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July 21, 2020

Dear Mr. Cliffe Phillips:

**EA1213-02 MACKENZIE VALLEY HIGHWAY PROJECT UPDATE**

The Department of Infrastructure (INF) is submitting this project update to the Mackenzie Valley Environmental Impact Review Board (Review Board) for EA1213-02 – Mackenzie Valley Highway (MVH).

INF remains committed to the MVH and to completing the Environmental Assessment (EA) process. Since our previous November 28, 2018 update letter, there has been considerable work completed on advancing the project, including internal organizational work within the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT), external work that we have been conducting with various parties, and desktop and field research to support the completion of the Developer's Assessment Report (DAR).

*Internal GNWT Structures for Development of the DAR*

Taking into account the experiences of INF and the GNWT with other projects, organizational structures have been created to manage the preparation of the DAR and advance the project through the EA and regulatory processes and eventually project construction.

The organization structure in place for the development of the DAR includes interdepartmental committees to ensure proper oversight of the project at a senior level, as well as various working groups with focused responsibilities in support of the EA.

Depending upon the issue and topic, matters relating to the MVH are dealt with as required by these various committees.



### *Engagement with External Parties*

Commencing in 2018, INF has visited the communities of Fort Simpson, Wrigley, Tulita and Norman Wells numerous times. INF has also been in Délı̄ne, Colville Lake and Fort Good Hope. There have been public engagement sessions in communities in the Sahtu Region, as well as meetings in the communities, in Yellowknife and by teleconference with partners and stakeholders to discuss the project and those meetings are continuing.

In April 2019, the GNWT signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on *Cooperation on the Advancement of the MVH through the Environmental Review and Regulatory Processes* with the Sahtu Secretariat Incorporated (SSI). Pursuant to this MOU, INF works with Sahtu Designated Organizations on various subject matters in support of advancing the EA process for the MVH. A copy of the MOU may be found on our website at [https://www.inf.gov.nt.ca/sites/inf/files/resources/memorandum\\_of\\_understanding\\_sahtu\\_secretariat\\_incorporated\\_and\\_the\\_government\\_of\\_the\\_northwest\\_territories\\_0.pdf](https://www.inf.gov.nt.ca/sites/inf/files/resources/memorandum_of_understanding_sahtu_secretariat_incorporated_and_the_government_of_the_northwest_territories_0.pdf).

A joint Wrigley Training Committee has been established with the Pehdzéh Kí First Nation (PKFN) and the GNWT. This Committee is co-chaired by PKFN and the Department of Education, Culture and Employment, and includes membership from Aurora College, the Department of Industry, Tourism and Investment, and INF. The objective of this Committee is to identify and provide training to maximize the eventual benefits of the project for the community.

INF has also met with various federal government departments to provide project updates.

### *Desktop and Field Research*

Considerable work has begun on environmental and engineering aspects of the MVH. Work that has been or is in the process of being completed includes:

- archaeological overview assessment
- climate lens assessment
- review of potential borrow sources and quarry locations
- data gap analysis by valued component (VC)
- baseline data review and reporting

INF has also been working with the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (ENR) on wildlife matters. This work has included the deployment of caribou collars in the Dehcho Region north of Wrigley and in the Sahtu Region – Tulita District. The purpose is to obtain a better understanding of the presence and abundance of caribou along the proposed MVH alignment and how impacts on caribou can be avoided or mitigated.



As the baseline data review continues and data needs are identified, additional field programs will be implemented.

#### *Preparation and Submission of the DAR*

A draft Table of Contents for the DAR is being prepared. It is INF's intention that the writing of the non-VC sections of the DAR will commence this summer, with the writing of the VC sections starting in October of this year. The development of the DAR is being led by INF with input from other GNWT departments; Indigenous partners will have the opportunity to review and provide input into the document. The target date for submission of the DAR to the Review Board is late 2021.

#### *Local Access Road Projects*

In previous correspondence dated November 29, 2018, INF had informed the Review Board that there could be local community-based initiatives along the current Mackenzie Valley Winter Road (MVWR) alignment that could be the subject of future regulatory applications. In that regard, we are planning to file regulatory applications for the following two projects in the near future:

- Mount Gaudet Access Road (MGAR)
- Prohibition Creek Access Road (PCAR)

The MGAR is a proposed 21 kilometre (km) road project that would connect the community of Wrigley with a quarry at Mount Gaudet. The road would be built mostly on the existing MVWR alignment with a possible alignment change associated with moving the Hodgson Creek Bridge (the bridge) further upstream to avoid ice back-up issues. A final decision on moving the bridge has not yet been made.

MGAR will increase PKFN access to their traditional lands for recreational and commercial use. The GNWT currently has funding for the construction of 15 kms of road north from bridge to Mount Gaudet and the replacement/move of the bridge. Funding for the remaining 6 kms of road to connect the terminus of Highway 1 south of Wrigley to either final bridge location has not yet been confirmed.

The PCAR is a proposed 13 km road project that would extend the current all-season road from the Canyon Creek Bridge south of Norman Wells to the Prohibition Creek Bridge. The PCAR would increase community access to recreational and traditional lands along this section of the road.



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The PCAR would also improve the ability of Sahtu IGOs to access their own land as there are large parcels of Sahtu-owned lands running along both sides of this road from Canyon Creek to Prohibition Creek. Having all-season access to their own lands will increase the potential for the Sahtu IGOs to develop these lands for the economic benefit of their members and their communities.

The GNWT is committed to maximizing the local benefits of the construction of these projects to help prepare local businesses and residents for the eventual construction opportunities of the MVH. In addition to the immediate economic benefits of contracting and employment during construction, these local access road projects will also be constructed with a significant emphasis on training, both prior to and during the construction process.

INF has discussed the PCAR and MGAR with local and regional IGOs, and has received support from these organizations, as well as local residents, businesses and communities for both of these projects. INF has also secured significant construction funding for both projects. Given the widespread support and the secured funding for construction, INF intends to file applications for land use permits and water licences to authorize the construction of these projects in the near future. A draft Project Description Report (PDR) has been prepared for each project and those draft PDRs are currently being reviewed and discussed with the relevant IGOs.

The MGAR and the PCAR are both independent, stand-alone, community-based projects that do not depend upon the MVH for their advancement. These projects would be advanced regardless of the status of the MVH. Similarly, the advancement of these projects does not create any certainty with regards to the eventual construction of the full MVH.

INF notes that the impacts of the MGAR and PCAR will be assessed as part of the cumulative impacts assessment for the MVH. After the PCAR and MGAR are constructed, the GNWT does not intend to pursue regulatory authorizations for the construction of any additional access road projects along the MVH alignment outside community boundaries until the conclusion of the MVH EA.

Additional information on the proposed MVH may be found on the INF website at <https://www.inf.gov.nt.ca/en/MVH>.



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For further information regarding the MVH, please contact either myself at [sonya\\_saunders@gov.nt.ca](mailto:sonya_saunders@gov.nt.ca) or 867-767-9082 ext 32009, or Mr. Joe Acorn, Manager, MVH at [joe\\_acorn@gov.nt.ca](mailto:joe_acorn@gov.nt.ca) or 867-767-9082 ext 31029.

Sincerely,

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