

Speaking Notes

Hon. Minister David Brazil, Minister of Transportation and Works

Atlantic Forum on Transportation 2015

May 20, 2015

- Good morning.
- Thank you for inviting me to speak this morning. It is my pleasure to be here to talk about some of the policies and initiatives that the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has undertaken in support of a strong and efficient transportation network for residents and visitors to the province.
- We have an extremely complex transportation network in this province, and as the Minister of Transportation and Works, I talk with individuals every day who drive our highways, fly our provincial air services, and take our ferries to work.
- These transportation systems affect every aspect of people's day-to-day lives; as such, we all have a vested interest in maintaining reliable and quality transportation networks. Whether it is investments in roads, highways or ferries, our government has made it a mission to provide safe and reliable transportation infrastructure to residents and families throughout Newfoundland and Labrador.
- Our focus is not limited to the movement of people and goods from one place to another. It is our view that we all gain from advancements in transportation infrastructure and that every person has a voice.
- Building and maintaining quality transportation networks is critical to creating a successful economy and has a major influence on the quality of life for all.
- Socially, residents are able to travel more easily and have greater accessibility to services.
- Commercially, well-developed transportation infrastructure supports a free flow of goods and helps contribute to a region's growing tourism industry. Appreciating this importance, we work diligently to manage the challenge of transportation requirements in one of the world's harshest environments. We have frequent fluctuations of temperatures, rough seas and harsh winds, and ice abounds throughout the winter months.
- In Newfoundland and Labrador, our transportation system facilitates economic development and is essential to investment, productivity and competitiveness.

- To this end, we are making strategic investments in key areas of our transportation network.

Roads

- The Department of Transportation and Works is responsible for nearly 10,000 kilometres of road that make up the provincial road network throughout the province; with just over 2,500 kilometres, or 26 per cent, of that being part of the National Highway System.
- These roads range from the Trans Canada Highway and Trans Labrador Highway all the way to gravel access roads. Annual maintenance of these roads is provided by the department at an average cost of approximately \$12,700 per kilometre.
- We continue to focus on enhancing the safety of our highways, which includes important maintenance work, as well as continued funding for the completion of strategic priority projects which were started last year.
- This year, \$317.9 million has been allotted for infrastructure projects including: \$204 million in provincial roads, bridges, and other road work; over \$86 million to provide marine services; and \$17.7 million as the final payment upon delivery of a fifth water bomber, marking the complete renewal of the fleet.
- Budget 2015 allocates over \$68 million through the Provincial Roads Program, and these investments help stimulate economic activity and support residents and communities throughout Newfoundland and Labrador. Projects this year include roads in the areas of: Baie Verte/La Scie; Bay d'Espoir Highway; Labrador West; Southeast Placentia Road; and Heart's Content Barrens.
- Other projects in various regions of the province are now being identified for this construction season and tender calls will be made over the coming weeks.
- The budget also includes funding for the important winter and summer maintenance programs. Both help address challenges we face each year and areas that are often most immediate to motorists, such as potholes. We have all heard the accounts of potholes that appear every spring throughout the province.
- Due to the fluctuations in temperatures in our climate, the stress on our roads and bridges is significant. Each year, we concentrate on identifying potholes, installing

signage, and making temporary repairs during the winter months when it is not possible to make a permanent repair.

- In order to expedite these efforts, this year we will be purchasing four asphalt recyclers, which will warm asphalt and allow us to provide a longer-lasting fix for potholes throughout the colder months.
- During the summer season, we will spend \$21.4 million for summer maintenance work, which includes: annual equipment inspections, line painting, pothole and asphalt repairs, excavating ditches, upgrading road shoulders, repairing culverts, grading gravel roads, and installing and repairing guide rails and signs.
- We also remain committed to the continuation of the dust suppression program and brush clearing, which have both proven to be successful initiatives. They help enhance sightlines and therefore safety for motorists, particularly in our efforts to reduce moose vehicle collisions.

