

MEDIA RELEASE

Tuesday, January 17, 2017

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MATAWA FIRST NATIONS COMMENCE TALKS WITH GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS ON NEW FEDERAL BROADBAND FUNDING AND MOVE FORWARD WITH ESTABLISHING A TELECO

THUNDER BAY, ON: Matawa First Nations today announced their plans to commence talks with government officials on new federal broadband funding called [Connect to Innovate](#) which was launched by the Ministry of Innovation, Science and Economic Development (ISED) on December 15, 2016 and to move forward on establishing a teleco/telecommunications company. These discussions come on the heels of a prior meeting with the Honourable Navdeep Bains, ISED Minister, on October 13, 2016 and the Canadian Radio-Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) decision on December 20, 2016 declaring broadband internet a basic service that all Canadians should have regardless of where they live. Matawa First Nation Chiefs and the Matawa Broadband Working Group will be present for this week's talks.

On Wednesday, January 18, 2017, they will be meeting with Assistant Deputy Ministers offices of the provincial and federal governments to discuss *Connect to Innovate* with respect to their project exceeding \$60 million to connect 5 remote First Nations. It will be the first time that new players from government will be around the table. It will be an opportunity for direct interface with officials administering the *Connect to Innovate* program. Matawa First Nations will be applying to this program for capital funding before the March 13, 2017 deadline.

5 First Nations in Matawa have been without broadband internet since they were left out of the *Northwestern Ontario Broadband Expansion Initiative (NOBEI)*, a project announced by Canada and Ontario in 2010 to bring a state-of-the-art backbone fibre optic network to First Nations communities through Nishnawbe Aski Nation (in partnership with Bell Alliant). They are the remaining First Nations in the far north of Ontario without broadband internet.

On Thursday, January 19, 2017, the Matawa Chiefs and Broadband Working Group will be moving forward with the plan to establish their own teleco/telecommunications company including making decisions on design and securing a private partnership with partial funding in the amount of \$1.2 million received from Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada.

Currently, they rely on an outdated, dysfunctional and expensive satellite and microwave telecommunications system that is riddled by blackouts and breakdowns. In the past, they have drawn attention to the hardships the lack of broadband connectivity has on their communities including the ability to do business like reporting on funding, providing students with web-based teaching resources

in their schools, ability to conduct banking, ability to access government services, including tele-health, etc. They have been calling for full support for broadband connectivity since 2014, and, in advance of the 2016 federal budget this past March. In addition, they have asked that government broadband connectivity funding programs remove barriers to access.

QUOTES

“While it has taken some time for our voices to be heard, I believe that after the Matawa Chiefs met with the Honourable Navdeep Bains on October 13, 2016 to talk to him about the disparities that are caused by the lack of broadband in our Nations, the ISED Minister has listened.”

— *David Paul Achneepineskum, CEO – Matawa First Nations Management*

“Coupled by the CRTC’s decision in December declaring broadband internet a basic human right, I believe that shifts in government broadband connectivity programs will be positive for our First Nations.”

— *Harvey Yellowhead, Nibinamik First Nation*

“We cannot continue to keep our people waiting for broadband internet. Now, it is another a basic human right that we do not have. Our children need broadband internet in order to learn what other children learn. Our people need to be able to access tele-health like the rest of Canadians are able. We have waited too long already. Our project has been shovel-ready for years.”

— *Wayne Slipperjack, Eabametoong First Nation*

A media conference is not taking place, but media availability is as follows:

Date: Wednesday, January 18, 2017
Location: Kitchi Sippi (Lower Level)
Matawa First Nations Management, 233 S. Court Street, Thunder Bay, ON
Time: 12:00 p.m. – 1:00 p.m.

— 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 Manager – Matawa First Nations at (807) 632-9663 or by email at caudet@matawa.on.ca.

