

What's with road to Whati?

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Yellowknife Centre MLA Julie Green says cabinet has prioritized spending about \$150 million on an all-season road to Whati over spending \$325,000 to extend A New Day for a year.

A New Day is a healing program for men who have committed domestic violence.

In a speech in the legislative assembly Nov. 3, she said she's never happy with spending on roads instead of people.

"The cost benefit study indicates some economic benefits if a mine ever goes ahead, almost no economic worth if it doesn't," Green said. "Investment in the New Day Program may change not only the life of a single man but the life of his family scarred by the trauma of colonization and residential schools."

Her speech came a day after Department of Transportation officials updated MLAs on plans for the 97 km road linking the community of about 500 to Highway 3. The road has been sent for environmental assessment which is expected to conclude in June 2017.



Deputy Minister of Transportation Russell Neudorf, left, with Transportation Minister Wally Schumann answer questions from MLAs at a committee meeting Nov. 2 about plans for new all-season road to Whati. - Shane Magee/NNSL photo

Economic development - and the potential the road could lead to a new mine opening near Whati - was one of several reasons listed in a presentation to MLAs as why the project is a priority.

Yet Russell Neudorf, deputy minister of transportation, said something slightly different when giving the presentation.

"It's not one of the reasons for the road. We are moving this ahead for improved access to the community of Whati, but it is a benefit if the road moves ahead," Neudorf said of the mine.

MLAs representing areas outside the city voiced support for the road during the committee meeting.

"This project we believe is beneficial to the Whati region," Transportation Minister Wally Schumann said, particularly the cost of living in the community.

MLA, MP promote guardians program

Tu Nedhe-Willideh MLA Tom Beaulieu said an expanded indigenous guardians program would benefit the territory.

The program, similar to ones in Australia and British Columbia's Haida Nation, has run in two territory communities.

"Working with the youth and with advice and direction from the elders, the guardians monitor wildlife, collect wildlife, water, sediment and soil samples to measure against baseline data while managing their territories and sacred places," Beaulieu said in a speech Nov. 3.

He pointed to a case study of the Lutselk'e and Dehcho First Nations guardians programs that have shown success. The report indicates spending a dollar resulted in \$2.50 of social, economic, cultural and environmental benefits.

Northwest Territories MP Michael McLeod supports the federal government spending up to \$500 million on a national guardians program. He appeared this year at a news conference in Ottawa alongside former NWT premier Stephen Kakfwi to promote it.

McLeod said it would be a great way to create employment in remote communities and help young people develop skills.

"As we wrestle with decisions on the environment and the economy, we have to make sure we don't forget about the youth," McLeod said in an interview with News/North Oct. 6.

Beaulieu asked the finance minister last week whether the territory would support a national program that the MP has endorsed.

"I will make that commitment that we will work with our federal counterparts and through our own government if there is potential room for investments in these type of initiatives, we will be happy to have a look at it," the finance minister said.