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Chair

Mr. Bruce Stanton

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• (1105)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC)): Good morning to all the members, witnesses and guests. This is the 34th meeting of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

[English]

Our topic is northern economic development, or more specifically, identifying the barriers and opportunities there are to advance the economic circumstances for Canada's north and for northerners.

Members, this morning we're joined by two departments. First will be Mr. David Boerner, the director general for the Geological Survey of Canada section of NRCan. He will be followed by presentations from the Department of Transport and Infrastructure Canada. We are joined today by officials from those departments: Ms. Guylaine Roy, the associate assistant deputy minister for policy, and Mr. Roussel, director general for marine safety, from Department of Transport; from Infrastructure Canada we have Mr. Taki Sarantakis, the associate assistant deputy minister for the policy and priorities directorate, and he is joined by Samantha Tattersall, director, policy and priorities directorate.

Thank you very much for joining us today.

Monsieur Lévesque, do you have a question?

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Lemieux will not be here today. He is going to be replaced by a colleague.

[English]

The Chair: We'll begin with presentations from our departmental officials.

I understand Mr. Boerner will begin with a ten-minute presentation. We'll follow that with split presentations from Madame Roy and Mr. Sarantakis of five minutes each. Then we'll go to questions from members.

Members, we will be trying to finish up by 12:30. We have a fair bit of committee business to conduct today in regard to our tour in the north in November.

Let's begin with Mr. Boerner for ten minutes.

Dr. David Boerner (Director General, Central and Northern Canada Branch, Geological Survey of Canada, Department of

Natural Resources): Thank you. It's a great pleasure to be here today.

I have a small presentation in powerpoint that I would like to distribute.

My name is David Boerner. I'm a director general in the Geological Survey of Canada, which runs a number of programs related principally to the geology of Canada. These are related to natural hazards, the offshore marine areas, such things as permafrost, climate change, environmental responsibility, and also, of course, minerals and energy.

Today for the most part I'll speak about the energy and minerals program, which is part of the geo-mapping activity that is an element of the northern strategy. I'd be happy to take questions on elements of this. There may be some questions from outside my particular area, but the focus I'll try to cover today is geo-mapping for energy and minerals.

In front of you is a short deck that describes something about this program. I'm not going to speak to every slide, but I'll try to hit the highlights of what the slides mean.

The first one I'll talk about is slide 3, which indicates that Canada has quite limited mineral and energy production from the north. It shows a graph of the mineral production for 2008.

The Chair: I'll ask you to stop there momentarily, Mr. Boerner, until we get documents in front of all the members. I think they're just coming now. We're not going to take away any of your time.

While we're waiting, if our other presenters have documents in both official languages to distribute, we could do that now.

Okay. *Allez-y.*

Dr. David Boerner: Slide 3 shows a graph of the mineral production in Canada. Obviously Canada generates a very large amount of wealth from mineral and energy production. This slide shows a comparison of the mineral production in the provinces relative to the northern territories. You can immediately see that places like Ontario and Saskatchewan produce a fair amount of wealth; some \$10 billion was produced last year in those two provinces. When you look at the Yukon, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut on the right-hand part of the slide, you can see that the production is actually quite a bit lower.

The Northwest Territories stand out at about \$2 billion per year. That's almost entirely generated by the diamond industry, which is about \$2.1 billion per year, so from a geological perspective, one of the questions that we've certainly asked is why there is such limited production of mineral and energy resource in the north. If I showed you an equivalent graph for energy resource production, you'd see the same thing. It would be dominated by Alberta, of course, but in fact there's very little produced in the north in a proportionate sense.

From a geological perspective, which is our domain, this doesn't make an awful lot of sense. We know there's a very large potential for mineral and energy resource in the north, and yet the production isn't there. What started us thinking about this energy and minerals geomapping program was that we asked what the deficiencies were in trying to promote those economic development opportunities through energy and minerals in the north, because if you can have a couple of diamond mines adding \$2 billion a year to an economy in one of the territories, that's quite a significant change in economic circumstances for those people.

Our feeling was there weren't a lot of economic opportunities of the same magnitude available to northerners. From our perspective, some of this is related to the lack of geological knowledge in the area. I'll talk about that in a bit more detail in a second.

Slide 4 shows our estimate of geological understanding in the north represented on a map. Our question was not so much what the available information was but more whether the available information was suitable for industry in terms of making the large-scale investments they have to in exploration.

We coloured the graph two different ways. Green indicates what we thought was an area where there probably was enough information for industry to go in and invest in exploring and developing mineral resources. Pink means we thought that the information was outdated and, for the most part, inadequate for that decision-making process that companies have to face.

You can see that a fairly large area is pink. It represents probably something in the order of 2,000,000 square kilometres of the north, or probably about 60% of the land mass, where we didn't think the geological information was quite up to standard.

I think this is one of the reasons that mineral production in the north is limited; it is simply because the understanding about where to invest is quite limited.

Another one, of course, is transportation infrastructure. If you find a diamond deposit, you can extract a fair amount of wealth in a small volume and a small weight, and transportation becomes a much easier problem to solve because you can fly things in and out. On the other hand, base metals such as lead and zinc have a huge volume and a huge weight, and without an acceptable transportation infrastructure they're effectively stranded resources that won't be developed. Companies are very aware of this, of course. They make decisions based on profit, so they focus on areas where they can extract the value in a way that they can economically justify.

Another aspect in the thinking of all the industry people is, of course, the regulatory situation. They have to be sure of that. They also have to be sure of things like an available workforce in order to provide people to work in their areas.

There are myriad factors, but we certainly felt that one of the basic ones was the understanding of the potential, because if you don't understand the potential for mineral or energy resources in the north, you're unlikely to take on the economic calculations for other factors, such as the regulatory system or the workforce system or the transportation system. That was the basic rationale for the program.

Slide 5 is a bit complicated, but it shows some of our reasons for trying to do this thing. We've found from past economic studies that when we invest a dollar's worth of public money in generating geoscience information, typically industry follows up and spends about five dollars pursuing whatever opportunities are created by that knowledge. Some people misunderstand this number, so I just wanted to be a little bit clear.

Industry never makes a profit until they actually find the resources and start to develop them; by providing this information about geoscience, we basically convince industry to spend more of their hard-earned money, or some of the capital they've raised on the markets, to explore, because they believe it gives them a chance to do a better job at discovering resources.

- (1110)

The analogy that's often used is that the public money that is invested by governments is trying to locate the haystacks; the industry still has to go into those haystacks and find the needle, which is the real prize. That's the goal here. We believe that this kind of work actually stimulates industry to do a fair amount of additional work, and that's the base for trying to create economic opportunities in the north.

Slide 6 talks about what the program was. We think that to provide reasonable geological information over all of the pink area would probably take about ten years and, in our estimate, about \$200 million. We had the authority given to us in Budget 2008 and in subsequent announcements for \$100 million over five years to begin the work. This is based on a plan of trying to complete the reconnaissance mapping over ten years, but we're going to try to produce a significant part of it and do at least 50% in the first five years.

