

Quesnel North-South Interconnector

An impact assessment on this vital provincial link

Prepared for City of Quesnel

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Executive Summary

Introduction

- The Quesnel North-South Interconnector is a proposed long-term transportation improvement that would increase safety and significantly reduce congestion by allowing commercial vehicles and through traffic to avoid the downtown core of Quesnel. The project, which is supported by the City of Quesnel, entails a new 3.7-km section of Highway 97 from North Star Road to River Park Road along with realignment and replacement of the Quesnel River Bridge and the CN Rail Overhead Bridge. The Ministry of Transportation and Transit has completed the preliminary design phase but no funding has been committed for subsequent work phases.
- The purpose of this report is to describe the socio-economic implications of the Interconnector project for the province, the region and the City.
- This report utilizes a multiple account analysis framework that is commonly used in socio-economic impact assessments. The five accounts were selected for evaluation include Economy, Socio-community, Environment, Indigenous and Business Case.
- In order to clearly identify project impacts, a comparison is made between "Base Case" and "Project" scenarios. The Base Case is the status quo, with the current Highway 97 route through the City remaining in use, a continuation of existing trends in traffic volumes, accident rates, adjoining land uses and property values, and reasonably certain future events. The "Project" scenario is the Interconnector route that bypasses downtown Quesnel.
- The spatial study areas for this assessment are the British Columbia, the Cariboo Economic Region and the City. The temporal study area is 25 years.

Economy Account

- **Construction**—The economic impacts of project construction, based on 2020 construction cost estimates, include Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of \$310.6 million, labour income of \$178 million, 2,546 jobs and tax revenues to all three levels of government of \$27 million.
- **Regional Economic Development**—The project would generate benefit for the Cariboo Economic Region's economy by improving highway mobility, reliability and safety and facilitating efficient freight movement, reducing transit time and costs, and enhancing connectivity. The combined present value of these over a 25-year investment horizon was estimated at \$156 million. These benefits are critical for driving the regional economy as they accrue to businesses and workers in the region and across the province. The project would better connect businesses to suppliers and customers by reducing transportation costs, enabling faster and more reliable delivery times that improve supply chain efficiency and creating opportunities for regional and international trade by enhancing linkages

between the province's two major ports and major industrial zones in Kamloops and Prince George.

- **Small Business**—Retail and commercial services in downtown Quesnel would expand with the rerouting as the development potential on Front Street and adjoining arterials is realized through implementation of the waterfront plan and other City planning initiatives. Net benefits would be realized if the diversity and competitiveness of new businesses stemmed the spending leakage flowing to outside communities such as Prince George and the Lower Mainland. A more vibrant downtown with direct, safe connectivity to the waterfront would unlock new investment by the private sector that would bring new businesses that create new jobs and household income. The tourism sector would be the biggest beneficiary of the Interconnector, as it would significantly enhance the visitor potential and experience in downtown through development of visitor services on Front Street.

Socio-community Account

- **Population**—Work done in the late 1990s for the Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (now the Ministry of Transportation and Transit) highlighted how improved travel times and highway routes was strongly correlated to business development and population growth. With the Interconnector, Quesnel and the region will be in a better position to achieve their stated population growth rates 0.6% per annum.
- **Waterfront Access and Use**—Commercial, shopping and visitor activity in Quesnel's downtown has always been separated from the waterfront. Front Street will cease to be a barrier between the downtown and the river. Simple interventions like crosswalks along Front Street, bike lanes and the reintroduction of on-street parking will improve pedestrian and active transportation connectivity to the downtown and encourage economic activity and entrepreneurship.
- **Active transportation Investments and Use**—The City has an active transportation plan and continually invests in its implementation. The project would encourage active transportation in two ways, first through placement of sidewalk surfacing and continuity, pedestrian crossings, signage, on-street parking and corner bulb outs along Front Street and second directly via design of the new route which incorporates active transportation features for pedestrian and cycling use.
- **Downtown Property Values and Property Taxes**—Once Highway 97 is rerouted away from downtown the City's planned beautification and liveability upgrades downtown would occur at a much faster pace than in the base case. Front Street and Carson Avenue will become much more desirable for local businesses to set up shop and invest in improvements, including the ability to establish outdoor patios, thereby increasing demand and leading to increased assessment values for the City. This could have a corresponding increase of approximately \$517,080 in municipal property tax for the City of Quesnel and further new property taxes of \$263,800 for other levels of government (2024 dollars).

- **Road Safety**—The Interconnector would dramatically reduce pedestrian/vehicle incidents in downtown and allow placement of safer transportation infrastructure for pedestrians, cyclists and all active transportation modes. High collision areas would be eliminated and modern road safety design on the new route would ensure an overall reduction in crashes and casualties. This would also reduce overall insurance costs paid as result of elevated accident levels in downtown Quesnel.

Indigenous Account

- **Achievement of Reconciliation Objectives**—The project budget actively involves local area First Nations in consultation, economic partnerships, and capacity-building. There is provision in the 2020 budget of \$32.7 million for First Nation consultation and accommodation which would go toward satisfying government obligations under DRIPA and reconciliation objectives. Collaborative planning would help shape final design, environmental mitigation strategies, and community safety improvements. The ministry also supports Indigenous employment and business development by requiring highway contractors to hire Indigenous workers and source materials from Indigenous businesses. The potential for First Nations' involvement in construction activities is based on their involvement in previous Highway 97 projects.
- **Collaboration and Partnerships**—With the Interconnector, it is expected the City of Quesnel and local area First Nations would collaborate in implementing downtown revitalization initiatives. The Lhtako Dene First Nation, Nazko First Nation and Quesnel Tillicum Society Native Friendship Centre participated in the Quesnel Waterfront Plan (QWP) including Water and Indigenous Celebration Monumentation. There is also an opportunity to better connect Lhtako Dene Park.

Environment Account

- **GHG Emissions**—The interconnector route will lead to reduced fuel consumption because of fewer delays and shorter travel distances through town. A total of 4,250 tonnes per year of GHGs will be saved mostly in the form of carbon dioxide but also Nitrogen Oxide and hydrocarbons.
- **Air Quality**—The project will lead to a noticeable improvement in air quality in the downtown due to more even, uninterrupted flow of traffic and reduced travel distances. There is expected to be a smaller airshed impact associated with the new Interconnector route as well.
- **Noise Levels**—Significantly reducing traffic volumes, and in particular heavy truck traffic, will have a positive impact on downtown noise levels, particularly along the Highway 97 route. Moving the highway from Carson Ave and Front Street would dramatically reduce the noise pollution for residents in senior care facilities, the hospital, low-income housing and emergency shelter and transitional housing. This will create a healthier and more peaceful environment that enhances well-being and overall quality of life.

- **Visuals**—The reduced highway traffic downtown and a return to a conventional municipal grid street setting will allow the City to move forward with its downtown and waterfront revitalization and beautification plans. Significant changes to the roadways with trees, walkways and other infrastructure, combined with reduced traffic volumes will create a more desirable visual setting while mitigating light pollution affecting roadside properties and buildings.
- **Dangerous Goods**—Dangerous goods and other heavy traffic would be significantly reduced from areas of downtown including in proximity to the hospital, care home facilities and other residential and accommodation properties.

Business Case Account

- The 2020 business case rendering of a positive benefit-cost ratio of 1.16 and a determination that it was financially sound to proceed with the Project remains unchanged. This means that the construction budget represents an efficient allocation of resources and that BC as a whole, is better off with the project than without.

Table 1 Summary of Impacts

Account	Sub-account	Description	Beneficiaries		
			City	CER	BC
Economy	Construction	GDP \$310 million, Payroll \$178 million, 2,546 jobs	■	■	■
	Regional Economic Development	Benefits industry and business by creating an efficient corridor for transporting goods and people and by lowering operating costs.	■	■	■
	Small Business	Investment in downtown trade and service, better connections to West Quesnel, increased demand in South Quesnel, improved visitor destination.	■	■	■
Socio-community	Waterfront Access and Downtown Revitalization	Improved resident usage of the Front Street, Davie Street Area and waterfront usage.	■	■	■
	Active transportation investments and uses	Improved active transportation opportunities.	■	■	■
	Downtown Property Values and Property Taxes	Increased property values downtown and corresponding tax increases.	■	■	■
Indigenous	Reconciliation	The project capital budget includes accommodation and consultation initiatives.	■	■	■
	Collaboration and Partnerships	The project will stimulate redevelopment downtown that will include First Nations initiatives.	■	■	■
Environment	GHG Emissions	Reduced GHG emissions from use of shorter and more efficient travel corridor.	■	■	■
	Air Quality	Better air quality in the downtown core of Quesnel. Reduced health risk.	■	■	■
	Noise Levels	Reduced noise levels in the downtown Quesnel area, minimally increased noise on north-south route.	■	■	■
	Visuals	Reduced traffic, and investments in active transportation, beautification and waterfront projects would enhance the downtown streetscape.	■	■	■
	Dangerous Goods Traffic	Remove dangerous goods from moving through downtown core.	■	■	■
	Road Safety	Decrease traffic accidents and costs and increase pedestrian safety with traffic moving along a better designed traffic and pedestrian route.	■	■	■
Business Case		Safety, travel time, and avoided catastrophic failure benefits outweigh costs; therefore, it is financially sound to proceed with the project.	■	■	■

