

## **CHAMBER CHATTER**

### **Evolving Transportation Infrastructure Strengthening Central Labrador Business**

There has been a lot of buzz lately surrounding the recent changes to Labrador's transportation infrastructure. With established connections to the region by air, land and sea, and substantial improvements to these critical networks in recent years and months, Labradorians are recognizing that changes to Central Labrador's landscape means changes to the way they approach and conduct business.

It's no secret that well-established transportation networks are critical to the quality of life and overall success of economic development in a region. Think back to when the Trans Labrador Highway (TLH) was merely a plan that even just a few years ago, felt so far from completion. Now with an investment of \$275 million from the province, stretching from the Quebec border in Southern Labrador to the border west of Labrador City, and spanning the length of 1,150 kilometers, the TLH is now an integrated transportation network that has proven to not only entice tourists and attract considerable business to the region, but change the way that Labradorians connect and communicate to the rest of province, Canada and abroad.

Designated as part of the National Highway System, the TLH has already had a critical impact on the regional economy including access to health and social services, the transportation of goods and services, and overall quality of life. More visibly, business has improved significantly for local small businesses.

"Since the opening of the South Coast Highway last year, we have seen increased travel both ways over the road," says Regina Vickers, co-owner of Goose Sales. "Businesses will continue to see increased sales in Goose Bay, Labrador City and along the South coast, and people will have greater choices, better prices and greater availability of stock."

While connecting the TLH has been a landmark achievement, widening and hard surfacing of the highway is also a strategically important undertaking for long-term system sustainability and economic development for Labrador.

"Great work has been done to complete the TLH connection, and we applaud the provincial and federal government for their commitment to development and maintenance of this key infrastructure," says Sterling Peyton, president of the Labrador North Chamber of Commerce (LNCC). "However, while significant progress has been made on Phase I, it is important to the business community and citizens of Labrador that a commitment be made by our government partners in the short term to widen and pave the entire TLH within a reasonable timeframe," adds Mr. Peyton.

Many other businesses in the region are preparing for future development, spearheading transportation infrastructure initiatives and upgrading key facilities. With a \$12.35 million investment by the federal government, provincial government, and the Goose Bay Airport Corporation (GBAC), the expansion of the current airport terminal in Goose Bay began this past July. Airport general manager Goronwy Price told us in an interview earlier this year that he believes this expansion is certainly one investment that will help attract people to the region and will better support the increase to the labour force that will occur in the coming years.

"This investment really shows our commitment to the region and our response to the development that is taking place here," said Price, adding that the upgrades will improve the experience for the traveling public and airport staff, and will further help support economic development initiatives within the region.

In keeping with significant investments in civil aviation, on October 15 of this year, the province launched a new \$5 million initiative called *Taking Flight*, a five-year strategy that aims to combat high airline ticket

prices while encouraging more competition within the industry. By working closely with airports and airlines across the province, the government has committed to reimbursing airlines that create a new route up to \$750,000 in advertising dollars. With potential of sparking further competition in the province, Labradorians may have more opportunities to travel to and from the region at lower cost.

With substantial improvements, changes are bound to occur. On October 26, the province announced that as of the end of this year, freight and passenger service from the *MV Sir Robert Bond* will be discontinued between Lewisporte and the Labrador towns of Happy Valley-Goose Bay and Cartwright. However, the Lewisporte and Happy Valley-Goose Bay terminals will still be maintained as cargo ports to northern Labrador, while connection to the island will be maintained year-round through Blanc Sablon.

Although there have been mixed reactions to the cancellation of the ferry, some believe that the decision illustrates a progression toward the long-awaited advancement to Labrador's transportation system. With the TLH now connected, more people are traveling the roads, and this also means more business for those positioned along or just off the highway.

NorthMart manager Dave Pelley says that the opening of the road is not only bringing in customers from the South coast, but has provided more flexibility. "We are no longer solely dependent on the boat," he says. "The road gives us access to products 12 months of the year, so instead of ordering large shipments and stockpiling products, we order products when we need it."

Though Labrador is still considered somewhat of an isolated northern region, its abundant natural resources and virtually untouched landscape continue to reveal favorable economic promise for developments in such industries as hydroelectricity, mining and forestry. The economic spin-offs of mega-projects like the Lower Churchill and Aurora Energy Resources Inc.'s *Michelin Project* (proposed uranium mining operation) will present significant labour market opportunities for many Labradorians, and the region is now more prepared for the increase to the work force in terms of transportation infrastructure.

The LNCC has also recognized opportunities beyond Labrador, and our members have never been more equipped to make their mark in the north. With the recent transportation upgrades, Central Labrador is poised to become a major gateway to Canada's eastern arctic and north. Many opportunities for responsible resource and socio-economic development are surfacing as collectively, northern regions are becoming more competitive by identifying untapped opportunities and building on current resource potential. Regional businesses are better positioned to continue to build upon existing and new northern partnerships specifically in the regions of Labrador/Nunatsiavut, Nunavut and Nunavik, with opportunities in such industries as transportation and shipping, tourism, construction, and forestry products.

We at the Chamber have identified these opportunities and have been spearheading projects such as *NorthLink*, *Expo Labrador* and the *Northern Lights Business and Cultural Showcase*, in hopes of increasing the awareness of these many strategic prospects, and helping our members and other interested businesses forge mutually-beneficial partnerships throughout Labrador, the Canadian North, and the circumpolar world.

With the strengthening of Labrador's transportation infrastructure, and unwavering determination of its citizens and the community, the region's resource and business potential will only continue to grow.

*For more information or feedback on this column, please contact the Labrador North Chamber of Commerce at (709) 896-8787, [admin@chamberlabrador.com](mailto:admin@chamberlabrador.com), or visit our website at [www.chamberlabrador.com](http://www.chamberlabrador.com).*