

15th Legislative Assembly

**Sixth Session
May 9-17, 2007
Second Sitting**

MAY 10, 2007

Deh Cho Bridge Project

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I am going to speak again today about the Deh Cho Bridge project. Having now had the opportunity to read through yesterday's Hansard, I am left even more confused today than I was yesterday.

After listening to both the Premier and the Minister of Transportation, it would appear as though the decision to proceed has already been made. This decision has been made in the absence of any federal funding and, Mr. Speaker, the question was asked yesterday: Is the project contingent on P3 dollars from the federal government? The Minister of Transportation responded, "That is a good question." His response leaves me very uneasy about where the government is allowing this project to go.

As I mentioned yesterday, each and every time the loan guarantee to the Deh Cho Bridge Corporation was increased, the excuse was they were waiting for the federal government to come in and help the project. Here we are today, Mr. Speaker, with the government admitting that they really don't need the federal dollars to build this bridge. I am left wondering why all of a sudden the Government of the Northwest Territories thinks it is a good time to start construction on the bridge this summer which, coincidentally, Mr. Speaker, is just a few months short of the next territorial election.

Yesterday, the Premier told the CBC Northbeat that the government would be committing to the project the \$2 million a year it spends on ferry operations and ice crossing maintenance at Fort Providence, plus an additional \$2 million per year. What I am seeking, Mr. Speaker, is proof that this is what it will cost us and that we will get a clear understanding of what the tolls and the concession agreement will look like before any agreement is signed off.

Mr. Speaker, is this too much to ask of the Premier and of the government? I want to understand how it is that the government can say construction is going to start this summer without first providing this House the details of the project. Both the Premier and the Minister of Transportation suggested the bridge project would lower the cost of living.

That might have been the case four or five years ago when the tolls on this project were pegged at \$4 to \$5 per ton and the bridge was estimated to cost \$70 to \$75 million. With the project now over \$130 million and tolls looking like they are going to be over \$6 per ton, what will that do to the price of consumer goods in the North Slave region and the city of Yellowknife?

In closing, Mr. Speaker, I just want some answers. I want the government to commit to providing this House every detail of this project before it proceeds.

Again, I want my colleagues to understand that I do support the construction of a Deh Cho Bridge. However, Mr. Speaker, as an Assembly and as stewards of public funds, we need to make an informed decision. Thus far, Mr. Speaker, I have not seen that. Mahsi.

--- Applause