Notes: CER Cariboo Economic Region

■ Major beneficiary ■ Minor beneficiary

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Abbreviations

BCI	Bridge Condition Inspection
CA	Census Agglomeration
CBC	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
CER	Cariboo Economic Region
dB	Decibel
DRIPA	Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act
EHP	Environ Health Perspect
EI	Environmental International
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GHG	Greenhouse Gas
GOBC	Government of British Columbia
ICBC	Insurance Corporation of British Columbia
LSA	Local Study Area
PSA	Provincial Study Area
MAH	BC Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing
MOTT	BC Ministry of Transportation and Transit
MOTI	BC Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure
NPC	Noise Pollution Clearinghouse
NPV	Net Present Value
QWP	Quesnel Waterfront Plan
SLAT	Single lane Alternating Traffic
UN	United Nations
WHO	World Health Organization

Introduction

Project Background

The Quesnel North-South Interconnector is a proposed long-term transportation improvement that would increase safety and significantly reduce congestion by allowing commercial vehicles and through traffic to avoid the downtown core of Quesnel.

The North-South Interconnector was recommended as a long-term priority in the [2018 Quesnel Transportation Study](#). The Interconnector would, among other things, increase safety and significantly reduce congestion, as commercial vehicles travelling through the region would be able to avoid the downtown. The project is supported by the City of Quesnel and was the preferred option of the community during [public engagement](#). The level of engagement was exceptionally high and overwhelmingly in support of the preferred option. Over 900 residents attended the open houses held in 2018, and over 800 residents completed the survey available at the open house.

In May 2019, BC Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure began a preliminary design on the proposed Quesnel North-South Interconnector. The design includes a new 3.7-km section of Highway 97 from North Star Road to River Park Road. The proposed route includes:

- Two new structures to replace the Quesnel River Bridge and the CN Rail Overhead Bridge.
- Addition of a dedicated multi-use path for use by pedestrians and cyclists over the Quesnel River Bridge and CN Rail Overhead.
- Addition of a multi-lane roundabout at the south end of the Interconnector to connect to Legion Drive, West Quesnel and Downtown.
- A signalized intersection at the north end of the Interconnector to connect to Front Street.

The Ministry has completed the preliminary design phase; however, no funding has been committed for subsequent work phases. The Ministry continues to monitor the performance of Highway 97, and the project will proceed as priorities and funding allow. (MOTI 2021)

Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to describe the socio-economic implications of the proposed Quesnel North-South Interconnector project, which would reroute Highway 97 and divert through traffic away from downtown Quesnel.

Methodology

Multiple Account Analysis

This report utilizes a multiple account analysis framework that is commonly used in socio-economic impact assessments. Government programs and public investments are often intended to address multiple objectives that have implications for communities, the environment, the economy, and government revenues. A multiple accounts framework provides stakeholders information on the full range of effects and supports an informed decision-making process (Ministry of Agriculture and Lands 2007).

Accounts and Indicators

The five accounts noted in Table 2 were selected for evaluation because they:

- are important to the City of Quesnel, the provincial government, businesses and residents of the Quesnel area;
- are expected to experience change due to interaction with one or more elements of the project; and
- can be characterized with accepted and defensible information sources.

Table 2 List of Accounts

Account/Sub-account	Indicators
Economy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Construction • Provincial and Regional Economic Development • Downtown Business 	Output, GDP, jobs, labour income, taxes Investment, competitiveness Number of businesses, jobs, labour income, taxes
Socio-community <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing and property • Transportation • Civic spaces 	Housing stock and cost Property values, assessments Active transportation investments, options and use Connectivity between downtown and the waterfront Front Street and waterfront access and use
Environment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • GHG • Air Quality • Noise • Visuals • Dangerous goods 	Emission levels Air quality levels and airshed change Noise levels Truck traffic downtown (visuals) Dangerous goods traffic
Indigenous <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievement of Reconciliation Objectives • Collaboration and Partnerships 	Contribution to reconciliation Consultation levels Participation levels Social cohesion levels Use of First Nations' place names and language
Business Case	Net gain in provincial economic welfare

	Economic resources valued at social opportunity costs (benefit-cost analysis)
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The **Economy Account** reports on the change in revenues, employment and employment income deriving from the capital expenditures of the project, highway rerouting and downtown visitor setting. For the purposes of this study the geographic boundary of the account is the Quesnel Census Agglomeration (CA) which is the greater Quesnel area.

The **Socio-community Account** identifies population and community effects associated highway rerouting, including non-priced wellbeing and quality of life considerations. An assessment is made in the context of forward-looking documents and planning completed by the City of Quesnel. This was supported with key informant interviews with City staff and the interview program already completed by the MOTI.

The **Environment Account** estimates the likelihood of beneficial or adverse outcomes because of pressures or changes in environmental conditions resulting from the Interconnector project and associated human activities.

The **Indigenous Account** is included in this assessment because of the Government of BC's reconciliation policies and commitment to bring them to action through all ministries. The capital cost of the project includes a significant component for First Nation consultation and accommodation.

The **Business Case Account** summarizes the benefit-cost evaluation previously commissioned by MOTI as an indicator of the project's worthiness from a societal perspective.

In order to clearly identify project impacts, a comparison is required of what might occur under the "base case" and "project" scenarios. The base case is the status quo, with the current Highway 97 route through the City remaining in use, a continuation of existing trends in traffic volumes, accident rates, adjoining land uses and property values, and reasonably certain future events. The "project" scenario is the preferred MOTT Highway 97-North-South Interconnector route that bypasses downtown Quesnel. The relevant aspects of these scenarios will be addressed further in the context of each account.

Data Collection

This assessment is based on the following data sources:

- Project background, problem statement, route scenarios, and costs and benefits described in Binnie (2020) constitute the project description;
- MOTT's Highway Construction Inflation Indexes 2023 was used for updating the 2020 costs and benefits to current dollars;
- Data for describing economic and socio-community Baseline conditions were obtained from BC Stats, provincial ministries and the City of Quesnel. A list of cited documents is provided in the closing chapter of this report.

Study Areas

The spatial study areas for this assessment are as follows.

- British Columbia
- Cariboo Economic Region
- City of Quesnel

The temporal study area is 25 years in accordance with Binnie (2020).

Project Description

Overview

The problem definition summarizes the key challenges and issues along Highway 97 through Quesnel. The current alignment of Highway 97 is constrained through the downtown core of Quesnel, which already has mobility and safety challenges that are projected to be intensified in the future without the Interconnector.

Highway 97 has many geometric design challenges that require significant upgrades and improvements to adhere to MOTI's current design standards and guidelines. Necessary upgrades include the Quesnel River Bridge and CN Rail Overhead.

Key issues that would be addressed through the Project and which exert beneficial impacts for the City, region and province include highway mobility, reliability and safety. (Binnie 2020)

Rerouting and Alignment

The Quesnel River Bridge is a narrow steel truss bridge, which was constructed in 1961. It is nearing the end of its service life and is showing signs of structural deterioration. In addition, its lack of shoulders, narrow lanes, and low clearance are safety hazards for motorists. During winter months, snow clearing is also a challenge on the bridge. It has an adjusted Bridge Condition Inspection (BCI) rating of 2.27, indicating the structure was in good to fair condition in 2019.

The CN Rail Overhead Structure was also constructed in 1961 and it has an adjusted BCI rating of 3.2, indicating the structure is moving from fair to poor condition. The Base Case assumes that major rehabilitation of the Quesnel Overhead Structure and Quesnel River Bridge are required in the near future. Although MOTT has stated that it would not detour traffic to the Johnston Bridge, the City is of the view that many residents will opt for this route anyway. The Johnston Bridge is in the capital plan and is expected to have a total cost of \$10 million.

The Quesnel Overhead Structure and Quesnel River Bridge rehabilitation is expected to take two years to complete, which would require single lane alternating traffic (SLAT) for periods

during construction. Bridge rehabilitation is typically not the recommended investment strategy for MOTT. The total rehabilitation cost (including regional recoveries) is estimated to be \$32.4 million to keep the structures in service over the next 25 years.