Turning to slide 7, I want to emphasize that we're not doing this in isolation. We have an advisory structure that puts a lot of technical expertise into our decision making, so that we can be sure we're doing the right kind of science in the right ways. Much of that expertise is shared with the provinces and the territories, which have geological surveys of their own. The other thing we do is listen quite heavily to members of industry, because we have to understand how they make decisions about exploration in order to provide them the information they're going to find useful. We have quite an extensive advisory structure to give that information.

At the very bottom of this slide is something we've begun that is a bit new. We have taken the view that this program needs to leave benefits in the north for northerners. We've also assumed that we don't necessarily know how to do that ourselves in the Geological Survey of Canada or in Natural Resources Canada. So we formed an advisory group of northerners and meet with them at least twice a year to ask their advice about how we can ensure that whatever benefits are created by this program stay in the north long-term and that when the program is over there are still benefits accruing to northerners. I think that's been quite a successful enterprise.

Let's turn now to slide 8. Some of the results of advice we've received from our advisory group of northerners has enhanced our ability to hire local people from communities. We've engaged up to 20 people—it's actually 24, I think, this year—including prospectors, camp assistants, cooks. We've engaged the training societies and colleges in the north to try to get more people involved in this. Part of the thinking is that if we're successful in this, industry will follow and invest in exploration programs, and that people who learn about earth sciences and geoscience and exploration would be as useful to those people who follow us as they would be to us. We're trying to stimulate some thinking that the new economy that is emerging on the horizon requires some people with skills and training to support it.

The bottom part of the slide talks about SSO. I apologize for the acronym; that's a "shared service office" in NRCan. NRCan is starting to change the way it does procurement and contracting in the north to try to involve northerners more in that process. We're actively thinking not just about the lowest price anymore; we're thinking about trying to get northerners into this business, get them aware of how government issues contracts, and make sure that we can deal with northern businesses in a way that makes them fully competitive with the rest of the country. So NRCan is taking steps to be much more supportive of this relationship and not seek purely the best business deal.

Slide 9 shows some of the results we've had from the advice of our advisory group of northerners. We've always gone in and told people what we were planning to do and asked them what information they would like from us. Now we're trying to ask them some more questions about what additional information they might be interested in. Here we have a list of some of the things people have asked us about.

They're quite interested in what's happening with respect to permafrost degradation. They also want to know about resources, hiring local people.... One group asked us about training for cooks, because they anticipated more oil companies coming into their area and wanted to provide catering services to those companies. They wanted to know how to get training to do it. Our job is not really to do that, but we've certainly put them in touch with people who can provide that training.

●(1115)

The Chair: Mr. Boerner, we're a little over time now. If you could summarize quickly, then we'll carry on. I realize there's good information here.

Dr. David Boerner: Let me go to the very last slide and say that now we have completed 18 months of this program. We're getting

quite a large amount of interest from industry and we're trying to connect with other organizations, such as HRSDC and INAC and the territorial governments as well, trying to find the linkages between our program and theirs. The basic idea is the same. We think there's potential in large parts of the north, and getting ready to develop that potential is something that will benefit northerners.

Thank you for your attention.

The Chair: Okay.

[*Translation*]

Thank you.

We will now move on to Ms. Roy.

[*English*]

Mrs. Guylaine Roy (Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Policy, Department of Transport): Thank you very much.

I'm with Transport Canada, and as you mentioned, both Transport Canada and Infrastructure Canada are represented here. We are two different departments, but we are in the same portfolio. We have the same deputy and the same minister.

We'll share the ten minutes we have to make sure there is more time for questions and discussion. I'll go quickly into my presentation.

It goes without saying that transportation is only one of the components of economic development. However, Canada's transportation policies and regulations have a role to play in supporting northern economic development and the other parties of the federal government's integrated northern strategy. I would like to elaborate on how Transport Canada is supporting the northern strategy, for which the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development has the lead.

●(1120)

The Chair: Could I just caution that for the purposes of interpretation, a good tempo is preferred? If you go a little bit over, don't worry. We'll give you a little bit of extra time.

Please proceed.

Mrs. Guylaine Roy: I have a tendency to go fast. I'm sorry.

Marine transportation is the mode of choice and a necessity for many communities and resource developments in Canada's north. As such, the government regularly and actively engages industry stakeholders, territories and provinces, northern communities, and other federal departments on northern marine issues. Transport Canada is working to ensure that as transportation grows we have the appropriate regulatory framework in place to ensure that transportation remains safe, secure, and environmentally sustainable.

On August 1, 2009, amendments to the Arctic Waters Pollution Prevention Act came into force. These changes extended the application of the act by amending the definition of “Arctic waters” from 100 to 200 nautical miles to help ensure that ships do not pollute Canadian waters.

Transport Canada is also drafting regulations under the Canada Shipping Act to make the current voluntary vessel traffic reporting system in Canada's northern waters, called NORDREG, mandatory. These requirements are expected to be in place by the 2010 shipping season.

As in other areas of Canada, Transport Canada inspectors provide regular inspections and certification services to ensure the safety of marine and air transportation in Canada's north.

To help deter pollution from shipping in the Arctic, Transport Canada has modernized its three maritime surveillance aircraft, which are now equipped with state-of-the-art remote sensors. Transport Canada's Dash-7 flew its first mission on June 29, 2009, while en route to the Arctic for the shipping season. In total, 188 pollution patrol hours were flown in the Arctic this past summer.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Slow down a little.

[*English*]

Mrs. Guylaine Roy: These initiatives minimize the likelihood that an increase in shipping in the Arctic will put the environment at increased risk.

By proactively modernizing our regulatory regime for Arctic marine shipping, we are laying the basis for safe, secure, and environmentally sustainable growth in shipping in the coming years. We are also working with international partners to improve international standards and regulations for transportation in the Arctic. For example, in 2008 Canada took a lead role at the International Maritime Organization to update the guidelines for ships operating in Arctic ice-covered waters. The resulting polar guidelines will help improve Arctic shipping safety and environmental protection by introducing high standards for vessel construction and operation in all Arctic waters.

The government is also making investments in northern air transportation. Transport Canada administers the airports capital assistance program, which provides funding to eligible airports for capital projects that promote safety, asset protection, and operating cost reduction. Since the creation of the program in 1995, the Government of Canada has provided \$22 million for capital improvements to six airports in the Northwest Territories, \$10 million for three airports in the Yukon, and almost \$30.9 million for 14 airports in Nunavut.

We are also working to assist northern communities in identifying their own transportation needs. For example, in July 2009 Transport Canada hosted a working session in Iqaluit that brought together federal departments, territorial governments, and regional stakeholders. Participants discussed marine transportation infrastructure priorities in the north and strategies for moving forward. They even provided an opportunity for regional stakeholders to consider the existing suite of national infrastructure programs and its potential role in helping to meet their requirements.