Bridges

- With so many bodies of water, we naturally have a great number of bridges to maintain. Over recent years, we have repaired or replaced over 25 bridges. These include Bonavista Water Supply Bridge and Glenwood East Overpass near Appleton, while rehabilitated bridges include Chapel Arm Bridge, Eddie's Cove East Bridge and Eddie's Cove West Bridge.
- The project to build the new Placentia Lift Bridge is currently ongoing. At a cost of \$51.9 million, this is a significant project for the department and is scheduled to be fully complete in 2016.
- This year, through an investment of \$5.3 million, we will also begin work on the construction of the new Sir Robert Bond Bridge. This bridge is a vital part of Newfoundland and Labrador's transportation network as it is the only east-west highway link that crosses the Exploits River. A significant amount of work has been completed to prepare for the actual bridge construction phase of this project.
- While the new bridge is under construction, the existing bridge will be maintained and receive any required repair work to ensure it remains safe. Upon completion of the new bridge, the existing structure will be completely removed.

TLH

- The Trans Labrador Highway is one of the largest infrastructure projects in this province's history. With this year's investment of \$55 million, over \$565 million has been invested in both provincial and federal funding on construction of the Trans Labrador Highway and will ensure completion of this mega-project.
- Spanning close to 1,200 kilometres, we have an upgraded road that connects to southern Labrador, to central Labrador, and to the rest of Canada. For many businesses and residents, it is a critical link between communities and the route closest to the terminal of the Strait of Belle Isle ferry service.
- Undertaking this massive upgrade from gravel to a paved surface represents significant social and economic benefits to the province and development of key sectors of Labrador's economy including mining, tourism, and energy. The improved surface reduces transportation costs for passengers and freight, enhances vehicle control and increases visibility through the elimination of dust.
- The project to upgrade the TLH has seen more than 500 kilometres of paved highway that connects communities and creates new opportunities for residents.
- The first phase of project, which is almost 530 kilometres from Labrador City and Wabush to Happy Valley-Goose Bay, will be finished this summer. Widening of Phases II and III is approximately one third complete, and we anticipate that another third will be complete by the fall.

Ferries

- Significant progress has been made over the past 10 years in modernizing the provincial ferry fleet through upgrades to wharves, ferry terminals, vessel replacements, refits and maintenance, all of which have enhanced supports for rural and remote communities.
- Like all other aspects of our transportation network, our focus is on delivery of services in an affordable and sustainable manner, with safety top of mind.
- Marine services are organized along four areas that are generally aligned by geography and a service operating model.

- These areas are Labrador (Strait of Belle Isle, north coast and south coast), North East Coast (St. Brendan's, Fogo Island, Change Islands, Long Island and Little Bay Islands), Avalon (Bell Island and two swing vessels), and the South Coast (La Poile, Ramea, Grey River, Francois, McCallum, Gaultois, Rencontre East and South East Bight).
- When determining the future of marine service – how needs are met and people are best served – we take a holistic view. It is the role of the Marine Branch, with input from stakeholders, to recommend the correct balance between competing needs and demands of the communities and the travelling public against the mandate of reasonable service levels and the resources of the Marine Branch and the taxpayer.
- Vessels and services may be reassigned and schedules amended as necessary in order to ensure an appropriate service for all, across all regions.
- The department is responsible for the provision, maintenance and management of 18 provincial ferries providing marine services to 23 communities throughout the province. Marine operations include seven government-owned and operated vessels, two government-owned and privately operated vessels through a contract with the Provincial Government, eight privately-owned contracted vessels, and one privately-owned vessel which is operated by the Provincial Government.
- We are people movers. Annually, approximately 900,000 passengers, 400,000 vehicles, and 20,000 tonnes of freight are transported via the intra-provincial ferry services. On the Island portion of the province, ferry operations are subsidized at 96 per cent; and in Labrador, marine operations are subsidized at 87 per cent.
- In early 2011, we christened two new ferries that are currently in service. The *MV Grace Sparkes* serves the St. Brendan's route, and the *MV Hazel McLissac* serves the Long Island/ Little Bay Islands route. The two vessels fulfilled a part of the Provincial Government's promise to renew the provincial ferry fleet.
- And we continue with that commitment. We have purchased two 80-metre ice class ferries. The *MV Legionnaire* is scheduled to arrive in February 2016 and will service those who travel to and from Bell Island, and the *MV Veteran* is scheduled to arrive in the fall and will service Fogo Island and Change Islands. This year's budget allocates \$41.5 million as part of a total investment of \$126.8 million for the purchase of the new vessels.

