
Release

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ALL-SEASON ROAD NETWORK MOVES FORWARD

Study Recommends Permanent Roads to Mainly Follow Existing Seasonal Winter Roads: Robinson

Today, the East Side Road Authority (ESRA) released the ***Final Report of the Large Area Transportation Network Study*** that recommends an all-season road network to replace the seasonal winter road system on the east side of Lake Winnipeg. The study confirms the east-west route recommended by ESRA last fall to connect the Island Lake and God's Lake communities to Norway House and includes new recommendations to connect Little Grand Rapids, Pauingassi, and Poplar River First Nations through to the all-season road under construction from PR 304 to Berens River. The overall network involves two separate roads in the North and South servicing all of the regional communities while preserving a large tract of boreal forest throughout the entire east side region.

"For many decades, residents of the east side have expressed a desire for an all-season road network that would link communities and improve the quality of life of the people in the region," said Eric Robinson, Minister responsible for ESRA. "With the completion of this study, we now have a blueprint for an all-season road network that will improve transportation, help reduce transportation costs, and provide jobs and economic development opportunities for local residents. These routes have been determined with community input and will follow existing winter road corridors wherever possible." Robinson noted that once the all-season road network is constructed, winter road routes no longer required will be decommissioned and returned to boreal forest, reducing the overall road network in the region by approximately 300 km.

The study's main recommendations are:

- A 648 km east-west route, rather than a longer north-south route, that involves a "Y" junction north of Molson Lake with branches going north-east to the God's Lake communities (Bunibonibee Cree Nation, Manto Sipi Cree Nation, and God's Lake First Nation), and south-east to the Island Lake communities (Red Sucker Lake, Garden Hill, Wasagamack and St. Theresa Point First Nations). For the western end of the route, the study is recommending that a link to Norway House Cree Nation be built initially, and that an all-season road to Cross Lake First Nation be considered for future construction.
- An approximate 131 km all-season road route linking Little Grand Rapids and Pauingassi First Nations to a midway point between Bloodvein and Berens River along the all-season road from PR 304 to Berens River First Nation, including a direct connection and access to the airport near Little Grand Rapids; and

- Extending the proposed all-season road from PR 304 to Berens River First Nation for approximately 93 km to Poplar River First Nation.

As part of the East Side Transportation Initiative, ESRA enlisted SNC Lavalin to undertake a Large Area Transportation Network Study (LATNS) in April 2009 to examine potential route options for a proposed future all-season road route on the east side of Lake Winnipeg. As part of the study, eleven different route options were examined and presented to local residents through a public engagement process that included two rounds of meetings in each community along with additional meetings with Chiefs and Councils.

All network options were evaluated using a multidisciplinary evaluation that took into consideration engineering, social, economic, and environmental factors. Specific factors taken into account included community input, constructability, environmental impact, and length of all-season roads and related travel distances and construction costs. Based on the technical analysis and feedback received from the communities, the options were refined and shortlisted. The Final Report is the culmination of the two-year study and outlines the study's recommendations.

On November 10, 2010, based on preliminary results and ongoing discussion with local communities, ESRA announced that it was recommending an east-west all-season road linking the Island Lake and God's Lake communities to PR 373, with a future connection to PR 374. The study confirms this recommendation for a distinct east-west connection over a single north-south route through the region.

"The study confirms ESRA's previous recommendation for an east-west all-season road while also making recommendations to link the communities of Poplar River, Little Grand Rapids and Pauingassi to the all-season road network," said Ernie Gilroy, CEO of ESRA. "With the study now completed, we look forward to beginning final design engineering and the environmental licensing process."

In an effort to build capacity and ensure that local communities are able to participate in and benefit from the all-season road project, ESRA has entered into Community Benefits Agreements with all thirteen east side First Nations. These agreements, valued at \$49.25 million, enable First Nation communities to undertake pre-construction activities such as gravel crushing, right-of-way clearing, and road improvement work.

"I would like to thank all the Chiefs, Councillors and community members who participated in the study over the last two years," said Gilroy. "Their input has helped to shape the study and we look forward to working with them to generate jobs, training and economic opportunities as we move forward with the all-season road project."

For more information, please visit www.eastsideroadauthority.mb.ca or call the ESRA at 945-4900 or toll free at 1-866-356-6355.

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KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- As part of the Large Area Transportation Network Study, SNC Lavalin conducted a two-year long public engagement process that included two rounds of community meetings in east side communities. Through this process, east side residents expressed widespread support for an east-west, over a north south, all-season road route;
- Other factors considered in recommending an east-west, over a north south route, included:
 - **Shorter distance:** An east-west route is approximately 202 to 248 km shorter in length connecting Manitoba's all season road system with Island Lake and Red Sucker Lake communities than a comparable north-south route, resulting in lower construction costs, shorter travel distances and travel times for residents, and a more timely completion date.
 - **Constructability:** A north-south route would pose significant construction challenges, because it would cross extensive rocky outcrops, swamps and muskeg. In comparison, an east-west route would be built along areas of good foundation and close to locations with access to road-building materials. Other benefits include:
 - A better knowledge and understanding of terrain/underlying soils along the route;
 - Construction of an all-season road will be along a greater length where disturbances have already been created, thus reducing the extent of new environmental impacts;
 - Construction staging will be simpler since more existing winter road is in place to facilitate the import of personnel, machinery and materials;
 - Availability of proximate materials for road construction is less of an unknown, than with a route across a greater extent of virgin territory.
 - **Reduced impact to the natural environment:** A north-south route would cross environmentally sensitive terrain, including undisturbed boreal forest, endangered woodland caribou habitat and the existing Poplar River Provincial Park and the proposed UNESCO World Heritage Site. Approximately 80 per cent of the east-west all-season road route follows the existing winter road corridor, thereby reducing the need to establish new rights-of-way and break-up undisturbed habitat.
- The proposed all-season road network will:
 - lower the freight costs of goods and essential supplies by 50% and medical cost transport by 40%.
 - reduce greenhouse gases by 30% with an estimated 16,700 tonnes per year of GHG reduction.
 - save 6.10 million litres of fuel per year from shifting travel from air and winter roads to the all weather road system.
- It is estimated that 22,000 person years of direct employment and approximately 15,000 of indirect person years of employment will be created with construction of the all-season road.
- To date, ESRA has entered into Community Benefits Agreements, estimated at nearly \$50 million, with all 13 east side First Nations.
- The estimated length of the all-season road network is estimated at 872 km (excluding all-season road from PR 304 to Berens River First Nation)
- The estimated cost of the all-season road network is estimated at \$2.7 billion (excluding the all-season road from PR304 to Berens River First Nation).
- It is estimated that once the all-season road network is completed, the existing road network will be reduced by approximately 300 km throughout the region.