Climate change and the anticipated increase in resource development will have an impact on transportation and public infrastructure in the north. Transport Canada is working with the territories and northern stakeholders to prepare for these challenges. For example, through the Transportation Association of Canada, the department is working in cooperation with the provinces and territories to develop a permafrost guide, entitled “Guidelines for the Development and Management of Transportation Infrastructure in Permafrost Regions”. The guide is expected to be published and available in the spring of 2010. It will serve as a compendium of best practices, along with new and emerging technologies, that practitioners will be able to consult when evaluating the construction of new transportation infrastructure, as well as adaptation and mitigation strategies regarding the effects of climate change on infrastructure in the north.

In addition, Transport Canada, in collaboration with the three territories, will carry out a northern transportation systems assessment, which will help identify the transportation infrastructure required to support economic development in the north over the next 20 years.

Finally, the transport, infrastructure, and communities portfolio continues to make investments in the most pressing infrastructure needs identified by northern communities, including transportation. This includes funding under Infrastructure Canada's programs, which my colleague Taki can speak to.

Thank you.

•(1125)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Sarantakis, you have the floor.

[*English*]

Mr. Taki Sarantakis (Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Policy and Priorities Directorate, Infrastructure Canada): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

It's a pleasure to be here today to talk about Infrastructure Canada's role in the north.

My opening remarks will be very brief to allow time for your questions.

Infrastructure Canada was created in 2002, and since that time we have developed a number of programs that have been largely national in scope, reach, and mandate, but the programs touch every community in Canada.

[*Translation*]

Through all our initiatives, the intent has been to support projects in every jurisdiction that address a number of different types of asset categories that are key to Canada's well-being, including waste and waste-water systems, public transit, local roads, prisons and broadband.

[English]

The goal over the long term has been to fund public infrastructure that supports a stronger economy, a cleaner environment, and better communities. Since budget 2009, this has been supplemented by the need for immediate economic action to stimulate Canada's economy.

Since 2002, our contributions in the north, and specifically in the three territories, have both increased and become more streamlined.

Under the Building Canada plan introduced in 2007, virtually all Infrastructure Canada's funding has flowed to the three territories through a new initiative called the provincial and territorial base funding program, or the PT base fund. Under this program, over \$182 million will flow to each of the three territories. This is roughly ten times what any of the territories would have received had this program been allocated on a per capita basis.

In addition to providing more money than ever through any single program to the territories for infrastructure, this measure is also extremely streamlined and very flexible to meet the needs of the territories. For example, cost-sharing is done on the basis of a plan. Rather than funding each particular project, we request from each of the territories a capital plan, and we fund that plan on its aggregate basis rather than examining each of the projects in great detail.

In addition, this plan is funded on the basis of 75% by the federal government and 25% by the territories. This is in recognition of the lower fiscal capacity of each of the territories in the north, and also in recognition of the fact that infrastructure tends to have a higher cost base in the north, given the relatively low population densities over the wide geographic areas.

• (1130)

[Translation]

I would also note that for the territories we have a general northern infrastructure category. This ensures the adequate flexibility for infrastructure considerations unique to northern needs.

[English]

Beyond the PT base fund and in recognition of their smaller populations and greater needs, the territories are also allocated a set amount of funding under Canada's gas tax fund. In all the provinces, with the exception of Prince Edward Island, the gas tax fund is allocated on a per capita basis. However, the territories each receive a payment of \$15 million per year at this time. That, again, is far in excess of their per capita allocation.

In partnership with Canada's territories and their local communities, the Government of Canada and Infrastructure Canada have accomplished a great deal in northern Canada. In the Yukon, for example, we are flowing funding under the infrastructure stimulus fund for the Top of the World Highway, and over \$71 million in contribution toward the Mayo B hydro facility through budget 2009's new green infrastructure fund. In the Northwest Territories, we're funding a great deal of highway construction under the PT base fund, including the Dempster Highway, the Ingraham Trail, the Mackenzie Highway, the Liard Highway, and the Fort Resolution Highway. In Nunavut, our highlight project in the past year has been supporting repairs to the facilities for the Arctic Winter Games arena.

These are just a few illustrations of the projects we've funded throughout the territories.

With that, I'd be very pleased to take your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much to all our presenters here today. It's very full information and of course is going to be very important for our study.

Let's now proceed to questions from members. It's seven minutes for both questions and the responses, so we'll try to keep those as succinct as possible.

Let's proceed with Mr. Bagnell for seven minutes.

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Thank you for coming. I have a lot of questions, so maybe you could have short answers.

I just want to thank all your departments. You and your staff have been very helpful. You could take that back to them.

I had a university student from Ottawa ask me yesterday what consultation was done with aboriginal peoples in the north in the development of the northern strategy. It's a question for all three departments.

Guylaine, you brought up the northern strategy. Does anyone want to make a quick reply to that?

Mrs. Guylaine Roy: The lead department on the northern strategy is the Department of Indian Affairs. Indian Affairs has worked with various departments in terms of the support for the strategy, but in terms of the consultation on the strategy itself I think it would be better addressed by the department.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Okay. This is for you as well, Guylaine. I was at a speech on the Arctic this morning, and this chap—I have no idea who he is, but there's a lot of private sector work in the north helping communities—said that although we've put in the new pollution act, Transport Canada had very few or insufficient inspections, and that was its role. Could you explain what the role is and what you are doing?

Mrs. Guylaine Roy: I will ask Donald Roussel, the DG, marine safety, to respond to your question.

Mr. Donald Roussel (Director General, Marine Safety, Department of Transport): Yes, I knew this one would come to me. Thank you, Mr. Bagnell, for the question.

When we did Bill C-3 in March, we were in front of the Senate Standing Committee on Transport and Communications with the ministers, and we did answer a large number of questions on that particular front.

When it comes to pollution prevention in the Arctic, we mentioned to the SSCOTC committee that we deploy a Dash-7 airplane for the Arctic, and in Madame Roy's speech we mentioned that we had done 188 flying hours on board those planes this year. It's not just a sightseeing tour. We have enforcement officers from both the Department of the Environment and Transport Canada.

Beyond the system in the north for aerial surveillance, which is also supported by satellite imaging, we have during the seasons people who are working in Tuktoyaktuk, where they are deployed. We have also staff in Churchill when ships are there, when foreign vessels are loading grains.

So we have our staff during the seasons who are fully authorized and have the power of pollution prevention officers. But of course we go where there is shipping activity, and there are limited shipping activities during the seasons. On average, we get about 88 vessels doing roughly 188—

• (1135)

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Okay, that's great, thanks.

For infrastructure, I have just a quick question, because I want to get to the other questions too. You said it was a more efficient system, streamlined, but the infrastructure programs were primarily for municipalities. Some of the senior officials in the municipal association in the Yukon say the vast majority of their municipalities do not have their stimulus funding yet, and the recession's over a year old.