- We recently issued the tenders for renovations to wharves at Portugal Cove and Bell Island and also at Fogo Island in preparation to accommodate the new ferries, whose larger dimensions will necessitate enhancements to the wharves. This year, over \$13 million will be invested in wharf modifications.
- As a government, we also appreciate that, with the considerable demand for service, there are always opportunities for improvement.
- In the coming months, the department will launch a new service excellence model and a series of initiatives which are designed to enhance the customer experience for those who travel the provincial ferries.
- These tools will include current information on the ferry, as well as new opportunities for users to provide feedback. We are also looking with particular focus right now on the service delivery for the South Coast and Labrador.

South Coast Service

- Marine services are provided to residents of the South Coast of the Island and the South Coast of Labrador via six services – five on the South Coast of the Island and one on the South Coast of Labrador. On average, 39,000 passengers are transported annually via these six services.
- We are now in the final stages of developing a strategy and of going to market to replace South coast vessels.
- The strategy is to modernize vessels and consolidate service delivery and management through fewer and longer-term contracts. This will include a requirement for new and/or newer vessels.
- This is being developed with Newfoundland and Labrador shipbuilding capacity in mind. We are also considering some alternate models for routing and scheduling.

Labrador Transportation Committee

- There is also much discussion and activity right now regarding services for the Labrador region.
- Building on discussions held recently with ferry users, municipal leaders and the service providers, we are re-establishing and revitalizing the Minister's Advisory Committee on Labrador Transportation.

- A revitalized committee will provide us with an avenue to seek out input from a wide range of people across the region as to what issues need to be addressed, and what path forward will best serve their needs.
- I have already made contact with some individuals who I believe have the ability to make excellent contributions to the committee. These are individuals who have been very involved, such as municipal leaders, with whom we have already had some valuable discussions, and I look forward to hearing more from them. I have also asked each of the Labrador MHAs to recommend an individual to sit on the committee.
- We anticipate the committee to be fully established by the middle of next month.
- In light of how important we believe it is to speak with representatives and ferry-users, this summer there will be consultations in communities which rely on the ferry service. Members of the committee will lead these sessions, and we would like them to be very much part of the process of determining the way forward, both in the short-term and long-term.
- After consultations, we will release a document that will help ensure all stakeholders and residents are aware of the discussions held during the consultations, the challenges that people have identified and the suggestions being made on the best way forward.
- After all, it is the people who use the ferries who are not only most affected by the quality and provision of the service, but also those who often have the most valuable contributions to make as we strive to build the best possible transportation networks for Newfoundland and Labrador.

Conclusion

- To support continued improvement of the provincial infrastructure network, nearly \$6 billion has been invested by this government since 2004.
- Projects include new and renovated schools, new health care facilities and as I have outlined for you, major investments in our roads and ferries.

- It is critical that we have high quality transportation networks as a service to the people who rely on them. But it is also critical because of the huge impact they have on our economic growth.
- I thank you for inviting me here today to address the forum. Events such as this provide an excellent opportunity to generate dialogue and encourage frank discussion about new ideas to address challenges and build on the advancements of the past ten years.
- I wish you all the best for an informative and lively forum on these topics which affect us all.
- Thank you.