

ADVICE TO MINISTER

CONFIDENTIAL ISSUES NOTE

Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure

Date: May 23, 2014

Minister Responsible: Todd Stone

Missing women's report

ADVICE AND RECOMMENDED RESPONSE:

- Government's commitment to provide safer public transportation options on our northern highways requires a multi-faceted approach.
- There is no easy fix here and I am not wedded to the idea of a shuttle bus being the solution.
- We are talking with regional associations to obtain a better understanding of the current challenges. We are focusing our efforts on identifying options that improve safety.
- Government will continue to work with local governments, First Nations and BC Transit to deliver transit services that are affordable, efficient and sustainable.
- These meetings are ongoing, and will be continuing over the course of the summer.
- Some local governments have shown an interest in partnering with the Province to provide transit service between their communities in addition to what is currently provided by BC Transit.

Actions to help fulfil the need for safer public transportation in the region include:

- Providing a \$100,000 grant to Carrier Sekani Family Services to build upon and enhance Community Safety Training Workshops held in communities across Highway 16, including addressing the safety needs of vulnerable Aboriginal women residing in these communities and discussions about safe transportation options.
- 70% of the route now has cell coverage in case of an emergency or if help is needed. TELUS is also exploring potential improvements along additional unconnected segments of Highway 16.
- A joint study is being led by the University of Northern BC to make Highway 16 safer for hitchhikers.
- Researchers from two UNBC programs are collaborating and sharing data with the RCMP in an effort to better understand the reasons people hitchhike and the risks associated with this mode of transportation.
- A community preventative/awareness presentation has been developed by the RCMP entitled Thumbs Down to Hitchhiking. It covers awareness, education and prevention strategies and has been delivered at the community level.
- The RCMP also worked together with the Native Women's Association of Canada to raise awareness about the dangers of hitchhiking. They distributed a new poster throughout B.C. that outlines steps to increase one's safety when hitchhiking.

KEY FACTS REGARDING THE ISSUE:

MoTI staff recently met with the Omenica Beetle Action Coalition (OBAC), as part of OBAC's regular board meeting, to discuss general transportation topics in the North, including transportation on Hwy 16.

The main issues identified were affordable and convenient corridor-wide travel, and a need for safe travel alternatives between neighbouring towns. It was clarified that transit service is cost-shared with municipalities, with BC Transit contributing 46.69% of the funding and local governments contributing 53.31% which comes from property taxes, fares and advertising.

Discussions also included Greyhound's "end to end" service from Prince Rupert to Prince George, and although it services the communities along Highway 16, the stops are often at odd hours which are inconvenient for users. However, since Greyhound reduced its service along the route, use has increased, so there may be an opportunity for the company to increase its service. BC Transit would take this into consideration for any service additions, as it wouldn't want to compete with Greyhound.

Transportation service for medical appointments provided by Northern Health was also discussed.

There was also a constant theme of the unfairness of northern-generated tax revenues being spent in Vancouver/Victoria, and that more transportation money should be flowing to the area.

OBAC would like to work with the province over the next few months in preparation for a follow-up meeting at UBCM on this topic. The ministry has also committed to the Mayors that there will be a consultation/conversation period over the next 4 weeks.

The OBAC includes the region from Valemount to Mackenzie and west to Smithers. Each member local government is represented on the Board by its Mayor or Chair or by an elected official designated by the Mayor and council.

Directors:

Mayor Stephanie Killam, District of Mackenzie
Chair Bill Miller, Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako
Councillor Rimas Zitkauskas, Village of Telkwa
Councillor Albert Koehler, City of Prince George
Mayor Rob MacDougall, District of Fort St. James
Mayor Gerry Thiessen, District of Vanderhoof
Mayor Taylor Bachrach, Town of Smithers
Mayor Dwayne Lindstrom, Village of Fraser
Mayor Linda Lindsrrom, Village of Fraser Lake
Mayor Linda McGuire, Village of Granisle
Councillor Shane Brennan, District of Houston
Councillor Rick Thompson, Village of McBride
Regional District Chair Art Kaehn, Regional District of Fraser-Fort George
Mayor Luke Strimbold, Village of Burns Lake
Mayor Andru McCracken, Village of Valemount

Further Background:

On Sunday, May 11, the Globe and Mail ran an article about the lack of progress on solving transportation issues on Highway 16. CKNW and CKWX carried similar stories. The reporter had received information from the ministry in response to an information request regarding the Missing Women Commission of Inquiry Report.

Ministry staff attended a February 2, 2013 meeting of the North Central Local Government Association to discuss transportation challenges.

