerce and the Northern BC Trucking Association indicated that it would be better for towns and businesses if the amenities like coffee shops and rest areas were located on the Dangerous Goods Route.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants noted that it is difficult to keep up with industry because it grows quickly and unpredictably.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The North Peace Regional Airport noted that it is expecting to see a minimum of around 600 000 passengers by 2027. This participant noted that the airport is already so behind, that another year of planning to be able to accommodate such growth is better than starting immediately without planning.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The North Peace Regional Airport pointed out that the investment needed to meet Transport Canada's runway and safety area requirements would jeopardize the airport's ability to expand and support expected economic growth. This participant indicated that terminal facilities like retail are critical for such growth.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants agreed that airports are crucial in supporting economic growth because they provide the opportunity to move labour.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The North Peace Regional Airport noted that the airport is going to look at demand for air freight services.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The North Peace Regional Airport pointed out that if airport services continue to grow, it will be running larger planes, which will require further investment in safety equipment and vehicles.
3) Connecting and Strengthening Communities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> North Peace Regional Airport indicated that it is very difficult to keep up with increased demand for air travel and with Transport Canada's regulations without some investment from the government.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> North Peace Regional Airport noted that access to the airport is bad and is problematic for employees. This participant noted that BC Transit does not serve the airport although there is a need for transit options to the airport.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The North Peace Regional Airport also pointed out that bus scheduling for Fort St. John needs to be reconsidered.
4) Maximizing Collaboration and Investment with Partners and Stakeholders
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants agreed that there needs to be more cooperation between the provincial and federal governments when addressing maintenance and planning for rehabilitation or capital expansion of the Alaska Highway.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Dawson Creek Chamber of Commerce stressed that CN was unwilling to ship grain for farmers in the region because there was more money in shipping sand for fracking. This participant noted that this causes the economy to slow down as

farmers will not be shipping or planting this year, and it burdens farmers with extra costs.	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Northern BC Trucking Association noted that there is a need for the Ministry to work closely with industry to produce functional project designs. This participant noted the examples of the Taylor Hill and the Highway 97 intersection with Braden Road, where design does not work well for commercial traffic. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The North Peace Regional Airport noted that the airport was looking at \$20-40 million in safety upgrades. However, this participant indicated that neither the airport nor the regional community has the money, and the federal government is unwilling to talk about it. Participants agreed that it would be useful for the Ministry to work with industry-based road monitors to ensure that they monitor safety equipment as well as speeds. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Dawson Creek Chamber of Commerce expressed an interest in the Ministry partnering with industry to work on Sukunka Forest Road. 	
TOP THREE PRIORITIES FOR TRANSPORTATION INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS	
<u>Northern BC Trucking Association:</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Northern BC Trucking Association prioritized projects that would reduce bottlenecks in the region. This participant urged the Ministry to consider the bottlenecks that are occasionally created by work that is underway. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Northern BC Trucking Association also noted a need for more rest stops in the area. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northern BC Trucking Association indicated a strong need for the Ministry to consider dangerous goods routes and bypasses around towns throughout the province. 	
<u>Dawson Creek Chamber of Commerce:</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Dawson Creek Chamber of Commerce's top priority was upgrades to the Taylor Hill. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Dawson Creek Chamber of Commerce indicated a need for the Ministry to encourage CN Rail to work with the South Peace Grain Growers to help that industry grow. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Dawson Creek Chamber of Commerce also noted a need for wildlife fencing around highways in the region to protect wildlife populations and to support tourism and hunting sectors. 	
<u>North Peace Regional Airport:</u>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The North Peace Regional Airport indicated a priority to improve access to the airport, including improving and widening at the 100th Avenue Corridor, and getting rid of the traffic circle. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The North Peace Regional Airport noted a need for increased funding to airports, especially to deal with economic growth and new safety requirements. 	
