

# **Boom or Bust: Northern Communities Must Have Social Infrastructure**

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# Questions to Consider

- What is the role of social infrastructure?
- What are challenges with social infrastructure in the North?
- Do we have a right to social infrastructure?
- Do we receive infrastructure consistent with our contributions to the provincial economy?
- What might be some solutions to infrastructure challenges that we face?

# What is Infrastructure?

- “basic structural foundations of a society”
- Types:
  - Transportation, communications & energy
  - Utilities – water, electricity, natural gas, etc.
  - Health, education, social services
  - Government and business services of various kinds
  - Sports, recreation and cultural services/activities

# Social Infrastructure

- Health, education, social services, culture, recreation, sports
- Vital for functioning of a modern society
- Importance reflected in societal norms; not only an expectation, but a right – e.g., to health care; to education; to social services, etc.

# Northern Social Infrastructure

- Small but tremendously productive population
- Make huge contribution to the provincial economy – but do we get back social infrastructure comparable our contribution?
- Paying our way; deserve good quality infrastructure

# Social Infrastructure: A Key to Our Future

Social Infrastructure opens doors to:

- Economy building – need it to attract & keep people in the North
- Community building – need it to build, strengthen and sustain our communities
- Province/nation building – creates cohesion, sense of common purpose, of “who we are” as a region, province and nation

## Interconnected Challenges in the North

- Small population – yet have urban/southern funding and staffing formulas
- Geography: Distances; Transportation; Weather; Access; Recruitment/Retention; Cost; Training/Education; and more....
- Boom and Bust economy – need social infrastructure to provide stability in volatile economy

# Interconnected Challenges in the North

...continued

- Inadequate/inconsistent infrastructure – can't count on it; makes community planning and personal planning a challenge
- Skewed priorities? Cutting social infrastructure while...
  - Funding Olympics, Vancouver Convention Centre, etc.,
  - Bailing out banks and multinationals
- Social infrastructure needs/access not always accessible to First Nations



# Addressing the Challenges

1. Recognize and ensure social infrastructure as a tool to even out spikes and dips in the economy – maintain in downturn and ensure is adequate in boom times
2. Review/adjust funding formulas to better serve rural and northern regions
3. Review/adjust staffing level formulas

## Addressing the Challenges...continued

4. Institute a variance formula for rural/northern communities – like the 25% variability in population allowed in determining electoral district boundaries
5. Flexibility and triggers in economic downturn – e.g., enhanced/extended EI benefits that kick in automatically in downturn

## Addressing the Challenges (continued)

6. More revenues to stay in the region where they are generated – e.g., NDI Trust (funded primarily by BC Rail sale) & “Fair Share” (in Peace Region) – but these funds should also be made available for social infrastructure
7. More secondary processing of resources – create more jobs/wealth from natural resource extraction

## Addressing the Challenges (continued)

8. Mechanisms for citizen empowerment –  
Workers & communities to have more say and more decision-making power; e.g., over mill closures & other issues
9. Recognition of importance of social infrastructure – not an “extra” – essential component of community
10. Settling treaties with First Nations – address capacity building needs; learn from First Nations experiences

# Taking up the Challenge

- Having a thriving rural/northern population is in the interest of entire province and country
- We've "*pre-paid*" for infrastructure whether boom or bust
- Gov'ts & politicians at all levels: look out for the good of communities, not narrow or partisan political interests

## Taking up the Challenge...continued

- Tap our own creativity and innovation
- Southern/urban geographies can learn from the northern/rural/remote experience
- Recognize and utilize local expertise – we have lots!
- Push and keep pushing for more change to empower our communities and region.

# Contact Information

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