

LA GRANDE ALLIANCE
 ስነ-ፍጥነት ስራ
 COMMUNICATIONS REPORT

MARCH 2024

TABLE OF CONTENTS

01

Timeline

02

Communications Plan

03

Engagement Activities

04

Community Feedback

05

Takeaways



INTRODUCTION

The following report presents the efforts undertaken by the Memorandum of Understanding regarding the Cree-Quebec Sustainable Infrastructure Program (commonly known as La Grande Alliance, or LGA) Transportation Infrastructure Feasibility Studies team during the Communications Phase, which ran more intensively between January 2023 and March 2024. This phase began ramping up work following the completion of the bulk of the study reports, in the first half of 2023. The goal of the Communications Phase was to engage with as many residents on the Eeyou Istchee-Baie-James territory as possible, to communicate the results of the studies, to gather feedback and to engage with citizens.

CONTEXT

Although the Grande Alliance MOU was signed in February 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic severely slowed down any advancement on the study for nearly one year. On April 1, 2021, a network of Community Information Officers (CIOs) was implemented by the Cree Development Corporation (CDC) in each of the nine Cree communities as well as with the Washaw Sibi Eeyou Association. In parallel, two Call for Tenders were made by the CDC for the Phase I Feasibility Study and the Phases II/III Pre-Feasibility Study, with contracts awarded in May and June 2021, respectively to the Vision Eeyou Istchee consortium (made up of Stantec, Systra Canada and Groupe Desfor) and to WSP and Maamuu Consulting.

The bulk of the draft reports for each of the two studies were finalized between January-June 2023. During this same period, the LGA team began implementing the Communications Phase.

Fully understanding such a wide-ranging comprehensive study was not an easy task. As such, much of the first six months of 2023 were used for internal capacity building as well as to develop communications tools adapted to community needs. Communications work was heavily increased as of June 2023 and has continued at a steady pace since then.

REPORT OVERVIEW

This report covers the main activities undertaken, including the communication plan developed by the team at the outset, sessions held with communities and regional entities, highlights of comments obtained and key activities. This has allowed the LGA team to establish a clear understanding of where each Cree community is in terms of reflections on the LGA as a whole as well as individual components. These are included in the report. The report then provides recommendations regarding future potential phases, if the Cree Nation wishes to continue the discussion.

TIMELINE OF LA GRANDE ALLIANCE

STUDY

FEBRUARY 2020

Signature of the MOU

APRIL 2021

Launch of the CIO network

JUNE 2021

Launch of the studies

SEPTEMBER 2022

Interim Report of the Studies

NOVEMBER 2023

Executive Summary
of the Studies

FEBRUARY & March 2024

Land Users' Meetings
in Ouje-Bougoumou,
Waskaganish, Chisasibi and
Mistissini

MARCH 2024

Submission of study results

MARCH 2024

End of mandate

COMMUNICATIONS

FEBRUARY 2020

Launch of the website
(one-page version)

APRIL 2021

First website enhancement
(6 pages)

MAY 2021

First edition of the newsletter

OCTOBER 2021

Launch of the Facebook page

OCTOBER 2022

Animated video #1
Launch of the YouTube channel

NOVEMBER 2022

Second website enhancement
(14 pages)

JUNE 2023

Launch of the intensive
Communications phase

APRIL 2023

Animated video #2

AUGUST 2023

First episode of the Radio show

SEPTEMBER 2023

100th edition of the newsletter

OCTOBER 2023

Animated video #3

MARCH 2024

Animated video #4

CIO MEETINGS

Online unless indicated otherwise

2021

April 22
May 21
June 10
June 23
July 8
August 5
August 27
September 3
September 22-23
October 21
November 25

2022

January 26
February 23
March 29
June 3
July 12-13 (Val-d'Or)
September 6
October 25-26 (Montréal)
November 21
December 6-8 (Gatineau)

2023

January 18-19 (Val-d'Or)
February 23
March 13-14 (Montréal)
May 25
July 10 & 12 (Montréal)
August 22
November 17
December 5-7 (Gatineau)

2024

January 12
January 30-31 / February 1
(Ouje-Bougoumou)
March 26-28 (Montréal)



COMMUNICATIONS PLAN

OBJECTIVES

The communications plan had 3 main objectives:

01

Continue the ongoing discussion and engagement with communities and land users

02

Promote LGA's study process and results

03

Build understanding and trust in the process as a Cree-led initiative by and for the communities

STRATEGY

Past development in Eeyou Istchee has not only left scars on the land but have also contributed to a sense of exclusion among community members who feel marginalized in decision-making processes and excluded from the benefits of projects that have impacted them. Due to the limits in the early moments of the communications campaign caused by the COVID outbreak, LGA needed to build trust somehow fast, so the communications strategy was one of availability and transparency.

