

Written Submission to the Review Board

Re-scoping Session for the Mackenzie Valley Highway

Dehcho Perspectives on Legacy Benefits, Workforce Development, and Community Growth

The expansion of the Mackenzie Valley Highway should be viewed not only as a transportation project, but as a once-in-a-generation opportunity to strengthen communities, create a skilled northern workforce, and build the infrastructure necessary for long-term economic development throughout the Dehcho region. The environmental assessment should consider how the project can leave lasting benefits for future generations, similar to previous landmark northern infrastructure projects.

1. Economic Benefits and Local Participation

How will the revised Terms of Reference require the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT) to identify, measure, and maximize direct economic benefits to Dehcho communities, businesses, and Indigenous governments throughout the planning, construction, and operational phases of the highway?

Will the assessment require a comprehensive Indigenous and local procurement strategy that includes business opportunities, employment targets, workforce development, apprenticeship programs, and capacity-building initiatives for Dehcho residents and businesses?

How will the environmental assessment evaluate both the opportunities and potential impacts that increased transportation access may have on existing Dehcho businesses and local economies?

2. Housing Policy and Workforce Participation

The social and economic conditions that influence labour force participation should be considered as part of the broader socio-economic assessment.

Many residents have expressed concerns that public housing rent calculations based on household income can create barriers to employment participation. As earnings increase, rent obligations may also increase substantially, reducing incentives for some individuals and families to pursue additional employment opportunities or career advancement.

Question: Will the socio-economic assessment examine whether current public housing rent policies affect workforce participation and the ability of residents to fully benefit from

employment opportunities generated by major infrastructure projects such as the Mackenzie Valley Highway?

Consideration: Governments should explore housing policies that encourage workforce participation, economic self-sufficiency, and long-term prosperity while continuing to provide affordable housing support for those who need it most.

3. Workforce Development and Skills Training

Major projects should leave behind more than roads. They should leave behind skilled people.

Many northern residents who participated in the Norman Wells Expansion Project during the 1980s benefitted from educational systems that emphasized practical skills development. Students commonly had access to shop classes, trades training, and hands-on technical education from elementary through high school, creating pathways into construction, trades, and resource development careers.

The Mackenzie Valley Highway presents an opportunity to rebuild that approach.

Question: How will the Terms of Reference require GNWT to develop workforce training, apprenticeship, mentorship, and certification programs that prepare northern residents to participate meaningfully in the construction of the highway and future economic opportunities created by the project?

Recommendation: A legacy workforce strategy should be developed that includes:

- Strengthened shop and trades programs in schools
- Apprenticeship opportunities tied directly to construction contracts
- Indigenous workforce development initiatives
- Partnerships with colleges and training institutions
- Long-term career pathways beyond project completion

The goal should be to ensure that northern residents gain skills and certifications that remain valuable long after construction ends.

4. Legacy Infrastructure Needed to Support Highway Development

Major infrastructure projects inevitably bring an influx of workers, contractors, suppliers, businesses, and investment. Communities must have the infrastructure necessary to support that growth.

The environmental assessment should not only examine the highway itself but should also consider what supporting infrastructure is required to accommodate increased economic activity and maximize long-term regional benefits.

A. Off-Island Water and Sewer Infrastructure

Fort Simpson's future growth is constrained by the availability of serviced land.

Development of off-island water and sewer infrastructure should be recognized as a strategic legacy project that would support both highway construction activities and long-term community growth.

This investment would create the foundation needed to accommodate workers, businesses, and future development including:

- New hotels and worker accommodations
- New commercial and business districts
- Residential subdivisions
- Future hospital expansion or replacement
- Future power generation infrastructure
- Industrial and logistics services supporting highway operations

Without additional serviced land and municipal infrastructure, communities may struggle to accommodate the workforce and economic opportunities generated by the highway project.

Question: Will the assessment consider complementary infrastructure investments required to support population growth, workforce housing, and business development associated with construction of the Mackenzie Valley Highway?

B. Airport Modernization and Expansion

The Fort Simpson Airport is a critical transportation asset that will become even more important during highway construction and future economic development.

Airport improvements would:

- Support movement of workers and construction personnel

- Improve access for contractors and suppliers
- Enhance emergency response capabilities
- Increase freight and cargo capacity
- Strengthen tourism opportunities
- Support future national and international visitor traffic

As development proceeds, airport modernization should be viewed as a complementary legacy project supporting both construction needs and long-term economic diversification.

Question: How can the Mackenzie Valley Highway be leveraged to support future airport expansion, transportation connectivity, and tourism development throughout the Dehcho region?

5. Community Legacy Expectations

Historically, transformative northern projects delivered benefits that extended beyond the construction period.

The Mackenzie Valley Highway should be assessed not only on transportation outcomes but also on its ability to leave a lasting legacy through:

- Skilled trades development
- Long-term employment opportunities
- Modernized community infrastructure
- Increased housing capacity
- Expanded tourism potential
- Indigenous and local business growth
- Regional economic diversification
- Improved transportation networks

The question should not simply be how to build a highway, but how to build stronger communities around that highway.

Key Question for the Review Board

Will the revised Terms of Reference require GNWT to assess what legacy infrastructure investments, workforce development initiatives, housing policies, and economic development measures are necessary to support the influx of workers, businesses, and

investment associated with construction of the Mackenzie Valley Highway, while ensuring that Dehcho communities receive lasting benefits long after construction is complete?

Closing Statement

The Dehcho region supports responsible development that creates measurable and lasting benefits for future generations. The Mackenzie Valley Highway represents a rare opportunity to not only connect communities through transportation infrastructure but also to strengthen the economic and social foundations of the North. We encourage the Review Board to ensure that the project's scope includes meaningful commitments to workforce development, legacy infrastructure, housing and community growth, Indigenous and local business participation, and long-term economic diversification. The success of this project should ultimately be measured not only by the highway that is built, but by the communities that are stronger because it was built.

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