The estimated disbenefits created by the SLAT and detour is estimated to be \$11.3 million, and traffic management cost would be approximately \$469,000; therefore, the total rehabilitation cost is estimated to be \$44.1 million. By replacing the Quesnel River Bridge and Overhead Structure completely, an estimate \$44.1 million of rehabilitation work would be avoided. Additional reasons that the rehabilitation of the Quesnel River Bridge and Overhead Structure is not preferred are as follows:

- Bridge rehabilitation would provide limited mobility, reliability, and safety improvements as trucks and dangerous goods would still need to travel through the downtown core and the existing two-lane cross-section is maintained on Highway 97.
- Rehabilitation of the bridges would not fix the potentially fatal design flaw of through-truss bridges such as the Quesnel River Bridge as the height and width restrictions would remain as would the risk of impact to the portal bridge members. (Binnie 2020)

Economy Account

Statement of Effect

The Interconnector project will reroute Highway 97 through downtown Quesnel, removing chokepoints, eliminating seven controlled intersections, reducing travel times and cost, and improving safety conditions. The project would have the following measurable economic impacts:

- benefit the construction sector in Quesnel, the region and the province;
- enhance the supply chain and overall economic development capacity of the resource-rich Cariboo Economic Region; and
- improve development potential and business activity in downtown Quesnel.

Each of these impact pathways will create business investment, jobs, labour income and taxes for government.

Baseline

In 2021, the total economic output¹ in BC by industry was \$83 billion in construction, \$32.8 billion in transportation, \$29.5 billion in retail trade and \$17.3 billion in accommodation and

¹ Economic output is the total quantity and value of goods and services produced within an industry during a specific period.

food services (Statistics Canada 2024). It is noted that 2021 was a Covid pandemic year affecting all industries but tourism most of all. According to BC Stats, tourism revenues in 2022 were 56% higher than 2021, which would imply a higher output as well (BC Stats 2025).

Quesnel's economy is dependent on the forest industry, specifically wood products manufacturing which in 2021 accounted for 16% of the labour force while also contributing to overall community and household income through high wages. Other industries also contribute. In 2021, the rank of industries by experienced labour force in Quesnel was construction (fourth), transportation (ninth), retail trade (third) and tourism (seventh) (Statistics Canada 2023a). Four significant mines are operating or in development within a 150 km radius of Quesnel (Blackwater Gold, Mount Polley, Gibraltar, and the Cariboo Gold Project).

Transportation services include airport, highway freight, warehouse/storage, transit, bus and rail services components, while retail trade is concentrated in downtown, South Quesnel and West Quesnel. Tourism activities are dispersed across the region, but downtown Quesnel has the majority of accommodation properties, food and beverage services, shops and visitor services such as the Visitor Centre, museum, and park facilities.

Construction

Quesnel is home to several construction companies and contractors that provide services ranging from general contracting to specialized trades like carpentry and electrical work. The city's construction business directory lists around 107 registered companies with several major players with revenues above the \$5 million mark (Dun and Bradstreet 2025). The experienced construction labour force in 2021 was 265 in the city and 810 if the surrounding rural areas are included. Major sources of demand include the forestry and mining industries, municipal capital works, and residential development.

Regional Economic Development

The Cariboo Economic Region has a similar economic base profile to Quesnel, historically rooted in resource extraction and goods production which relies on an efficient transportation network to keep the flow of goods and people running smoothly. Forestry has long been the backbone of the regional economy, and although it is facing major challenges due to wildfires, beetle infestations, trade barriers and changing government policies, it is still a critical source of community income and household wealth. The same can be said for mineral exploration and mining and to a lesser extent ranching, farming and food production. The tourism offer in the Cariboo is built around nature-based tourism and the accessibility of lakes, rivers, mountains, and historic sites. The region is working to diversify its economy beyond resource extraction, partially in response to environmental concerns but also as a result of changing industry conditions and trade relationships. Transportation infrastructure and services play a key role in keeping these industries growing and competitive.

Highway 97 alone is central to the supply chain of the region's economy. It serves as the link between suppliers, manufacturers, distributors, and consumers but also as a conduit for transshipments via other modes, particularly rail. Without an efficient, integrated network, raw materials, components and finished goods cannot move smoothly through the supply chain, leading to delays, increased costs, and supply disruptions. Highway 97 is responsible for bringing an overwhelming proportion of visitors into and across the region to use areas, parks, trails and destination attractions. It is a gateway to the north and Alaska and one of the most important tourism routes in the province.

Small Business

In 2024, there were 1,733 businesses located in the City of Quesnel, 490 of which had employees. Of these, 13 businesses had more than 100 employees and 454 (93%) had fewer than 50 employees, the threshold for being a small business (Statistics Canada 2024a). Active networks include the Quesnel & District Chamber of Commerce, Quesnel Downtown Association, West and South Quesnel Business Associations and Community Futures North Cariboo.

Downtown Quesnel is dominated by small business that provide a mix of services that supports both residents and visitors with a full range of amenities and local flavours. Hospitality includes fast food establishments, classic diners and specialty cuisine, breweries and pubs, hotels, motels, B&Bs and an RV park. The Quesnel Visitor Centre and Quesnel Museum are also downtown. Retail includes boutiques, craft stores and antique shops, while there are many financial and professional services such as banks, credit unions, insurance agencies and accounting firms. Health, medical, dental and personal care services and transportation and automotive shops round out the business profile.

Outlook

The region's dependence on forestry and mining is unlikely to change anytime soon, however, the cyclical nature of these sectors means that fluctuations in global demand and trade relations will always carry risk. The Cariboo Economic Region's forest industry faces significant challenges due to U.S. tariffs and duties on Canadian softwood lumber exports. Redirection to Asia Pacific markets has potential but existing mills are set up to serve the US. Meanwhile BC's major forest companies have been investing heavily in their US operations, not BC—it could be many years if not decades before reliance on US markets is lessened, if at all.

Agriculture will increasingly focus on high-value crops, local food production, related agri-tourism initiatives and the linking of production to visitor and local markets. Tourism's role as a complementary industry, supported by investments in cultural attractions, outdoor recreation, and improved infrastructure will expand, especially as travel patterns normalize following past disruptions such as wildfires and pandemics. Continued improvements in transportation, broadband connectivity, and regional infrastructure is expected to drive diversification.

Construction

The Cariboo's construction sector is not booming, with declining goods employment and limited job outlook, but there is still a high demand for skilled trades, technical, and management roles. Labour shortages are prevalent, and an estimated 6,600 construction jobs are expected to remain vacant by 2033. Total job openings are expected to reach 23,500 in the Cariboo in the next 10 years, some through economic growth but primarily because of replacement needs of retiring workers (GOBC 2024). The specialty trade contractor industry will have the third-most job openings in the region. Demand will be tied to residential and commercial renovation which will balance out what is expected to be a small number of housing starts. Infrastructure project planning, including energy, mining and highway projects, will generate demand locally for construction contractors and workers.

Regional Economic Development

In the longer term, the Cariboo Economic Region is facing challenges in attracting and retaining skilled workers and this is linked to population growth and overall community stability. Over the next decade the Cariboo is expected to generate 23,500 job openings. About 12 percent of these will be driven by economic growth, while the remaining 88 percent will result from the need to replace workers, mainly due to retirement. Employment demand is projected to grow at an average annual rate of 0.4 percent over the next decade, closely mirroring the region's expected annual population growth (GOBC 2024). If this growth is to be met or exceeded it will be necessary to increase investments in public sector infrastructure and service such as education and health care.

Transitioning from a heavy reliance on traditional industries to a more diversified economy requires ongoing support from both government and private sectors. Encouraging innovation in agriculture, technology, technical services, renewable energy, and small business development is seen as a key strategy to build resilience against future shocks. While the traditional sectors continue to be vital, diversification efforts offer promising avenues for growth. The region's future economic health will depend in large part on the success of initiatives aimed at enhancing infrastructure and connectivity throughout the Cariboo that is expected, in turn, to drive more private sector investment in productive capacity in critical industries like forestry and manufacturing.

Small Business

While Quesnel businesses are facing headwinds, particularly those attached to the forest industry, a modest recovery can be expected moving forward. Easing interest rates, provincial support programs, and growing niche sectors (like clean-tech, critical minerals, and tourism) will provide real opportunities. Businesses that diversify, leverage funding, and strategically recruit will be best positioned to thrive.

Constraining factors include labour shortages and ongoing uncertainty in the forest sector. As an economic base sector, forestry is a major supporter of small business through the local supply chain and spending of workers and their families. Export tariffs to the U.S. (up to 35–40 %) and provincial policy constraints have depressed lumber prices and squeezed margins, which eventually filters down the suppliers, retailers and service providers across the city.

Forestry remains troubled, but US–Canada trade talks are ongoing and tariff relief could improve margins for forest-sector businesses. Meanwhile, international markets for minerals and clean tech are growing. BC’s deepening export and critical-mineral strategies may benefit Cariboo producers. Tourism will continue to recover and will be helped along by consumer spending increases as interest rates come down. Any expansion in these economic base industries would filter down to small businesses, bringing stability and opportunities for growth.