In attendance:

Mitch Campsall	Mayor, 100 Mile House
Cheryl Shuman	Councillor, Dawson Creek
Mike Frazier	Mayor, Village of McBride
Maxine Koope	Executive Director, UBCM Northern Region

ADVICE TO MINISTER

Bruce Christensen	Councillor, City of Fort St John
Jerrilyn Schembri	Director, Peace River Regional District
Laurey-Anne	Councillor, Quesnel
Bruce Bidgood	Councillor, Terrace
Dave Wilbur	Councillor, City of Prince George
Art Kaehn	Chair, Fraser Fort George RD
Brian Frenkel	Councillor, Vanderhoof
Luke Strimbold	Mayor, Village of Burns Lake/Director, OPBAC Coalition
Dave MacDonald	Mayor, District of Port Edward

November 14, 2013, ministry staff participated on a conference call with Sharon Tower and Mayor Rob MacDougall. We agreed to participate in their February meeting, but that was postponed.

Staff met with North District RCMP headquartered in Prince George, and have talked to the Professor of Women's Studies at the University of Northern British Columbia with respect to the hitchhiking study currently underway in the North. The study will result in recommendations for hitchhikers, police and communities on how to improve safety, and identify alternatives to hitchhiking.

Facts about Services provided by BC Transit:

- Transit service in Northern BC is a shared responsibility between local governments and the Province.
- Local governments determine service levels (the number of buses, the routes and frequency) and the fares.
- Any expansion or route alterations are at the discretion of the local government.
- BC Transit works with the local governments, which have the final authority to make decisions related to their local service levels and fares.
- BC Transit provides ongoing advice, e.g. - feasibility studies, to the local governments that are responsible for decision-making. Over the past 15 years, these vary depending on the service provider.
- BC Transit contributes 46.69% of the funding and local governments contribute 53.31% which comes from property taxes, fares and advertising.
- The current provincial contribution is \$1.5 million for the five systems within the area.

Below outlines some of BC Transit's key opportunities and consultations with local governments regarding the opportunity to pursue Transit initiatives, such as Highway 16 expansion.

- Annually the Senior Regional Transit Manager attends the North Central Local Government Association which provides an opportunity for local governments to raise transit initiatives and issues with BC Transit staff.
- Additionally, each year a transit initiatives letters is sent to all local governments confirming and requesting potential expansion interest.
- BC Transit is willing to reconnect with the communities it did the feasibility studies on and see if they have any new interest in partnering.

There were three feasibility studies done along the Hwy 16 corridor in 2010:

- Regional District of Bulkley Nechako:
 - District of Vanderhoof Feasibility study: Vanderhoof, Fort St. James, Fraser Lake, Stony Creek and Cluculz Lake, with connection to Prince George
 - Houston-Burns Lake-Granisle Feasibility Study: Houston, Burns Lake, Granisle and the Lakes District
- Regional District of Fraser-Fort George Feasibility Study: Valemount, McBride and Electoral area H (Robson Valley – Canoe)

BC Transit provides service in some communities and along Highway 16:

- Smithers and District Transit System provides service between Smithers and Telkwa (the system is sponsored by the Town of Smithers in partnership with the Village of Telkwa, the Regional District of Bulkley-Nechako and BC Transit);
- Hazeltons' Regional Transit System provides service between the Hazeltons and both Smithers and Kispiox (the system is cost shared between the Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine, Village of Hazelton, District of New Hazelton, First Nation communities, BC Transit and passenger fares);
- Skeena Regional Transit System provides service between Terrace and Kitimat (the system is cost shared among the City of Terrace, the Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine and BC Transit).
- Kitimat Regional Transit System provides service between Terrace and Kitimat (the system is cost shared among the City of Terrace, the Regional District of Kitimat-Stikine and BC Transit).
- Terrace Regional Transit System – Service in and around Terrace cost shared among the City of Terrace and the Regional District of Kitimat Stikine.

A transit feasibility study done in 2009 looked at service connecting Vanderhoof, Fort St. James, Fraser Lake and the Stoney Creek Reserve. Service to Prince George was also examined but not recommended. The local governments did not proceed due to the cost of the service. The feasibility study suggested less costly alternatives to transit, such as a volunteer driver or car share program, or partnering with Northern Health or School District 91.

2005 and 2010 transit feasibility studies looked at service between Houston, Burns Lake, Southside and Granisle, and examined less costly alternatives such as vanpooling. Transit service was not implemented.

Missing Women's Report:

The findings and recommendations of a public inquiry into missing and murdered women in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside were released on Dec.17, 2012.

The report contains 64 recommendations and two measures. One of the measures urges the Province to immediately commit to developing and implementing an enhanced public transit system to provide a safer travel option connecting the Northern communities, particularly along Highway 16.

