

Government of
Northwest Territories

June 26, 2023

KEVIN O'REILLY
MLA, FRAME LAKE**Oral Question 1474-19(2) Audit Report and Unspent Funds on Internet Connectivity**

This letter is in follow-up to the Oral Question you raised on March 27, 2023, regarding the Audit Report and Unspent Funds on Internet Connectivity. During our exchange, you brought up questions surrounding an Audit Report that states that there are unspent federal funds for internet connectivity not being allocated to support internet connectivity in smaller, more remote communities. I am aware of the ongoing issue of connectivity in rural locations in the Northwest Territories (NWT) and would like to share some of the Government of the Northwest Territories' (GNWT's) solutions to this problem.

- 1. What is our government doing to fix this problem of supporting internet connectivity in rural and remote communities?*

The Federal government has various funding pots available to support internet connectivity, including the Broadband Fund administered by the Canada Radio-television & Telecommunications Commission (CRTC). I am aware that these funding solutions are not always well-tuned to some of the needs of northern residents. The GNWT continues to advocate for funding availability to support interconnectivity in rural and remote communities; for example, the Department of Finance is actively participating in the review of the CRTC framework for NorthwesTel, advocating for affordable, reliable, and competitive broadband internet in the NWT. Later this year, the Department of Finance will also participate in another proceeding on the policy renewal of CRTC's Broadband Fund where it can advocate for improved policies on how the Broadband Fund money can more readily be spent to support additional broadband projects in the NWT. Furthermore, the GNWT will make recommendations with respect to how to improve those funds as part of our submission.

Fibre optic infrastructure in the NWT is a single point of failure, meaning if there is a service outage on a fibre line there is no alternative to route the traffic of residents and businesses. Redundancy is limited, however the GNWT continues to explore opportunities to expand the fibre optic network in our region. There are a few projects which illustrate this involvement:

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- Whati Fibre Line: Following the completion of the Tlicho Highway, the Tlicho Government opted to construct a fibre optic line to service the community of Whati. The GNWT supported this project by providing funding to the Tlicho Government.
- Dempster Fibre Line: The Yukon Government is currently constructing the Dempster Fibre Line which will connect in Inuvik to the endpoint of the Mackenzie Valley Fibre Link; once this occurs, the infrastructure in both of our territories will be more resilient and be able to offer reliable service.
- Inuvik-Tuktoyaktuk Fibre Line: The GNWT is advancing the development of a fibre optic line travelling from the current endpoint of the Mackenzie Valley Fibre Link in Inuvik to Tuktoyaktuk allowing more reliable internet connections for both residents and businesses. Construction of this project is targeted for Summer 2024.
- Every Community Project: NorthwesTel received funding from the Federal government for their “Every Community Project” which aims to meet the universal service standard of 50/10 mbps speeds in every community in the Yukon and the NWT. The GNWT provided support for their application for this project and continues to track progress closely.
- Great Slave Lake Fibre: Another group is considering the feasibility of placing fibre in Great Slave Lake to provide redundancy to the Yellowknife area. The Department of Finance communicates on this project to understand if there are any areas where our government can provide support.

2. *Would the Minister commit to providing a briefing note to Regular MLAs about what our government is doing in response to the report from the auditor general?*

I would be happy to provide a briefing, whether it be as a briefing note or a briefing in person regarding challenges and future opportunities for broadband funding. I have previously communicated with federal Ministers about the issues of unspent funds and will continue to advocate for the needs of northern residents on this topic.

I will be working with the Department of Finance to ensure a briefing is established in order to provide a better understanding of what the GNWT can do to better advocate for the allocation of these unspent funds towards improved internet connectivity for all of the NWT.

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Thank you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a large, stylized 'C' followed by a series of loops and a long horizontal stroke.

Caroline Wawzonek
Minister of Finance

- c. Clerk of the Legislative Assembly
Legislative Coordinator, Executive and Indigenous Affairs