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December 09, 2021

Tamara Rudge
Email: tamara.rudge@tc.gc.ca Director
General
Surface Transportation Policy

RE: Fort Frances - International Bridge

On behalf of the Town of Fort Frances, please accept this letter as the official comments on the proposed change of ownership or operation of the Canadian side of the International Bridge between Fort Frances, Ontario and International Falls, Minnesota. Thank you for providing us with the extension in submitting our comments.

The international bridge is a lifeline for Northwestern Ontario. Businesses, families, and tourism operations from Kenora, to Sioux Lookout, to Atikokan, and every municipality and First Nation in between and beyond are dependent on this vital transportation link.

The Town has significant concern that the International Bridge is being considered for sale to other private investors and in the subsequent possibility of the bridge not being maintained and/or eventual closure if a maintenance or serious rehabilitation need arises. This seems likely, in light of the most recent information available to us on the condition of the bridge and the timeline for reinvestment in this asset. The Town had already expressed its concern at the regular Council Meeting on June 14, 2021. The resolution no. 707 regarding the **International Bridge - Ownership and Access Concerns** is enclosed.

In view of the correspondence from Transport Canada and discussions with government officials, it seems self-evident at this point that there is a limited prospect that the bridge will transition to public ownership, particularly, with the American half of the bridge already having changed hands.

As per the letter from Transport Canada dated November 16, 2021, the Town understands that the *International Bridges and Tunnels Act* (IBTA) ensures the proper consideration of our concerns and comments regarding the approval of the sale of the international bridge. Also, the Government of Canada will make the new owner(s) of International Bridge responsible for the safety (inspection and maintenance) and operation of the bridge under the *International Bridges and Tunnels Regulations* (IBTR).

The bridge could be a challenging asset for new owner(s) and will require ongoing investment to keep it in reasonable shape in the longer run. Due to its economic significance, the Town requests Transport Canada to require new owner(s) to create and maintain an asset management plan and fund for efficient maintenance of this bridge. If the bridge changes hands in the future, it ensures that the fund will be transferred to the next owner(s).

We also emphasize that the tolls for use of the bridge are among the highest in the country, and this serves as a drag on our economic opportunities as a region. We would ask that Transport Canada fix a ceiling on the price structure of tolls, require favourable toll rates for local residents and Indigenous communities, and

require a plan to lower tolls over the long-term. Any increase in the toll prices should require public consultation over a reasonable notice period and be subject to Transport Canada approval. We are concerned about the continued placement of the toll booth on the U.S. side of the bridge, which may be an attempt to evade Canadian jurisdiction under both provincial and federal legislation.

Any closure or restriction on this bridge or toll hike would economically devastating for our community and region. While we are optimistic that the new ownership group – having local roots – will be mindful of these concerns, we think it is critical that the public interest in this asset be codified in the license or approval document for this transaction. Should the bridge become available for acquisition in the future, we strongly encourage the federal government to work with its counterparts to acquire it and make it a public asset and toll-free crossing.

We look forward to working with Transport Canada and the new owner(s) to keep one of our most important economic assets viable. However, we would like Transport Canada to address our concerns regarding asset management and tolls.

Please let us know if you have any questions or require clarification.

Sincerely,



Faisal Anwar,
Chief Administrative Officer, Town of Fort Frances

cc: Hon. Omar Alghabra, Minister of Transport (Canada) - omar.alghabra@parl.gc.ca;

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Hon. Caroline Mulroney, Minister of Transportation (Ontario) - caroline.mulroney@pc.ola.org;

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