Impacts

Construction

The economic impacts of project construction shown in Table 3 are for British Columbia, based on capital cost estimates in Binnie (2020), updated to 2025 dollars and allocated to three industries. The total impacts include direct, indirect and induced components. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) at basic prices (i.e., after adjustments for taxes and subsidies) is \$310.6 million, which is made up mostly of labour income to workers and gross operating surplus (i.e., company and contractor profits). A total of 2,546 jobs would be created in the province.

A portion of these impacts would benefit local contractors, construction workers and non-construction businesses such as suppliers of construction materials, equipment supplies, traffic management, environmental services, machine shops and similar. However, Quesnel has a limited supplier and contractor capacity for a project of this magnitude, which would put an upper ceiling on benefits accruing locally.

Table 3 Total Impacts of Project Construction, by Industry

	Transportation Engineering Construction	Architectural, Engineering & Related Services	Management, Scientific and Technical Consulting Services	Total
Direct Expenditure	266,970,935	31,300,453	48,641,437	346,912,825
Output	477,611,002	52,991,667	81,425,766	612,028,435
GDP at basic prices	227,192,266	32,552,471	50,878,943	310,623,680
Labour Income	130,281,816	19,406,281	28,795,731	178,483,828
Gross Operating Surplus	95,842,566	12,895,787	22,034,571	130,772,923
Taxes (products & production)	21,624,646	2,472,736	3,113,052	27,210,433

Jobs	1,826	258	462	2,546
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Source: Binnie (2020), Statistics Canada (2025a)

Notes: Reference area is British Columbia; Includes direct, indirect and induced impacts

Regional Economic Development

Regional economic impacts are summarized in Table 4 and discussed following.

Table 4 Beneficial Impacts of Project Completion on Regional Economic Development

Description	Magnitude	Geographic Extent	Likelihood	Confidence
Expanded use as an efficient corridor for transporting goods and people.	Low	Northern BC	High	High
Lower operating costs.	Low	Northern BC	High	High

The Interconnector would benefit provincial and regional economic development capacity by improving highway mobility, reliability and safety and facilitating efficient freight movement, reducing transit time and costs, and enhancing connectivity. Importantly it would fulfill provincial commitments to Highway 97 as critical economic infrastructure for northern BC and the province. It would support provincial and regional policy through the following.

- By supporting realization of the Government of BC's Cariboo Connector program and more broadly National Highway System improvements, the project would encourage investment and productive capacity in transportation services, logistics and supply chain linkages. Quesnel is the major chokepoint between Kamloops and Prince George because of the current route configuration, which is affecting operating costs and investment potential. In 2014, the then Minister of Transportation underlined the importance of the Quesnel Interconnector by stating the following:

"when completed, almost 50 percent of the 440-kilometre highway between Cache Creek and Prince George will be either three or four lanes wide. The Government of B.C. recognizes the importance and significance of the Cariboo Connector to Northern B.C. We will continue to assess this corridor, along with our other major highway corridors, to ensure that we're keeping our commitment to provide a safe and reliable transportation system throughout the province." (MOTI 2014)

- The primary benefits of the Interconnector Project are travel time savings, safety savings and vehicle operating cost savings. The combined present value of these over a 25-year investment horizon was estimated at \$155.59 million in 2020 (Binnie 2020). These benefits are critical for driving the regional economy as they accrue to businesses and workers in the region and across the province. The project would better connect businesses to suppliers and customers by reducing transportation costs, enabling faster and more reliable delivery times that improve supply chain efficiency and creating opportunities for domestic and international trade by enhancing linkages between the province's two major ports and major industrial zones in Kamloops and Prince George. The Prince Rupert Container Terminal Expansion will result in container throughput growth and truck-related highway volume.

- In its 2025 budget, the BC Government identified the need to grow the economy and build resilience in response to trade friction and tariffs with the US. Priorities include climate change and renewable energy initiatives, carbon finance and forest conservation, and transportation and infrastructure investments. In defending against US tariffs, the government says that BC is in a better position than other provinces when it comes to mitigating impacts, but that some sectors are more reliant and thus more exposed to US trade action (GOBC 2025). This includes forestry, which is the mainstay of the Quesnel and regional economy. It includes mining and energy as well, which rely on highway movement of major equipment during development and maintenance. There are five major energy projects (Nilhts'l Ecoener, Brewster, Nithi Mountain, Stewart Creek, Taylor) that usually transport oversized blades, towers and nacelles that exceed standard highway vehicle limits and challenge roadway geometry. If the regional economy is to strengthen and diversify its markets in accordance with provincial objectives then investments such as the Interconnector Project will be needed to attract private capital that will unlock resource and innovation potential.
- The longer-term perspective on community and regional development in the Cariboo and the North is that without critical infrastructure such as the Interconnector it will be challenging to keep competitive, growing and resilient. Companies are more likely to invest in areas with strong infrastructure, leading to economic growth through expansion of industrial parks, logistics hubs, and retail centres. Keeping costs low for existing industry and small business is vital, improving capacity for attracting new industry and new investment that meet provincial objectives such as greater capacity in renewable energy and transitioning to green sectors even more so. A 2009 Highway 97 study found that the industries most likely to benefit from highway improvements were energy, mining and port-related transportation activity (Associated Engineering and Decision Economics, 2009).

Small Business

Downtown business impacts are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5 Beneficial Impacts of Project Completion on Quesnel Small Business

Description	Magnitude	Geographic Extent	Likelihood	Confidence
Greater investment in downtown trade and service operations.	Moderate	Downtown	Moderate	Low
Better connections to West Quesnel	Low	West Quesnel	Moderate	Low
Increased demand in South Quesnel from through-traffic	Low	South Quesnel	High	High
Improved visitor destination with more overnight stays and spending.	Moderate	North Cariboo	Moderate	High

Retail and commercial services in downtown would expand with the rerouting as the development potential on Front Street and adjoining arterials is realized through implementation of the waterfront plan and other City planning initiatives. There may be some redistribution of spending from South and West Quesnel, which is really a transfer of benefits to the downtown, however net benefits would be realized if the diversity and competitiveness of new businesses stemmed the spending leakage flowing to outside communities such as Prince George and the Lower Mainland. A more vibrant downtown with direct, safe connectivity to the waterfront would unlock new investment by the private sector that would bring new businesses that create new jobs and household income.

As waterfront and infrastructure plans are implemented, awareness of and connections to West Quesnel would be improved once highway traffic is diverted away from downtown and Moffatt Bridge.

Highway 97 travellers not destined for downtown may be more inclined to use services in South Quesnel, with the potential for more highway-related services such as service stations and restaurants.

Once completed, the tourism sector would be the biggest beneficiary of the Interconnector, as it would significantly enhance the visitor potential and experience in downtown. Connecting the waterfront, redeveloping Front Street and implementing an active transportation network would animate the shopping core beyond Reid Street. The potential for new accommodation, food and beverage and tour operations on Front Street would increase and encourage more overnight stays and visitor spending.

Socio-community Account

Statement of Effect

The North-South Interconnector Project will exert economic, environmental and social impacts that will collectively contribute to positive socio-community outcomes for the City, its residents and its businesses. The removal of highway traffic through the heart of downtown will serve as a catalyst of change in the character and feel of City's main shopping, social and cultural area. A less congested downtown will be more of a "people place". Overall, downtown will transform into a more connected and vibrant commercial and community hub once the Interconnector project is completed.

Baseline

Population

Over the past twenty years the population of Quesnel, the Cariboo Economic Region and the province has grown but not in equal measure, as growth in Quesnel has trailed that of the

region and the province. Much of the growth in the Cariboo Economic Region has been generated by neighbouring Prince George.

Table 6: Historical Population Change 2005 to 2025

	2005	2015	2025	% Change
City of Quesnel	9,645	10,095	10,115	+4.9%
Cariboo Economic Region	158,825	161,220	173,440	+9.2%
Province	4,196,075	4,765,470	5,709,805	+36.1%

Source: BC Stats (2025b).

Waterfront Access and Use

Highway 97 runs through downtown along Carson Avenue and Front Street, however, most of the commercial development has been focused on Reid Street area over toward Vaughan Street. This area of downtown offers accessible on-street parking, sidewalks, treed boulevards and street lighting.

Commercial activity and demand on Carson Avenue tend to be highway-related services including fuel service stations and convenience stores. Carson is also the location of two car dealerships, and there is no on-street parking in this part of downtown. Front Street has several businesses focused on vehicular traffic with fast food restaurants, motels, and fuel stations. Front Street is also the location of GR Baker Memorial Hospital, several health care providers, a seniors' facility and an Indigenous housing facility. Here again, there is no on-street parking due to its designation as Highway 97.

Connectivity between the downtown to Front Street and Carson Avenue and the area's rivers is constrained by the limited pedestrian crossings and the need to keep highway traffic volumes moving through the downtown.

