

MEDIA RELEASE

Monday, March 21, 2016

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MATAWA FIRST NATIONS DEMAND FULL SUPPORT FOR BROADBAND CONNECTIVITY IN ADVANCE OF FEDERAL BUDGET 2016

THUNDER BAY, ON: Matawa First Nations today called for the commitment of the governments of Ontario and Canada to fully collaborate on providing funding for a project aimed at connecting 5 remote First Nations in Matawa to broadband. They are seeking \$4.028 million to complete design, engineering and construction planning. They will be seeking additional capital for the construction phase which they hope to start this winter with the goal to have the first communities connected in the spring of 2017. The project has potential to be the only one of its kind in any First Nation in Canada as it replaces the copper method.

In 2010, \$81 million in funding was announced by Canada and Ontario to bring a state-of-the-art backbone fibre optic network to 26 First Nations communities in Nishnawbe Aski Nation who partnered with Bell Alliant. This initiative, called the *Northwestern Ontario Broadband Expansion Initiative (NOBEI)*, originally planned to include Nibinamik, Webequie, Neskantaga, Eabametoong and Marten Falls First Nations—the 5 remote Matawa First Nations directly within the area known as the Ring of Fire. Then, in 2013, they were informed that the NOBEI had gone over budget due to issues in the construction of the 21 Non-Matawa First Nations leaving them without funding or a plan for broadband connection.

The 5 Matawa First Nations left out of the NOBEI said that full funding commitment is required on April 1 as the 2016 federal budget is released. They are growing increasingly frustrated after have been waiting for 3 years and having been disappointed by the NOBEI. They warn that if investments do not take place now, future costs will rise with inflation and they will have to continue to rely on an outdated, dysfunctional and expensive satellite and microwave telecommunications system that is riddled by blackouts and breakdowns.

The call comes on the heels of the 2nd anniversary of the [Regional Framework Agreement \(RFA\)](#) signed between Ontario and Matawa First Nations on March 24, 2014. The RFA includes infrastructure such as broadband as one of its [four pillars](#). Other pillars include revenue sharing, socio-economic, and environment. Matawa CEO David Paul Achneepineskum said that the lack of broadband leaves First Nations disadvantaged in these negotiations with respect to access/dissemination of information and reporting.

Recently, Eabametoong First Nation Chief Elizabeth Atlookan drew attention to the hardships the lack of broadband connectivity is having in her community saying that it is interfering with the ability to do business like financial reporting and conducting banking.

The *Broadband Commission for Sustainable Development*, a United Nations body that advocates for digital inclusion have reaffirmed the important and urgent need to provide access to basic telecommunication/information and communication technology (ICT) services for everyone, and particularly for developing countries, in order to provide coverage in rural and isolated areas which lack this service, and in Indigenous communities. Ironically, within Canada, programs such as Industry Canada's [Connecting Canadians](#) are not accessible to First Nations as Matawa First Nations



learned after being denied funding in 2015. They feel this program needs to be re-launched to remove barriers to access.

It is not known if previous cuts to Canada's FedNor played a role in the ability of this project to get underway but Matawa First Nations are in agreement that support for economic diversification in the north should be a priority with projects such as improving their broadband connectivity. They also believe that long term re-tooling of the Canadian economy for sustained growth needs to include support for *how*, and *in which sequence*, they would like to see infrastructure development taking place within their territories.

The Matawa Broadband Project Steering Committee who have been overseeing this project, made up of representatives from 6 First Nations interested in broadband connectivity, including Aroland First Nation, are meeting with officials from Canada and Ontario at the end of this month. They are hoping for a favourable response from them and in the federal budget 2016.

QUOTES

"Why when the governments say they are looking for *shovel ready* projects they hesitate to fund the next stage of the Matawa Broadband Connectivity Project and instead favour projects in municipalities? Governments must support infrastructure in the area known as the Ring of Fire *based on First Nation priorities*—the way we want it to come in, not the other way around if we are to move forward. Our remote First Nations on satellite internet systems require additional bandwidth capacity for the time being until fibre optics reaches our communities. Until then, we cannot conduct business at the level that we need to, in order to properly negotiate with Ontario."

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

"Our First Nations have declared state of emergencies and are in still in crisis over health issues that broadband access can help with. Nowadays healthcare applications and techniques are being developed and utilized over the Internet, including health education, remote imaging, remote check-ups, tele-medicine, tele-visitation, tele-psychiatry and more. Very significant benefits are achievable in healthcare using Internet capacity. These benefits address our long-standing community concerns regarding availability of health care services, and bring medical technologies and practices to our First Nations when previously this could only be obtained with significant, costly, and often difficult travel. This is crucial to the well-being of our people."

— *Chief Elizabeth Atlookan, Eabametoong First Nation*

"Better services through broadband fibre optic construction will strongly facilitate prompt and efficient communications among band administration and band members whether located on or off reserve. It will also facilitate operational needs for utilities including remote monitoring of facilities, pertaining to any utility including water, sewer and electric. There is extensive opportunity for achievement of greater efficiencies in delivery of First Nation services, including registrations and certifications, grants and programs, family and court services. In particular, the Joint Fly-In Court Working Group's "Report on Fly-In Court Operations" (August 2013) provides a very thorough review of the efficiencies and better services that can be realized from incorporation of video services enabled by the Internet. Actual costs of travel can be greatly reduced by utilizing established Internet technology. In addition, better health and education would be available for members on-reserve."

— *Chief Cornelius Wabasse, Webequie First Nation*

...2/3



QUOTES CONTINUED

“For Ring of Fire mining development internet services and very high bandwidth will be crucial to facilitate extraction and processing of ore, delivering educational, medical, training, and on-line services to mine and processing facilities, support remote monitoring functions, and very large data flows including environmental and geographic assessments and monitoring. With Ontario Mining Act on-line claim staking potentially coming into effect it will be unfair to our First Nations that someone could stake a claim online to land in our backyard from other parts of the world before we can.”

— *Chief Bruce Achneepineskum, Marten Falls First Nation*

“Every year innovations are occurring in the delivery of education and training. Distance learning practices are developed and ready for implementation in our First Nation via the Internet. We just don’t have the broadband infrastructure to support the delivery of it. Some examples are using new technology such as wireless iPads for students and teachers. A variety of adult and post-secondary education programs, webinars, and various partnerships can be supported over the Internet. Similarly, we require training centers to be established in each of our First Nations, and efficiently and economically utilized via the Internet to promote personal growth and development and job/trade skills. This fosters personal growth and entrepreneurship as well as community growth.”

— *Chief Wayne 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 the attached brochure “Broadband Development Project”.

...3/3

