

BCAFN First Nations Low-Carbon Transportation Forum



MAY 27-28 2025

PRINCE GEORGE CONFERENCE AND CIVIC CENTRE, LHEIDLI T'ENNEH UNCEDED TERRITORY

What We Heard Report



About BCAFN

The BC Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN) is a Provincial Territorial Organization (PTO) advocating on behalf of the 204 First Nations in British Columbia (BC). Led by Regional Chief Terry Teegee—elected by BC First Nations leadership in BC for his third term and supported by a Board of Directors—BCAFN advocates for the rights, title and interests of First Nations in BC, guided by resolutions passed at BCAFN Chiefs Assemblies.

Specific to this project, BCAFN advocates for the Crown to uphold First Nations rights and climate leadership in addressing the climate crisis. This approach aligns with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UN Declaration), which is an international framework that affirms the rights of Indigenous Peoples to self-determination, lands, territories, culture, and governance.



In loving memory of Leona Humchitt



Honouring a Champion of First Nations Climate Leadership

The British Columbia Assembly of First Nations (BCAFN) First Nations Low-Carbon Transportation Forum is dedicated to the memory of Leona Humchitt, who, alongside her sister Valerie Humchitt, passed away unexpectedly on March 12, 2025.

A proud member of the Haítzaqv Nation, Leona was a powerful and respected voice in advancing Indigenous climate leadership. Her work spanned local, national, and international arenas—grounded in First Nations' worldviews, knowledge systems, and the pursuit of environmental justice and food sovereignty. She was a passionate advocate for self-determination and intergenerational knowledge sharing.

Leona played a key role in advancing BCAFN's climate initiatives. She represented the Haítzaqv Nation as one of the Phase 1 pilot communities selected to develop a Low-Carbon Transportation Plan, helping lay the foundation for sustainable and culturally grounded mobility solutions for First Nations. Her contributions also extended to BCAFN's work on climate, housing, cannabis, Women, Girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people.

Leona's legacy is one of vision, strength, and deep commitment to her community and to all First Nations. Her leadership continues to inspire the path forward.

Acknowledgements

BCAFN would first and foremost like to thank and acknowledge the Lheidli T'enneh peoples for hosting the BCAFN First Nations Low-Carbon Transportation Forum on their territories. We wish to thank all the participants for joining the First Nations Low-Carbon Transportation Forum and lending their knowledge, expertise and perspectives throughout the discussions. We would also like to acknowledge the many speakers who helped enrich the dialogue and set the tone for meaningful discussion throughout the Forum including:

- Ruth Adams, Elder – Tsawwassen First Nation
- Orene Askew, 2SLGBTQIA+ Representative – BCAFN
- Darryl Adrian, Emergency Management Coordinator – Lillooet Tribal Council
- Jordan Barrett, Manager, Partner Programs – Northern Development Initiative Trust
- Lorna Brown, Executive Director – Tears to Hope Society
- Paula Cousins, Associate Deputy Minister – Ministry of Transportation and Transit
- James Donald, Executive Director – Ministry of Energy and Climate Solutions
- Darian Edwards, Climate Readiness & Wildfire Technician – Lillooet Tribal Council
- Hayden Guilderson, Councillor – Ch'íyáqtel First Nation
- Ryan Hennessey, Associated Engineering Alberta Ltd
- Tiffany D. Hind Bull-Prete, Assistant Professor – University of Lethbridge
- Mercedes Innes, Community Member – Haíłzaqv Nation
- Owen James, Associated Engineering Alberta Ltd
- Jeremy Johnston, Community Planner – Community Energy Association
- Victor Kisoun, Advisor – First Nations Energy and Mining Council
- Freda Long, National Leader Indigenous Communities at Associated Engineering Alberta Ltd
- Anna McKenzie, Chairperson – Forum & Senior Planner – Sanala Planning
- Adriana McMullen, Senior Transit Planner – BC Transit
- Dawn McGrath, PhD Candidate – Civil Engineering
- Gillian Moxham, Project Director, Transit Strategy & Policy – Ministry of Transportation and Transit
- Adam Olsen, Lead Negotiator – Tsartlip First Nation
- Aaron Pete, Chief – Chawathil First Nation
- Sarah Powell, Manager of Clean Energy Initiatives – New Relationship Trust
- Jeevana Rajkumar, Create Climate Equity
- Kaitlyn Robinson, Climate Action Coordinator – Nisga'a Lisims Government
- Renata Rovelo, Senior Climate Action Advisor – Squamish Nation
- Allan Stroet, Manager of Economic Development – Lheidli T'enneh First Nation
- Jacob Taylor, Founder Orijinative Aerial & Executive Director, National Indigenous Economic Prosperity Institute – Curve Lake First Nation
- Erralyn Thomas, Councillor – Snuneymuxw First Nation
- Leonard Thomas, Councillor – Nak'azdli Whut'en Nation
- Pablo Zacarias, Executive Director – CityStudio

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REPORT OVERVIEW

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First Nations Low-Carbon Transportation Project

*The Low-Carbon Transportation Forum is a key deliverable of the **First Nations Low-Carbon Transportation Project**, a five-year project (2022 – 2027) led by the BCAFN, with funding support from the BC Ministry of Energy and Climate Solutions.*

This project is aligned with the implementation of the **BC First Nations Climate Strategy and Action Plan** (Theme 4.2, Objectives 4.2.1 and 4.2.2).

