



For Immediate Release
2003TRAN0063-000931
Oct. 28, 2003

Ministry of Transportation

NEW BRIDGE FULFILLS PREMIER'S COMMITMENT TO KELOWNA

KELOWNA – The province has issued a request for expressions of interest to build a new five-lane Okanagan Lake Bridge, Transportation Minister Judith Reid announced today.

“Residents of Kelowna and the Okanagan have been waiting over a decade for a new bridge,” Reid said. “Previous governments repeatedly promised to build a new bridge. Premier Campbell pledged in his state of the province address in February that our government would deliver, and today we are moving forward.”

“We’ve met with a number of stakeholders including the City of Kelowna, the Downtown Business Association and the chambers of commerce for Kelowna, Westbank and Peachland,” said Kelowna Mission MLA Sindi Hawkins. “We all agree that a new bridge will have a positive impact on jobs, on tourism, and most importantly, on safety.”

The Okanagan Lake Bridge, located on Highway 97 in Kelowna, is the most congested stretch of highway outside the Lower Mainland. After 45 years of use, Kelowna has outgrown the bridge, and repairs are no longer an option. It is estimated that within eight years, 52,000 cars will use the bridge daily.

The project is expected to cost approximately \$100 million. In addition, two interchanges valued at approximately \$20 million will be built on the west side of the bridge. The ministry is now seeking a partner to design, build, finance and operate the bridge, with no user tolls.

“A new five-lane, toll-free bridge will relieve congestion on the highway and make the route safer and more efficient for my constituents,” said Okanagan-Westside MLA Rick Thorpe. “It will also support economic growth in the Okanagan tourism industry, especially in Kelowna, Westbank and Peachland.”

“Government has been working continuously to arrive at this point,” said Kelowna-Lake Country MLA John Weisbeck. “Numerous studies and consultations have been taking place to ensure this bridge meets Kelowna’s future traffic needs.”

“The city is very pleased that the government is now moving forward with a new Okanagan Lake Bridge,” said Kelowna Mayor Walter Gray. “A new bridge will definitely be a significant economic engine for the Okanagan region. Kelowna and the communities on the west side are economically linked and I know we all look forward to the day when the new bridge, with increased capacity, will open. Congestion has certainly been a frustration for residents, businesses and tourists, and I applaud the government on its commitment to the Okanagan.”

As part of government's Heartlands Transportation Strategy, the province is investing more than \$300 million over three years in the southern Interior.

Projects already underway include \$15.6 million to widen Highway 97 between Peachland and Summerland, \$22.5 million to upgrade the Swan Lake junction north of Vernon and \$16.7 million worth of provincial-federal improvements to Highway 5 at Preacher Hill and Highway 1 near Salmon Arm.

A request for expressions of interest has been issued for the design, construction, finance and operation of the bridge. Construction is expected to begin by fall 2004.

Expected timeline:

October 2003 – Request for expressions of interest issued

Spring 2004 – Formal request for proposals issued

Fall 2004 – Construction begins

Spring 2008 – New Okanagan Lake Bridge opens

The request for expressions of interest can be viewed at <http://www.th.gov.bc.ca/olb-reoi/>

Media Public Affairs Bureau
contact: Ministry of Transportation
 250 387-5798

Visit the province's Web site at www.gov.bc.ca for online information and services.