
NEWS RELEASE

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Office of the Premier

PREMIER LAUNCHES INITIATIVES TO BOOST RURAL ECONOMIES

PENTICTON – Premier Gordon Campbell announced a host of new initiatives to support rural communities today, including a major expansion of the Towns for Tomorrow infrastructure program, extending cell phone and Internet service, a new medical accommodation assistance program and a commitment to help communities utilize industrial resource roads to create better transportation networks.

“Every community I visit has a vision of what they want their town to look like and how they plan to make it better for their children,” said Premier Campbell, who made the announcements at the Union of B.C. Municipalities Convention. “Today we are making a commitment that we will do the small things that make a big difference and work hand-in-hand with communities across British Columbia so they can realize their vision.”

The Province will expand the Towns for Tomorrow community infrastructure program to communities with a population up to 15,000 and extend the program for an additional two years for a total commitment of \$50 million; \$10 million for the remainder of this year and \$20 million for each of the next two years. Previously, the program was only available to communities with a population up to 5,000.

Unlike traditional government infrastructure programs that provide matching funding up to one-third of the total project costs, Towns for Tomorrow provides up to 80 per cent of the funding for approved projects up to \$500,000, with communities funding the remaining 20 per cent. Towns under 5,000 will continue to cost share with the Province on an 80/20 basis. Towns from 5,000 to 15,000 will share on a 75/25 basis.

A new streamlined application process will also be introduced for Towns for Tomorrow, cutting down on the amount of preparation work small communities need to apply for funding. Applications will be no more than two pages, and communities will have an answer within 60 days.

Other rural and remote initiatives announced by Premier Campbell include:

- A BC Family Residence Program to help provide accommodation for family members who need to travel to regional health centres. It will start at BC Children’s Hospital in Vancouver. The medical travel assistance program will also be increased.
- The extension of cell phone and Internet service directly to homes and businesses. Over the next three years, the Province will use procurement policies to leverage “last mile” Internet connections. The Province also plans to work to expand cell phone service.

- A new one-stop Rural Secretariat within the Ministry of Community Development will directly assist municipalities and regional districts in applying for provincial and federal government infrastructure funding programs.
- An initiative to open access to resource roads for residents and ensure they are properly maintained. The Province will work with the UBCM executive to develop a plan that ensures resource roads across the province meet the needs of communities.
- A task force composed of representatives from remote communities and farmers will be formed to develop strategies to get fresh food grown in B.C. to remote communities.
- Support for the designation of Wells Gray Park as a United Nations Education, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) World Heritage Site.

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