I assume it's the same in the other two territories, because in the list you gave, there were very few projects for municipalities. Can you tell me if that problem's going to improve pretty quickly?

Mr. Taki Sarantakis: Each of the three territories has actually exhausted their infrastructure stimulus funding, so basically the totality of what's available for the territories has been committed.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Did most of the municipalities get money, like they used to?

Mr. Taki Sarantakis: The infrastructure stimulus fund is an entirely new program, but under the PT base, each of the three territories ended up receiving more money than they used to under the old MRIF program, yes.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Yes, but that wasn't my question. I'll go on record, because it looks like the municipalities are not getting the money they used to get in the past, which is what it was primarily for in the first place.

Let's go on to David, and I'll ask all three questions so I get them in before the chair cuts me off.

One, did you want to make any comments on frozen methane? I think you mentioned that briefly. There are huge resources and there is also a huge effect on global warming.

The second question is on the fact that we don't have any technology to clean up oil spills under the ice. Do you know if there's any research? I've been told in past committees that there's not, but is there any research going on by the federal government?

And finally, on geoscience, could you just tell us briefly how we compare to other countries' expenditures, especially northern countries, on geoscience?

Dr. David Boerner: Frozen methane is also known as gas hydrates. It's a poorly known resource, but it's basically methane trapped in permafrost ice crystals. It's known on the land and the sea floor. We've had an active program, particularly some work done in a place called Mallik in the Northwest Territories, to see whether we

could have a production test of these resources. It's been relatively successful and we think methane-type resources can be developed.

The challenge right now is that gas prices probably won't support the development of this in the short term, because of things like shale gas. There's actually a surplus of gas resources. We're going to continue studying the problem and try to investigate what it means, because the estimates are quite substantial for the amount of methane that might be available in these resources. As we try to tailor our activities according to the likelihood of economic development in the relatively near term, it will probably not see as much emphasis in the near future, but we're going to keep working on it.

Does that answer your question?

On oil spills under the ice, I really couldn't comment. I'm not an expert in that particular area, the cleanup part. I think you would have to ask someone else.

The final question was on geoscience and how we compare with other nations. Canada has been pretty good about having a good geoscience base. You can see the gap in the north, so we probably haven't been as good as some of the northern nations, but maybe in the past we haven't had to be because we've been so successful in the southern part.

Russia has an enormous effort towards collecting geoscience across its territory. They have thousands of people in their geological surveys. We have about 500. They're investing quite substantially in trying to understand the resources. I think it's debatable which approach is better. We feel confident that we produce good results in these, without necessarily having the huge investment. I think this current GEM program is a really worthwhile investment that will give us a good insight into the resource potential we have in the north.

• (1140)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bagnell.

We will now move on to Mr. Lévesque from the Bloc Québécois.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good morning, ladies and gentlemen.

Mr. Boerner, slide 3 includes a classification of the provinces based on mineral and energy production.

Do you have another slide indicating the mineral and energy resources in those provinces? Or could we get a more detailed description?

[English]

Dr. David Boerner: Yes, this is information from Statistics Canada. They actually provide the breakdown by mineral resource. I don't have it with me, but I can certainly provide the table and information telling you which resources add up to how much is produced in each province. Absolutely.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Slide 4 indicates that 60% of the North has not undergone modern geological mapping. Based on your definitions, Quebec has had no modern mapping. Is that what we are seeing?

[English]

Dr. David Boerner: We didn't actually estimate the state of mapping in each of the provinces, so there was no information included on this. Quebec actually has quite good geological information, and they have one of the better geological surveys in the entire country in that province. The fact it's not shown here is because we didn't include it in the estimates; we focused only on the territories for this graph.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: The document indicates that Newfoundland has had modern mapping done and this is also the case for Ontario, which borders my riding near James Bay. However, nothing similar is shown for Quebec. That is why I ask the question.

I am now going to move on to Ms. Roy, Mr. Roussel or Mr. Sarantakis.

I am originally from the Lower St. Lawrence, I studied in Quebec City and I worked my whole life in Abitibi. My riding, which goes from Abitibi to Schefferville, borders Mr. Roussel's area. He was born in Saguenay, which, by the way, is where I met my wife.

A gentleman called Mr. Legault, from the Terrebonne area, near Montreal, has a modern vision for development. He has been trying to get a railroad built between Schefferville and the coast of Nunavik. This could be a wonderful opportunity for the people in Nunavut. He has been trying to do this for a long time. Mr. Roussel can confirm that boat travel is a problem whether it is in Nunavut, or Nunavik in Northern Quebec. In fact, it is only possible for a short time each year.

In 2007, if I remember correctly, \$33 billion over seven years was allocated specifically to develop road and rail transport in particular. Perhaps it was for something else as well.

Have you received Mr. Legault's application? Have you taken any steps or done any feasibility studies in this regard? Mr. Legault communicates regularly with me. He relies heavily on federal assistance. A number of companies have already shown interest. If the federal government got involved in this project, I feel that it could bring about rapid progress for the nations along the coast.

Mrs. Guylaine Roy: I am going to answer first and Taki can then perhaps add details about the infrastructure plan.

You asked me whether I was aware of Mr. Legault's request. He has not communicated with me, but he could well have spoken about his project with someone else in the federal government.

With regard to the \$33 billion over seven years that was announced under the infrastructure program, those funds cover a wide range of infrastructure. It includes transportation, but it also includes waste water and a number of other areas.

With regard to rail transport, you no doubt know that Transport Canada supports the aboriginal company that provides service to Schefferville. If you have no objection, I will let Taki tell you about the eligibility criteria for rail infrastructure funding.

• (1145)

Mr. Taki Sarantakis: In the past, we have undertaken railway projects in cooperation with the Quebec government. I think it was to the tune of \$200 million. We have to look at the merits of the projects and of undertaking them. However, we have not yet had an application for the project you refer to, to my knowledge.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Currently, the Canadian Air Force is responsible for transportation perishable products, but that costs an arm and a leg, as they say. We are hearing about an additional \$60 million to extend the program. Currently, three pilot communities are involved. An application involving all northern communities, including Nunavut, has been filed. However, there have been no developments in this area. Other food items are sent by truck from Montreal to Halifax. They are then sent by boat during the short time of the year when this is possible. Mr. Roussel can certainly talk more about this. A company just closed because it was unable to turn a profit.

Is there anything in the works in this regard?

The Chair: Please give a brief response.

Mrs. Guylaine Roy: I am not sure I understand the question. Are you asking whether there is any funding set aside for rail or marine transport?

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Are there any funds for air transportation?

Mrs. Guylaine Roy: Do you mean air transportation to go to northern Quebec?

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Yes, while we wait for a railway or two. I am talking about air transportation to get to Northern Quebec and, by extension, to Nunavut, because they will need marine transportation to cross.

Mrs. Guylaine Roy: Okay.

