

**Speaking notes for Meeting with Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers  
Responsible for Transportation and Highway Safety,**

**February 14, 2020 – Lorraine Whitman**

**Check against Delivery**

Weytek, bonjour and good morning. On behalf of the Native Women's Association of Canada, as the President, I am grateful for the opportunity to share our views on issues dealing with the safety of Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse peoples. I would first like to acknowledge that the land we are meeting on is the traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples. We also acknowledge that Toronto is covered by Treaty 13 with the Mississaugas of the Credit.

Since 1974, NWAC has advocated for Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people from many nations. To this day we are without basic, fundamental human rights within a country enjoying a global reputation as a defender of human rights.

Canada's transportation system has been described as the lifeblood of our country that transports our goods and our people within Canada and abroad; however, Canada's transportation system is also a significant contributing factor to the disproportionate issues affecting Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people.

**Issues such as food insecurity** — where Indigenous women and gender-diverse people face barriers accessing affordable food because of the high transportation costs associated with delivering good-quality, affordable food to families living in our northern and remote regions. These costs drive up the price of food to the point where First Nations, Métis and Inuit people have been forced to access a diet of prepackaged, unhealthy foods, which in turn are responsible for the rising rates of obesity and chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease.

According to Statistics Canada, 21% of Aboriginal women aged 15 and older lived in households that experienced food insecurity compared to 8% of the non-aboriginal female population.

**Issues such as inaccessible health care** — where Indigenous women and gender-diverse people are forced to travel long hours to seek medical attention on public transit, if public transit is even available. Let me remind you today that the bus

company Greyhound announced on July 10, 2018, its intent to cut all services to northern Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia. In many of these places, especially in the more remote communities, this bus service was the only means of accessible city-to-city transportation. The service's importance to local residents — especially to Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people living in rural and remote communities — cannot be understated.

**Issues related to safety and security** — where hitchhiking or walking unsafe highways is often a necessity, but a dangerous one. Being forced to stay in a motel after missing a bus home is dangerous. And we know that human traffickers target and hunt vulnerable Indigenous women and teenage girls on our highways, at bus depots and airports.

**Access to affordable transportation is critical...**

- **if we are to stop violence against Indigenous women and girls,**
- **if we are to stop putting Indigenous women girls and gender diverse people in dangerous situations; and**
- **if we are going to assist Indigenous women and girls to escape from domestic violence.**

Reducing our transportation options — when those options are already limited — only adds to what continues to be a major safety crisis for Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people.

Let me remind all of you here today that Indigenous women and girls are over-represented as victims of human trafficking in Canada.

PAUSE

As we get set to explore today's important topic around transportation safety, security and the economic opportunities that result from improved infrastructure, I would like to step back and remind everyone here today about the importance paid by the National Inquiry Into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls to the issue of safe and secure transportation networks and services.

Recommendation 4.8 in the Inquiry's final report called on federal and provincial/territorial governments to plan and fund "safe and affordable transit and transportation services and infrastructure" in remote and rural communities. These services must be safe, sufficient and readily available in towns and cities across this country. They must also take into account the lack of commercial

transportation available in many of these communities, with particular attention to fly-in, northern and remote communities.

Safe and affordable transportation recommendations go back more than a decade in B.C., home to the Highway of Tears, an unsafe stretch of Highway 16 where approximately 40 women have been murdered or gone missing since 1969.

**Most of whom were Indigenous.**

A coalition of Indigenous groups responded by releasing a list of recommendations in 2006, including a proposal for a shuttle-bus service that would connect every community along the highway and “pick up every young woman they encounter walking or hitchhiking” on the way. Today the Highway of Tears is still as unsafe as it ever was for Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people.

Travelling long distances to attend school, including post-secondary institutions; to access health care and social services; even to buy groceries and goods — these are a daily reality for Indigenous people, a fact of life that particularly places Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people in danger, **Every-Single- Day.**

PAUSE

Unsafe transportation in and out of communities creates more vulnerability for Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people.

This is a key concern for NWAC and the Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people we represent and support. We must make progress here today- there is too much at stake not to.

**We have to do more!**

**We have to do better!**

**We have to make a difference** so our women, girls and gender diverse people know we care and will do everything in our power to keep them safe.

PAUSE

The three important priorities that we will be focusing on today —

transportation safety and security;

transportation infrastructure and services; and

economic development and participation in projects.

These projects are very much interconnected, and our discussions must, out of necessity, recognize how these priorities intersect. For example, transportation safety and security must include a discussion about infrastructure and services. Infrastructure projects create employment opportunities that must involve Indigenous communities especially Indigenous women and gender diverse people.

PAUSE

In summary, prioritizing the safety of Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people is crucial. Transportation intersects with accessibility, education, poverty, income and employment.

No matter how rural or remote, Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people have the right to the same access to transportation as the rest of Canada — just think Indigenous women, who make up 2% of Canada's population but represent more than 50% of human trafficking victims.

Safe, secure and reliable transportation is not an option it is a necessity!

**It's time for new ideas.**

**It's time for change.**

**It's time for Canada to rethink its transportation system.**

We must consider the daily needs and requirements of Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people who live in both urban and rural/remote communities.

The Native Women's Association of Canada is a grassroots national organization with the ability to engage with Indigenous women, girls and gender diverse people across this country. Our organization has the ability and know-how to apply an Indigenous-led, culturally relevant, gender-based analysis on any and all solutions that we develop to address the transportation crisis for Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people.

It's time to engage with us fully, in order to achieve real progress in the implementation of services that not only address our transportation infrastructure gaps — but also the safety and security concerns that Indigenous women, girls and gender-diverse people face **each and every day.**

Wela'lin!

Thank you!

Merci!