As mandated by BCAFN **Resolution 12/2023** the First Nations Low-Carbon Transportation project aims to:

- **Assess gaps and opportunities** that restrict and assist First Nations' access to transportation;
- **Advocate for transportation-related policies** that help reduce greenhouse gas emissions and uphold First Nations' Title, Rights and Treaty Rights; and
- **Strengthen community capacity and climate awareness.**



*The Low-Carbon Transportation Forum was built on all of the BCAFN-related transportation work since 2022 and provided a platform to engage in dialogue, build relationships, and explore innovative solutions and opportunities to advance First Nations in BC's **access to equitable, safe, affordable, and reliable low-carbon and active transportation.***

KEY THEMES

Throughout the two days of the Forum, panellists and participants shared a wide range of challenges and priorities related to transportation. The key themes below highlight some of the most important insights.



1. First Nations Have Always Been Leaders

Speakers, including Elders, reminded participants that First Nations have long been innovators in transportation—walking, paddling, and travelling in harmony with the land and waters. This Traditional Knowledge positions First Nations as leaders in creating transportation solutions that are sustainable, equitable, and contribute to cultural revitalization.

2. Self-Determination is Essential

First Nations repeatedly emphasized that their community needs are diverse and unique, and that transportation projects must reflect these realities. While limited capacity was identified as a key barrier, many Nations expressed a strong desire to lead and manage their own transportation initiatives.

3. Transportation is a Human Right

Across nearly every session, participants framed transportation as a human right. Transportation intersects with safety, health, dignity, and self-determination—and must be treated as a fundamental component of equity and reconciliation.

4. Relationship-Building is Vital

Many panellists shared how successful partnerships depend on building trusting relationships that align with, and are respectful of, the Nation's needs, values and protocols. Many speakers emphasized that Nations must always be involved from the start, and government and industry must stop presenting them with “fully baked” projects.

5. Rural and Remote Nations have Distinct Needs

Hosting the Forum on Lheidli T'enneh territory (Prince George) amplified the voices of rural and remote Nations, whose transportation barriers are often overlooked in policy and funding decisions. Participants underscored how transportation systems in many rural and remote Nations remain fragmented, underfunded and at times dangerous.

6. Infrastructure is Foundational

Inadequate infrastructure was consistently cited as one of the greatest barriers to safe, affordable, and reliable transportation. Participants stressed that addressing infrastructure gaps—such as roads, bridges, and active transportation networks—is essential to advancing equity and climate resilience.

KEY OUTCOMES

1. Celebrating First Nations Leadership

The plenary and breakout sessions showcased First Nations' leadership in advancing equitable access to safe, affordable, and reliable low-carbon and active transportation solutions. Participants left with new knowledge, resources, and best practices to strengthen transportation planning and climate resiliency in their Nations. By highlighting the successes of the **BCAFN First Nations Low-Carbon Transportation Project** Phase 1 Pilot Project Communities (2023–2025) in developing their self-determined Low-Carbon Transportation Plans, the forum encouraged many participants to apply for the Phase 2 Pilot Project Communities (2025–2027).

2. Building Partnerships and Breaking Down Silos

The forum created networking opportunities between First Nations, provincial government representatives, NGOs, and transportation organizations. Through breakout discussions, the trade show exhibition, and lunch breaks, participants were able to share experiences, exchange knowledge, and explore potential partnerships to support Nation-led transportation initiatives. These connections are helping to break down silos, build trust, and encourage a collaborative approach to transforming First Nations' transportation equity, safety, and climate action.

3. Incorporating First Nations' Rights and Realities in Policy Development

The forum provided a platform for First Nations to voice their priorities and challenges, whether as panel presenters or as participants contributing through audience discussions. This dialogue directly informed the refinement of the **BCAFN First Nations Low-Carbon Transportation Project** Transportation Assessment Report and Action Plan. The Plan identifies the barriers and opportunities First Nations face in accessing equitable, safe, affordable, and reliable transportation and low-carbon transportation, and sets out recommendations for reforming transportation policy in BC. All sessions contributed to strengthening this report, but Plenary Panel 2 provided a direct opportunity for Nations to share their feedback on the draft recommendations through an interactive Mentimeter exercise.