Active Transportation Investments and Use

With Highway 97 intersecting downtown Quesnel, pedestrian/vehicle incidents are frequent along the Carson Avenue and Front Street segments, with this route characterized by limited crosswalk access and no separated bike lanes. The highway is designed to keep traffic moving as quickly and safely as possible, which tends to impede safe road crossing. At the same time, the City is working to improve active transportation networks locally, which face increased risk when travelling with, against or across highway traffic. (City of Quesnel, 2025)

Table 7 Current Property Assessment in downtown Quesnel, 2024

	Current Property Assessment	Current Property Taxes	Acres	\$/Acre	Property Assessment Ratio Compared to Reid Street
Front St.	\$7,469,400	\$129,660	8.43	\$ 886,050	3.15
Reid St.	\$26,613,400	\$461,990	9.55	\$ 2,786,743	1.00
Carson Ave.	\$10,564,100	\$183,385	8.73	\$ 1,210,092	2.30
Total	\$44,646,900	\$775,035	26.71		

Source: City of Quesnel (2025)

Reid Street has seen several property upgrades and new developments over the years and in 2024 had the highest per acre assessed value of the three streets. With Carson Avenue and Front Street forming part of the downtown portion of Highway 97 it is likely that these two streets have lagged in occupancy levels, with numerous vacancies and relatively low levels of investment activity, this is in despite of being in close proximity of Reid Street, leading to lower assessed values and property taxes. As long as Highway 97 maintains its current alignment in downtown the City will see suppressed interest in development, and thus lower values and assessments on Carson and Front when compared to Reid.

Road Safety

Downtown Quesnel along the Highway 97 corridor is subject to numerous vehicle crashes that result in casualties and property damage each year. Casualty crashes are those resulting in injury or fatality, while property damage crashes entail material damage only. Table 8 highlights vehicle accidents on Carson Ave and Front Street in the downtown core (south of Bowron Ave). These numbers do not include vehicle accidents that occur in parking lots and involving parked cars.

Total traffic accidents along the Carson Avenue and Front Street corridor downtown have ranged from between 54 and 80 annually in recent years. Between 12 and 36 crashes have resulted in casualties (ICBC defines casualties to include accidents where injuries occurred and not just vehicle damage). Over the period, 2019 to 2023, these two streets have experienced a total of 330 vehicle crashes, of which 110 have been crashes with casualties.

By comparison, the entire area south of Bowron Avenue has experienced 433 total vehicle accidents, of which 132 have been casualty crashes. Carson Avenue and Front Street account for 76 percent of total crashes and 83 percent of all casualty crashes in the downtown core of Quesnel.

It is difficult to determine the cost associated with the 330 accidents that have occurred on the Front Street and Carson Avenue portion of Highway 97; however, based on average cost per

claim in the ICBC Cariboo Area for private passenger automobiles and assuming 1.5 to 2.5 claims per accident it is possible that upwards of between \$4.4 million and \$7.4 million have been spent on accidents claims on these two roads between 2019 and 2023 (ICBC no date).

Table 8 Vehicle Crashes on Carson Avenue and Front Street, 2019 to 2023

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Total
Carson Ave.						
Personal Injury	20	8	8	12	8	56
Property Damage only	24	19	22	23	33	121
Total	44	27	30	35	41	177
Front Street						
Personal Injury	16	13	8	13	4	54
Property Damage only	20	17	16	26	20	99
Total	36	30	24	39	24	153
Total Front St and Carson Ave						
Personal Injury	36	21	16	25	12	110
Property Damage only	44	36	38	49	53	220
Total	80	57	54	74	65	330

Source: ICBC (2025)

Note: Low crash numbers in 2020-21 coincided with the pandemic when tourism and overall highway activity was curtailed.

Outlook

Population

BC Stats population projections Quesnel, the Cariboo Economic Region and BC for 2035 and 2045 are shown below in Table 9.

Table 9: BC Stats Projected Population Change 2025 to 2045

	2025	2035	2045	% Change
City of Quesnel	10,115	9,575	8,880	-12.2%
Cariboo Economic Region	173,440	171,400	164,530	-5.1%
Province	5,709,805	6,234,195	6,787,355	+18.8%

Source: BC Stats (2025b).

Over the next twenty-years, BC Stats sees a population decline of 12.2% in Quesnel, while the Cariboo Economic Region is expected to decline 5.1%. The provincial population is anticipated to continue robust growth, adding an additional 18.8% between 2025 and 2045.

Cariboo municipalities tend to be more optimistic about the future than BC Stats. Table 10 highlights growth projections for Quesnel, Williams Lake, and Prince George that are in stark

contrast to BC Stats model results. The municipalities are more inclined to look favourably on new economic activities (e.g., mines, tourism), the attractive affordability and cost of living in the region compared to elsewhere in southern BC. Anticipating this will lead to further footloose workers and retirees from these higher-priced regions seeking more reasonable housing costs driving in migration. Of course, in order for the region to accommodate this growth there will have to be continued investment in public infrastructure, namely health care, education and transportation infrastructure.

Table 10: Cariboo Communities Projected Population Change 2025 to 2045

	2025	2035	2045	% Change
City of Quesnel	10,405	10,755	11,105	6.7%
City of Williams Lake	11,435	11,725	12,020	5.1%
City of Prince George	82,850	89,720	97,165	17.3%

Source: City of Quesnel (2024) City of Prince George (2025) City of Williams Lake (2011)

Waterfront Access and Use

The City has developed a plan for public investment and improved access to the waterfront along Front Street. This includes beautification initiatives, widening of sidewalks, pathways along the Fraser River, and street-side parking, all to make the Front Street area more community and visitor friendly. One goal is to strengthen connectivity between Reid Street, Front Street and the waterfront which is anticipated to stimulate demand for shops, restaurants and visitor services on the east side of Front Street, as well as waterfront dining and food trucks on the west side, creating the conditions for a much more active, vibrant downtown waterfront.

Figure 2 Downtown Quesnel at the Barlow Overlook off of Front Street



Source: Urban Systems (2019).

Further a proposed lookout tower structure at the west end of Barlow Avenue will create a focal point and visual anchor for the corridor while effecting future renewal of the existing

picnic shelter. This feature will also provide vertical permeability from the Front Street elevation to the trail below drawing visitors to the waterfront and allowing them to experience the views from multiple perspectives (Figure 2). (Urban Systems 2019)

The goal of the Waterfront Plan is to make Front Street into a true river street and the centre of downtown (Urban Systems 2019). Key public investments associated with the Waterfront plan include a community theatre, cultural centre, campground and trail connectivity along the Fraser River.

The City also has the Davie Street Revitalization Plan which includes efforts to address overall aesthetics, culture, economic conditions, and recreational opportunities in the area (L&M Engineering Ltd. 2022). Specifically, this plan would build on the downtown plan and has the vision to:

- Increasing mobility and accessibility of vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists, including sidewalk surfacing and continuity, pedestrian crossings, signage, on-street parking and corner bulb outs.
- Creating primary and secondary gateway elements through improved signage, street design and landscaping.
- Strengthening connections, both visually and physically, between the Plan area and the surrounding downtown core.
- Beautification of the Plan area through the design and maintenance of street trees, landscaping elements and public art.

Implementation of the Waterfront plan and the Davie Street Revitalization Plan could proceed with the status quo where Highway 97 continues along its existing route; however, key elements of the plans would not move forward until the Interconnector was in place. Even with plan implementation, the effect of leveraging more private sector property investment, building activity and pedestrian activity may not happen with increasing volumes of traffic and especially commercial vehicles and heavy trucks bisecting the area.

The overall downtown core of Quesnel will not meet its full economic development potential as long as Highway 97 remains in place in the downtown. In fact, the Quesnel OCP makes mention of the implementation of the Interconnector and the need for the City to work with the Ministry of Transportation to promote safety and efficiency by creation of the North-South Interconnector.

Active Transportation Investments and Use

The volume of traffic associated with the highway downtown will continue to grow and this will further challenge active transportation activities in the downtown along the Highway 97 route. With growing demand for bicycling and increased pedestrian traffic, along with other forms of active transportation, conflicts with the highway traffic will continue to increase. Further, active

transportation will continue to be in conflict with truck traffic as installation of separated bike lanes will remain challenged by the current corridor space in the downtown core.

Downtown Property Values and Property Taxes

Following from the baseline above, the discounted property values along Front Street and Carson Avenue are unlikely to change and close the gap with those on Reid Street as long as the current Highway 97 route remains. This will occur as a direct result of highway conditions and safety issues that have prompted the interconnector project in the first place but also indirectly because of deferred implementation of the City's downtown plans and the inability to park on Carson and Front Streets as long as this route is a highway.

Road Safety

As seen in the baseline above, the number of accidents in the downtown on Front Street and Carson Avenue (Highway 97 corridor) has remained constant over the last decade. However, the number of accidents along Highway 97 corridor through downtown represent the vast majority of all accidents and the associated insurance claim costs for the entire downtown of Quesnel.

Over time there will be incremental efforts to mitigate vehicle accidents but given growing traffic volumes and a continuation of the current highway design and route through the downtown, significant improvements in road safety are unlikely and accidents, insurance claims and injuries and property damage from these accidents will continue to rise.