From Quesnel north, there are 27 communities with a population greater than 500. Of these, there are 16 communities within 75 km of Highway 16 along the route from Prince George to Prince Rupert. Passenger transportation services are currently available through Greyhound, the Health Connections program, BC Transit (Smithers to Hazelton - two days per week, and Kitimat to Terrace - Monday to Friday) and taxis, based in Prince George, Fort St. James, Burns Lake, Smithers, New Hazelton, Terrace, Kitimat and Prince Rupert, and cumulatively licensed to serve the entire route.

Communications Contact:	Cindy Cousins	250 356-1572
Program Area Contact:	Sandy Evans	250 953-4940

Minister's Office	Program Area	ADM	Comm. Dir
	SE	GG	

MISSING WOMEN INQUIRY & VIOLENCE FREE BC

	2
	3
	3
	4
	5
Not Responsive	6
	7
	8
	9
	10
	11
Highway 16 Transportation	12
Overarching	12
BC Transit	13
Northern Health Bus + Other Transit Options	14
Improved Personal Safety	15
	16
	16
	17
	18
	18
	19
Not Responsive	20
	20
	22
	23
	24
	25
	26

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HIGHWAY 16 TRANSPORTATION

OVERARCHING

- We need to be clear – the recommendation identifies the need for safer transportation options on our northern highways – thousands of kilometres of highways.
- Fundamentally, this means two things:
 - One: that there needs to be adequate public transportation options.
 - Two: that we need to ensure those who are traveling are safe.
- Much has been done to accomplish this goal, including:
 - Government investing \$4.5m annually in public transportation options;
 - The expansion of cell phone service along Highway 16;
 - Funding provided for vulnerable women in the north.
- The work that has been done to improve safety is being accomplished through partnerships with local communities and First Nations.
- Thanks to the efforts of northern communities and our government, B.C. is a safer place than it was 15 years ago, and our northern highways are safer than they were 15 years ago.

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BC TRANSIT

- As I mentioned, we need to ensure safe and adequate transportation options along our northern highways.
- The member opposite is calling for a shuttle bus – in fact, there are a number of buses already in place both on Highway 16 and on other highways in the area.
- Specifically, our government commits \$1.5 million per year to BC Transit to partner with local communities for local bus service throughout the week.
- Right now, it exists between:
 - Smithers and Telkwa (since 2008);
 - the Hazeltons and both Smithers and Kispiox (1998);
 - Terrace and Kitimat (2006); and
 - Prince Rupert and Port Edward (1992).
- If other local governments or First Nations along the northern highways would like to partner in a cost-share for similar services, BC Transit is always open to having those discussions.

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NORTHERN HEALTH BUS + OTHER TRANSIT OPTIONS

- We know the distance between some of B.C.'s northern communities can present a significant challenge for people who need to travel back and forth.
- In a video done by the members' opposite, the member for Skeena says people need to travel to Terrace because it is a hub for medical and dental services.
- In another video, the member for Victoria-Beacon Hill says British Columbians in the region need a bus to cover the basics, for things like a medical appointment.
- We recognized these needs and that's why, since 2006, Northern Health has operated a round trip subsidized shuttle service for British Columbians in the region who have medical appointments outside their communities. (Govt funds it at approximately \$3m/year)
- In that same video, the member for Victoria-Beacon Hill said people need to travel to get to things like a family feast. I can tell you today there are options for that as well:
 - Greyhound offers daily service between Prince George and Prince Rupert
 - Via Rail offers service between Prince George and Prince Rupert three times a week (Mon, Thurs & Sat).
 - Taxis are based in Prince George, Fort St. James, Burns Lake, Smithers, New Hazelton, Terrace, Kitimat and Prince Rupert. Cumulatively, they are licensed to serve the entire route of Highway 16.

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IMPROVED PERSONAL SAFETY

- Beyond these options for public transportation, our government has taken a number of other actions to make the highways safer, and to support communities and vulnerable women in the area.
- Just last month we provided the Carrier-Sekani Family Services with \$100,000 to expand safety training workshops for communities near Highway 16 which will include further discussions on safe transportation options.
- Since 2009, we have taken steps to add a significant amount of new cellular coverage – 153 kilometers – to Highway 16.
 - Now 70% of that highway has cell coverage, which means drivers and people can use their cell phones to call for emergency services and support if they are needed.
 - As a result of our Connecting BC Agreement (CBCA) with Telus, nearly \$7M has been invested since 2009 along Highway 16.
- UNBC and the RCMP currently have a joint study underway to come up with recommendations for hitchhikers, police and communities on how to improve safety, and identify alternatives to hitchhiking.
- And as part of our commitment to vulnerable women in the north, we've provided the Prince George New Hope Society drop-in centre with a \$100,000 civil forfeiture grant to help women and youth – because we want to keep women in all parts of the province safe from violence.

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On Nov. 25, 2013 Minister Anton and ministry staff met with the Missing Women's Coalition and an Opposition MLA in Vancouver to brief them on the Province's progress on the MWCI recommendations.

