

Speaking Notes for Minister Archie Lang
Advantage North Conference
May 29, 2007
Topic: Welcome Comments

Good morning.

On behalf of the Government of Yukon, I would like to officially welcome you to this conference.

And to all of you who are visiting from outside the territory, welcome to the Yukon. I trust your stay in the Yukon will be a pleasant one and that you will be able to take some time during, or at the end of this event, to see a little of what our fine territory has to offer.

While I could spend my allotted time over the next ten minutes as a tourism spokesperson for the government, it is probably more appropriate if I stick to the topic at hand.

Given my role with the Yukon government, I cannot tell you how pleased I am to see this conference hosted in Yukon. For those of you who do not know, I hold a dual mandate within our government, as I am fortunate to serve as both the Minister of Department of Highways and Public Works (i.e., our transportation department) and as Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources.

As such, I cannot think of a better event than one that includes a joint dialogue on transportation AND resource development.

And it is even better that this dialogue will take place with all affected parties in the same room, including representatives from industry and all levels of government.

As I look through the agenda for the next two days, I have to congratulate the conference organizers. The list of topics to be discussed is excellent.

I am pleased to see that you will be discussing transportation – along all modes – in the context of economic development, specifically related to key topics such as resource development, pipeline projects and other related issues.

And it is equally positive to see that these discussions will be placed within the proper context, with due attention paid to the global economic environment, as well as important environmental considerations, such as climate change.

Finally, it is laudable that we will put our heads together over the next two days and have some good discussion on the current challenges in our northern transportation systems, as well as options for future improvement.

It should come as no surprise to you to hear that the Government of Yukon is fully supportive of development in our transportation system. As articulated during our most recent election campaign, we have a vision for transportation in the Yukon, as summed up by the following.

We envision:

A multi-modal transportation system that connects communities, enables economic development, enhances national sovereignty and security, and creates corridors and gateways to national and global markets.

This vision is consistent with the themes to be explored during this conference over the next two days.

Our government's commitment to infrastructure has been articulated in our latest budget, where some 61 million dollars has been budgeted for capital investment in Yukon transportation.

These funds will be used to support many aspects of our system, including a continued focus on the Shikwak Project (some 30 million dollars), which is nearing completion. Under Shikwak, about 500 kilometres of the Haines Road and Alaska Highway between Haines Junction and the Yukon/Alaska border, as well as several major bridges, have been – or are in the process of being – rehabilitated and brought up to current standards.

Over the next year, significant capital investment will also occur along the Dempster and the Robert Campbell Highways, as well as via two million dollars in pavement rehabilitation on the Klondike Highway. An additional 10 million dollars will be invested in Yukon airports, most notably at Whitehorse International.

But we believe more needs to be done. According to research conducted within the Department of Highways and Public Works, a massive transportation infrastructure deficit exists in the Yukon.

Bringing our roads, airports and bridges up to the standards required for the 21st Century will require some 1.3 billion dollars. While some of these needs are more long-term in nature, some are definitely more urgent.

As articulated by my colleagues across all provincial and territorial governments in Canada, one of the biggest challenges – if not the biggest challenge – currently facing our jurisdictions, is the lack of funding to support transportation infrastructure.

Studies continue to show that transportation is an enabler of economic development. This fact, I am sure, will be discussed over the next two days.

At the provincial and territorial level, we continue to discuss funding options with our colleagues in the federal government. And some good news is emerging.

The recent federal budget set aside a 7-year commitment for infrastructure funding across the country.

My sense, however, is that we may still be left with a transportation deficit at the end of the day, particularly in the north, where the needs are great, but the resources are limited.

These are the issues that require ongoing work at the government level and I can assure you we take this task very seriously.

As I noted earlier in our vision statement on transportation, we strive for a multi-modal system that not only connects our communities within the north, but supports economic development, both within Canada and on the global stage.

I believe we can accomplish this vision, within Yukon and across the northern parts of this country.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this morning. Again, I welcome you to this excellent event. And wish you the best of luck in your deliberations over the next two days.

Thank you.