SESSION SUMMARIES

OPENING SESSION DAY 1

Tuesday May 27, 8:30AM- 9:15AM

Address from Regional Chief Terry Teegee

Regional Chief Teegee opened the Forum by reminding participants that First Nations have long had trade routes across the province, yet today transportation remains a safety and human rights issue. He spoke personally about relatives who went missing while travelling and how awareness of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) only grew when a non-Native woman went missing. He emphasized that transportation rights are recognized in the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Declaration Act), noting, “It is our right to move safely and freely within our territories—and it is essential that we are key leaders of the low-carbon transition on our own terms and with justice, equity and our rights central to this transition.”

Citing floods, wildfires, and disasters that have left First Nations stranded, he stressed that low-carbon transportation is “a resilience and human rights issue,” while also pointing to transportation as BC’s largest source of emissions (42%). He concluded that while the Province has made commitments under the Declaration Act, implementation must be done “in partnership with First Nations and not without us,” highlighting the launch of the First Nations Low-Carbon Transportation Project and the leadership of the Pilot Project Communities as examples of community-driven solutions paving the way forward.

Opening Remarks from the Ministry of Energy and Climate Solutions, James Donald

James Donald emphasized the importance of building strong partnerships with First Nations to advance reconciliation, reduce transportation emissions, and meet provincial targets. He highlighted commitments under the Declaration Act (2019) and Action Plan (2022), as well as programs such as the Clean Power Action Plan, the First Nations Clean Energy Business Fund, and rebates that helped complete BC’s electric highway in 2024. He underscored the collaborative development of the BCAFN First Nations Low-Carbon Transportation Project, noting that through this project, our Ministry’s been able to support First Nations-led work and strengthen our partnership with BCAFN.”



HONOURING LEONA HUMCHITT

Tuesday May 27, 9:15AM-9:45AM

The session opened with the Khas'tan Drummers performing the Women's Warrior Song in honour of Leona Humchitt, followed by remarks from Regional Chief Terry Teegee, who remembered her as "a climate champion" who wore many hats as a "daughter, mother, grandmother, fisherwoman, elected Tribal Councillor, Chair of the Economic Development Corporation, and Climate Action Coordinator," all dedicated to advancing Heiltsuk-led climate justice. He recalled her reminder that "transforming energy and transportation systems is not only about carbon, it is about culture, safety, economic dignity, and intergenerational responsibility," noting that her life's work now serves as "our shared roadmap."

Leona's daughter, Mercedes Innes, then provided a moving tribute, describing her mother as "a proud Heiltsuk woman, a mother, a matriarch and a dedicated advocate for our people" whose leadership guided the Nation's energy sovereignty and climate justice plans. She shared that the Women's Warrior Song reflects the strength, love and courage her mum carried throughout her life and reminded participants that "the most meaningful changes come when we lead with care, culture, and connection." As Leona herself once said, "what we're doing is hard work, but it's heart work for our children."



PLENARY PANEL 1: PANEL OF PILOT COMMUNITIES

Tuesday May 27, 9:45AM-10:45AM

- BCAFN First Nations Low-Carbon Transportation Project Phase 1 Pilot Representatives:
 - Kaitlyn Robinson, Climate Action Coordinator for the Nisga'a Lisims Government
 - Renata Rovelo, Senior Climate Action Advisor for the Squamish Nation
- Jeremy Johnston, Community Planner at the Community Energy Association (CEA)
- Kristi Denby, Climate and Environment Policy Analyst at the BCAFN

This plenary panel featured representatives from Nisga'a Nation and Squamish Nation who shared their experiences as a **BCAFN First Nations Low-Carbon Transportation Project** Phase 1 Pilot Project Community. As part of this project, from late 2023 to early 2025, BCAFN supported five First Nation community-led pilot projects to develop their own self-determined Low-Carbon Transportation Plans to respond to each Nation's specific needs, realities and priorities.

The Community Energy Association (CEA) discussed the **Draft First Nations Low-Carbon Transportation Planning Guide** and its role in supporting the planning process, emphasizing that long-term relationship-building and community-led design are crucial for successful implementation. CEA provided technical support and planning guidance for Nisga'a and Squamish.

Kaitlyn Robinson (Nisga'a Nation) shared that their participation as a Pilot Project was driven by a need to reduce diesel reliance and increase energy sovereignty. While enthusiasm for electric vehicles is growing, limited grid capacity in remote areas presents a barrier. Having technical support to produce their low-carbon transportation plan was helpful, but decisions remained rooted in community direction, reinforcing local ownership of the process.

