
NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation
Huu-ay-aht First Nations

Province partners with Huu-ay-aht First Nations to improve Bamfield Road safety

VICTORIA – Huu-ay-aht First Nations and the Province have partnered to make vital safety improvements to Bamfield Road.

The 76-kilometre stretch of unpaved industrial road on the west coast of Vancouver Island has been the site of numerous serious accidents over the years, claiming the lives of Huu-ay-aht members, as well as two University of Victoria students in a 2019 bus crash.

“Upgrading the Bamfield Road has been a top priority for our Nation for many years, and we are pleased by today’s announcement,” said Huu-ay-aht Chief Councillor Robert J. Dennis Sr. “By working in a respectful way with Huu-ay-aht to make upgrades to the Bamfield Road a reality, we see that the Province is ready to work on true reconciliation with First Nations and is honouring the importance of the safety of our community. We want to thank Premier John Horgan and Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation Scott Fraser for the commitment they made to this project. The upgrades they announced today will make Bamfield and Anacla safer places to live, and it will open up economic opportunities for our communities to prosper together in the future.”

Funding for safety upgrades and hard surfacing the road with a seal coat will help make the road safer and more reliable. The project also supports the Huu-ay-aht vision for economic growth and diversification in the regional economy, supporting job creation for local businesses in forestry, tourism and construction.

“We have worked in partnership with Huu-ay-aht First Nations on a solution that will make the trip to and from Bamfield and Anacla a safer one, helping to avoid heartbreaking tragedies and bringing peace of mind to everyone who travels the road,” said Premier John Horgan. “This project is part of our ongoing work to support a robust recovery from COVID-19 and a more secure future for British Columbians – built around people and strong, resilient communities.”

After the fatal bus crash in September 2019, the Province struck a working group with Huu-ay-aht First Nations and local forest companies to explore safety and reliability upgrades and develop options for consideration.

“Huu-ay-aht First Nations have been advocating for these road improvements for many years. Their partnership is central to this important project, which will support reconciliation goals, our treaty relationship, and most importantly, safer travel for Huu-ay-aht members to and from their community,” said Scott Fraser, Minister of Indigenous Relations and Reconciliation and MLA for Mid Island-Pacific Rim. “This project is also key to building the critical infrastructure the communities in this region need to thrive.”

The road is the main transportation link between Port Alberni and the communities of Bamfield and Anacla for medical, emergency and community access for Huu-ay-aht First Nations members, Bamfield residents, forest companies and their employees, and tourists. It is also the key route to the Bamfield Marine Sciences Centre.

“The Province is honouring our elders and the Nation’s sacred principles of ʔiisaak (Utmost Respect), ʔuuʔaʔuk (Taking Care of...), and Hišuk ma cawak (Everything is One) with today’s announcement. Our Nation was forever changed when Tayii ʔawii Art Peters, my grandfather, was killed on the Bamfield Road,” said Tayii ʔawii ʔiišin (Derek Peters) of Huu-ay-aht First Nations. “It is tragic that it took the loss of so many to highlight the need for chip-sealing the road, but we honour the ones we have lost by doing everything we can to prevent the loss of life along this vital link in the future.”

The total cost of the three-year upgrade project is estimated at \$30.7 million. The Province will contribute \$25.7 million to the project. Huu-ay-aht will contribute the additional \$5 million for the project and manage the project with technical support from the consulting firm Urban Systems. Huu-ay-aht will also provide in-kind resources, including gravel from gravel pits on their treaty lands, which are expected to result in significant cost savings for the project.

In addition to safety improvements from the seal-coat hard surfacing, due to its smoother surface, the seal-coat will cut greenhouse-gas emissions by decreasing travel times. Better travel times are also expected to reduce costs for the region's forestry sector by about \$16 million over five years, by lowering fuel consumption and reducing wear and damage to vehicles. The road will also have improved drainage through new and upgraded culverts, which will greatly reduce the likelihood of closures due to flooding. Improved drainage will also mean better road reliability for residents, industry and tourists during the rainy season.

Quotes:

Claire Trevena, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure –

“We are pleased to see this collaborative approach will lead to upgrades as well as a hard surface of the road with a seal coat. This project will increase safety along Bamfield Road.”