In-person discussions are essential activities for trust-building, so were relied on for direct communications with most audiences. However, communicating face-to-face with a relatively small audience on a large territory is a challenging venture that requires schedules alignment, good weather, solid planning, and considerable budget.

This is why the communications plan included, from the beginning, a range of digital communications channels, to help as support to the in-person ones with awareness-building, to notify and updating on ongoing conversations and events.

Beyond this physical proximity, the communications campaign also needed to be available from a language standpoint. Building on the network of Community Information Officers (CIOs) and Cree Liaison Officers (CLOs), almost all meetings featured at least one Cree team members, allowing participants to express themselves and obtain answers in their preferred language.



AUDIENCES

Most communications actions focus on the large population of territory residents, but some groups require specific attention, either for their very precise reality or because they tend to be excluded from some discussions that happen in larger groups.

Throughout the LGA program, the following groups have been engaged with at various levels and with specific messaging and event formats, in many cases developed based on their feedback.

CREE LAND USERS	COMMUNITY MEMBERS	REGIONAL LEADERSHIP
LOCAL LEADERSHIP	ELDERS	YOUTH
WOMEN	INTEREST GROUPS	BUSINESS GROUPS
JAMESIANS	OTHER GOVERNMENTS	OTHER FIRST NATIONS



CHANNELS

MEETINGS

PUBLIC MEETINGS:

Offering community members opportunities to learn, ask questions, obtain clarifications, and express opinion about the program

FOCUS GROUP MEETINGS

Delivering presentations to organizations, often focused on their field of interest, to sharpen the content

PRODUCED BY LGA

WEBSITE

A source of information for consultation at any time

PROMOTIONAL ITEMS

Items to attract attention and increase visibility

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Synthesized and popularized version of the full study reports

NEWSLETTER

Weekly news in short format

SOCIAL MEDIA

Ensuring a Facebook presence

STUDY BRIEFS

Reference information to be used as leave-behinds

MEDIA INTERVIEWS

Ensuring media coverage to promote process, discuss results and invite to events

RADIO SHOWS

Long form shows developed by CIOs and aired on James Bay Cree Communications Society

PODCASTS

Audio content created by CIOs and made available on our platforms

ANIMATED VIDEOS

Explanatory videos on LGA, its mission and process

POSTERS

Short content and invites to events to be posted in communities

BOOKMARKS

Simple and bilingual content offered at events to boost survey responses



PAID OPPORTUNITIES



FACEBOOK/ INSTAGRAM ADS

Content targeted
at Eeyou Istchee
residents



SEARCH ENGINE MARKETING

Online ads targeting
search queries close to
LGA topics



YOUTUBE ADS

Short versions
of the animated
videos advertised
to territory residents in
their video feed and
during videos



MEDIA ADS

Ads in local media to
promote events and
discussions on LGA

MEASUREMENT

SURVEY

15-question perception survey for all territory
residents to better understand public perception,
understanding and support

DIGITAL ENGAGEMENT RESULTS

Data from the digital campaigns to
keep track of results and required
adjustments



RESULTS

SOCIAL MEDIA & ONLINE PRESENCE



WEBSITE

264,000

Visitors on
the website

02:13

Average time spent
on each page



NEWSLETTER

124

Editions of the
newsletter

800+

Readers each week



FACEBOOK

702

Followers

152

Posts



PAID ADS (FACEBOOK)

1.8M

Video views

19,000

Clicks



YOUTUBE

12

Animated videos
(in 3 languages)

2.7M

Views



PAID SEARCH (GOOGLE/BING)

245,000

Impressions

10,000

Clicks



DISPLAY ADS (GOOGLE)

40M

Impressions

280,000

Clicks



DETAILS ON ENGAGEMENT

The discussions with community members and land users that have taken place since the beginning of LGA are referred to as “engagement” to mark the exploratory nature of the program. If any of the studied infrastructures was to go forward, then further studies and analyses would be required, including the standard “consultation” process that people are accustomed to.

	GENERAL ASSEMBLY PUBLIC MEETINGS	FOCUS GROUP	LAND USER MEETINGS & INTERVIEWS	TRAPLINES INCLUDED
Regional Entities	33	11	4	N/A
Whapmagoostui	7	6	17	13
Chisasibi	12	4	37	23
Wemindji	3	1	22	8
Eastmain	3	3	15	4
Waskaganish	5	2	26	8
Nemaska	1	1	28	12
Waswanipi	1	0	3	3
Ouje-Bougoumou	3	0	8	4
Mistissini	3	2	66	19
Washaw Sibi Eeyou Association	2	1	9	4
Total	73 AGA meetings (30- 100 participants for each)	31 focus groups (usually between 5 and 15 participants)	235 interviews (with 2- 3 people at that time)	98 traplines included