Renata Rovelo (Squamish Nation) emphasized that transportation is not just about mobility—it is about exercising rights and safeguarding cultural identity. Transportation contributes to the largest source of emissions in Squamish Nation, so addressing transportation-related emissions is essential to implementing their **Climate Legacy Strategy**. Projects like connecting Sehákw development to public transit are key to reducing car dependency and upholding Squamish values of land stewardship.



Source: Skwxwú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish Nation) Climate Legacy Strategy

Panellists emphasized various key points, including:

- It is important to take the leap into transportation planning, even when beginning with small steps
- Stick to your Nation-driven timelines and always take time for meaningful engagement
- Embed your Nations' cultural values into every stage of your transportation planning
- The federal and provincial governments must support First Nations transportation planning and implementation through funding, intergovernmental coordination, and policy alignment with the UN Declaration and self-determination.

BREAKOUT SESSION 1: HOW TO GET ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION PROJECTS OFF THE GROUND - EXAMPLES FROM FIRST NATIONS IN BC

Tuesday May 27, 11:00AM-12:00PM

- Aaron Pete, Chawathil First Nation Chief
- Elder Ruth Adams, Tsawwassen First Nation
- Hayden Guilderson, Ch'íyáqtel First Nation Councillor
- Moderator: Pablo Zacarias, Executive Director of CityStudio

This breakout session focused on First Nations-led active transportation projects. Elder Ruth Adams spoke about the **Great Blue Heron Way**, a trail of reconciliation that honours Tsawwassen territory and its people. Sparked by the desire to be recognized by visitors passing through the territory, the project aims to reconnect people with the land and educate them about the Nation's ongoing presence. She emphasized youth engagement, cultural stewardship, and Tsawwassen's leadership in transportation innovation, such as launching a 'health bus'.

Chief Aaron Pete shared how Chawathil First Nation developed an active transportation plan to address serious safety concerns—members walking along dangerous highways without sidewalks, and children crossing highways to catch school buses. Through provincial funding and community engagement, the Nation identified priorities and began advocating for infrastructure improvements that reflect their needs. He stressed the importance of building partnerships and following through on engagement by showing tangible next steps.

Hayden Guilderson detailed Tzeachten First Nation's multi-year initiative to build safer, connected infrastructure using **BC's Active Transportation Infrastructure Grants Program**. Projects like the Chilliwack River Road and Bailey Road multi-use pathways have increased walkability, safety, and community mobility. The Nation also launched a bike program, distributing over 50 bikes to members and using trails to reconnect people with natural spaces. Hayden emphasized that these projects support both health and Nation-building by enhancing livability, increasing land value, and promoting economic self-sufficiency.

During the Q&A, panellists reflected on the deeper meaning of active transportation as a continuation of Indigenous lifeways—not a new or “Western” idea. Speakers emphasized that First Nations must be involved from the outset in transportation planning, and that youth engagement, recognition of traditional knowledge, and flexible and stable funding are crucial to building safe and inclusive active transportation infrastructure.



”

“Indigenous peoples have always walked, paddled, and lived in connection with the land.”

- Elder Ruth, Tsawwassen First Nation

BREAKOUT SESSION 2: POWERING THE FUTURE: ENERGY SOLUTIONS FOR FIRST NATIONS TRANSPORTATION

Tuesday May 27, 11:00AM - 12:00PM

- Sarah Powell, Manager of Clean Energy Initiatives at the New Relationship Trust (NRT)
- Victor Kisoun, Advisor to the First Nations Energy and Mining Council (FNEMC)
- Leonard Thomas, Councillor at Nak'azdli Whut'en Nation
- Moderator: Chairperson Anna McKenzie

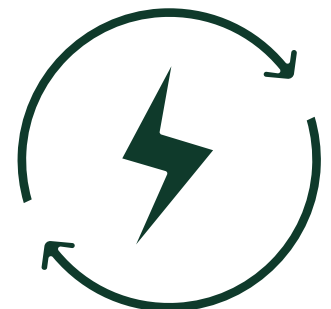
This breakout session explored pathways for First Nations to develop their own renewable energy projects, as well as examine the role of biofuels and other renewable fuels in the transition to low-carbon transportation. Sarah Powell (New Relationship Trust) shared how funding initiatives such as the BC Indigenous Clean Energy Initiative and the **Community Energy Diesel Reduction (CEDR) Program** are supporting remote communities in reducing diesel reliance and increasing energy sovereignty. She emphasized the need for local energy generation to support electrification, especially as many First Nations grids are already at capacity.

Victor Kisoun (First Nations Energy and Mining Council) called for a transformative, rights-based approach to clean energy and transportation in BC. He presented the Council's proposal for a First Nations Clean Energy Strategy, which emphasizes Indigenous leadership, equity ownership, and the need for exclusive project streams for First Nations. He also highlighted the lack of government response to the proposal and called for co-development of future strategies that reflect the UN Declaration and support Nation-led planning and ownership. A fairness monitor and Indigenous-led environmental reviews were also recommended to ensure equitable decision-making.

