

KEVIN O'REILLY—MLA FRAME LAKE
Frank Channel Bridge vs Slave Geological Province Road
Committee of the Whole—2019-2020 Operating Budget Review
Dept. of Infrastructure—February 22, 2019

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. In the Minister's opening remarks, I was kind of dazzled with all the millions of dollars that he was talking about. I am wondering how many millions of dollars are going towards the Slave Geological Province road in 2019-2020? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Minister.

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As far as I know, we don't have any more than some staff time going towards this, and some small planning that we are doing, some announcements that we expect to be coming later in the year around this project. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you, Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Can the Minister tell us whether there is any money in 2019-2020? I understand this is the O and M budget for the planning that needs to know done for the Frank Channel bridge. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Minister. Sorry. Who am I directing this to? Mr. Guy.

MR. GUY: Thank you, Mr. Chair. For the Frank Channel bridge, we are doing some preliminary work using our own-source funds through the 2018-2019 fiscal year. We do have some applications in through a number of federal infrastructure programs, including the Northern Trade Corridors Fund, to seek funding. We also have applications in for smaller amounts, to do some planning work, through agencies like CanNor, and we are expecting at some point to hear back on those in the coming weeks and months. In terms of specific money in 2019-2020, there is some staff fund time allocated in the strategic infrastructure division to work on advancing those applications and those projects, but I would have to go back, and the Minister would have it commit to coming back with a more detailed number on how specifically we would prorate that to that project. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Yes, I would like a commitment out of the Minister. If he could just sort of identify how much in terms of the O and M budget is being devoted to these two projects, the Frank Channel bridge and the Slave Geological Province road, I would find that information helpful. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Minister.

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, we can do that and provide the Member with that detailed information. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Thanks to the Minister for that commitment. I am just wondering, I understood that there had been money in previous budgets for the Frank Channel bridge. I am just trying to understand why we are still planning for it and we are not actually doing the work. Can the Minister's officials explain what's happening? Why we continue to spend money on planning rather than doing the work? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Minister.

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As you know, there was an allocation towards the Frank Channel bridge originally through the old program, the federal program. When we went out and did consultation with the community of Behchoko and industry, it was clearly relied to us at that point that there was a need to have a look at the realignment and a possibility of a new bridge at that point with discussion with these people, one without a top on it because it's a chokehold for industry going north from there. It is the only choke point in the Northwest Territories for industry. With that, we have decided to go back and reallocate those funds and have another look at replacing the Frank Channel bridge. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Thanks to the Minister for that. Well, not only is it a problem maybe for the supplies that are going to the diamond mines, but it is a public safety hazard. I have driven across that bridge. It is unsafe. There are not even stop lights at either end. It is an accident waiting to happen. Can the Minister tell me what kind of priority that project has within his department? Is it being given the same level of effort and so on as the Slave Geological Province Road? How much of a priority is this Frank Channel bridge with the department? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Minister.

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As I said in my comments there about the consultation with industry and looking at replacing it, we made the decision to have a look at that. We have spent some money on the Frank Channel bridge to try to get a little more life out of it while we look at trying to access funding from the federal government to replace this thing. It is roughly \$60, \$70 million, if I remember correctly the number for it. We presently have an application out of the National Trade Corridors Fund, which we would have shared with committee on our application around with that and the Slave Geological Province. We are waiting to hear back from the federal government. Hopefully, that will be before the federal election takes place. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. That is helpful from the Minister. If the Minister had to put a priority on the planning work that needs to be done on the Frank Channel bridge versus planning work that needs to be done for the Slave Geological Province road, which one is the highest priority? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Minister.

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. As I have clearly stated, we have put in both of our applications for both these projects with the federal government. Both of these projects are of high priority for our department. Safety is number one. As I have said, we spent money on this Frank Channel bridge right now to get some life out of this thing, but the Slave Geological Province is also a clear mandate to the Government of the Northwest Territories, and one that I have been committed to trying to secure funding for. Based on our applications, the Slave Geological Province is my preferred priority over the Frank Channel bridge. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Mr. O'Reilly.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. I appreciate the Minister putting that on the record that is his priority and for the department, his work on the Slave Geological Province road over the Frank Channel bridge. I am glad that he put it on the record, because I don't think that should be the priority. The Minister even said public safety should be number one, so I really don't understand why the Minister is putting the Slave Geological Province Road as a priority over the Frank Channel bridge. That is what he said. You can check Hansard if we want, but I disagree with that priority and I don't think that is in the public interest. Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Would the Minister care to retort?

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: Absolutely. Thank you, Mr. Chair. Let's make it quite clear on the record. That is why we are sitting here today, discussing these things. This was based on an application for the National Trade Corridors Fund, the amount of \$400 million that was carved out for the three northern territories. Based on that application, that is where my priority would be. It would be under the Slave Geological Province. It doesn't mean that the bridge is not a priority. This fund is just for the three northern territories with a carve-out, as I have said. There are only a certain amount of dollars left in there. The federal government has changed the rules around our application process and changed the cap on it, which we have done our two applications for this. If we are not successful to get the money for the Frank Channel bridge through that process, we will certainly be chasing other avenues through the federal government to replace this bridge. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Anything further from Mr. O'Reilly?

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. Yes, I am confused probably at the best of times, but now I am really confused with regard to what the priorities of the department and the Minister are. It seems like when it comes to applying for federal money, the Slave Geological Province road planning work is a priority over Frank Channel. Can the Minister tell us, with his own money, with the department's own money, what is the priority? Is it replacing the Frank Channel bridge or is it doing the planning work for Slave Geological Province Road? Thanks, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Minister.

HON. WALLY SCHUMANN: Thank you, Mr. Chair. If we are going to sit here and play on words, let's make it quite clear. I have been mandated to access funding for the Slave Geological Province road. That is a part of my mandate commitment. It is in the

mandate agreed by all Members in this House. We are out there clearly trying to get funding for the Slave Geological Province, and Frank Channel bridge is clearly part of the application for the Slave Geological Province. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

CHAIRPERSON (Mr. Simpson): Thank you. Final brief word, Mr. O'Reilly?

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Mr. Chair. The Minister well knows my views on this, that the mandate is so broad you could drive trucks through it. Here is a clear example of the Minister driving some trucks through the mandate. Look, if the priority is public safety, and I believe it should be, the Minister and his department should be working at replacing the Frank Channel bridge. The Slave Geological Province road should wait. Thanks, Mr. Chair.