



August 18, 2020

Concerned Citizens of Old Fort
PO Box 810, 1981 Alaska Avenue
Dawson Creek BC V1G 4H8

Dear Residents of Old Fort:

Thank you for the list of questions and concerns, captured after the meeting between residents and various government representatives on June 29, 2020, regarding the Old Fort landslide. As Minister of Public Safety and Solicitor General, and the Minister responsible for Emergency Management BC (EMBC), I have coordinated this cross-ministry response.

Let me start by acknowledging the extremely difficult situation facing the residents of Old Fort. I commend you for your patience and resilience as you await clarity on the landslide and the single road connection into your community.

It is known that the unconsolidated materials overlying the shale bedrock of the Peace River region are prone to movement and landslides. Typically, the surrounding landmass lends itself to slow-moving slippages and not dramatic, sudden releases of material that present direct risk to community safety. Some properties in the Old Fort community received subdivision approval in the early 1980s subject to covenants restricting activities that redirected water, added load to slopes above other properties, and in some cases, further development without geotechnical assessment. At the time, the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MoTI) experts assessed the landslide risk as manageable and believed that safe and reliable access to Old Fort could be maintained.

Unfortunately, a landslide initiated on September 30, 2018 impacted the Old Fort Road. Once the slide movement slowed to a safe rate, MoTI was able to rebuild the road to provide access to the community.

The 2020 freshet, followed by a significant rain event on June 14, led to reactivation of the slide which ultimately moved 100 metres of the Old Fort Road 300 metres downslope. Again, once the slide movement rate slowed to a safe rate, MoTI rebuilt the road and restored access for residents of Old Fort.

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In addition to rebuilding the road, an examination of options has commenced, which I know is something residents have been looking for. MoTI has identified a project manager to analyze options for an alternate route into Old Fort.

A multi-ministry committee has been established that will review the following:

- Outcome of the Options Analysis for an alternate route or additional emergency route into Old Fort as identified by the MoTI project;
- Slope stabilization options (if viable);
- A cost-benefit analysis of establishing a new permanent route versus other options; and
- Other solutions or considerations that may be identified.

The region's landscape, the general topography and overall landslide risk presents significant challenges. Slope stabilization will be expensive, require on-going maintenance, and would likely compromise infrastructure and property at the top of the slope. The process to fully consider all factors and determine a way ahead, including consultation with residents, will take some time.

In the interim, MoTI will continue to maintain the current road configuration with the support of real-time GPS sensor monitoring. EMBC has provided additional funding to the Peace River Regional District (PRRD) to conduct a wider geotechnical study that will complement the work of MoTI to ensure that residents remain safe in their homes and reveal any changes from previous studies.

As the slide remains active, it is important that residents PRRD develop contingency plans to be able to evacuate or remain in place for up to two weeks. Since domestic services such as potable water, garbage, and sewage are not provided by local government, residents are encouraged to collaborate on reasonable measures to maintain these services should the road be closed. While provincial responsibilities are limited to emergency services essential for the sustainment of life, we can all work together to identify reasonable measures to be implemented should the road be compromised in the future.

Old Fort residents have raised a number of questions and concerns to the attention of the Province. I will do my best to answer:

- Questions have been raised regarding compensation. We fully appreciate that the situation in Old Fort has likely impacted property values, at least in the short term. There are no provincial programs that compensate for property devaluation. There are many places in the province where property values have been affected by acts of nature, and the Province is not prepared to enter into compensation where the cause has not been determined.

