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2-02280

ADDITIONAL FUNDING SUPPORT TO FORT PROVIDENCE FOR DEH CHO BRIDGE PROPOSAL

Yellowknife, NWT (April 14, 2003) - Road access to Yellowknife and surrounding communities could become year round in the not so distant future if the Fort Providence Combined Council Alliance's business plan is successful.

Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) is contributing \$200,000 to the current phase of a study which will include finalizing the preliminary design and estimate, negotiating a final Agreement with the Government of the Northwest Territories (GNWT), project financing, initiating the environmental assessment of the project, drafting a business plan, completing a risks and benefits analysis and assessing the impacts of the project on Aboriginal communities.

The Fort Providence Combined Council Alliance, including the Deh Gah Got'ie Dene Council, the Ft. Providence Metis Council and the Fort Providence Hamlet Council, has proposed to design, finance, construct and operate the crossing of the Deh Cho (Mackenzie River) at Fort Providence.

"Our contribution to the project planning is being funded under the department's economic development programming," said the Honourable Robert D. Nault, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development. "Programs such as these allow the department to form partnerships at the community, regional and national level to improve and enhance local economies and infrastructure."

"This is an example of public-private partnership that makes for truly effective and substantive northern economic development opportunities to flourish, with the proper infrastructure in place," said Ethel Blondin-Andrew, Member of Parliament for the Northwest Territories.

The Alliance signed a Memorandum of Intent with the GNWT on November 15, 2002. The MOI commits the parties to begin formal negotiations towards the goal of design, financing, construction and operation of a bridge across the Mackenzie River. The community recently formed the Deh Cho Bridge Corporation, under local Dene and Metis Council ownership, to advance the proposal.

Bridge Corporation President Michael Vandell noted, "This funding support is essential for us to continue to advance project development. The positive signals from the territorial government and the general public give us further confidence that this proposal can work."

If a final deal can be reached, construction of the kilometre-long structure could be completed by the summer of 2005, at a cost of about \$50 million. The GNWT would pay the Alliance the savings from the current ferry and ice bridge operations and the proceeds of a bridge toll. These revenues will be used to pay for maintenance and debt servicing and provide a return on equity to the Alliance. After 35 years, the bridge would be paid for and would be handed over to the GNWT.

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