

Partnership with Williams Lake Indian Band to four lane Highway 97

by Agness Jack, NSTC Communications

[NSTQ Release - June 25, 2015] The Williams Lake Band hosted an historical event at the Coyote Golf Course today in order for the Band to make a joint announcement with Minister Todd Stone, of the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure.

A press release from the BC government stated ‘*A tentative agreement between the BC government and the Williams Lake Indian Band to move forward on four-laning Highway 97 through the Williams Lake Indian Band’s Indian Reserve #1, from the reserve boundary near 150 Mile to Lexington Road.*’

Chief Ann Louie and her Council, band staff and a few members attended the announcement. I had the honour of doing an opening prayer.

Cora Lee Oakes, MLA for Cariboo North MCD the event. Chief Ann Louie welcomed everyone in Secwepemetsin then acknowledged the dignitaries Minister Stone, MLA’s Donna Barnett and Cora Lee Oakes, Jennifer Fraser, Williams Lake Mayor Walt Cobb and CRD Director Joan Sorley.

Chief Louie also acknowledged the Williams Lake Indian Band’s Development team who helped to negotiate this project, Kirk Dressler, Councillor Willie Sellars, Rhonda Leech, Celine Lee, Byron Louie, and Wenona Gordon.

Chief Louie stated, “This is the beginning of new things for our community members. I would like to acknowledge Lake Excavating, in particular Trevor and Ingo Seibert, who worked with us in creating a partnership with the Williams Lake Indian Band. They were also instrumental in working with us on Mount Polley.”

She closed stating, “I would like to thank Minister Todd Stone for staying with us in negotiations which were difficult at times.”

MLA Donna Barnett stated, “I would like to congratulate Chief Ann Louie and her community. I was the eye on this project, whenever I got an e-mail from Kirk Dressler, I would contact my colleagues. When we work together with First Nations we improve the quality of life for all of us. Congratulations Chief Louie and Minister Stone.”

This project is an important part of Phse 2 of the \$200-million Cariboo Connector Program and will add over six kilometres of four-laning, as well as turning and deceleration lanes. Construction will also begin on a new on-reserve frontage road that will link the Band’s Coyote Rock Development Project, and other developments lands, with new Highway 97 construction.

The tender for the new \$47-million project is anticipated for this fall with completion scheduled for late fall 2017. In his speech Minister Stone mentioned a possible 2016 completion. The next phse for the agreement to be approved by the Williams Lake Indi-



Chief Ann Louie with Lake Excavating team, Joe Hooker, Ingo Seibert and Trevor Seibert



Chief Ann Louie, Minister of Transportation & Infrastructure Todd Stone, Cariboo Chilcotin MLA Donna Barnett, WIIB Band Councillor Willie Sellars, Cariboo North MLA Cora Lee Oakes and Jennifer Fraser.

an Band community before being finalized.

Minister Stone said, “I count this area, the Cariboo, as being one of the most scenic spots”. In his presentation Minister Stone emphasized that ‘safety for travellers on BC highways’ is an important factor in the road work such as this going forward.

In the press release he is quoted as saying, “*We’re very pleased that we’ve reached this crucial step with Williams Lake Indian Band on a tentative agreement to gain this four-laning project. As a vital link to northern parts of the province, work to four-lane Highway 97 through the Cariboo Connector Program is a key component of our BC on the Move 10-year transportation plan.*”

Chief Louie is quoted in the release, “Not only will this result in enhanced traffic movement and improved safety on this section of the highway, it will also facilitate economic development and provide much needed opportunity for our members and other residents of the Cariboo.”

A development plan will be available for viewing of this section of the highway on the BC government website in the near future.

[text in Italics is from the Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure news release.]