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NEWS LOCAL

Roads from riches in Ring of Fire

Sunday, March 1, 2015 7:24:13 EST PM



What is the one thing that would make living in Ontario's far North communities better?

If you asked that question to seven people knowledgeable about the North, you might very well get seven different answers. Clean drinking water. Functional sewer systems. Quality education. Improved health services. Reliable electricity. Healthy food at affordable prices. Better housing.

To a large degree, this wish list stems from the fact that Ontario's far North communities are accessible only by air for most of the year. These challenges rarely exist for communities with road access. Astronomically high costs are attached to anyone or anything that has to fly to these places. If the weather cooperates, a winter ice road might provide a month or two of access in every year. There have been poor weather conditions in recent years attributed to global warming. If the pattern continues, winter road construction and use will be progressively problematic.

So what is the one thing that would make living in the far North better? Answer: a network of year-round roads.

While there are correlations to improving the quality of life at all levels through road access, none illustrate the benefits more strongly or tangibly than food and fuel.

Webequie is the First Nations community closest to the Ring of Fire and about 260 kilometers by air from Pickle Lake. A few weeks ago you would have found the following prices for basics at the local store: \$4.50 for a quart of milk, \$6.00 for a loaf of bread, \$42.00 for 10 kilograms of sugar. If you wanted a friend in Pickle Lake to do some shopping for you and ship the goods by air, the shipping cost per pound is \$1.32 including fuel surcharge and HST. So, while you might find a 10-pound bag of potatoes for \$4.00 at a Pickle Lake grocery store, it would cost you another \$13.20 to ship it to Webequie.

Gas is in the range of \$2.60 per liter. That makes it expensive to run snowmobiles and small equipment but it's the diesel fuel and heating oil costs that really hurt. These two fuels are needed for keeping community electrical generators running 24/7/365 and for the oil furnaces that keep homes, schools, clinics and band offices warm through long cold winters that consume fuel at horrific rates.

Flying a medical professional, a water technician or a government worker to and from Thunder Bay to Webequie means a ticket price of \$700 dollars at the time of this writing. Air France was offering a return ticket from Toronto to Europe for less than \$600 the same week.

This is not an attack on the northern food stores or airlines. They need to stay profitable under risky, expensive and difficult operating conditions. Economies of scale make it understandable to cheaply fly 400 people in an Airbus instead of 18 people on a Beechcraft. If there was a year-round road from Webequie to Pickle Lake, the store in Webequie would be able to get their deliveries at far lower prices that could be passed on to residents.

Roads connecting some or all of the five fly-in communities surrounding the Ring of Fire are on the threshold of becoming a reality. Why stop there? Why not use the momentum and the expertise of the construction crews and the trained local workers who will be ready to operate everything from heavy equipment to survey tools? Let's have a construction plan and a timetable to eventually connect all the North's fly-in communities with permanent roads.

There is no question that thousands of kilometres of road construction will cost billions of dollars. But it can be argued that the cost savings of delivering goods and people to more than 30 communities by road would also save billions of dollars in very little time. The enhancement in life quality would be priceless.

To see the potential of Ontario's northern road vision, it only requires a look over the border to our neighbours. Quebec's Premier is about to launch "Le Plan Nord" which will see an investment of \$80-billion over 25 years to expand mining and develop energy resources in northern Quebec.


You can already drive from Montreal to the Arctic waters of James Bay on 1,456 km of paved road to the Cree coastal community of Chisasibi. That roadway was made possible by the realized dream of building a hydro-electric dam on La Grande Rivière.

We have "Le Cercle de Feu."

Rick Millette

Senior Executive Director

Ring of Fire at Northern Policy Institute.

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Ambrosia Smith · 14 hours ago

Rick, all of these things are doable, all these possibilities are within reach and could have been achieved years ago. Billions of dollars allocated to the northern native communities by way of Provincial and Federal funding have been wasted on Executive mis-management of the northern bands, exorbitant salaries and sprawling costs to so-called leaders, Chiefs and agencies that hamper realistic improvements in life to Band members. The issues we have in the North are not easily understood by proponents from southern regions proposing easy change and instant solutions to problems that have escalated to astounding heights.

The Province is broke, all the revenue that is generated is not equally distributed to the Province in a fair way, Southern Ontario does not understand the circumstances you have outlined to define the hardship of buying a living in the North. Until all the money is accounted for and the abusers of privileged assumption are brought to justice there will be no answer to this problem. One thing is obvious, "Le Cercle de Feu" will remain dead in the water until responsible management and a solution that the Provincial Taxpayers are not accountable to surfaces and Private Industry steps up to the plate in order to realize any potential profit.