Transport Canada does not subsidize air transportation in the way that you are referring to. I know that the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs has a program called the Food Mail Program. The department might perhaps be better able to answer this question.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: Thank you for your indulgence, Mr. Chair.

[English]

The Chair: Merci.

We're way over time. Now let's go to Mr. Bevington. We'll try for seven minutes and see how we do.

Go ahead, Mr. Bevington.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Thanks, witnesses, for being here. I have seen you in front of the transport committee, of course.

Mr. Boerner, you talked about the mining industry in the north, the relative value of it, and the requirement for more mapping. I agree, but it is not the only issue around mining and mining development. Right now in the Northwest Territories I think we have five or six active properties that could be enhanced and brought to production. They are all in areas where there is reasonable road access and a potential. They're in the developed areas. The opportunities to develop them are tied to a lot more other issues, including personnel, transportation, and energy costs. There is a whole medley of issues that we have to deal with in that regard.

What you're really talking about is future exploration. We have the potential in the Northwest Territories for quite a bit more mining activity in the near future. Don't you agree?

• (1150)

Dr. David Boerner: Yes, I do.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Okay.

With regard to diamonds, we have three mines open now. We've got a mine coming up to open in northern Ontario. We've got a mine in Saskatchewan that is supposedly going to come on stream soon.

In previous years we talked about a national diamond strategy. The value of the diamonds mined in the Northwest Territories is \$2 billion. When they come to the point of retail sale, they are closer to \$20 billion. The value is magnified ten times.

Is there any sense within the department that we should be working toward a national diamond strategy to extract more value out of this resource? Quite obviously, Canada is going to be a big part of the world supply over the next decades. Has that subject come back to the table?

Dr. David Boerner: That's an area that is in another group inside NRCan, and I wouldn't be able to speak on it.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Could you get an answer for me on that, then, from your other group? It is certainly something that merits being pursued for the whole of the country.

Dr. David Boerner: Okay.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Ms. Roy, you were talking about northern air transport.

One issue that has come up has to do with your new regulations on the length of runways, the size of planes, and the number of passengers that can be put on those planes. This is a very serious matter for many of the northern communities.

We have situations in our communities in the Sahtu and in other areas of the north such that the existing carriers are not going to be able to fill their planes if your regulations come into place in the next year, which I understand they will. I want to raise that concern with you. Right now a real concern for northerners is to find some economical way of delivering people into those communities until these runways are lengthened.

I do not know if you want to comment on that.

Mrs. Guylaine Roy: That is in the area of the safety and security group at Transport Canada, so I could raise the issue with my colleagues in safety and security. It is not an area I am responsible for, so I could not elaborate on it, but I could certainly bring your comments back to my colleagues in safety and security.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: You're doing a northern transportation assessment. Could you describe that in a little more detail?

Mrs. Guylaine Roy: Thank you for the question.

We have decided to do such an assessment to be able to see, over a period of 20 years, in light of economic development, what the transportation requirements could be. We have issued a request for proposal for a consultant to do such an assessment, and we've asked the three territories to sit down with us on the steering committee to oversee this assessment.

In the context of the northern strategy in terms of transportation, we know what exists, but we want to look into the future and see, over the next 20 years, potentially what economic development could occur and what the transportation requirements would be. That's the idea of looking forward a bit.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Is there a timeframe on it?

Mrs. Guylaine Roy: We hope to have a contract in place very soon and maybe next year have the results of this assessment.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: On another topic, you mentioned NORDREG. The Prime Minister announced 15 or 16 months ago that he was going to go ahead with the mandatory registration under NORDREG. What's the holdup?

Mr. Donald Roussel: We have mentioned that it will be ready for shipping season 2010. We expect to be able to publish it in the *Gazette*, probably before the end of the year. So it's coming. There's no holdup, but we have to consult with the stakeholders, of course, and make sure they understand the details.

It's on track.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Mr. Sarantakis, you mentioned the stimulus funding. If that has completely been put out, you should have a dollar figure on all the stimulus money for the territories.

• (1155)

Mr. Taki Sarantakis: The stimulus money essentially is roughly \$4 million for the Yukon, \$5 million for the Northwest Territories, and \$4 million for Nunavut. This was a per capita allocation, so this is what the three territories would receive notionally under that program.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: That's because, of course, the territories were not in a position to apply for additional stimulus money under the program and were limited to this particular amount of money.

Mr. Taki Sarantakis: I believe this was in the budget, but I'm not entirely sure. The way the program was designed, each province would receive a notional amount of its per capita allocation, and then to the extent that provinces and territories accessed that, it would be available to them, but if they didn't, it would be used for other purposes. All three territories have essentially accessed their funding.

The Chair: We are a little bit over there, but thank you very much, Mr. Bevington.

We'll now go to Mr. Duncan, for seven minutes, for the last questions in our first round.

Mr. John Duncan (Vancouver Island North, CPC): I thank the witnesses.

The north is a big subject, as you know. I was interested in the geo-mapping presentation, because I took the geo-mapping policy resolution to the party convention in Montreal in 2005. That became a government initiative. Now I see you've actually started the process, and I think it's all good news.

My question related to that is kind of technical. We have the radar satellite. I'm curious as to whether that is something that's useful in the geo-mapping exercise. I'm also curious about how Radarsat works in terms of coordination with the Dash-7 flights, or whether they're coordinated at all, and where mission control is for Radarsat. I think it's a vital initiative for the nation. I know it has larger implications than just the north, but my question is specific to the north.

I'm asking the question to both departments.

Dr. David Boerner: I can start on the geoscience part.

Geoscience is really a forensic detective story. There are certain events in the earth's history that have concentrated energy and minerals, and our job is really to try to find the evidence that points to those events, so we integrate every piece of data we can possibly get. In general, it's extremely difficult to get enough information to solve the problem. A thing like Radarsat is an invaluable piece that we use as part of the basic integration of data at the very early stages, because it covers the whole territory. So it's an absolutely integral piece to our thinking. It doesn't on its own solve the problem, but it is certainly used.

For the rest of the question, I'll turn to my colleagues, I think.

Mr. Donald Roussel: Thank you.

When dealing with mission control, I actually don't know where it is. But we still get the information. Probably the Department of National Defence or other people can give you the information you require.

You asked how Radarsat works with our airplanes, the Dash-7 and the two Dash-8s we operate. When the satellite goes around the earth every 19 minutes, it scans the sea areas. It's good for all three seas: the Atlantic, the Pacific, and the Arctic. The satellite then conveys that information to the planes, which see if there are vessels around that have not reported, or if they have reported, whether they are creating pollution. Then following that, of course, the mission of the planes is to focus more specifically on the actual ship that is a potential suspect. So that's the way it works, in a nutshell.

Mr. John Duncan: Okay, thank you.

