

Float or fly: provincial transportation strategy needed

Considering the geography of the province and the economic opportunities that can be developed here, coordinated transportation is vital to Newfoundlanders and Labradorians. Consider:

- just over half-a-million people live on an island and a separate mainland section;
- population density is barely more than one person per square kilometer, on average;
- both public and private transportation links exist – road, rail, marine, and air;
- there are only two ways to get on and off the Island; and,
- Labrador is booming, with massive resources moving in and around the mainland portion.

“It’s time to see a vision for transportation to, from, and within this province,” said St. John’s Board of Trade Chair Jo Mark Zurel. “Transportation is too vital for moving people to and from their workplaces and communities, for getting necessities to the people here, and for providing opportunities for us to benefit from exporting to global markets. A provincial transportation strategy is absolutely imperative to the people of this province.”

Some benefits of a provincial transportation strategy include:

- help better develop natural resources in remote areas;
- give our skilled workforce more mobility, matching skills with opportunities;
- leverage our geographic location, which naturally links with the U.S., Europe and the arctic;
- enhance emergency response, public transit and the environment; and,
- plan for the long term use of both public and private assets all over the province.

“Possibly the main argument for a transportation strategy is this: if you don’t have integrated, efficient and effective transportation links, you’re putting a ceiling on your own economy,” said Mr. Zurel. “With our demographic challenges, our reliance on a non-renewable resource for public sector financing, and our public financial position, we can’t limit our own economy. We need to grow to have any chance of being in a sustainable position, and transportation is a big part of that growth. Coordinated, forward-looking, possibly bold moves are needed.”

Over the past few years, transportation issues have been advanced in Newfoundland and Labrador. Investments in ferries and ground infrastructure in Marine Atlantic, for instance, have been complemented by a new landing system for St. John’s International Airport, significant progress on the Trans-Labrador Highway and a provincial air access strategy. However, an overarching strategy still remains to be developed to direct the development of transportation resources under provincial control, those jointly managed with other levels of government, and those managed on behalf of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians at the federal level.

“In the lead up to the fall election, we hope that a transportation strategy can get on the agenda as just good, solid public policy,” said Mr. Zurel. “We think there will be a lot of support for this in the larger community, especially among people who rely on transportation for business or

recreation or to get back and forth to family or their jobs or simply to access things like food and medical supplies. There are plenty of good reasons why this should have widespread support, and we hope that this is something all voters can get behind.”

The St. John’s Board of Trade is a non-partisan, business advocacy organization that is the principal voice of business for over 800 members and their tens of thousands of employees. Its mission is to improve the local business climate, enhancing its members’ ability to do business through advocacy and member services. Twitter: @stjohnsbot

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BACKGROUND: Provincial transportation strategy

Significant strategic work has been done on provincial transportation and provides a strong base of knowledge: government has comprehensive publications such as a Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters (CME) *Transportation Directory for Newfoundland and Labrador*, a CME *Transportation Best Practices Manual*, and a consultation document on *The Development of a Sustainable Transportation Plan for Labrador*. Additionally, in 2005 a National Transportation Strategy was announced by the Council of the Federation and in 2008, Atlantic Ministers of Transportation released a 10 year regional plan.

For 2008-11: “The vision of the Department of Transportation and Works is of a sustainable public works and transportation infrastructure that meets the economic and social needs of the province.” The department’s strategic issues in that time are: improved highway system, marine services and government air services, and support the Provincial Energy Plan.

The 1978 *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Newfoundland Transportation*, by the Government of Canada, indicated: “Our task, therefore, has been the preparation of a master plan that would guide the development of transportation in Newfoundland and Labrador for the next twenty years. We have not completely succeeded in this, but we have, we think, provided the basic essentials for such a plan. That we have not succeeded completely is not surprising, considering the complexity of the task...”

Quebec’s Plan Nord: Announced in May of this year, the 25 year Plan Nord will have investments of over \$80 billion. It will create or consolidate 20,000 jobs a year, on average, and generate \$14 billion in revenue for government and Quebec. It focuses on community well-being and development, economic potential, environmental protection, and a coordinated approach within government using a defined financial framework. Transport is a critical pillar, significant money is being invested, and the north shore will position Quebec in the development of the Arctic.