Leonard Thomas (Nak'azdli Whut'en Nation) presented a local success story: the BioNorth Energy project in Fort St. James, which converts waste timber into energy, feeding power into the BC Hydro grid. The project was revitalized from a distressed asset and now creates substantial employment while reducing GHG emissions. Leonard emphasized the importance of partnerships, access to capital, and the community benefits of using forest waste materials traditionally left to burn.

Audience questions focused on technical barriers, cumulative impacts, and opportunities for improvement. Panellists reiterated the importance of technical upgrades, capital access, and tools to assess utility capacity, all of which are necessary to support Indigenous-led clean energy expansion. Sarah Powell noted that outdated grid infrastructure in remote communities limits the development and electrification of microgrids.

Approximately 40 remote First Nations communities in British Columbia remain disconnected from the provincial electricity grid and rely on diesel, making the electrification of transportation unfeasible.



BREAKOUT SESSION 3: HOW TO SUPPORT RURAL AND ON-RESERVE TRANSIT DEVELOPMENT

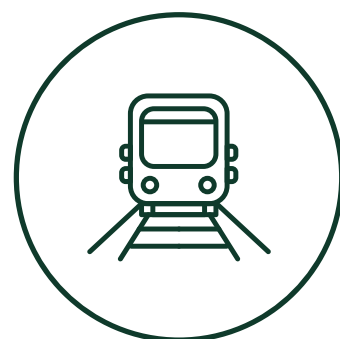
Tuesday May 27, 13:00PM - 14:00PM

- Jordan Barrett, Manager, Partner Programs at Northern Development Initiative Trust (NDIT)
- Adriana McMullen, Senior Transit Planner at BC Transit
- Gillian Moxham, Project Director of Transit Strategy and Policy at the Ministry of Transportation and Transit
- Dawn McGrath, PhD Candidate in Civil Engineering
- Moderator: Jeevana Rajkumar, Create Climate Equity

This session focused on how First Nations living in rural/remote areas can develop public transportation projects in collaboration with partners, such as multiple levels of government, NGOs, BC Transit, and other organizations. Panellists from the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MOTI), BC Transit, Northern Development Initiative Trust (NDIT), and academia shared current work and reflections on improving public transportation access for First Nations communities, particularly in rural and remote areas. Speakers emphasized the importance of safe, reliable, and affordable transit as a lifeline to essential services, including healthcare, education, employment, and cultural gatherings.

The MOTI shared its cross-government coordination efforts and highlighted funding programs supporting rural transportation and Indigenous-led initiatives. NDIT described how their Northern Community Shuttle Program supports long- and short-haul services across Northern BC, with several successful First Nations-led projects now in operation. BC Transit outlined how service planning, such as the Highway 16 action plan, is shaped by engagement and tailored to the unique needs of rural, urban-adjacent, and economically active Nations. Panellist Dawn McGrath shared her research on the Okanagan Valley Electric Regional Passenger Rail (OVER PR) service, advocating for long-term, socially beneficial public transportation that aligns with the UN Declaration and self-determined goals. Speakers emphasized that one-size-fits-all transit models don't work—First Nations must be at the table in shaping locally appropriate solutions, with flexibility in modes such as shuttles, ride-hailing, on-demand transit, and inter-community coordination.

Audience members raised questions about affordability, long-distance service gaps, and options such as ride-hailing and light rail. Concerns included rising fares, safety on under-supervised transport options, and a lack of communication about existing services. Panellists acknowledged funding limitations, especially for operating costs.



Flexibility, coordination, and First Nations leadership are essential in creating equitable, effective transit systems.

BREAKOUT SESSION 4: ACCELERATING LOW-CARBON MARINE TRANSPORTATION AND IMPROVING FERRY SERVICES FOR FIRST NATIONS IN BC

Tuesday May 27, 13:00PM - 14:00PM

- Erralyn Thomas, Snuneymuxw First Nation Councillor
- Adam Olsen, Lead Negotiator at Tsartlip First Nation
- Trent Moraes, Deputy Chief Councillor Skidegate Band Council
- Moderator: Chairperson Anna McKenzie

This breakout session explored ways to improve marine ferry services serving First Nations communities, with a focus on both service delivery and low-carbon options for marine transportation. Councillor Erralyn Thomas (Snuneymuxw Nation) emphasized that ferry terminals on their territory have long operated without their consent. While a Protocol Agreement with BC Ferries has created a structure for dialogue, key priorities, such as economic reconciliation and emissions reductions, remain largely unmet.