6 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



Knob Nocks → Ambrosia Smith · 13 hours ago

Absoulutly 100% bang on!

3 ^ | v · Reply · Share >



Ambrosia Smith → Knob Nocks · 12 hours ago

Frankly, I'm tired of this conversation, there will be only one winner in any mistake to develop this BS dream, the answer is simply this, you want it, you pay for it, go get it but don't create a new tax platform to an already overtaxed Province to finance it - put up or shut up!

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Knob Nocks → Ambrosia Smith · 11 hours ago

Again I agree 100%. It is time to call a spade a spade and it is time to put this country back on track and everyone needs to get off thier a\$\$ and lend a hand instead of putting out thier hand.....

2 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



crymeariver → Ambrosia Smith · 4 hours ago

People who have what we have, must do what we do to achieve it and keep it. " pay taxes"

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Hugh Dysart → Ambrosia Smith · 5 hours ago

The Aboriginal issues are complicated and blaming mismanagement for the problem is tantamount to blaming natives for the natives problems. Let's dismiss segregation , residential schools, thousands of dead native women and the national prejudice issue. I don't have a solution but I'm certainly glad you stumbled on incarcerating more Aboriginals. lol

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



crymeariver → Hugh Dysart · 4 hours ago

You are right!

Our government's mis-management!

Our Govs., would rather pay than have to face problems .

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



SmokeandaPancake → Ambrosia Smith · 28 minutes ago

Wow!! All I can say is WOW!! Why is it that we expect the individual native communities from the far north to pay for road construction between those communities? We don't expect Timmins to fund construction of new roads from here to let's say Sudbury. I see in your comments the exact same attitude Timmins and the rest of the mid north cities get from Southern Ontario and I say shame on you for your lack of vision and honesty. Every day I see comments on here about how Natives have it so much better and here is yet another comment on how the average Canadian really does not even want them to have

equality. Provincial and Federal governments pay for roads between centers with funds allocated specifically for that. Wow, I am struggling to get past the ignorance. Sorry.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Knob Nocks → SmokeandaPancake · 9 minutes ago

Unfortunately you have failed to realize that the road between Timmins and let's say Sudbury was built by OUR government paid for by OUR tax dollars between OUR communities. Now the way I understand the First Nations position on this is that we are TENANTS on their land and that they are NOT Canadians they are First Nations. The Canadians pay 8 billion dollars per year to Natives for rent and the First Nations pay NOTHING towards the TENANTS existence. The only time the First Nations recognize OUR government or the CANADIANS is when they have their hand out. Sorry but it is not "ignorance" it is reality.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



crymeaiver → Ambrosia Smith · 4 hours ago

Bang on!

Also, the residents in that area must want this!

Or they will "block it"

Are we sure that they want to work in the construction field?

We have to stop forcing our way of life on those who don't want it!

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



skippye · 12 hours ago

People would be surprised how much money First Nations have invested . The north could be opened at little cost to taxpayers The Ontario gov't were ready to dump the ONR not that long ago so why not sell it to First Nation .A railway from Moosonee to the ring of fire would open the north . My problem is the amount of dubious liberals involved . Guys like Bob rae to have quit politics to get his fingers in the Ring of Fire . Yes the same Bob Rae that has been at the trough and is collecting 2 pensions . Then of course there is George Smitheram you know the politician in charge of the failed billion E-Health . The there is Gravelle trying to get the railway to run to greenstone . The same Gravelle that tried to dump the ONR . Now I hope Mr Martin can convince the first Nation reserves involved will join him and their first order of business would be to get rid of the liberals before the Ontario Taxpayer get nailed for another financial scandal

3 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



20% ofWhiskey · 13 hours ago

Ring of BS Promises.

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Ambrosia Smith · 13 hours ago

Oh, forgot one other issue, how about building a proper highway to the North that Ontario



Oh, forget one other issue, how about building a proper highway to the North that Ontario taxpayers are being denied. What is the problem here? You speculators in the South can't make any money on it?

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Digger Dan · 14 hours ago

If the government can't fix the little problem it created at Lake Abitibi it sure cannot fix the big problems it created in the Ring of Fire.

Premier Wynne come clean on the Solid Gold scandal, then resign

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Ram → Digger Dan · 10 hours ago

You should use another line. This one is getting old.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›



Digger Dan → Ram · 10 hours ago

.How about -

Premier Wynne come clean on the Solid Gold scandal, then resign?

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



crymeariver → Digger Dan · 4 hours ago

She just isn't finished destroying us yet!
She just started!

1 ^ | v · Reply · Share ›



SmokeandaPancake → Ram · 22 minutes ago

You have to admire his dedication lol.

^ | v · Reply · Share ›

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