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Member's Statement On Proposed Mackenzie River Bridge Project

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I would like to use my Member's Statement today to speak about the proposed Mackenzie River bridge project. The Mackenzie River is one of the great rivers of the world. The Mackenzie River runs through most of our territory, and affects and impacts many of our residents in a variety of different ways.

It causes me a great deal of concern that this government is going down the path of building a bridge without all the answers to many questions. I should state for the record that I am a supporter of putting a bridge across the Mackenzie River. However, we should, at the very least, get a handle on some key concerns.

I have not seen a design. It seems to change on the fly. The proponent was recently asked what the impact of rising steel prices would do to the project. His reply was that more concrete would be used. What is the design, and what will be the price?

Mr. Speaker, I also have some concerns regarding the financial arrangement for this project and how other initiatives brought on by this government, such as the Taltson hydro project, what impact that will have on the possible toll revenue for the bridge project? I have many questions surrounding the cost and viability of this project. The last cost we have seen is in the neighbourhood of \$57 million. How sound is this number and, again, what exactly is being proposed?

Mr. Speaker, most people want a bridge. It is exciting. It will be a key piece of public infrastructure for a century or more. I just want to ensure that we have all the answers to the many questions that surround this project. It is also a concern of mine that under the Deh Cho Bridge Act, Cabinet has the authority to sign off on this project without input from Regular Members.

If all goes well, the GNWT will get a \$60 - \$70 million bridge paid for by toll revenues over 35 years. If all goes south or sour, the GNWT will get an \$80 - \$100 million bridge that toll revenues alone will not cover. The shortfall will then have to come from other GNWT revenues. To me it seems like a very one sided agreement, and I will have specific questions for the Premier, who is the Minister responsible for the Deh Cho Bridge Project, at the appropriate time. Thank you, Mr. Speaker.