Adam Olsen (Tsartlip Nation) described the process and reasons for signing a Tsartlip-BC Ferries Protocol Agreement in 2022. Despite this, BC Ferries has yet to take responsibility for ongoing harm, such as the ferry wake damaging village sites, causing coastal erosion or the impact of ferry sound on his Nations more-than-human relatives. Adam called on Transport Canada, the provincial government, and BC Ferries to be more attentive to First Nations' cultural needs, as well as offering cheaper ticket prices to First Nations. He also called for stronger collaboration between Nations and increased investment in electric ferry technologies that have the potential to reduce emissions, sound pollution and the wake.

Trent Mores (Haida Nation) highlighted persistent challenges with ferry reliability and availability, particularly in the summer months when the ferries are overcrowded with tourists. While BC Ferries' leadership has shown greater responsiveness since the implementation of the Declaration Act, significant gaps remain, including limited access for Nation members who need urgent healthcare services, such as dental care. In addition, there are still issues with waste management and a lack of local hiring for ferry staff.



Source: Kristi Denby, Haida Gwaii, BC Ferries

During the Q&A, audience members called for greater recognition and benefits for First Nations. Suggestions included free ferry travel for Elders, revenue-sharing through a per-trip fee, and board representation to ensure Indigenous voices are heard.

Elder Ruth Adams emphasized that ferries travel on ancestral lands without acknowledgment, stating, “they owe us rent.”

PLENARY PANEL 2: DISCUSSION ON THE OUTCOMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS OUTLINED IN THE TRANSPORTATION ASSESSMENT REPORT AND ACTION PLAN

Tuesday May 27, 14:15PM-15:15PM

- Kristi Denby, Climate and Environment Policy Analyst at the BCAFN
- Jeremy Johnston, Community Planner at the Community Energy Association (CEA)
- Kaitlyn Robinson, Climate Action Coordinator for the Nisga'a Lisims Government
- Charlotte Bull, Junior Climate Change Policy Analyst at the BCAFN
- Moderator: Chairperson Anna McKenzie

This plenary session focused on the Transportation Assessment Report and Action Plan ('Transportation Action Plan'). This report outlines barriers and opportunities and provides recommendations to address gaps and strengthen opportunities to ensure that First Nations across BC have equitable access to transportation. Kristi Denby (BCAFN) started the session by presenting the background on the BCAFN **First Nations Low-Carbon Transportation Project**, including its goals, objectives and progress.

Jeremy Johnston (CEA) presented key findings from the BCAFN Transportation Surveys, which fed into the Transportation Action Plan. With over 400 responses from Nations across BC, the surveys confirmed that affordability is a major barrier—over 70% of respondents spend 20% or more of their income on transportation, double the provincial average. Respondents also showed strong interest in public, active, and shared transportation over electrification. Common gaps reported by Nations included poor road conditions, limited active transportation infrastructure, little or no public transit, and insufficient capacity and funding to address transportation needs.

Kaitlyn Robinson (Nisga'a Nation) shared insights from her experience as a Pilot Project Community. She emphasized the need for climate-resilient infrastructure, coordinated emergency and maintenance planning, and flexible, community-led transit solutions with sustainable funding—especially in remote areas. She also highlighted the importance of workforce development through training programs that align with community priorities, noting that participation increased when people saw the training directly supported their Nation's projects

Charlotte Bull (BCAFN) shared the draft Transportation Action Plan high-level themes and recommendations. A Mentimeter was then used to gather direct feedback from participants and further strengthen the Transportation Action Plan. The Mentimeter results closely aligned with the BCAFN Transportation Survey, with the greatest challenges and barriers to transportation access identified as financial barriers (30%), followed by infrastructure gaps (28%) and inadequate public transportation (26%). The majority of participants called for public transit to be prioritized, followed by investments in walking infrastructure and cycling/e-bikes.

What are your biggest challenges or barriers in accessing safe, affordable, reliable transportation?

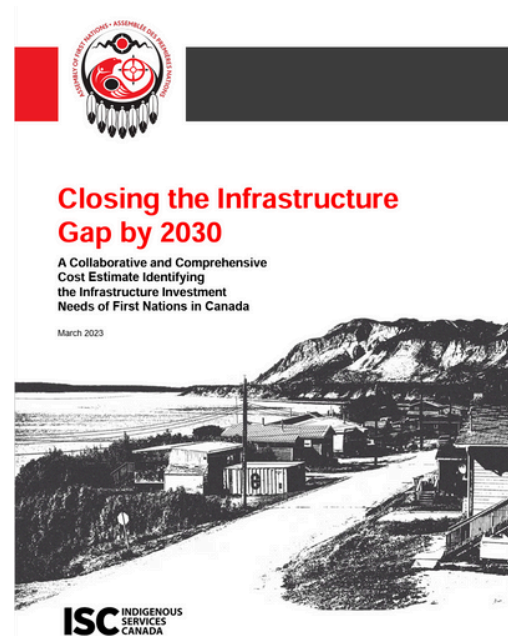


BREAKOUT SESSION 5: INVESTING IN INFRASTRUCTURE: WHAT WILL IT TAKE?

