

MEDIA RELEASE

Thursday, September 15, 2016

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MATAWA FIRST NATIONS SEEK COMMITMENT ON CONSTRUCTION OF BROADBAND FIBRE OPTICS NETWORK TO ELIMINATE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

THUNDER BAY, ON: The Matawa First Nations Broadband Working Group were pleased to announce today that they have received commitment from the federal government to move into the design phase of a project aimed at connecting 5 remote First Nations in northwestern Ontario to an advanced fibre-to-the-home broadband network. The remote First Nations of Nibinamik, Webequie, Neskantaga, Eabametoong and Marten Falls are seeking additional commitments from the provincial and federal government to move forward with the construction build which also connects them to Aroland First Nation.

The design and planning of the Matawa First Nations Broadband Technology (MFNBT) project is estimated to cost \$4.028 million. Hopes continue to remain high that additional capital will be invested soon so that fibre optic cable could be ordered this fall and line cutting can begin this winter. If this plan is followed, the Matawa First Nations Broadband Working Group are hoping to see the first few First Nations connected by the summer of 2017.

In other parts of the province, cities in southwestern Ontario, are moving from regular broadband to ultra-high speed through the Southwestern Integrated Fibre Technology (SWIFT) project. This is while basic broadband is still not available to communities in the remote north of northwestern Ontario—an area the Matawa First Nations Broadband Working Group argue, is still part of the province. The SWIFT project will be receiving \$180 million in total from the federal and provincial governments towards the total project cost of approximately \$281 million. Funding will come from the 2014 *New Building Canada Fund*, the Provincial-Territorial Infrastructure Component to the *Small Communities Fund*. Federal Minister of Science and Innovation, Navdeep Bains made an announcement on broadband but has yet to sit down and meet with the Matawa Chiefs regarding broadband and other regional economic development issues with FedNor.

In March, the Matawa First Nations demanded full support for broadband connectivity in advance of the federal budget 2016 (see [media release](#)). Today the MFNBT project, a *shovel ready* project, has still not received full investments needed for First Nations identified infrastructure priorities. They said that proper bandwidth capacity is needed in order to properly negotiate with Ontario on the proposed Ring of Fire and to properly review proposed technology related initiatives like the Ontario Ministry of Northern Development and Mines proposed online staking. Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne has also made comments on social media that broadband connectivity is coming to the far north of Ontario. The Matawa Broadband Working Group have said that these comments have had empty meaning as they have only experienced countless delays and lack of clear answers from government bureaucracies.



QUOTES BROADBAND WORKING GROUP

“Our telecommunications system through satellite is poor and over-saturated, it is like we are on dial-up internet. In Eabametoong First Nation, we continue to experience an increase in growing demand for bandwidth from both residential and commercial users like our band office, schools and health centres. This lack of service puts us in a compromising position when we try to give the best service we can to our subscribers. The government should recognize this as major communications breakdowns are occurring on a regular basis impacting the response time of emergency services. We require an interim solution now until fibre-optic reaches our First Nations.” — Wayne Slipperjack, Eabametoong First Nation

“With the lack of movement from government on this infrastructure build we are seeing a negative socio-economic impact. The costs to our education and health systems are soaring and more importantly our operations are being compromised. The frustrations from our teaching and clinic staff that provide essential services are making it extremely difficult to do basic tasks for segments of the population like the youth and elderly. We need government to commit to our timelines to begin the project this fall.” — James Suganaqueb, Webequie First Nation

“We have petitions with over a thousand signatures in our communities demanding a broadband connection that will improve the quality of lives of our peoples. We were supposed to be connected in 2014 and years later we are still discussing the project. We are ready to take on the development and bring the digital highways to our people that will open up global communications and put us on the same playing field as the rest of Canada.” — Edward Moonias, Neskantaga First Nation

— 30 —

Matawa First Nations Management is a Tribal Council providing a variety of advisory services and programs to 8 Ojibway and Cree First Nations in James Bay Treaty No. 9 and 1 First Nation in the Robinson-Superior Treaty area. Follow them on Facebook or Twitter @MatawaFNM.

For more information, please contact Carol Audet, Communications Officer – Matawa First Nations at (807) 632-9663 or by email at caudet@matawa.on.ca. Also, see attached brochure ‘Broadband Development Project.’