Impacts

Population

Table 11 outlines the implications for population associated with the project

Table 11 Beneficial Impacts on Population

Impact Pathway	Description	Magnitude	Geographic Extent	Likelihood	Confidence
Shorter travel time through Cariboo Economic Region	Reduced travel time in region supports regional population growth.	Low	Cariboo Region	Low	Low
Removal of Highway in downtown	Opportunity for new growth in Quesnel Downtown	Moderate	Downtown Quesnel	Moderate	High

Municipalities in the Cariboo Economic Region are positioning their communities for growth, focused on capitalizing on “foot loose” workers who can bring their jobs with them, as well as seniors. Much of this transition is being driven by affordability issues in communities in southern BC. Work done in the late 1990s for the MOTI highlighted how improved travel times and highway routes is strongly correlated to business development and population growth. A review by MOTI highlighted the benefits of the Coquihalla Connector and Island Highway, including the increased economic development activity and population in communities in the Okanagan and mid-Vancouver Island (RCA Consulting. 1999).

It is likely that reducing travel times through Quesnel and continuing to implement elements of the Cariboo Connector program along Highway 97 will provide similar benefits to the Cariboo region.

Waterfront Access and Use

Front Street and Waterfront access impacts are summarized in Table 12.

Once the North-South Interconnector is established and Highway 97 traffic is removed from the downtown, Front Street will cease to be a barrier between the downtown and the river. Simple interventions like crosswalks along Front Street, bike lanes and the reintroduction of on-street parking will improve pedestrian and active transportation connectivity to the downtown and encourage economic activity and entrepreneurship.

Table 12 Beneficial Impacts on Waterfront Access

Impact Pathway	Description	Magnitude	Geographic Extent	Likelihood	Confidence
Waterfront Access via Front Street	Improved resident usage of the Front Street and waterfront usage.	High	Downtown	High	High
Waterfront Access via Davie Street area	Improved connectivity to City and waterways.	Moderate	Downtown	High	Moderate

Further, these investments would dovetail with development work within the Davie Street Revitalization Plan which would allow for upgraded connectivity to the downtown core. Wider sidewalks to support active transportation, new meeting places, and sidewalks connecting to Carson Avenue are anticipated.

Overall, removal of the highway designation on Front Street and Carson Avenue would open the opportunity for the attraction of new private sector investment in the downtown area as

restaurants and boutique shops that are better connected to the downtown and the waterfront areas of the City establish in the Front Street and Davie's Street areas.

Active transportation Investments and Use

Active transportation investment impacts are summarized in Table 13.

Table 13 Beneficial Impacts of Project Completion on Active Transportation

Impact Pathway	Description	Magnitude	Geographic Extent	Likelihood	Confidence
Active transportation investments and uses	Improved active transportation opportunities	High	Downtown/North-South Connector	High	High

The City has an active transportation plan and continuously invests in this network. One of the goals of the Davie Street Revitalization Area is to increase mobility and accessibility of vehicles, pedestrians and cyclists, including sidewalk surfacing and continuity, pedestrian crossings, signage, on-street parking and corner bulb outs. Better and safer connections between the waterfront and downtown is also foreseen. These objectives would be more seamlessly integrated into the surrounding area with the removal of Highway 97 from the downtown (L & M Engineering Ltd 2022).

Active transportation would also improve along the proposed Interconnector route itself. One of the guiding principles of the Project is supporting active transportation for pedestrians and cyclists thereby improving connections from North Star Road into downtown and up to Two Mile Flat, something that is not in place currently. (Urban Systems 2018) One key piece is the active transportation pathway that would be part of the new bridge and rail overpass. The existing separated sidewalk is very narrow, especially on the rail overpass, requiring single file pedestrian use. Bikes should not use the sidewalk, but due to the narrow lanes on the bridge, cyclists often ride/walk their bikes through the narrow sidewalk. At the south end of the Quesnel River Bridge, there is a trail to nowhere - a rocky, informal trail connects the sidewalk at the end of the bridge to the paved trail below that connects up to Carson subdivision and on to North Star Road and the Bryce Trail connecting up to South Quesnel. This disconnect is a common complaint from trail users.

Downtown Property Values and Property Taxes

Downtown property values and property taxes impacts are summarized in Table 14.

Table 14 Beneficial Impacts of Project Completion on Downtown Property and Property Taxes

Impact Pathway	Description	Magnitude	Geographic Extent	Likelihood	Confidence
Downtown Property Values and Property Taxes	Increased property values downtown and corresponding tax increases	Moderate	Downtown	Moderate	Moderate

Once Highway 97 is rerouted away from downtown, the public investments planned by the City of \$24 million in beautification and liveability upgrades is expected to occur at a much faster pace than in the base case. Front Street and Carson Avenue will become much more desirable for local businesses to set up shop, thereby increasing demand and leading to increased assessment values for the City (Table 15). For example, there is expected to be much greater interest in establishing outdoor patios to take advantage of riverfront views and access. If new private sector interest and activity matches the City's planned investments, assessments would increase with the potential to reach \$23.5 million dollars should averages reach the same level as Reid Street.

Table 15 Estimated Property Assessment in Downtown Quesnel with the Interconnector, 2024

	Property Assessment	Ratio	Additional Property Value	Total New Property Assessment
Front St.	\$7,469,400	3.15	\$16,022,845	\$23,492,245
Reid St.	\$26,613,400	1	\$0	\$26,613,400
Carson Ave.	\$10,564,100	2.3	\$13,764,170	\$24,328,270
Total	\$44,646,900		\$29,787,015	\$74,433,915

Source: City of Quesnel (2025) BCMAH (2024a,b)

This could have a corresponding increase of approximately \$517,080 in municipal property tax for the City of Quesnel for total municipal property taxation of \$1.29 million annually. Further new property taxes of \$263,800 for other levels of government would also be generated, making for a total of \$780,875 in incremental property taxes from increased investment leading to increased property assessments. This would represent an almost four percent increase in total property tax revenue for 2024.

Table 16 Estimated City of Quesnel Property Tax Increase in Downtown Quesnel with the Interconnector completion (Based on 2024 Property Tax Rates)

	Current City Property Tax	Ratio	Additional City Property Tax	Total New City Property Tax
Front St.	\$129,660	3.15	\$ 278,145.00	\$407,805
Reid St.	\$461,990	1	\$0	\$461,990
Carson Ave.	\$183,385	2.3	\$ 238,935	\$422,320
Total	\$775,035		\$517,080	\$1,292,115

Road Safety

Road Safety impacts are summarized in Table 17.

Table 17 Beneficial Impacts of Project Completion on Road Safety

Impact Pathway	Description	Magnitude	Geographic Extent	Likelihood	Confidence
Road Safety	Decrease traffic accidents and increase pedestrian safety with traffic moving along a North-South Connector on better designed traffic and pedestrian route	High	Downtown	High	High

The Interconnector would dramatically reduce pedestrian/vehicle incidents in downtown and allow placement of safer transportation infrastructure for pedestrians, cyclists and all active transportation modes. High collision areas would be eliminated and modern road safety design on the new route would ensure an overall reduction in crashes and casualties. Further, reduction in crashes will also lower overall insurance payments associated with having traffic move through Quesnel.

Indigenous Account

Statement of Effect

The Interconnector Project will engage and involve First Nations' in provincial and local transportation, land use and socio-economic planning that will meet the reconciliation objectives of the Province and City.

Baseline

The Quesnel area is home to several First Nations, including Lhtako Dene Nation, Nazko First Nation, Lhoosk'uz Dene Nation, and ʔEsdilagh First Nation. Each of these nations maintain their distinct traditions, languages, and governance structures.

The Lhtako Dene has been proactive in establishing various agreements to support economic development and environmental stewardship. These include partnerships related to clean energy projects, forestry agreements, and community development initiatives. Lhtako Dene has a benefits agreement and is involved in environmental stewardship initiatives with the Cariboo Gold Project. It has plans to access the province wide First Nations Clean Energy Business Fund to invest in projects that reduce energy costs and promote sustainability. This initiative aligns with broader efforts to adopt clean energy solutions within Indigenous communities.

Nazko has administrative offices in Quesnel. The nation is actively engaged in economic development initiatives to enhance community prosperity and sustainability. The Nazko Economic Development Corporation serves as the business development arm with involvement in logging and retail operations. Nazko Logging Limited specializes in forestry operations, while Three Nations Store & Lodge provides retail services and accommodations, supporting tourism and community needs.

The City of Quesnel has established relationships with several First Nations in the region, and a memorandum of understanding with Lhtako Dene. Historically, these relationships have been collaborative, with joint initiatives such as the development of a community forest involving the City and four local First Nations. In recent years, the City and the Lhtako Dene Nation have worked together to promote cultural awareness and reconciliation. For instance, the Quesnel Museum offers programs that explore Carrier First Nations' culture, highlighting traditional practices and the historical significance of the Lhtako Dene people in the area.

