

16th Legislative Assembly

Third Session

Second Sitting

February 4 - March 12, 2009

FEB 17, 2009

Deh Cho Bridge Project

MR. RAMSAY: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I'd like to speak today about the Deh Cho Bridge project. For the second year in a row, this government has failed to mention anything about the Deh Cho Bridge in the Finance Minister's annual budget address. Like last year, I again find that this is a peculiar omission.

The Deh Cho Bridge project is the largest single piece of public infrastructure to ever be built in the Northwest Territories. At \$165 million, this is a project that one would think the GNWT would be proud of. According to the government, this \$165 million bridge is going to reduce the cost of living. If it is true, why would the government leave that out of the budget address when the cost of living is the single biggest issue facing our residents?

With tolls being applied on all truck traffic, I still don't know or understand how this could ever be possible. Everything that is transported across that bridge will cost more when it lands in the North Slave communities and any other community that these goods are flown into.

The bridge is being built and because of decisions of the last government, we are going to have to, beginning in 2010-2011, take our \$1.8 million we currently use for ferry operations and ice crossing construction and maintenance, plus an additional \$2 million on top of that because of the price increasing to \$165 million, for a total of \$3.8 million indexed every year for the next 35 years. This doesn't include the cost of administration and collection of tolls, which is going to cost this government another \$700,000 to \$800,000 per year.

With the recent economic downturn, the amount of truck traffic crossing this bridge may not meet the original financial projections, which would leave the GNWT having to pay even more for the bridge on an annual basis. Questions and rumours abound on the bridge project. Is it going to be constructed on time and on budget? What about all the rumours of lawsuits, people not getting paid, and cost overruns? Where exactly is the GNWT exposed financially in all of these areas?

The deal itself was signed off on a Friday afternoon three days prior to the last election. A year ago, the Premier made a commitment in this House to do a post-mortem on how and why this decision was made. I have not forgotten about this commitment and I look forward to the Premier tabling this post-mortem in this House at the appropriate time.