

Our Region
TRANSPORTATION
Information Sheet 16

Context

Nunavik is a vast, remote and wild territory. None of the 14 communities are connected to one another by road or railway, or to southern Québec. The cost of living and of doing business in the region is very high due mainly to the prohibitive cost of transportation by air and the short marine shipping season which imposes excessive additional warehousing and financing costs. Development of energy, mining and tourism potentials will proceed at the same pace as development of the region's transportation system.

A Few of the Challenges

Inuit depend on renewable resources, such as caribou, arctic char and waterfowl, for their traditional subsistence harvesting. Climate change, however, is having a significant impact on the capacity to safely access harvesting areas.

Parnasimautik covers three main components of the regional transportation sector: air, sea and land links.

Between 1984 and 1991, airports were built in all the communities except in Kuujjuarapik and Kuujjuaq where airport infrastructure existed already. Since then, while airlines have expanded considerably to meet the region's growing needs (increased population, health services, tourism and mineral exploration activities), airport infrastructure have not grown in the same way. In fact, the condition of this infrastructure is deteriorating due in particular to changes in the permafrost and overuse.

The costs incurred transporting goods and supplies to the region is a significant contributor to the high cost living. As well, current methods of transportation impose extensive warehousing and financing costs on businesses and organizations.

Currently, road development for industrial development is unregulated.

Enhancements to regional land, air and sea transportation networks will generate construction activity and user traffic. Impacts on the environment and subsistence harvesting activities will be unavoidable.

Solutions and Priorities

In 2008, the Kativik Regional Government, the Makivik Corporation, the Cree and non-Native communities of James Bay, and the ministère des Transports du Québec laid the groundwork for a multi-year transportation strategy for Northern Québec. The strategy's main goals are to optimize transportation safety, reduce the share of transportation costs in household expenses, support the regional economy, upgrade user mobility, and maximize regional spin-offs and sustainable solutions.

The region will likely continue to largely depend on air and marine transportation over the next 25 years.

Source: Plan Nunavik, Sector by Sector Concerns and Priorities for Nunavik – Access to Territory, p. 387–391.

Efforts to modernize airport infrastructure must respond to community expansion and the development of the region's potentials.

Under the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement (1975) and the Sanarrutik Partnership Agreement on Economic and Community Development in Nunavik (2002), the governments made a commitment to improve marine infrastructure in the communities, including the construction of breakwaters, anchoring basins, access ramps and sealift zones.

A marine transportation subsidy for Nunavik, similar to the program offered along the Lower North Shore, is needed.

Adopt a policy with regards to the construction, maintenance and shared use of land, air and sea links associated with industrial development.

Study the feasibility and strategic importance of deep-sea ports near Kuujjuaq and Kuujjuarapik.

Based on the results of feasibility studies and public consultations, construct land links between Kuujjuarapik and Radisson and between Kuujjuaq and Schefferville.

Discussion

The maintenance and continued expansion of airport, marine and local road infrastructure will continue to be essential. Nonetheless, possible land links with southern Québec and deep-sea port construction are strategic issues for regional development. While enhanced transportation links have the potential to reduce high living costs and stimulate the economy through business opportunities and job creation, roads, railways and ports could pose a threat to the way of life in the communities, the environment and wildlife. How and under what conditions should Nunavik connect to the rest of Québec and the world?