The committee is dealing with or is focused on economic development primarily. Part and parcel of that in the north is the whole permitting process. In the Yukon, I think we're nearing completion of the review of the Yukon Environmental and Socio-economic Assessment Act, the YESAA legislation. That's a Yukon-federal initiative, but I'm wondering how much involvement the two departments had in that review process.

Perhaps that's an unfair question.

● (1200)

Mrs. Guylaine Roy: Are you indicating that the Yukon is reviewing its own legislation in terms of environmental assessments, and you want to know how we've worked with them? Is that the question?

Mr. John Duncan: Yes, on YESAA.

Mrs. Guylaine Roy: I don't have a specific answer on the Yukon example, but what I can say about environmental assessments is that I'm sure you're very aware of our streamlining of the process in the context of the infrastructure investments. In light of the economic downturn and the stimulus funding, there were steps taken by the government to streamline the environmental assessment process. So that's what I can say about the federal government's involvement.

If you want, I can find out more about the Yukon process and how we work with them. I don't have an answer right now.

Mr. John Duncan: Okay, thank you.

What we've done with the Arctic waters in terms of extending our legislated jurisdiction and NORDREG reporting is all very significant. I don't think it's well known or understood by the public. We have international conventions that deal with all of this. The government has indicated that we're planning on signing international conventions that will allow us to hold ships accountable for polluting our waters. I'm wondering if you can perhaps describe those conventions, what they are and how they would help in that regard.

Mrs. Guylaine Roy: I think you're referring to the conventions under the Marine Liability Act.

Some amendments have been made to the Marine Liability Act. The bill was passed by Parliament in June. The amendments include the legislative framework for two international conventions related to marine pollution.

There are two conventions that we are supporting. They've been ratified and they're going to come into force in January. One is a new international convention that was agreed to at the International Maritime Organization. It deals with bunker oil spills. What it does is impose compulsory liability or responsibility related to bunker fuel spills. Bunker fuel is what helps propel vessels; it's your gasoline in the vessel, in a way. The convention we have ratified will force carriage of insurance.

The other convention is about oil spills from a tanker that carries oil as a cargo. It is a convention that had been in place for a while, but the international community realized that it was necessary to increase the coverage for potential liability, because as you know, if you have a tanker spill, it could be major. There were a couple of major spills, and it was felt that there was a need to supplement the fund that already existed.

● (1205)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Thank you, Mr. Duncan.

We will now begin our second round with Mr. Bagnell. You have five minutes.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Thank you, Mr. Chair.
[English]

The majority of inhabitants north of 60 are aboriginal people, but also they have the highest unemployment rate. Our topic being economic development in the north, could each of you answer what plans or initiatives you have in place to increase aboriginal employment in the north in the various programs that you have talked to us about this morning?

Dr. David Boerner: I can start.

We've gone to the training societies and the colleges and have tried to outline the types of skills we would hire into the program for ourselves. They've been extremely responsive. We probably have more people than we can actually afford to hire in these things.

One of the problems we have is that the work we do is fairly scientific and technical, so we need people with relatively advanced education. Those people, in the north, are often already employed, so we're finding sometimes that the challenge is in matching the opportunity and the local people. But our efforts are really geared through the organizations that provide training and generate students for us.

I think there's a longer-term issue behind that, though, that we haven't really dealt with.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: And Infrastructure Canada...?

Mr. Taki Sarantakis: As you mentioned, a lot of the population in the north is aboriginal, so many of our projects have aboriginal involvement, some of them through workforces, but some of them even through direct equity shares. So, for instance, in the Mayo B Carmacks-Stewart transmission line project that I mentioned earlier, a first nation is actually an equity partner in the project. It will provide not only direct aboriginal employment but direct economic aboriginal development as well.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Transport Canada...?

Mr. Donald Roussel: Of course Transport Canada favours diversity in its employment. For example, we have in Nunavik an office that is manned by Inuit individuals, in Puvirnituk. Actually, they moved the office to where the actual employee is, to give us a level of flexibility.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Let's talk about Nunavik, then. My understanding is that in the geoscience program there's a very healthy program for the three territories, and then there's 40% or something, I think you said, left for the provinces to fight over. But there are big Inuit populations in Nunavik and Labrador, and I'm assuming they have to fight for the small portion that's left for the provinces, so that they will generally be getting less than the Inuit populations in Nunavut and the Northwest Territories.

Dr. David Boerner: Up to 25% of the money can be shared with the provinces, but it's on a cost-sharing basis, and we haven't required the territories to do cost-sharing, because they have a different fiscal regime. Where we can get a collaboration with the provinces, this is all co-planned and co-delivered with the provinces. We're trying to allocate money on the basis of the geoscience need more than on a per capita basis or through any such mechanism.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Thank you.

Guylaine, will your Transport Canada study look at improving the access to high Arctic communities? Most of them don't have ports or good ship access, so they have to fly things in. Will it be looking at that type of problem?

Mrs. Guylaine Roy: The assessment is for the three territories in the north, so it will look at the whole territory.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Do you think it could look at that problem and see what needs to be done so that these communities could get supplies in by ship, which would be a lot cheaper?

Mrs. Guylaine Roy: Do you mean in the high Arctic?

Again, the assessment is to look at the potential of the economic development in the north over 20 years and what the requirements will be in terms of transportation, and it covers the three territories.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Economic development would include feeding the people, and it's a lot cheaper to send things by ship.

Mrs. Guylaine Roy: Yes, it will also look at the re-supply side of the equation.

• (1210)

The Chair: That's about it, Mr. Bagnell.

All right, ask a very short one.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: Concerning geoscience, could you briefly give the level, over the last six or eight years, of geoscience? Has it been about the same, or going up, or down?

Dr. David Boerner: Until this program it had been declining quite substantially. The Geological Survey really only had one field party out, about three years ago before the program was created. Now we have four major projects and probably about 15 small projects around the north. So there is a substantial increase in the last two years.

The Chair: Very good, Mr. Boerner.

Mr. Bagnell, thank you very much.

Now we'll go to Mr. Payne for five minutes, then to Monsieur Gaudet.

Mr. LaVar Payne (Medicine Hat, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Along with my colleagues, I'd like to also welcome the witnesses and thank them for their attendance here.

I was interested in some of the opening remarks that were made. In particular, I have a question that I am hoping Mr. Boerner and Ms. Roy can answer. It looked as though there are similarities in some of the questions that were raised through your study and what you're doing in your permafrost study.

Are the two departments talking to each other concerning the permafrost study, or are they doing their own individual studies, and are they going to share information so that it can be distributed widely?

Mrs. Guylaine Roy: In my opening remarks I referred to a guide that is developed under the Transportation Association of Canada. The association groups a variety of stakeholders under the association, including the provinces and territories. The guide is being developed under that umbrella. We hope it is going to be helpful in terms of sharing best practices and helping in transportation infrastructure.

Concerning work with Natural Resources Canada, we work on many fronts together. I could not tell you what has been done in the department on permafrost, but I can say that in the assessment we are doing on transportation needs over 20 years, we would certainly want to make sure that whoever is going to be picked up in the assessment has access to Natural Resources Canada, of course, as a source of information for us.