Tuesday May 27, 15:30PM-16:30PM

- Owen James, Associated Engineering Alberta Ltd
- Ryan Hennessey, Associated Engineering Alberta Ltd
- Freda Long, National Leader, Indigenous Communities at Associated Engineering Alberta Ltd
- Moderator: Hannah Cripps, Economic Development Junior Policy Analyst at the BCAFN

This breakout session examined findings from the **AFN's Closing the Infrastructure Gap by 2030 report**. This report analyzed the true scale of costs associated with addressing infrastructure disparities across 634 First Nations in Canada. Owen James, who contributed to the report, explained that the study covered both on-reserve infrastructure and off-reserve supporting requirements, including all-season roads and connectivity. He noted that transportation is one of the most significant contributors to greenhouse gas emissions, but one of the most challenging sectors to decarbonize, making climate resilience a critical focus. Ryan Hennessey expanded on the concept of co-benefits, noting that investments in transportation can improve social cohesion, health, safety, affordability, employment opportunities, and attract investment. Several case studies were shared, illustrating how relatively small or innovative initiatives can deliver tangible benefits to the community.



Panellists invited participants to share examples, which included improved family connection through better travel options, enhanced cultural exchange, and increased community resilience. One participant described how Lheidli T'enneh Health Centre staff often provide transportation because there are no alternatives between the reserve and downtown Prince George. Another participant shared the potential of festivals celebrating cycling to spark small but meaningful shifts.

Freda Long emphasized that under the UN Declaration, First Nations must remain at the forefront of stewardship and decision-making. Ryan outlined practical steps for developing an implementation plan: assessing jurisdictional realities, community context, available resources, and potential partnerships; considering development trends such as population growth; and evaluating timelines, capacity, and funding risks. Together, the speakers reinforced that while the scale of the infrastructure gap is daunting, progress is possible by centring First Nations leadership, starting with practical steps, and building momentum through partnerships that align with reconciliation and climate goals.



Everything is connected to net zero, from internet connectivity to service location, and the overall cost of closing the gap is estimated at \$349.2 billion, a figure that highlights both the scale of the challenge and the urgency to act now.

- Owen James, Associated Engineering Alberta Ltd

BREAKOUT SESSION 6: CLIMATE RESILIENCE AND PLANNING FOR EMERGENCIES

Tuesday May 27, 15:30PM-16:30PM

- Darian Edwards, Climate Readiness and Wildfire Technician at the [Lillooet Tribal Council](#)
- Darryl Adrian, Emergency Management Coordinator at the [Lillooet Tribal Council](#)
- Moderator: Nikki Saadat, Senior Economic Development Policy Analyst at the BCAFN

This breakout session explored how transportation infrastructure and systems can be strengthened to improve resilience in the face of climate-related disasters such as wildfires, floods, and landslides. Panellists emphasized that First Nations communities face unique vulnerabilities, including fuel shortages, impassable roads, a lack of accessible vehicles and communications challenges.

Darryl Adrian (Lillooet Tribal Council) noted that emergencies, such as the 2021 atmospheric river, the heat dome, and the McKay wildfire, exposed how “pinch points” in evacuation routes, inconsistent radio systems, and limited transportation capacity can leave communities stranded for days. He highlighted the importance of collaborating with neighbouring communities and agencies, such as the RCMP and the BC Ministry of Transportation and Transit, to develop evacuation plans. This involves planning routes together, sharing resources, and establishing unified alert systems to reduce confusion.

Darian Edwards (Lillooet Tribal Council) shared how Indigenous-led drone programs are enhancing resilience and accessibility in remote areas. He showed how drones have already been used to transport medical supplies from Penelakut Island to Vancouver Island, and other case studies have shown their potential for organ delivery. He showcased how the Lillooet Tribal Council is advancing drone use in search and rescue, land management, and emergency response, with youth training camps sparking strong engagement. He highlighted how Transport Canada’s expanded regulations are creating more equitable access for Indigenous communities to adopt drones. The Lillooet Tribal Council hopes to expand licensing and training opportunities to build self-sufficiency and sustainability.

The Q&A emphasized both the practical challenges and opportunities for strengthening emergency preparedness. Panellists discussed effective strategies such as identifying households without vehicles early, moving Elders out during the alert stage, organizing carpools and community transit, and integrating shuttle buses into evacuation plans. When asked what governments can do to support this work, panellists emphasized that relationship-building and collaboration are essential, but often “hard to get local agencies to come to the community.” Youth engagement emerged as a hopeful theme, with panellists noting how young people are taking pride in protecting their communities and leading resilience initiatives. Darian reflected that the path forward lies in pairing education and awareness with community-driven innovation, ensuring First Nations can become increasingly self-sufficient in the face of growing climate emergencies.