- There are a number of concerns regarding how the incident has been managed. While we appreciate that the emergency situation in Old Fort directly relates to the closure of the provincial road, the *Emergency Program Act* Section 6 states: “a local authority is at all times responsible for the direction and control of the local authority’s emergency response.” MoTI has accepted full responsibility for the roadway, but it remains the responsibility of the PRRD to develop emergency plans and to communicate directly with residents. This has proven to be an effective model province-wide. EMBC provides support to local government in managing emergencies by coordinating provincial actions and providing reimbursement for eligible response costs.
- In support of the PRRD, EMBC is; funding additional staff hires to augment incident management, funding for geotechnical studies, providing Emergency Support Services for evacuated residents, and funding water taxi and emergency services for residents that elect to remain in their homes. This level of support exceeds that provided in similar situations elsewhere in the province. EMBC has done their utmost to modify policy to meet the desires of residents to remain in their homes rather than evacuate. Specific questions regarding local government actions should be directed to the PRRD.
- A number of residents have expressed concerns over the change of drainage that affects their properties. Changes in drainage can be expected following a landslide, and it may take considerable time for the final pattern to emerge. MoTI’s responsibility is to facilitate the flow of water to follow the natural drainage patterns and contours of the slope. MoTI will continue to assess the drainage and work to limit impacts to downstream properties, but ultimately, all property owners have the responsibility to facilitate the flow of water across their properties as well.
- MoTI and their maintenance contractor were able to keep the road open for a full day after the slide began moving to allow for water top up, sewer pumping, etc. The alternate roadway was established with urgency as soon as the slide slowed to a rate that it was safe to move construction crews onto the slide. The route selection and construction was done under the guidance of professional engineers, and a temporary road was open to single lane alternating traffic within two days of construction beginning.
- Since the alternate roadway was established in 2018, movement of the slope has been continually monitored by MoTI and PRRD’s geotechnical professionals through a series of 10 real-time GPS sensors, frequent visual inspections, and periodic assessment by Light Detection and Ranging LiDAR technology. There were no observable indicators of slippage in advance of June 18, 2020. The predominant factor leading to slope failure in this region relates to excessive groundwater which compromises the cohesiveness of the subsurface layers. These conditions are not readily evident from surface monitoring, and it is difficult to monitor groundwater conditions over a wide area.

- MoTI confirms that the sensors did register slope movement on the night of June 18, 2020, which coincided with the visual report of cracks forming on the roadway. The monitoring system remains the best method to monitor road safety.
- In light of the recent slide reactivation, MoTI has dedicated a project team to review and analyze access options for Old Fort. The team will work through the summer to analyze options, do cost benefit analyses, and make recommendations to decision makers.
- Geotechnical studies and recent slide activity have confirmed the assessment that the nature of slides in this area is likely to be slow-moving and doesn't present a direct risk to occupied properties from a sudden, catastrophic slippage. There is no indication from previous studies or recent analysis that has identified a risk to homes. Nevertheless, additional funding has been provided to assess other slopes to ensure that residents remain safe from direct landslide impact.
- On the issue of the investigation regarding any role that the Deasan Holdings operations may have played in the landslide of September 30, 2018, the Ministry of Energy Mines and Petroleum Resources (EMPR) have noted that the Chief Inspector is taking the time necessary to adequately consider all relevant information. The report will be made publicly available on completion and following the required privacy assessment pursuant to *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*. The report is in its final stages but is not yet complete.
- EMPR releases information related to any immediate risks without waiting for an investigation to reach completion. In the case of the Deasan investigation, no such information has been found.
- Deasan Mine remains under a Stop Work Order and there is no potential for mining activity to impact slope stability and no risk to worker health and safety while that Order remains in place. The mining company will not be allowed to resume operation until they have demonstrated that it is safe to do so.
- BC Hydro has indicated that they will provide a response to the questions regarding site C by separate correspondence.

Lastly, questions regarding the possible impact of the City of Fort St. John's sewage lagoons on slope stability, tax deferrals, emergency services, transportation arrangements, and the status of contracted engineering reports are best responded to by the PRRD for comment.

I appreciate being made aware of your concerns and your ongoing management of this situation.

Sincerely,



Mike Farnworth
Minister of Public Safety
and Solicitor General

pc: The Honourable John Horgan
 The Honourable Claire Trevena
 The Honourable Doug Donaldson
 The Honourable George Heyman
 The Honourable Bruce Ralston
 Fazil Mihar, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Energy, Mines, and Petroleum Resources
 Bob Zimmer, MP, Prince George—Peace River—Northern Rockies
 Andrew Wilkinson, QC, MLA, Vancouver-Quilchena
 Dan Davies, MLA, Peace River North
 Her Worship Lori Ackerman, Mayor, City of Fort St. John
 Brad Sperling, Chair, Peace River Regional District
 Shawn Dahlen, CAO, Peace River Regional District
 Dave Conway, Community Relations Manager, BC Hydro