In 2019, the Government of BC passed into law the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act (DRIPA), meant to guide reconciliation with Indigenous people and self-determination. This has subsequently led to the 2022 Action Plan, revenue sharing agreements, land and title agreement and forestry reform. Many municipalities have signed protocol agreements, Memorandums of Understanding (MOUs), and Friendship Accords with local First

Nations to establish ongoing collaboration. The City of Quesnel partnered with Lhtako Dene Nation on projects like the Lhtako Dene Park and is working to improve government-to-government relations.

Outlook

In the future Indigenous communities will continue to strengthen governance and self-determination through modern treaties and more direct involvement in land and resource management and decision-making as directed by BC's adoption of United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples in law. While progress has been made, addressing the systemic inequalities remains an ongoing effort.

There will be further First Nations' involvement in and partnerships with industries such as forestry, mining, clean energy, and tourism. Indigenous-owned businesses are expanding, with support from organizations like the Indigenous Business and Investment Council, Indigenous Tourism BC and government funding for economic initiatives. More revenue-sharing agreements and Impact Benefit Agreements (IBAs) with corporations are providing financial resources and employment opportunities.

Many First Nations are developing clean energy projects like hydro, solar, and wind power to replace reliance on fossil fuels, while traditional ecological knowledge is being incorporated into forestry, fisheries, and resource management, and modernized land use plans.

There is a strong movement to revitalize Indigenous languages through immersion programs, digital tools, and funding for language preservation. Cultural tourism and heritage initiatives are growing, allowing First Nations to share their traditions while generating economic benefits. More schools and post-secondary institutions are incorporating Indigenous history and perspectives into their curriculum.

Ongoing challenges include housing and infrastructure as many communities still face a lack of affordable, quality housing and essential infrastructure. Gaps in healthcare access, mental health resources, and addiction services remain pressing issues. Continued investment is needed to support Indigenous youth in gaining skills and higher education.

Impacts

Achievement of Reconciliation Objectives

The impacts derive from two pathways, the project's capital budget for achieving reconciliation objectives and the opportunities for working with the City on redevelopment plans once Highway 97 is realigned away from the downtown core. Benefits for Reconciliation are noted in Table 18.

Table 18 Benefits for Reconciliation Objectives

Impact Pathway	Description	Magnitude	Geographic Extent	Likelihood	Confidence
Achievement of reconciliation objectives	The project capital budget includes accommodation and consultation initiatives	Moderate	BC	High	High

The BC Ministry of Transportation and Transit (MoTT) actively involves First Nations in highway and transit projects through consultation, economic partnerships, and capacity-building initiatives. There is provision in the project budget of \$32.7 million for First Nation consultation and accommodation which would go toward satisfying government obligations under DRIPA and reconciliation objectives. Collaborative planning would help shape final design, environmental mitigation strategies, and community safety improvements. The ministry also supports Indigenous employment and business development by requiring highway contractors to hire Indigenous workers and source materials from Indigenous businesses. The potential for First Nations' involvement in construction activities is based on their involvement in previous Highway 97 projects.

Collaboration and Partnerships

Table 19 Benefits for Reconciliation Objectives

Impact Pathway	Description	Magnitude	Geographic Extent	Likelihood	Confidence
Collaboration and partnerships with the City of Quesnel	The project will stimulate redevelopment of downtown that will include First Nations initiatives	Moderate	Quesnel	Moderate	Moderate

With the Interconnector, it is expected the City of Quesnel and local area First Nations would collaborate in implementing downtown revitalization initiatives. The Lhtako Dene First Nation, Nazko First Nation and Quesnel Tillicum Society Native Friendship Centre participated in the Quesnel Waterfront Plan (QWP) including Water and Indigenous Celebration Monumentation. The QWP proposes a public art and signage celebrating local Indigenous culture. (Urban Systems 2019).

The project would also improve safety conditions for Indigenous housing projects in downtown. Dakelh & Quesnel Community Housing Society owns and operates Milestone Manor and Stepping Stone, both located on Front Street. Stepping Stone was built for people of

Indigenous, Metis and Inuit ancestry who are living drug and alcohol free and has 26 one-bedroom units. The reduction of truck traffic would enhance street safety and living environment for these residents.

Environment Account

Statement of Effect

The North-South Interconnector Project will better address the potential risks and impacts associated with aquatic and terrestrial habitat resources as well as the development of cost-effective mitigation compared to the existing route, leading to better environmental outcomes. In addition, the rerouting and resulting transportation efficiencies will positively impact environmental values for residents and visitors, especially in the downtown.

Baseline

GHG

The current Highway 97 route through downtown Quesnel involves additional travel distance through the City as it follows a large U-shaped route through the community. It also involves numerous stops, idling and accelerating at traffic lights. This involves additional energy and associated green house gases (GHGs) for vehicles travelling additional distances as they move through town, particularly for trucks.

Air Quality

Besides the GHG impacts from vehicle traffic, there are localized air quality impacts associated with vehicles idling at intersections or larger vehicles accelerating from stop lights. With an increase in localized dust, carbon monoxide, and other toxic fumes, impacts can be most noticeable for those using the adjacent area as pedestrians or other active transportation modes (i.e., bikes, scooters, etc.), as well as residents living directly on the route.

Specifically, the contribution from on-road vehicles to ambient air pollution is referred to as traffic-related air pollution (TRAP). TRAP consists of a mixture of particulate and gaseous pollutants associated with combustion (exhaust) and non-combustion (e.g. evaporation, abrasion wear) processes. TRAP can influence ambient concentrations of several air pollutants, including fine particulate matter (PM_{2.5}) and ozone (O₃) that are responsible for smog. The impact of TRAP on air quality is greater near a roadway and gradually decreases to background conditions within 100 m to 500 m from a roadway. (Health Canada 2022)

Businesses located at intersections experience the adverse externality of on-going idling and vehicle accelerating near their business entrances as well impacts from dust from truck breaking, this can lead to health impacts with long-term exposure. In addition, the downtown

area along Front Street, the hospital and several seniors' residents are all located adjacent the highway. The elderly are at higher risks of adverse health impacts from TRAP (Health Canada 2022). A resident survey highlighted the impacts on air quality from vehicle traffic as a concern (Urban Systems 2018).

Noise

Long-term exposure to traffic noise has been linked to adverse human health impacts. Research has shown that rates of a variety of negative health impacts are associated with roadway noise (EHP 2023, EI 2022). According to the World Health Organization, road traffic should not exceed 53 dB L during the day, while nighttime exposure the sound pressure levels are recommend not to exceed 45 dB (WHO 2024). While a fairly busy road has an average decibel level of 61 (CBC 2023). A heavy truck traveling at 48 kilometres/hour creates approximately 80 dB at approximately 15 metres (NPC 2025). In the Front Street area this heightened noise volume is also in close proximity to vulnerable population in the resident developments and the hospital located along the Front Street route.

One of the challenges for Quesnel is that heavy trucks often come to a complete stop in the downtown core and are required to accelerate from a stop that results in even greater vehicle loudness. This noise has impacted the downtown corridor for decades and noise plus other adverse externalities has contributed to the current state of under investment at numerous properties adjacent to the highway in the downtown area.

Visuals

The downtown area of Quesnel is visually impacted by the Highway 97 corridor and the associated large volume of traffic moving through the centre of town. This also includes light pollution associated with the volume of traffic using the highway in the dark which again detracts from the desirability of the route for other municipal uses.

Dangerous Goods

Considerable dangerous goods and other heavy traffic moves through the downtown area of Quesnel and within close proximity of multiple senior residences, medical clinics, low-income housing, emergency shelter and transitional housing and the regional hospital. Currently, the highway runs beside G.R. Baker Memorial Hospital and comes within approximately nine metres of the main hospital building.

Outlook

GHG

As long as highway vehicle traffic travels through the downtown core of the City of Quesnel GHG Emissions are not anticipated to change noticeably unless there was a fundamental conversion from internal combustion engines to other forms of propulsion that did not

generate GHG. If traffic volumes increase on Highway 97 moving forward, it is likely that GHGs emissions associated with the current route through Quesnel will only increase.

Air Quality

Air quality will remain impacted in the downtown core as long as the highway traffic continues to use the downtown route. Again, the proviso is that vehicle and particularly truck traffic is using internal combustion technologies. It is possible that overtime emissions may decrease as electric vehicles (EV) and other technologies become more popular, but it is believed that the adoption by commercial vehicle and truck fleets will be much slower in coming and will still not alleviate vehicle dust. A likely outlook is that incremental improvements in vehicle emissions will be offset by an absolute increase in traffic volumes. In the meantime, exposure to TRAP for those living and working in close proximity to the Highway downtown, particularly the elderly, will continue to be exposed to adverse long term health impacts.