Dedicated evacuation routes, predetermined safe locations, and re-entry plans must be paired with training - communities are now meeting monthly to “find gaps and work better together.”

- Darryl Adrian, Lillooet Tribal Council

PLENARY PANEL 3: IMPROVING ACCESSIBILITY TO TRANSPORTATION FOR FIRST NATIONS, WOMEN, GIRLS AND 2SLGBTQQIA+ INDIVIDUALS AND RESPONDING TO THE CALLS FOR JUSTICE 4.8, 8.1 AND 17.9

Wednesday May 28, 10:45AM-12:00PM

- Orene Askew, BCAFN 2SLGBTQQIA+ Representative
- Tiffany D. Hind Bull - Prete, Assistant Professor at the University of Lethbridge
- Lorna Brown, Executive Director of the Tears to Hope Society
- Moderator: Chairperson Anna McKenzie

In this plenary panel, focused on the urgent need for safe, reliable, and culturally grounded transportation for Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ (Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, Intersex, and Asexual). The discussion focused on the Calls for Justice 4.8 and 8.1 from the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirited Peoples (MMIWG2S+).

Orene Askew (BCAFN 2SLGBTQQIA+ Representative) described BCAFN's gender equity work and the need for First Nations-led transportation solutions that are funded and respected as essential, not temporary. Lorna Brown (Tears to Hope Society) reflected on her personal motivation following the loss of her niece along the Highway of Tears and shared her current work on a youth safety toolkit that empowers and educates through workshops. Dr. Hind Bull-Prete (University of Lethbridge) explained how the lack of a national action plan, limited access to disaggregated data, and jurisdictional fragmentation continue to stall real progress. She emphasized that transportation must be understood as a social determinant of health and called for sustained investment in community-led transit and Indigenous data systems.

Speakers outlined long-standing barriers such as short-term funding and policy silos, but stressed that Nations must be at the forefront of planning and implementation. Dr. Hind Bull-Prete proposed a Red Dress Alert system, similar to Amber Alerts, to respond quickly when Indigenous women or 2SLGBTQQIA+ people go missing. The conversation also highlighted the importance of trauma-informed transportation infrastructure, youth engagement, and culturally safe transit alternatives to reduce reliance on unsafe options, such as hitchhiking.

During the Q&A, attendees asked how they could access Lorna's youth safety programming in their own schools and communities, and several others wanted to know how they could help advocate for a Red Dress Alert system in their regions. Panellists stressed that community-led, trauma-informed solutions are critical and that true safety will only come when transportation is grounded in Indigenous knowledge, healing, and self-determination. In closing, panellists emphasized the urgency of action and reminded the audience that Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA+ people have waited far too long for the safe, accessible transportation they deserve.

Transportation is not just a service but a right that intersects with safety, dignity, and self-determination.

PLENARY PANEL 4: BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS FOR MORE EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE TRANSPORTATION

Wednesday May 28, 13:00PM-14:00PM

- Jeevana Rajkumar, Create Climate Equity
- Allan Stroet, Manager of Economic Development, Lheidli T'enneh First Nation
- Paula Cousins, Associate Deputy Minister, Ministry of Transportation and Transit
- Moderator: Chairperson Anna McKenzie

The final plenary panel examined how partnerships among governments, non-profits, and First Nations can foster inclusive and community-led transportation solutions. Jeevana Rajkumar (Create Climate Equity) presented a Vancouver pilot project designed in partnership with urban Indigenous residents, emphasizing that transportation programs are often imposed top-down, rather than being developed in collaboration with local communities. By co-creating with partners such as the Aboriginal Housing Management Association and the BC Indigenous Housing Society, the pilot addressed concerns regarding safety, accessibility, and connections to home communities. She emphasized that “trust building” and community leadership are key, and that NGOs must listen with humility, share power, and support Indigenous partners to lead.

Allan Stroet (Lheidli T'enneh First Nation) described the Chuntoh Ghuna project, which produces biodiesel from wood residue in partnership with Arbios Biotech. While many Nations are pro-development, he noted, success depends on respectful and values-aligned collaboration. Paula Cousins (Ministry of Transportation and Transit) pointed to highway upgrades, including the Highway 1 Ford to Tappen and Highway 8 rebuild, as examples of more collaborative approaches, which included early engagement with Nations, capacity funding, and Indigenous contracting. She acknowledged the government has too often arrived with “fully baked projects” and emphasized that “we are the learners in our ministry,” underscoring the need for long-term relationships rather than one-off consultations.



“Partnerships must begin early – on a napkin, not as a fully-baked project – and be grounded in transparency and shared information.”

- Allan Stroet, Lheidli T'enneh First Nation



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