

## **APPENDIX 12**

## **Fort Liard feels cut off from NWT due to poor road Highway 7 reconstruction to be done in pieces over many years**

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ACHO DENE KOE/FORT LIARD - An official with the hamlet of Fort Liard says the community has closer ties with B.C. than the NWT because of the condition of Highway 7.

The highway, also known as the Liard Trail, was reopened to light vehicles on May 20 after being closed to all traffic between Checkpoint and Fort Liard for two weeks because of rough conditions found in five sections between kilometres 172 and 203. Fort Liard, however, felt few effects from the closure, said John McKee, the hamlet's senior administrative officer.

"We gave up on the road a few years ago," he said.

The community and businesses within it receive the majority of their supplies from Fort Nelson, B.C. Even the bulk of the community's mail comes three times a week from the south through Fort Nelson, McKee said. The highway closure may have resulted in some delays in the additional mail that comes from Fort Simpson, he said.

During its closure McKee said complaints weren't, as you'd expect, made regularly about the highway.

"You hear the odd one," he said.

Fort Liard residents are more concerned about the shorter portion of Highway 7 that connects the hamlet to the B.C. border and south. The hamlet is more like an enclave of B.C. than a part of the territory, said McKee.

The failing conditions of Highway 7 can be traced back to the original materials that were used in its construction in the late 1970s and early 1980s, said Earl Blacklock, the manager of public affairs and communications with the Department of Transportation.

The materials aren't as suitable for highway construction as what would be used today, he said. That factor combined with weather conditions and high moisture content, particularly from spring runoff, as well as the weight of vehicles on the highway means work to rebuild the road can't happen as fast as the road is breaking down, he said.

"There's a need for the road to be reconstructed, basically, in its entirety and we need to prioritize that work," Blacklock said.

The highway's deterioration caught up with the department in 2008. That spring the highway had to be closed to all traffic on five separate occasions between May 22 and the end of June.

In 2010 the highway was closed to all heavy vehicles for at least the majority of May. This year's closure also began as a restriction on heavy vehicles. It was the first full closure since 2008.

"It's top of mind for us in terms of continuing the rebuilding to bring it to the point it won't have these problems in the future," Blacklock said about the highway.

The highway's reconstruction is already in progress. This year the department has budgeted \$4 million to be used on the highway. Part of that money will be used to reconstruct the section between kilometres 105 and 107.

The portions of the highway that will be reconstructed next will be decided on through a number of factors including ongoing inspections. Information and input is also gathered from other sources including contractors and communities, he said.

Although no exact timeline has been set for the complete reconstruction of the highway, Blacklock said it won't be done in the next few years.

"It's a big job and it's a big task and it's a big problem especially because in some parts of the highway we have to rebuild it from the ground up," he said.

Highway 7, however, is only the department's highest priority, as with any highway, when it needs work in order to reopen it for service. All highway reconstructions, including that of Highway 7, are given equal weight within the territory, Blacklock said.