Noise

Noise associated with vehicle traffic on Highway 97 is not anticipated to change noticeably in the downtown area in the near future. This will continue to deter (along with road safety issues) and commercial development along Front Street and Carson Avenue. It also will continue to reduce the desirability of the area for residential use and recreational enjoyment.

Visuals

The visuals and concerns with light pollution are not anticipated to change noticeably as long as Highway 97 moves through the downtown core.

Dangerous Goods

Data from MOTI at the Quesnel truck scales from February 2016 over an 8.75-hour shift found that 86 trucks with dangerous goods were weighed. The two dominant types of dangerous goods are Gasoline (49%) and Diesel Fuel (41%), followed by corrosive liquids (6%), alcohols (1%), batteries (1%), flammable liquids (1%), and aviation fuel (1%) (Urban Systems 2016).

While the destination of these dangerous goods was not known, it can be assumed most would travel along the Highway 97 route through Quesnel. This would continue as long as industrial and business activities along the corridor remain similar into the future.

Impacts

GHG

Benefits of reduced GHG Emissions are noted in Table 20.

Table 20 Beneficial Impacts of Project Completion on GHG Emissions

Impact Pathway	Description	Magnitude	Geographic Extent	Likelihood	Confidence
GHG Emissions	Reduced GHG emissions from use of shorter and more efficient travel corridor	Low	Cariboo	High	High

The interconnector route will lead to reduced fuel consumption, this is anticipated because of a decrease in delays and a shorter travel distance. Calculating fuel consumption as a basis for the vehicle operating costs leads to an estimated 1.52 million litres of fuel required over a 25-year planning period when the Interconnector route is in operation, compared to the current downtown route estimate of approximate 3.05 million litres. The lower fuel consumption over the 25-year period will lead to reduced GHG emissions. (Binnie 2020)

Table 21 shows average vehicle emissions reduction per year when the Interconnector route is in operations. A total of 4,250 tonnes per year of GHGs will be saved mostly in the form of carbon dioxide.

Table 21 Vehicle Emissions Savings (Tonnes Per Year)

Greenhouse Gas	Tonnes
Carbon Dioxide	3,751
Nitrogen Oxide	307
Hydrocarbons	192
Annual Savings	4,250

Source: Binnie (2020)

Air Quality

Benefits for improved air quality are noted in Table 22.

Table 22 Beneficial Impacts of Project Completion on Air Quality

Impact Pathway	Description	Magnitude	Geographic Extent	Likelihood	Confidence
Air Quality	Improved air quality downtown	Moderate	Downtown	High	High
	Improved air quality throughout City	Low	City	Moderate	Low

The completion of the North-South Interconnector will lead to a noticeable improvement in air quality in the downtown due to more even flow of traffic and reduced travel distances. There is expected to be a smaller airshed impact associated with the new Interconnector route as well. This should create a noticeable benefit to hospitalized patients, seniors, and vulnerable people who live along the highway downtown.

Noise

Benefits from reduced noise levels are noted in Table 23.

Table 23 Beneficial Impacts of Project Completion on Noise Levels

Impact Pathway	Description	Magnitude	Geographic Extent	Likelihood	Confidence
Noise Levels	Reduced noise levels in the downtown Quesnel area, increased noise on north-south route	High	Downtown/North-South Connector route	High	High

Significantly reducing traffic volumes, and in particular heavy truck traffic, will have a positive impact on downtown noise levels, particularly along the Highway 97 route. Moving the highway from Carson Ave and Front Street would dramatically reduce the noise pollution for residents in senior care facilities, the hospital, low-income housing, Indigenous housing, emergency shelter and transitional housing. This will create a healthier and more peaceful environment that enhances well-being and overall quality of life. (City of Quesnel 2025)

The Interconnector will see an increase in traffic along that route; however, traffic will not require the same frequent stop and starts and with traffic noise abatement techniques not available in the urban downtown setting, noise should be more moderated.

Visuals

Benefits from improved visuals in the Downtown core noted in Table 24.

Table 24 Beneficial Impacts of Project Completion on Visuals

Impact Pathway	Description	Magnitude	Geographic Extent	Likelihood	Confidence
Visuals	Heavy traffic removal supports downtown redevelopment	High	Downtown	High	Moderate

The reduced highway traffic downtown and a return to a conventional municipal grid street setting will allow the City of Quesnel to move forward with its downtown revitalization and beautification plans. Significant changes to the roadways with trees, walkways and other infrastructure, combined with reduced traffic volumes will create a more desirable visual setting while mitigating light pollution affecting roadside properties and buildings.

Dangerous Goods

Benefits from reduced dangerous goods transportation are noted in Table 25.

Table 25 Beneficial Impacts of Project Completion on Movement of Dangerous Goods

Impact Pathway	Description	Magnitude	Geographic Extent	Likelihood	Confidence
Dangerous Goods Traffic	Remove dangerous goods from moving through downtown core.	Moderate	Downtown	High	High

Dangerous goods and other heavy traffic would be significantly reduced from areas of downtown including in proximity to the hospital, care home facilities and other residential and accommodation properties. Diversion to the Interconnector would experience fewer intersections, be shorter in distance through town and be constructed with greater distances from the roadside to any adjoining structures. The Interconnector would not eliminate all dangerous goods in downtown as some local-area businesses would still receive them. However, the removal of traffic moving through Quesnel with dangerous goods would significantly improve overall environmental and health safety risks in the downtown core.

Business Case Account

Statement of Effect

The Interconnector Project will require provincial spending on planning, construction and maintenance that will generate safety, travel time savings, and avoided catastrophic failure cost. A ratio of discounted costs and benefits above 1 indicates for every dollar spent, the returns (or benefits) are more than one dollar, suggesting the Project is financially viable and worth pursuing. A ratio of less than 1 suggests the opposite.

Baseline

The current route and alignment of Highway 97 occur through downtown Quesnel has high intersection collision rates and significant travel time and delays. Heavy vehicles and trucks carrying dangerous goods impact community safety.

Travel time and delay are caused by high volumes of heavy vehicles traversing multiple stoppage points and conflict locations and an overall poor quality of travel through the downtown core.

Highway reliability is poor as this stretch of Highway 97 has a history of closure due to collisions and natural hazards. Alternative detour routes require trucks to travel onto residential roads. Highway 97 is an important north-south route for the communities of Quesnel and Williams Lake as it is the only connection between these communities and to the provincial highway network.

Highway 97 conditions in downtown combined with occasional inclement weather conditions (e.g., fog, ice, wildfire smoke) creates a hazardous environment for both local and through traffic.

Outlook

Even without the Interconnector project, MOTT has indicated the two bridges on Highway 97 in Quesnel - the Quesnel River Bridge and the Quesnel Rail Overhead Structure – require replacement in the near future or significant rehabilitation for continued use. In 2020 the estimated replacement cost was more than \$44 million (Binnie 2020).

Even with the replacement of bridge infrastructure, travel time and delay, reliability and safety issues would still be unresolved. By 2026, the speed within the study corridor is expected to average between 42-47 km/h while the posted speed ranges from 50-60 km/h. Without any improvement, by 2050, the speed is expected to further drop to the 40-45 km/h range. (Binnie 2020)

Impacts

A Business Case prepared in 2020 for the MOTI (Binnie 2020) found that the Project generated incremental benefits of \$281.6 million and incremental costs of \$243.6 million. The B/C ratio of 1.16 has a net present value (NPV) of \$38.0 million. The safety, travel time savings, and avoided catastrophic failure cost of the Project outweighed its costs; therefore, it was financially sound to proceed with the Project to construct a four-lane Interconnector and replace the Quesnel Overhead Structure and Quesnel River Bridge. The Project would address a major safety and mobility concerns through the Quesnel downtown core and play a large part in ensuring reliable and efficient movement of people and goods through Quesnel.

A positive business case is important because of the following: (MOTI 2015)

- Business cases establish the basis for investment and must be incorporated into the life cycle of a project.
- Business cases must be complete, representative and developed based on accepted practices.

- The responsibility for the preparation and submission of business cases and ensuring that recommendations are supported by, and consistent with the business case, lies with the project sponsor.

In this case, the project sponsor is MOTT and the provincial government. The Business Case found that the financial soundness of the project is from a provincial perspective, in other words, the province overall would be better off through its investment and completion.

In lieu of changes to route design and the underlying assumptions in MOTT's previous studies on the Interconnector the key difference since 2020 would be the effects of inflation. An update of business case costs and benefits using the Ministry's Highway Construction Inflation Indexes 2023 – Updated April 2023 (MOTI 2023) was used to convert historical construction cost data from 2020 to 2025 values. As all monetary values are inflated equally, the 2020 business case rendering of a positive benefit-cost ratio of 1.16 and a determination that it was financially sound to proceed with the Project remain unchanged.

In summary, the benefits of the Interconnector project outweigh its costs and represents a sound use of public resources that would increase social welfare in the province, the Cariboo Economic Region and the City.

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