At that meeting the Coalition identified five priority recommendations it wants the Province to address:

1.

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2. Implement a safe public transportation system along Highway 16
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In late Dec. 2013, Minister Anton sent a letter to members of the Coalition advising that Ministry staff will connect with Coalition as soon as possible in the new year to discuss their submission and opportunities for engagement.

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Transportation recommendation:

The Highway of Tears Symposium report had as its recommendation #1 that a shuttle bus be established between each town and city along the entire length of Highway 16. This shuttle bus would pick up and drop off young female passengers at all First Nations communities, towns, or cities, and any young female walking or hitchhiking along the highway between Prince George and Prince Rupert. The report added that seven shuttles would be needed.

One of the main recommendations in the MWCI report is to support the full implementation of the Highway of Tears Symposium's action report which includes the shuttle bus recommendation.

The MWCI report also urges the Province to immediately commit to developing and implementing an enhanced public transit system to provide a safer travel option connecting the Northern communities, particularly along Highway 16.

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The Ministry of Transportation advises it has met with the North Central Local Government Association, RCMP, and representatives of Omineca Beetle Action Coalition to discuss safe travel in the north.

From Quesnel north, there are 27 communities with a population greater than 500. Of these, there are 16 communities within 75 km of Highway 16 along the route from Prince George to Prince Rupert. Passenger transportation services are currently available through Greyhound, the Health Connections program, Via Rail, BC Transit. (Smithers to Hazelton - two days per week, Kitimat to Terrace - Monday to Friday, Prince Rupert to Port Edward - Monday to Saturday, Kispiox, Hazelton, Smithers - Tuesdays and Fridays, Smithers to Telkwa - Monday to Saturday) and taxis, based in Prince George, Fort St. James, Burns Lake, Smithers, New Hazelton, Terrace, Kitimat and Prince Rupert, and cumulatively licensed to serve the entire route.

A transit feasibility study done in 2009 looked at service connecting Vanderhoof, Fort St. James, Fraser Lake and the Stoney Creek Reserve. Service to Prince George was also examined but not recommended. The local governments did not proceed due to the cost of the service. The feasibility study suggested less costly alternatives to transit, such as a volunteer driver or car share program, or partnering with Northern Health or School District 91.

2005 and 2010 transit feasibility studies looked at service between Houston, Burns Lake, Southside and Granisle, and examined less costly alternatives such as vanpooling. Transit service was not implemented.

Of note, in debate on the budget, two government MLAs made reference to the issue as well:

MLA Morris:

I know my colleague also mentioned some of the recommendations that members opposite have brought up with respect to the bus service along the west coast. That is something that I know that this government is serious about looking at, but it's a significant issue with a lot of compounding factors to it. It's 800 kilometres from Prince George to Prince Rupert, the same distance as it is from Vancouver to Prince George. To institute some kind of a service like that provides significant hurdles that must be overcome.

I do know from personal experience that there are a lot of First Nations communities up there that operate their own small passenger vans, providing

MISSING WOMEN INQUIRY

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services to their members going from community to community. That's something that we have to look at as well.

It is something that's being looked at, but it's a larger issue than just talking about it across the floor here and saying that it must be implemented right away, because it has all kinds of connotations.

What do you do with the commercial enterprises that are in place? Is it based on age? Is it based on sex? Is it based on the amount of income that you make? There is a whole bunch of factors that we need to be cognizant of when we make that.

MLA Plecas:

There has also been some attention given in the House here to implementing the recommendations of the Oppal Commission. Of course, this government has said they are committed to considering every single recommendation. I think it's fair comment to say that most of those recommendations will be addressed fully.

That doesn't mean that all of them would have to be. I say that being attentive to the one recommendation regarding the proposal for a bus service in the north between Prince Rupert and Prince George. I wouldn't be convinced that that's a particularly safe thing to do. Knowing what I know about predators against women, one might think that perhaps there's an opportunity there where predators would see this as a target. I'm reminded of all those incidents of violence against women which happen on or near bus stops. Whilst I appreciate the concern, I would say that that's perhaps not one of the things we should be doing at the moment.

From the report:

The number of missing and murdered girls in Northern British Columbia is unknown; people have disappeared along the highway network of Highways 16, 97 and 5 for decades. The estimates range from 18 to over 40 victims.

The vast spaces between communities acutely increase women's vulnerability to violence given the lack of public transportation, and create additional challenges to the initial search and investigation of missing persons. Many of the victims were said to be hitchhiking when last seen. Community members state that abduction is a more apt description than disappearance.

The vast majority of the missing and murdered are young Aboriginal women, and a significant number were under the age of 18; they were girls.

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RECOMMENDATION:

2) To develop and implement an enhanced public transit system to provide a safer travel option connecting the Northern communities, particularly along Highway 16.

Please note that point 2 is not a formal recommendation.