

KEVIN O'REILLY—MLA FRAME LAKE
Whati Hydro Transmission Line
Committee of the Whole—2021-2022 Supplementary Infrastructure Expenditures
Budget Review
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MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. I remember sitting in the chamber in August of 2019 when the House approved, I didn't agree with it, money for the Whati transmission line. Have we actually spent any money on this? Thanks, Madam Chair.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, obviously if there was some carryover is required there's certainly some work yet to be done. Neither the Minister nor I were here in August of 2019, but I'd suggest, perhaps, if the Minister of Infrastructure can provide some update as to the status of the project that might be the place to go.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you. Oh, Minister.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, so, you know, you look at the Whati transmission line and, you know, some of the -- how it aligns under our 2030 energy strategy and, you know, it is a priority for this government to be able to look at some alternative energy solutions. And, yes, we did spend some money and, you know, we did some technical studies. We did review and update preliminary environmental studies, looking at additional traditional knowledge and some of the land use studies as well. So, yes, Madam Chair, we did do some work on this transmission line. Thank you.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Minister. Member.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. Can I get a commitment out of the Minister to provide a list of the studies, their cost, and could she make the studies available if I ask for them on a confidential basis, of course. Thanks, Madam Chair.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, not knowing exactly the entirety of the studies, I'll certainly commit to get a list of what exactly has been done and confirm if there is some reason that they can't be made publicly or made confidentially available, I will provide an explanation as to why.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. Yes, one of the issues that I had with the Whati transmission line back in 2019, and remains still today, is for the cost of the project -- and I tabled documents in the last Assembly -- showed for the cost of doing the Whati transmission line, you could actually get mini hydro in three Tlicho communities for about the same cost. So why would we build this huge transmission line to one community when we could actually get sustainable alternative energy in

three different communities? I just don't get it. Can the Minister tell me whether any analysis has been done around that. Thanks, Madam Chair.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Thank you, Madam Chair. So again, Madam Chair, I can't speak to what may or may not have been presented by the Member back in 2019. I can say that the Tlicho Government, I understand, is in support of this transmission project and it certainly is a part of the priorities of this government to make sure we are working with Indigenous governments when -- typically on projects that are on Indigenous lands. And, you know, I'm not sure where the disconnect is between the information that's available. So perhaps in those studies, it may well answer those questions. The information I have available to me is that in fact transmission will be much more durable and last many times much longer than what the mini hydro would which certainly factors in in terms of the costing. As well as in terms of the operations and maintenance costs, that it's much easier and much cheaper to maintain. And certainly can set the stage for other projects in the region that are hydro-based. So, you know, Madam Chair, I'll pause there. And if -- certainly, if there's more detail that we would like to get into on the specifics of the project in the review of this, I'm welcome to another question and I can turn it back to the Minister of Infrastructure. Thank you.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Minister. Member.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks to the Minister for that level of detail. Kind of hard for me to understand why mini hydro would be any less durable or last less time than a big hydro project like Snare which actually requires a massive investment to replace turbines and all kinds of stuff. And your technical folks will know way more about the work that's required in the Snare system to keep it going, because that was built in the 1940s and is going to require a massive investment to modernize and update it again. So, yeah, if there is any more detailed work that's been done to -- you know, do some sort of comparison between mini hydro versus building a huge oversized transmission line to one community, I would love to see that. So can I get a commitment out of the Minister to search their archives and find out if that kind of analysis was actually done and share the information. Thanks, Madam Chair.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. CAROLINE WAWZONEK: Madam Chair, this is going to be studies and information done by expertise within Infrastructure so I'll turn it back to the Minister of Infrastructure again, please.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you. Minister of Infrastructure.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Madam Chair. I didn't hear it turned over to me but I would be quite happy to answer that question.

So I mean, you look at the -- the Whati transmission line, and I do want to say that it is more reliable than mini hydro, and not only that but sometimes what seems to be the cheapest option isn't always the best option. However, there were cost estimates done on a potential 1.2 megawatt mini hydro project on the Lac La Matre River about a

decade ago. We look at, you know, the Tlicho government and just working with the government to be able to, you know, to look at some of the projects at the same site however conserve some of the Whati and the North Slave as well. Yeah, I think, you know, that is something that we can look at as well. Thank you, Madam Chair.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Minister. Member.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. While the Minister is looking at it, could she commit to share that information with this side of the House? Thanks, Madam Chair.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Member. Minister.

HON. DIANE ARCHIE: Thank you, Madam Chair. Madam Chair, there is, you know, when this project first started, there was a lot of work that was put into it to be able to determine whether it's feasible or not to continue with this project, and this is something that we are looking at in terms of some of the reports and the work that Infrastructure's done to be able to have a look at the projects. That's perhaps something we can look into and if we're able to share it, absolutely. Thank you, Madam Chair.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Minister. Member for Frame Lake.

MR. O'REILLY: Thanks, Madam Chair. Well, I look forward to the Minister opening the vaults and sharing that information and when I get it, I'll look at it carefully and probably have lots more questions about this money because I just think that we would get a much bigger bang for our buck and help serve three communities for the same cost of doing this one project that I just think is not -- you know, there was a lot of feasibility work done on the mini hydro projects as well that was in some of the information I tabled in the last Assembly. And I just don't get why our government wants to invest in this large project that is -- I don't think it's even -- I understand the need to get a sustainable and durable power supply to Whati but I don't think this is the best way to do it in my opinion. But I'm more than happy to look at the information the Minister's going to provide to me. Thanks, Madam Chair.

MS. SEMMLER: Thank you, Member. I will take that as a comment.