Lisa Beare, Minister of Tourism, Arts and Culture –

“Development of roads like the one to Bamfield add to our tourism infrastructure, encourage people to explore lesser-known areas in our province and disperse tourism dollars to more rural and remote communities. All of these factors contribute to the recovery of tourism in these areas and mean jobs for people in both the near and long-term.”

John Jack, chair of Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District –

“This investment will produce generational benefits for the entire region, its neighbours, and the Island as a whole. A road improvement like this will increase the health, economic and social prospects of both the Huu-ay-aht lands and Bamfield area. Connecting communities with transportation infrastructure will not only unlock the value in the lands, but also the potential in the people on the land even more.”

Josie Osborne, vice-chair of Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District and mayor of Tofino –

“The safety and reliability of road access is always a top concern for rural and remote communities, so today’s announcement represents a very significant investment for residents and workers in Anacla and Bamfield. Living on the West Coast almost 50 years after the road from Port Alberni to Tofino and Ucluelet was paved, I know that the benefits of this investment will be felt for generations to come.”

Bob Beckett, Bamfield director of Alberni-Clayoquot Regional District –

“While today’s announcement is wonderful news for the entire Alberni-Clayoquot Region, on the eve of the first anniversary of the UVic bus crash last September, I must also acknowledge that nothing we have done or can do will erase the loss and pain that these families will live with the rest of their lives. I acknowledge and thank Chief Robert Dennis and the entire Huu-ay-aht Nation for their vision, leadership and investment, those from Bamfield and the regional district for their years of advocacy for improvements to the road, and of course Premier Horgan and Minister Fraser for their support and ultimately approval for the project.”

Sharie Minions, mayor of Port Alberni –

“The lives lost on this road over the years have highlighted the need for this work time and time again. It’s important to remember that each tragedy has represented the loss of a family member — a child, or a sibling, a mother or a father. Today, we would like to thank Premier Horgan and the provincial government for remembering with us those who have been lost, and investing in this critical infrastructure to keep us all safe moving forward.”

Jamie Cassels, president of University of Victoria –

“The University of Victoria is incredibly grateful to the Huu-ay-aht First Nations and B.C. Government for their partnership and investment to improve this essential travel corridor that is used by thousands of students from universities and other institutions to visit the Bamfield Marine Sciences Centre, with its world-class research and learning opportunities. The families of students who were on the bus in last year’s tragic accident were clear in their desire for the road to be improved. All of us at the university welcome the safety and quality improvements to the road as we all work together so no one has to endure the loss of a loved one while travelling through this beautiful region.”

Dr. Sean Rogers, director of Bamfield Marine Sciences Centre –

“We were overjoyed to hear from Minister Fraser that the Province is partnering with Huu-ay-aht First Nations in support of our calls for safety upgrades to the Anacla/Bamfield road. This project will be transformational for the Bamfield Marine Sciences Centre and ensure that generations have the opportunity for safe passage to experience life-changing exploration and discovery in this beautiful environment.”

Jeff Zweig, CEO of Mosaic Forest Management –

“As owner of portions of the road, we strongly support this investment to help manage the increasing traffic and make travel safer for all users. Congratulations to Huu-ay-aht on its leadership in working with the Province and landowners to develop solutions.”

Shannon Janzen, vice-president, Partnerships & Sustainability and Chief Forester and TFL 44 Board Member, Western Forest Products –

“Today’s announcement is a positive step forward towards enhancing this important transportation link for local communities and the Alberni Valley more broadly. Given the need for Huu-ay-aht citizens and residents of Bamfield to use the road, Western has supported communities’ requests to upgrade the road and we look forward to continuing to support our partners, the Huu-ay-aht First Nations, going forward.”

Quick Facts:

- Huu-ay-aht First Nations, located in the Barkley Sound region on the west coast of Vancouver Island, are part of the Maa-nulth First Nations, which reached a treaty agreement with the federal and provincial governments in 2011.
- Since it opened for public use, eight Huu-ay-aht members have lost their lives on the Bamfield Main Road.

Learn More:

- Huu-ay-aht First Nations: <https://huyuayaht.org/>
- Maa-nulth First Nations: <https://www.maanulth.ca/>

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