Dr. David Boerner: Just to add to that, it may not be quite right to say we are actually working together, but we are certainly exchanging information. We run a permafrost monitoring network to try to assess the state of permafrost in northern Canada. This information is shared, and it's part of the basis of the report. There is a group of people in the academic, federal-provincial worlds who are all contributing to put this data together, and this is the basis of much of what's going on in this.

Mr. LaVar Payne: I see that as a potential way to save money, instead of doing two separate studies and increasing the expenditures.

The next question I have is particularly around the ACAP funds that you were talking about, Ms. Roy. I couldn't write fast enough for all of the numbers that were issued. Could you revisit those? Then I have a question.

Mrs. Guylaine Roy: Let me go back to my speech here.

Essentially what I said was that since the creation of the program in 1995, the Government of Canada has provided \$22 million for capital improvements to six airports in the Northwest Territories, \$10 million for three airports in the Yukon, and almost \$30.9 million for 14 airports in Nunavut.

If you want, I could easily share with you a list of these airports.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Okay. Then the question I have around that is, in terms of all this funding, how much has been spent in the last five years, and what impact might it have created in terms of economic development in the north?

Mrs. Guylaine Roy: I cannot tell you precisely over the last five years how much was spent, but I think the important thing to flag here is that this program is to help airports in terms of safety requirements, and it is quite a popular program. It helps in terms of maintaining the safety of the facilities.

We surely have the breakdown over the last five years and could provide it to you, but I cannot tell you here how much was spent. Surely it is helpful to maintain the safety of the airports in these regions.

I have to say, the airports capital assistance program is not only a northern program, it's across Canada, of course.

• (1215)

Mr. LaVar Payne: Yes, I understand that, because in my own riding of Medicine Hat we actually got some of that ACAP funding.

Mrs. Guylaine Roy: It's a very popular program.

Mr. LaVar Payne: Yes, and it can help create some employment as well in terms of the safety.

I still have some time, I presume, for a short question.

Mr. Sarantakis, I wonder if you could briefly give me some information in regard to the economic action plan, on some of the programs and how that has helped in the north. I understand that all of the funds have already been allocated.

Mr. Taki Sarantakis: In terms of Canada's economic action plan as it pertains to the north, the largest instrument is actually the acceleration of the provincial and territorial base fund. The government, in budget 2009, offered every province and territory the opportunity to receive payments that they would have received over seven years, in fact over two years. So \$175 million, instead of being presented over seven years, could have actually been accessed over two years. That's the largest single benefit for the north.

Two of the territories have access to that provision and they are now receiving probably \$30 million or \$40 million more, faster than they otherwise would have received it.

The Chair: We'll need to wrap it up there.

Merci, Monsieur Payne.

[Translation]

Welcome to the committee, Mr. Gaudet. You have five minutes.

Mr. Roger Gaudet (Montcalm, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I apologize for coming in late; I was at another committee.

Do you have any programs of study to integrate or encourage aboriginal communities in the territories to work with the Department of Natural Resources or the Department of Transportation, Infrastructure and Communities? We have not been in the far northern Territories for one or two years, but for hundreds of years.

Mr. Boerner said that researchers and scientists are needed. Perhaps the communities there should be empowered to undertake certain studies, as happens elsewhere. I would like to know what all the witnesses think.

It seems that there is no established program, but perhaps it is time for you to about the future. At present, all we think about is getting energy, minerals, diamonds and so on, but we do not think about the communities. If you keep the communities in the dark—excuse the expression, I do not mean to insult anyone—they will stay in the dark.

I find it strange that there is nothing for those communities in the \$33 billion that has been allocated for the next seven years.

Mrs. Guylaine Roy: Mr. Gaudet, the question you are asking is more related to the abilities of people in the North to participate in economic development. Perhaps this question should be asked to the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development. I do not know whether they have any programs along those lines, but it would certainly be a good question to ask them. Indian and Northern Affairs perhaps has programs too, but Transport Canada has no specific programs.

I think that your question deals with the region's economic development and the ability of people in the North to participate in that economic development and work towards it.

Mr. Roger Gaudet: I find it strange that, of the three departments here—Natural Resources, Infrastructure Canada and Transport Canada—none has thought of this. I am thinking of the future; I am not thinking about today. At some point, they need to be integrated and encouraged to work.

I will give my remaining time to Mr. Lévesque.

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: How much time do I have left?

[English]

The Chair: One minute, Monsieur Lévesque.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: You are investing money in airports. You did not mention Nunavut because you are doing it through Quebec. I was struck by the large amount being invested in Nunavut. Is this connected to sovereignty over the Arctic and its coastlines, or is this amount in part or in whole for northern development?

• (1220)

Mrs. Guylaine Roy: Are you talking about the Airport Assistance Program or the \$33-billion Infrastructure Canada Program?

Mr. Yvon Lévesque: In your last answer to Mr. Payne, you talked about airport assistance.

Mrs. Guylaine Roy: I will answer your question. Luckily, I have colleagues here with the information at hand. I would like to take advantage of that to tell you how much money was invested in the three territories over the past five years under the ACAP or the Airports Capital Assistance Program. In the Northwest Territories \$11 million; in the Yukon \$5 million; in Nunavut \$22 million. Thanks to my colleague for giving me that information.

The ACAP was implemented in the 1990s, when a new airport policy was adopted. It sought to provide assistance to local and regional airports for which the federal government had no security responsibility. We wanted remote local and regional airports to have access to funding for their security needs.

You ask whether this program was related to sovereignty. The program is available all across Canada and has no specific connection to sovereignty. It is a program that helps all the airports in the country take care of security.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lévesque and Mr. Gaudet.

[English]

Now we'll go to Mr. Rickford for five minutes. Then we have one more questioner after that, Mr. Bevington; and if there is time, Mr. Bagnell has a very brief question.

So let's go to Mr. Rickford.

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thank you to the witnesses today.

I'm going to shift gears a little bit. I wanted to delve into energy conservation and the environment, but I think, given my time allotment today, I'll just focus on the environment. If we get enough time, I'll ask some questions about the other topic, energy and conservation.

I'm the MP for the great Kenora riding. We have a lot of similarities with the areas the committee has embarked on studying. Obviously, the southern end of my riding is along the Trans-Canada Highway, but we have communities on Hudson Bay and more than 25 first nations communities that are completely isolated, with no road access. So a number of the issues we're talking about here bear great similarity to our own. So I appreciate Dennis's questions earlier, as they resonate in my riding as well.

I want to focus on the impact of some of these infrastructure projects, particularly some of the larger-scale infrastructure projects. I know there can be challenges in any riding, but up north, and certainly in the territories and beyond, we know that the impact can even be greater in terms of the effects on the migration of animals, on hunting routes, and the like.

