

**MUNICIPAL DISTRICT OF MACKENZIE NO. 23  
SPECIAL COUNCIL MEETING**

**May 17, 1995**

**PRESENT:**

Bill Neufeld, Reeve  
Edward Froese  
Betty Bateman  
Ernest Dyck  
Jake L. Peters  
Pauline Flett  
Reuben Derksen

**ALSO PRESENT:**

Gary Mayhew, Manager of Public Works  
Joanne Mitchell, Assistant Manager, Recording Secretary  
Terry Hood, Alberta Transportation  
Keith Helberg, Alberta Transportation  
John W. Driedger  
George Friesen, La Crete Logging  
Gary Peterson, Town of High Level  
Bob Walter, Town of High Level

**ABSENT:**

Arly Roe  
Jay Lanti  
Walter Sarapuk

Minutes of the special meeting of the Council for the Municipal District of Mackenzie No. 23 held on Wednesday, May 17, 1995 in the Council Chambers, Provincial Building, High Level.

**CALL TO ORDER**

1. Reeve, Bill Neufeld, called the meeting to order at 1:17 p.m.

**TOMPKINS LANDING  
FERRY**

Bill Neufeld welcomed the delegation from Alberta Transportation, John W. Driedger and George Friesen to the meeting and invited Keith Helberg to address the meeting.

Keith Helberg said the meeting was called as a result of the request made at the La Crete ratepayers meeting to review the manpower costs for the Tompkins Landing ferry operation. Alberta Transportation did that and came up with an approximate \$65,000.00 savings by operating the ferry on reduced hours. He invited the representatives present to advise him of why the hours between 11:30 p.m. and 6:30 a.m. were so important.

John W. Driedger reviewed the freight hauling practices from Edmonton to La Crete, saying the trucks loaded in the late afternoon and arrived in La Crete in the early morning hours so they could be unloaded before the start of each business day. Reduced hours would affect virtually every business in La Crete. If the trucks were forced to go through High Level and across the bridge at Fort Vermilion, they would have to have second drivers on because of the added hours on each trip.

Reuben Derksen said another issue is the people who live near the ferry. If the ferry is shut down for the night, it means an extra three hours of travel time to get to Highway #35. If you compare that to other areas, it would be the same as shutting down a secondary highway.

Bill Neufeld added that speeding is a main concern as people would drive at excessive speeds to reach the ferry before it closed for the night. John W. Driedger said there are accidents caused by speeding on the roads that have limited hours of operations.

Keith Helberg reported the studies showed an average of 6 to 8 vehicles per night during the hours of 11:30 to 6:30 a.m. and the split between trucks and light traffic was about equal.

Terry Hood said about 10% of the large trucks that use the ferry, use it during the night hours which is only about three trucks per night.

Betty Bateman noted that with the technology we have today, it looks like we're going backwards and not forward. She asked if a user pay scheme would work for these night hours and said Alberta Transportation should not just come in and say they're going to cut the service. John W. Driedger suggested Transportation cut back where it isn't so noticeable.

Bill Neufeld suggested that Municipal District's will eventually take over the operation of ferrys and the Province will have to negotiate with the Municipalities regarding the costs.

Keith Helberg asked if the M.D. would consider operating the ferry if both parties could reach a funding agreement. He added that the operation of the ferry is only one part of the system and they don't have the dollars to keep going the way they have in the past.

Bill Neufeld stated the Province should keep the ownership of the ferry and be responsible for capital costs but minor repairs and operation should be with the Municipal District.

Keith Helberg said the Province would likely provide some funding to the municipality and they may have some advantages in how they can do business whereas the Province is restricted. The M.D. may be able to contract the work out for less. Mr. Helberg asked if the M.D. would be receptive to a plan whereby the Province provided an amount of funding equal to what they would expect to spend in the operation of the ferry.

Bill Neufeld replied yes, as long as the figure can be negotiable. Mr. Helberg said they would give the M.D. their costs, including labour, and the M.D. can calculate their expected costs.

