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For Immediate Release
2015TRAN0162-001961
November 24, 2015

Ministry of Transportation and
Infrastructure
First Nations Health Authority

Highway 16 symposium gathers community partners to act on next steps for safe and sustainable transportation

SMITHERS – The Highway 16 transportation symposium held in Smithers today resulted in a successful and constructive discussion between over 90 community participants to address transportation challenges and explore opportunities to improve services along the corridor from Prince Rupert to Prince George.

“This transportation symposium was an important step in finding solutions that work for the people in these communities, and I’m pleased to say, a lot of good work came out of this day-long collaboration,” said Transportation and Infrastructure Minister Todd Stone. “We’re now going to turn the discussions into action and to work on a plan that provides an effective model for transportation along the highway as quickly as possible.”

The Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure and the First Nations Health Authority co-hosted the symposium to engage with First Nations leadership, community members and local government representatives to help identify safe transportation options for communities along the Highway 16 corridor.

"Gitanyow has been marginalized in terms of access to services and amenities. This symposium has involved a meeting of minds of local municipalities, representatives of the provincial and First Nations governments providing an opportunity to work together to create change," said Wanda Good, Deputy Chief Council, Gitanyow. "I am hopeful that this is a first step to meaningful change to address the transportation needs of people in need."

“This forum was an opportunity to explore new possibilities and models for transportation in a transparent manner with a number of proactive and innovative solutions brought forward,” said First Nations Health Authority Chief Operating Officer Richard Jock. “The forum aligns well with our mandate to increase access to medical services and we’re committed to working with our partners to find the right solutions for safe and effective transportation in the area.”

During the meeting, participants discussed a number of community-based transportation options, which could service the First Nations communities located along the Highway 16 corridor. Participants heard about services in communities where First Nations and local governments are working together and providing transportation services. Some examples included the Fort St. James “Seniors Helping Seniors,” the First Nations community led transportation service in Lake Babine, as well as Northern Health Connections, a medical transportation service provided by the Northern Health Authority.

"This transportation symposium was an important collaboration to be a part of," said Rob MacDougall, Mayor of Fort St. James. "Attending this meeting of community leaders and government representatives has provided me with the opportunity to hear some of the challenges faced by residents along Highway 16, present the Seniors Helping Seniors program developed and operating in Fort St. James, and to encourage government to look at ways to assist all of us in finding solutions that will make our towns safer."

The symposium also included an afternoon of roundtable talks, where participants shared their ideas on practical and sustainable transportation options to connect communities along the nearly 800 km stretch of highway between Prince Rupert and Prince George and built upon lessons learned from previous community engagement, surveys and reports.

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