ADDITIONAL COMMENTS/DISCUSSION	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants noted that there are aggressive drivers in the region that put other drivers at risk. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The North Peace Regional Airport noted that staffing was an issue for the airport because the base wage is low, but that with other benefits and overtime, employees make good money. This participant indicated that because of the specialized nature of work, the airport spends a lot on training. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants noted that truckers respond better to industry-based monitors than to CVSE because their jobs are at stake. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Northern BC Trucking Association indicated that the Ministry should work with industry to figure out the best design and location for weigh scales, and then can avoid situations where large amounts of money are spent on facilities that are under-utilized like at Red Rock, BC. This participant noted that putting another pad at the Red Rock facility would not be a true solution but a band-aid. He urged the Ministry to find the right, not the most expedient, solution, even if the costs are high. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Northern BC Trucking Association noted that a branch of the federal government was not aware that they handle part of the Alaska Highway. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Dawson Creek Chamber of Commerce noted that it can be difficult to model industry traffic. However, the Northern BC Trucking Association pointed out that it is usually cyclical and that some corridors will not change much. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Northern BC Trucking Association inquired about plans for the Taylor Bridge. Scott Maxwell noted that the Ministry is nearing the end of the engineering analysis. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Dawson Creek Chamber of Commerce inquired about what project was underway at Sukunka Forest Service Road. Scott noted that it was not a MoTI road. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The North Peace Regional Airport pointed out that the highway to Alberta was part of its "fly local" campaign. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The North Peace Regional Airport indicated that traffic is going to increase in the region. This participant also noted that a big issue is whether it is safer to move LNG by rail or by pipeline, while some also say it is better to haul it by truck. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Northern BC Trucking Association noted that the rail line between Dawson Creek and Grand Prairie had been upgraded for a large sum of money but that it does not seem to be used. Scott Maxwell noted that it is not up to standards for running trains. 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Dawson Creek Chamber of Commerce noted that two rail sidings in the region had been bought by American companies and indicated that these would probably be used for fracking sand. This participant noted that it was odd that Canadians could not really access a company that is owned by Canadians (CN). 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Northern BC Trucking Association inquired whether the Ministry has considered fixing bottlenecks like that in Pouce Coupe. 	

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants from the Northern BC Trucking Association and the Dawson Creek Chamber of Commerce noted that a problem with a 10 year transportation plan is that industry grows so quickly in the region that it is difficult to keep up. The Dawson Creek Chamber of Commerce indicated that in two years' time, the plan could be out of date.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The North Peace Regional Airport indicated that because staffing is a problem, the airport cannot increase security screening services, which causes congestion in the terminal. This participant indicated that the airport is undertaking a master planning process to deal with major growth. The North Peace Regional Airport noted that it now has a traffic forecast with changeable input variables, and the airport expects to handle a minimum of about 600 000 passengers by 2027. This participant also noted that the airport will do a facilities assessment.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Dawson Creek Chamber of Commerce inquired of the North Peace Regional Airport if it would be looking at providing international flights. The North Peace Regional Airport responded that it would be looking at partnering with a sister airport to do so, but that it would not be happening in the short term because the airport facilities could not yet handle it.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The North Peace Regional Airport noted that it competes with Prince George and Grand Prairie airports.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Dawson Creek Chamber of Commerce inquired of the North Peace Regional Airport whether it was owned by the same group as YVR. The North Peace Regional Airport noted that it was owned by Vantage Airport Group, and the benefit to that was that there is a pool of resources that smaller airports can draw on. The participant from the North Peace Regional Airport noted that YVR management has now recognized that feeder airports are important to business.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The North Peace Regional Airport pointed out that as a small airport, it is lucky to have been able to secure bank financing, but that this jeopardizes other funding streams like airport capital assistance programs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants expressed appreciation for the consultation. The Dawson Creek Chamber of Commerce felt that this region is sometimes forgotten or not heard.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Dawson Creek Chamber of Commerce noted that the Encana work camp is going to be reduced to about 1200 workers from what was originally planned because Encana is about a year behind on engineering work. This participant pointed out that this kind of growth and the shadow population is difficult to predict.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Northern BC Trucking Association noted that projects take too long to be completed now. Some participants noted that this can be caused by operations happening upon unexpected challenges.