Keith Helberg stated that during the previous two years, the ferry operated for approximately 215 days. He said he is willing to try sell this scheme to the Department if the M.D. feels they can operate 24 hours a day with the same amount the Department operates on. He added that an agreement could be made to keep the capital costs separate.

Reuben Derksen said the river levels aren't stable anymore because of the dam and we can't depend on the time frame for freeze up. Eventually the Province will have to build a bridge at Tompkins Landing.

Keith Helberg stated it is obvious that the community and the M.D. are in support of 24 hour operations and Transportation would be happy to see this transferred to the M.D. They don't enjoy this kind of controversy.

Bill Neufeld asked if Transportation would go back to 24 hour operation now and Keith Helberg replied that if the M.D. is serious about taking it over, they would as soon as the road bans are back to 90% on Highway #697.

Reuben Derksen asked if the ice crossing would be part of the deal and Mr. Helberg replied yes and suggested Council establish a working committee to go over the proposal once Transportation submits their projected costs. John W. Driedger and George Friesen could serve on this committee if Council wished to have representation from the public. He suggested June 15 as a target date for 24 hour operations.

Keith Helberg said he will provide the budget estimates and all of the statistics on traffic counts and ferry usage and suggested a meeting in approximately two weeks. John W. Driedger asked if he could receive a copy of the statistics from Transportation.

Ernest Dyck asked when this transfer would be made and Keith Helberg replied we should look at a transition date and plan to keep a couple of the Transportation employees on for a transition period. He suggested until freeze up as the Department Staff could help with taking the ferry out of the river and help with launching it again in the spring. They have the expertise to provide this information to the municipality.

Keith Helberg advised Council the ramps need some work and Transportation will have to be involved with that work. They have been working on a plan to correct the ramps or curves.

George Friesen and John W. Driedger discussed the problems with the slope or rise on the deck of the ferry and asked if Transportation is considering any design changes on the decks to accommodate the chip trucks. Terry Hood replied there is a 10% rise on or off the ferry and any design changes would be very costly.

Keith Helberg said he will try get the information to Council by their May 26 meeting. Bill Neufeld will distribute the information to John W. Driedger and George Friesen.

John W. Driedger and George Friesen left the meeting at 2:00 p.m.

AIRPORTS

Bob Walter and Gary Peterson, representing the Town of High Level, entered the meeting.

Keith Helberg provided an update on the transfer of the High Level and Fort Vermilion airports, saying the Department encourages the two municipalities to make a decision as soon as possible. From the correspondence he had received, it looked like the Town is interested in operating the High Level airport and M.D. #23 was considering taking over the Fort Vermilion airport. Since then, it appears there might be a joint venture between the two municipalities.

Gary Peterson said the Town prepared a proposal and the M.D. was to review it but the Town has not received a response from them yet.

Gary Mayhew reported the M.D. Council had looked at both proposals and was considering forming an authority with the M.D. acting as the Unit Authority. One of the main considerations of the M.D. is the question of transitional funding from the Province.

Keith Helberg said the municipalities should not get their hopes up on transitional funding as other municipalities who have taken over airports have not received any. There may be an opportunity to get some funding from the Forest Service for their use of the airports. Most of the airports have no revenue and businesses and communities are looking at ways to operate them without Provincial involvement.

Gary Mayhew stated the M.D. needs to look at the access to potential funds and asked if anyone has addressed the question of a head tax. Keith Helberg said he didn't think anyone will get a portion of the head tax as that's a Federal tax. He added, if you do get it, it's a bonus but he didn't think it would materialize.

Ernest Dyck asked what the purpose of the head tax is and Keith Helberg replied it's to contribute to the funding of navigational aids at the airports.

Gary Peterson said the Town spent a lot of time on researching possible revenue and felt there was not much chance of getting the head tax. There is a movement to phase out the tax as they phase out controllers. The Town was looking at transitional funding for two to three years and drafted a proposal to the M.D. but have not received a reply. If the M.D. wants to form a joint committee, the Town would like to hear their proposal.

