

Speaking Notes
Rail Road Conference
Juneau, Alaska
Jan. 15/03

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Introduction

- On behalf of the Yukon government, I would like to thank Senator John Cowdery for inviting me here today.
 - First I'd like to introduce our Yukon contingent:
 - The Grand Chief of the Council of Yukon First Nations, **Ed Schultz**
 - The Yukon's Member of Parliament in Ottawa, **Larry Bagnell**
 - Member of the Yukon's Legislative Assembly for Southern Lakes, **Patrick Rouble**
 - My Chief of Staff **Rick Nielsen**
 - Deputy Minister of Highways and Public Works for the Yukon government, **John Stecyk**
 - Deputy Minister for Economic Development for the Yukon government, **Eugene Lysy**
 - Yukon Chamber of Commerce representative Rob Harvey
 - and Yukon businessmen **Charles Jurasz, Ian Robertson, Richard Jamieson and Murray Hampton.**
 - The topic of a joint Canada-U.S. railroad is an important one, and something that is dear to the hearts of Yukoners.
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- It would usher in a new era in Northern transportation, and would complete the Transcontinental Railway that began more than 100 years ago.
- The economic benefits of a rail link are phenomenal for both the Yukon and Alaska. I'll talk about those benefits in just a moment.
- The main message I want to bring you today is that the Yukon supports the vision of an Alaska Rail link through our territory, and we are prepared to continue working with Alaska to make such a link a reality.

Benefits

- Now to the benefits, and they are numerous. For one, connecting Alaska and the Yukon to the rest of North America will benefit the mining, tourism, oil and gas, agriculture, forestry and manufacturing sectors of our respective economies.
 - It will reduce the cost of bringing goods into the North, and of exporting our products Outside.
 - It is very compatible with the development of a natural gas pipeline, electric transmission lines, fiber optic cables or other utilities along the same right-of-way.
 - It opens up all kinds of opportunity in the field of tourism. Every year, one of the highlights of visitors' trips to the North is the White Pass and Yukon Railway train ride they take from Skagway, Alaska to Bennett, B.C. To extend that line to Whitehorse, and
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ultimately to have a line that connects the Alaska Railroad and the British Columbia Railroad would be a traveler's dream or the building of a great tourism feature / product.

Our work to date

- As I've said, the Yukon is committed to this project, and my government has lobbied our federal counterparts in Ottawa at every opportunity to encourage Canada's participation in the Joint Canada-U.S. Rail Link Commission.
 - In April of this past year, I wrote to our then Prime Minister Jean Chretien to express my strong support for the establishment of a Commission. Key federal, provincial and state decision-makers were copied on the letter.
 - As you know, we have a new Prime Minister and a new federal Minister of Transport, and at this point we do not know the current leaders' views on this project.
 - When the former Transport Minister David Collenette recently visited the Yukon, he said he supported the feasibility study and that the railroad was 'a bold, innovative, national dream-type project.'
 - I remain optimistic that the new Transport Minister Tony Valeri and Prime Minister Paul Martin share those sentiments.
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- The Yukon government does not agree with the limited analysis that's been done by our federal government to date on the value of a feasibility study. We will continue to urge Canada to immediately engage with Washington to proceed with such a study.
 - Early last month, I wrote to Mr. Martin to congratulate him on becoming Prime Minister. In that letter I spoke about the Joint Commission and my hope that Canada will soon accept the U.S. invitation to participate.
 - I am very pleased that the Yukon's Member of Parliament, Larry Bagnell, is here today. I know he has been a long standing supporter of the railroad and now with his new responsibilities as Parliamentary Secretary for Northern Economic Development to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development he will be an even more effective advocate in Ottawa.
 - I should mention as well that in the recent Cabinet shuffle, Bill Graham maintained his job of Foreign Affairs Minister. Both myself and British Columbia's Premier Gordon Campbell have expressed to Mr. Graham our support for the Commission.
 - The governments of Alberta and the Northwest Territories have also indicated their interest in the railway project and have confirmed their support for Canada's participation in the Joint Commission.
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- I have discussed the Alaska-Yukon rail link proposal and Joint Commission with Governor Murkowski on a number of occasions – most recently in Whitehorse last month, when the Governor and I signed an **intergovernmental accord**.
- The accord puts in place a framework for us to work cooperatively on issues such as a railroad, to maximize benefits for citizens on both sides of the Alaska/Yukon border.
- It sets the tone for our jurisdictions to work together and indicates that at the highest level, there is the political will to cooperate and collaborate.
- Working with our northern neighbours cooperatively on projects such as the railroad is critical in creating an environment for northern economic development.

Partnerships

- Partnerships are extremely important to the Yukon government. I believe it is only through cooperation and collaboration with other governments, agencies and private businesses that we will see large projects such as this rail link happen. Governments can't do this alone.
 - I'll give you a few examples of how the Yukon is pursuing partnerships. Not only have we signed an Accord with Alaska, we have Cooperative Accords as well with our neighbours to the east – the Northwest Territories and Nunavut – and I am about to sign one with British Columbia.
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- When our government came into power just over a year ago, we set about building partnerships with our First Nations as well...partnerships based on mutual respect and cooperation. The work we are doing with our First Nation governments to prepare for a pipeline project is just one example of that. Together, we will be ready for any major development that affects our territory. I appreciate that the Grand Chief of the Council of Yukon First Nations, Ed Schultz, has joined us here today to share his ideas and wisdom with regards to a rail link.
- Of course we are also working in close partnership with our private sector. As you can see, there are several representatives from the Yukon's business community here today. Whatever we accomplish, it can only be with the help and support of Northern businesses, and I look forward to working with Alaska in exploring how we can continue to bring private investment to this railroad project.
- This is, however, not just an issue of cooperation between Alaska and the Yukon. Ottawa and Washington have an opportunity to work cooperatively for the betterment of both countries.

Climate for Development in the Yukon

- I'd like to emphasize that the Yukon is at a time in its history where a railway would be a logical next step. We have settled almost all the land claims with our First Nations, and – as I mentioned - are working in partnership with them on a number of projects.
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- Within the last year, we have taken over control of our land, water, mineral and forestry resources from the federal government, allowing us to manage and develop the territory's resource wealth for benefit of our people.
- We have the political will to grow a strong viable sustainable economy. We are poised to enter an exciting period of responsible resource development in the Yukon.

Closing

- In closing, I'd just like to go back through history to the discovery of gold in the Klondike. That, of course, started one of the most remarkable stampedes of people in history.
 - Getting to the goldfields, though, was difficult, and hundreds of companies were formed to get people there by ship, wagon, horse, dogsled and railroad. The White Pass & Yukon Route is the only one of those companies still in existence today.
 - In 1898, many people said that a railroad could never be built through the granite of the Coastal Mountains.
 - It was an incredible challenge, but it did happen. The final spike was driven in Carcross, Yukon on July 29, 1900.
 - Today, there are skeptics who say a modern day rail link through Alaska and the Yukon will never happen. Just as was the case with the White Pass & Yukon Route, there are certainly some challenges.
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- However, I'm optimistic that we will prove those skeptics wrong, just as the cynics of 1898 were proven wrong.
 - I look forward to working with you to see this initiative through to the end.
 - Once again, I would like to thank Senator Cowdery for giving me the opportunity to speak to you today.
Thank you.
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