With respect to infrastructure, Mr. Sarantakis, perhaps you can comment on whether you're doing some work in a minimal-impact way and on whether that's become necessary. And if so, you could point to a few specific examples, and then I'll move the questioning from there.

Thank you.

Mr. Taki Sarantakis: Thank you.

As you know, each of our projects goes through an environmental assessment at either the federal or the provincial level. It's sometimes both, but that's becoming more and more streamlined. So each of those projects is examined that way.

Typically, when most of the projects come forward for application, they have to show how they mitigate the environmental consequences of what they do. And as you know, more and more mitigation will become an increasingly important issue in the future with climate change, and things like that.

Mr. Greg Rickford: May I interrupt you for one second? I get the EAP sense, but I think that in the north, more than ever, one of the things is that on a project-to-project basis the environmental assessment, whether it's good or not, can have an impact on another region, because the tracts of land and water here are vast. Is there any coordinated effort to read in what other projects might be doing? I know there would be limits on that, certainly, but does it occur at all?

• (1225)

Mr. Taki Sarantakis: I'm not sure I understand the last part of your question. Are you asking if projects work together in environmental assessments?

Mr. Greg Rickford: Right. One EAP could pass in one area, but right next door it could perhaps impact unfavourably.

Mr. Taki Sarantakis: Environmental assessments tend to be comprehensive. They tend to look not just at the actual physical work that you're undertaking but also at its effect on the broader environment, so on the whole I would answer that yes, that kind of assessment is done.

Mr. Greg Rickford: With respect to the first nations communities that are involved in or affected by development projects, I believe Mr. Roussel mentioned a consultative process with respect to one specific project. It involved talking with all the stakeholders. My colleague identified this one project as being possibly delayed, but in fact it was not. There was a process. Can both of you talk a little bit about the consultative process, specifically in relation to first nations communities in these regions?

Mr. Taki Sarantakis: Sure. Actually, there is jurisprudence on this matter. Section 35 of Canada's Constitution essentially mandates aboriginal consultation, so for every government-funded infrastructure project that potentially impacts on a first nation, the government is obligated to go forward and actively seek out those first nations for those consultations. The result is that in one way or another, virtually every infrastructure project goes through an aboriginal consultation. It can be a very elaborate and formal process.

Mr. Greg Rickford: Mr. Roussel, do you have anything to add to that?

Mr. Donald Roussel: No, I think Mr. Sarantakis covered it.

Mr. Greg Rickford: How much time do I have, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: We're just about wrapped up. You may have a very short question.

Mr. Greg Rickford: No, that's fine. I was going to go into it.

The Chair: Okay. Now we'll go to Mr. Bevington for five minutes. Go ahead, Mr. Bevington.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: I want to touch on the same issue, because I think it's very valuable. Many northern communities are the same. It used to be represented in the natural resources department through the remote communities program. Is that program still running today?

Dr. David Boerner: I'm not exactly sure which program you're referring to. We have activity about northern communities, but it's in an area that I'm not responsible for.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Perhaps we should bring that forward to this committee, because it actually deals in a consistent fashion with all the communities right across the north in terms of their energy and their isolated nature. Whether you're in Newfoundland or northern Ontario or any other part of northern Canada, there is a similarity between the communities that was very well expressed in Natural Resources Canada. I think we probably need to bring a witness forward to talk about these issues.

I'll come back to the northern transportation assessment. You're going to project forward a transportation strategy for 20 years. If the price of oil gets back up to \$150 a barrel, we're not going to be able to afford to live up there, so we have to have a transportation strategy that actually looks at how we're going to deliver energy, and I just caution you on this. You can design a transportation strategy today that's based on fuel oil for all these northern communities, and 20 years from now it will not allow them to be sustainable. I really would urge that this strategy for northern transportation assessment

be more than simply taking the status quo today and applying it to 20 years from now for where we need to go.

Perhaps you could comment on that.

Mrs. Guylaine Roy: It really is an assessment; it's not a strategy. The reason we thought we should have such an assessment is that, as I mentioned, we know the transportation system that exists right now, but in the context of the northern strategy, we want to look forward.

I take your point. I think it's going to be a challenging task for the consultant we work with. It's looking forward at what the development could be, at what the resupply potentials or challenges are, and seeing the demands in terms of transportation.

• (1230)

Mr. Dennis Bevington: I can give you a couple of examples. There's the potential to ship electricity north from the Manitoba grid into the Keewatin district. There's also the debate over the Bathurst Inlet port road, which could completely change by having transmission lines from hydroelectric facilities into the Slave geological province.

These are a couple of examples of the importance of actually examining where you want the society to be before you make the decisions on transportation infrastructure. That's the kind of challenge that I think, if you're going to do an assessment, you have to stand up to.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bevington.

I think Mr. Bagnell has a short question.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: I just have one short question for the transport and infrastructure people.

A couple of years ago the Prime Minister made a great announcement that he was going to build a port for Iqaluit. I would like to know how that project is coming along.

Mrs. Guylaine Roy: We're looking at each other.

I think the territories are looking at what they will do in Iqaluit concerning their port. To my knowledge, they were looking at studying what they need at the port.

I don't know whether the territories have expressed a view of what type of port they want in Iqaluit. I don't know whether they raised that with Infrastructure Canada.

Mr. Taki Sarantakis: It's not an Infrastructure Canada project. I believe it might be DFO. I can follow up on that for you.

Hon. Larry Bagnell: If you could get back to us through the clerk, that would be great.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bagnell.

Thank you to all of our presenters here. If you would, just hang in for a second. We're going to take a suspension here in a few minutes.

Before we do that, I want to first let members know that in your trip binder for our tours to the north, there will be a section included with respect to some of the projects of Infrastructure Canada in particular.

I would also, for the benefit of our witnesses here today, ask that after the meeting you look at the blues. If there are statements that might compel you to respond on some of the commitments you undertook to get back to us on today, it would be extremely helpful that you review them.

There are a couple of items I want to add to that list.

This is for Mr. Boerner. In your deck you mentioned that 65 communities were visited in 2009. If you could give some examples of those communities, that would be great.

Also, Mr. Sarantakis referred to the Top of the World Highway. Is it in Yukon?

Okay. That was just to be sure.

Going back to Mr. Boerner, you mentioned four projects for engaging northern economic development specifically. I wonder

whether you could get back to us concerning those. If you have a question, we can clarify it when we're on our very short break here.

Finally, I want to let members know—you have received information on this in advance—that some of the representatives are still in the gallery with us today from the Aboriginal People's Circle of the Public Service Alliance of Canada. They were on the Hill today, and I think some were in the gallery with us.

What we're going to do is take a five-minute recess. We're going to suspend the meeting for five minutes. After that, we must go in camera. So if you wish to, you can say hello to some of the folks who are here today as well as say goodbye to our presenters.

We really appreciate your input and your responses. The testimony will be very helpful in our report.

We will suspend for five minutes.

[Proceedings continue in camera]

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