Gary Mayhew said the M.D. has just recently come to a consensus on their approach. They haven't done much research yet but have looked at the study and it indicates the Town is considering annexation and a tax base or a transfer of money from the M.D. for operational costs. Council would like to talk to the Town to see how we can operate it as an authority.

Gary Peterson asked how the M.D. proposes to operate as an authority. The Town has the sewer and water systems and maintenance personnel, a snow plow, fire protection, etc. The Town could operate those now but if the M.D. wants to be the authority, they could provide all of those services.

Gary Mayhew suggested that would all be done as a joint function or under an agreement.

Gary Peterson suggested a ten year plan be drafted on how they would operate. The Town needs access to the tax base at the airport. Any money generated at the airport has to go into the operation of the airport.

Gary Mayhew replied the M.D. didn't go into that much detail and Gary Peterson asked that if the M.D. has another plan, the Town would like to hear it.

Keith Helberg said this question needs to be pursued with some urgency now. These airports are one of the first ones on the table and one of the last ones to be settled. He asked if the members would like someone from the Department to come in and assist the two municipalities in forming a joint authority and Gary Mayhew said that would be fairly constructive.

Gary Peterson said Dennis Pommen is working in this area and if he didn't have any new information, he could at least facilitate discussions.

Keith Helberg stated that if the M.D. opts out, then the Town would be looking at the tax revenue from the M.D. If an agreement states that revenue goes to the operating authority, then whoever looks after it, gets the revenue.

Gary Peterson said the entire operation must be considered as the High Level airport is like a small community and needs all the essential services to go with it.

Keith Helberg asked if there were any other suggestions.

Gary Peterson suggested Dennis Pommen put together a proposal to organize an Airport Authority.

Terry Hood asked if the M.D. is interested in taking over the Fort Vermilion airport, if the municipalities were considering Fort Vermilion, High Level and Rainbow Lake airports all under one authority.

Bill Neufeld said the M.D. is not considering the Rainbow Lake airport and their main concern is that the transitional funding period is so short.

Gary Peterson noted the Fort Vermilion airport can probably be run quite easily because there is an organization out there that could do it on a contract basis. Little Red Air is in Fort Vermilion and they have indicated an interest in operating the High Level airport on a contract.

Gary Mayhew asked if both councils would be receptive to having a consultant make a recommendation on this and who should be the unit authority or if there should even be one. An outside opinion on what would work best from an unbiased observer may be helpful. They could list the advantages or disadvantages with different scenarios.

Keith Helberg said an advantage to using Pommen is that Transportation has them on stream now and they could provide some of this information through them.

Gary Peterson suggested Pommen provide the initial information to the municipalities. Keith Helberg added that each side could give Pommen their information and then Pommen could make recommendations based on that.

Gary Peterson asked if Keith Helberg would make the arrangements with Pommen to come in and get information from both the Town and the M.D. and Mr. Helberg said yes he would. He will also ask Pommen to arrange for a joint meeting between the Town and the M.D.

Gary Peterson reported that his last day of work with the Town is May 31 but he will carry on with some of the ongoing projects, including the airport.

It was suggested each Council appoint someone from their administration as well as a couple of Councillors to have a small group that can sit down for a few hours and go through the pros and cons.

Reeve Bill Neufeld thanked the delegations for attending the meeting and they left the meeting at 2:45 p.m.

Reuben Derksen, Edward Froese and Ernest Dyck all indicated they want to be on the committee discussions on the operation of the ferry.

Bill Neufeld asked Betty Bateman if she would sit on the airport committee and Mrs. Bateman agreed to.

Reuben Derksen asked what the Town's offer included and Gary Mayhew replied they haven't shared all of that information with him. They put a proposal together but only talked about the tax base.


**MOTION 95-359**

**MOVED:** Edward Froese

The Municipal District of Mackenzie No. 23 adjourn at 3:03 p.m.

**CARRIED**

  
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Reeve

  
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Secretary Treasurer