

May 3, 2005

Alberta invests \$530 million for highways to the oil sands

Fort McMurray... Motorists will find it easier and safer to travel Alberta's booming northeast corner, thanks to an investment of \$530 million in the region's highways over the next 10 years.

"This \$530-million commitment supports the phenomenal growth we're seeing in Wood Buffalo, and greatly improves the movement of goods, equipment and people to and within this vital region," said Premier Ralph Klein. "These highway improvements are part of our long-term commitment that reflects the economic importance of this region."

Work will begin this year, with an investment of \$41 million for various projects on Highway 63 in and around Fort McMurray and on Highway 881 between Lac La Biche and Anzac.

"These highway improvements are needed to support rapid economic activity and are in line with what industry has said is needed," said Dr. Lyle Oberg, Minister of Infrastructure and Transportation. "The plan right now is to make these upgrades over 10 years. I know the community wants it sooner than that and so do I. If provincial revenues remain strong, we will be in a position to push that timeline forward considerably."

The plan includes: twinning Highway 63 north of Fort McMurray from the Suncor Access to Fort MacKay and south of Fort McMurray to the junction with Highway 881; adding 25 kilometres of passing lanes between the junction with Highway 881 and Highway 55; building commercial vehicle staging areas near Crow Lake Provincial Park and near the junction with Highway 881; constructing four interchanges on Highway 63 within Fort McMurray; completing the paving of Highway 881; and building a commercial vehicle staging area on Highway 881 near Conklin.

"This is a significant investment in Fort McMurray infrastructure that will enhance both travel and transportation," said Guy Boutilier, Environment Minister and MLA for Fort McMurray-Wood Buffalo. "This is an important step in recognizing Fort McMurray's important contribution to our province."

Work on Highway 63 this year will include four-lane grading from the Suncor Access to north of Mildred Lake, intersection improvements at Thickwood Boulevard, Morrison/Hardin Streets, and Gregoire Drive/Beacon Hill in Fort McMurray, and a rest area/commercial vehicle staging area near the junction with Highway 881.

On Highway 881, another 46 kilometres of highway will be paved this year. The remaining unpaved 71 kilometres of the 266-kilometre highway is expected to be paved by 2007-08.

"Highway 881 provides a much needed alternative route between Lac La Biche and Anzac, and will take a significant amount of traffic off of Highway 63," said Ray Danyluk, MLA for Lac La Biche-St. Paul. "Paving and other improvements will definitely make this highway safer. My hope is enough resources become available to complete this project as soon as possible."

The Government of Alberta is also developing a long-range plan for highways connecting Nisku and Edmonton to Highways 63 and 881 north of Boyle.

Overall, the Alberta government will invest \$684 million for construction and preservation of the province's highway network in 2005-06.

- 30 -

Backgrounder attached

Media enquiries may be directed to:

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To call toll free within Alberta dial 310-0000.

Backgrounder

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Major projects in 2005-06

Highway 63

- Construction of a rest area/commercial vehicle staging area near the junction with Highway 881
- Four-lane grading from the Suncor Access to north of Mildred Lake
- Intersection improvements at Thickwood Boulevard, Morrison/Hardin Streets, and Gregoire Drive/Beacon Hill in Fort McMurray

Highway 881

- Base construction and staged paving of 24 kilometres near Wiau Lake
- Widening and reconstruction of 0.5 kilometres between Anzac and Highway 63
- Second stage paving of 19 kilometres south of Kettle River to south of Cottonwood Creek
- Base construction and full paving of 22 kilometres from south of Chard to south of Kettle River

Future Projects

Highway 63

- Twinning 18 kilometres from the junction with Highway 69 south to the junction with Highway 881
- Twinning 60 kilometres from the Suncor Access north to Fort MacKay
- Adding 25 kilometres of passing/climbing lanes at various points between the junction with Highway 881 and the junction with Highway 55 (locations to be determined)
- Construction of a rest area/commercial vehicle staging area Crow Lake Provincial Park
- Four new interchanges within Fort McMurray at Morrison Street, Thickwood Boulevard, Beacon Hill

Highway 881

- Paving 71 kilometres to complete paving of the entire 266-kilometre stretch between Lac La Biche and Anzac
- Construction of a rest area/commercial vehicle staging area near Conklin

- 30 -

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