

**KEVIN O'REILLY - MLA FRAME LAKE**  
**Committee of the Whole—2019-2020 Operating Budget Review**  
**Slave Geologic Province - February 11, 2020**

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair. Can someone tell me what this \$200,000 for initial work on an environmental assessment, what that is actually going to be spent on and what is it going to accomplish? Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Minister of Finance.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Madam Chair. This is the contribution of the GNWT towards the project. A larger proportion of the amount is being funded by the federal government under the National Trade Corridors Fund. This was a successful application by the Government of the Northwest Territories for this partnership with the federal government and, as a totality, this part of the Slave Geologic Province will fund quite a number of things. There will be the initial environmental assessment, which will include studies of everything ranging potentially from water, water use, water quality, wildlife, permafrost, fish studies, air quality, as well as business opportunities using both scientific method as well as traditional knowledge. There is some pre-planning work that is to be done in terms of engineering, although the root analysis has been determined under prior funding. The next stage is actually to bring the matter to being shovel-ready.

As well, of course, and perhaps most importantly, is consultation with Indigenous governments, and to ensure that there is a thorough consultation plan in place, and that that work gets under way so that all Indigenous governments and Indigenous communities are a part of this process from the earliest possible stages. Thank you, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Minister. Member O'Reilly.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair. Thanks to the Minister for that. What is the total cost of this project? Thanks, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Minister of Finance.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Madam Chair. The total cost, year over year, I can give the cost. In terms of 2019-2020, the total cost is \$200,000; then, going forward, it reaches \$40 million over the course of the four-year plan. I assume that that was the timeline that the Member is asking. I'm prepared to go into other detail if he's looking for other numbers.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Minister. Member O'Reilly.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair. Yes, I would like the total amount to construct this project. I understand that the planning phase, so to speak, phase 1, is \$40 million. What is the cost for the rest of it? Thanks, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Minister of Finance.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Madam Chair. I am aware that there have been studies compiled and work has been done. I would just like to confirm what stage those numbers are at in terms of their publication. As I said, I can confirm that this is a \$40-million estimate for phase 1 of the project. There are other phases to the project, and I'll just confirm the status of those numbers and, if I can release them, I certainly will. I apologize. I'm not familiar enough with where those studies are at.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. Member O'Reilly.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair. I'm trying to understand what the Minister said. Is she going to be able to provide to the House information on the total cost of this project, and that that will come shortly? Thanks, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Minister of Finance.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Madam Chair, as I've just said and I'll say it again, as soon as I can confirm whether or not the cost estimates are confidential, then, if they're not, I will be more than happy to bring them to the House.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Minister. Member O'Reilly.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair. Can the Minister tell us whether there is actually a full project description or a business case for this project? Thanks, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Minister of Finance.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Yes, there was. In order to partake in the Trade Corridors Fund, there was a complete business case assessment done. It was my understanding that quite a bit of that information was shared during the last Assembly, but I'm sure that what was sent to prior committees can be resent to the current committees as they are constituted, so that the information about the business case can be provided.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Minister. Member O'Reilly.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair. Yes, I was a Member of the last Assembly and we received a lot of information, some of which was about this particular project, but I don't actually ever recall seeing a business case for it. If the Minister can commit to share that, that would be great. Thanks, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. Minister of Finance.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Madam Chair, as I've said, I am confident there has been a cost benefit analysis and a business case provided. What I will do first is to identify what was shared with the last committee, ensure that the current composition of the committees have that information available to them, and certainly, if what was shared before was unsatisfactory, then we'll have to go back and confirm so that the committee can be assured of the analysis of the cost benefits, of the very positive cost benefits, of the Slave Geologic Province to the Northwest Territories.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you. Member O'Reilly.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair. Just a couple, or one last question, perhaps. Can the Minister tell me whether any of this \$200,000, or indeed any of the \$40 million, is actually going to be used to protect caribou and their habitat? Thanks, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Minister of Finance.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Thank you, Madam Chair. Certainly, as I mentioned, in order to have this project being shovel-ready, it will require baseline studies to understand the current situation facing the wildlife in the area and in the region, as well as conducting whatever studies will be no doubt required for the environmental assessment process that I expect would be required for this kind of level of project. That part of the money will be going precisely to do that, to engage in that process, to engage in that study, to ensure that we have the baseline data, and to ensure that we are prepared, going forward, with an environmental assessment so that this project can move forward in a way that is respectful of all of the needs of all the people in the territory. Thank you.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Thank you, Minister. Member O'Reilly.

**MR. O'REILLY:** Thanks, Madam Chair. Look, I need to be clear, here. In the last Assembly, I said that I don't support this particular project when we don't have a comprehensive plan in place and funded to protect the Bathurst caribou herd, which is down to 8,200 animals. Until our government gets serious about habitat protection and has that plan fully implemented, in place, funded, and so on, I will not be supporting this expenditure of funds. We can't have an all-weather road through critical habitat, including the Nunavut portion, which is a slightly different project, go through the calving grounds of this herd, when they are at such a low level, so I won't be supporting this. Thanks, Madam Chair.

**CHAIRPERSON (Ms. Semmler):** Minister of Finance.

**HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK:** Madam Chair, I appreciate the Member's candid remarks. I can only assure the House, broadly speaking, that this is a project that is of tremendous significance to the Northwest Territories. It is, as I understand it, supported over in the Kitikmeot Region of Nunavut. It is being done under a business case and with a cost benefit analysis. It is multi-departmental. It will involve ENR, and it will involve Lands, so I am sure that there will be

plenty of opportunity, whether through this project or through the other work of the other departments, to review the impacts on the caribou as it goes forward. Thank you, Madam Chair.