REGIONAL CREE ENTITIES INCLUDED

- Cree Native Arts & Crafts Association
- Cree Trappers' Association
- Cree Nation Youth Council
- Nishiiyuu Council of Elders
- Cree Board of Compensation
- Niskamoon Corporation
- Cree Women of Eeyou Istchee Association
- Cree Outfitting and Tourism Association
- Economic Development Officers (Eeyou Economic Group)
- Department of Commerce and Industry (Cree Nation Government)
- Department of Capital Works (Cree Nation Government)
- Apatisiwin Skills Development (Cree Nation Government)
- Department of Environment and Remedial Works (Cree Nation Government)
- Environmental and Social Impact Review Committee (Comex)
- Cree School Board
- Cree Board of Health and Social Services of James Bay

CONSTRAINTS

Since the COVID-19 global pandemic, engaging people in communities has continued to be a challenge. In fact, social distancing restrictions remained in place in many parts of the territory into the summer of 2022. These severely constrained the team's ability to hold engagement sessions prior to the Communication Phase. As a result, little to no sustained communications to the entire communities were conducted prior to 2023. Thus, many of the discussions engaged in the last year represented a first contact with people.

Much effort was therefore made to explain the basic concepts of the study, and so advanced discussions were limited to the last few months.

In summer 2023, a series of devastating forest fires, first in the southern part of Eeyou Istchee, then in the north, caused important delays to the implementation of the communication plan in several communities. In fact, several Assemblies scheduled for the summer, were postponed until the fall.

CREE PERCEPTION SURVEYS

In August of 2021, the first survey was conducted online within the Cree communities with 294 respondents, to establish a benchmark of the level of awareness of La Grande Alliance (LGA). The questionnaire was simple and presented 7 questions. Two years later, a second online survey, with 15 questions, including those from the previous survey, gathered 282 Cree respondents. Moreover, this time, a telephone survey collected answers from a total of 462 respondents with the Jamesian population. A full report of the survey can be found on the website.

The purpose of the survey was to measure the evolution of the awareness of Cree communities about LGA between 2021 and the present and between the Cree and the Jamesians. However, both surveys can't be generalized to the population due to the small sample size, particularly among the Crees, and the not probabilistic sampling method. Caution is advised in the interpretation, which can be found in full here.

For Crees and Jamesians, social media is the main source of information (37%) but the Crees rely on LGA official sources as a second provider of information (22%) whereas the Jamesians rely on traditional media (28%) as a second source of information (television, radio, newspaper).

Many misunderstandings and interpretations persist about LGA.. Approximately one-fifth of respondents demonstrate adequate understanding, while one-third either lack knowledge or are unwilling to discuss it. More than half of respondents express a desire for and necessity of increased engagement. In summary, there is a clear need to further the conversation in Eeyou Istchee.

Here are a few takeaways from the surveys:

Most respondents have somehow heard about LGA 84% (in 2021) versus 90% (in 2023).

In 2021, 50% of Cree have a general idea of LGA versus 81% in 2023, a clear improvement.

Moreover, more Crees declared being well-informed about LGA in 2023, at 22%, previously 11% in 2021.

ENGAGEMENT FEEDBACK

To achieve its objective of involving local communities in the design of transportation infrastructure development, LGA carried out a number of engagement activities with community members. For each engagement activity, a record was produced using the “Survey 123” tool, which allows for collected information to be Cree-owned, and only be used to facilitate and document the engagement process.

This section summarizes the hopes, concerns, questions, and suggestions that were documented throughout the engagement phase.

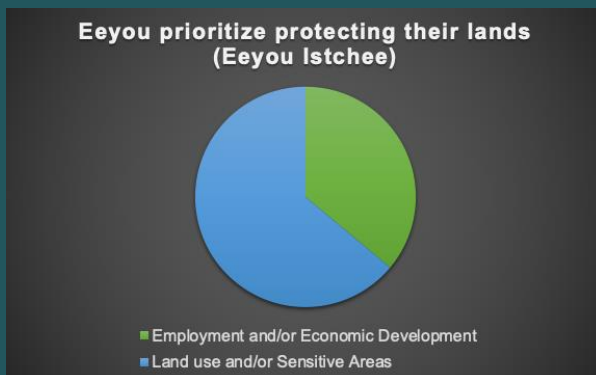
PRE-ENGAGEMENT PERCEPTIONS

LGA’s engagement efforts noted a notable disparity between the goals described in the Memorandum of Understanding and Eeyou perceptions about LGA studies. At the initial stages of presenting the studies,

questions arose on topics such as tallymen refusal, alternative road alignments, construction start or general need for a railroad. Additionally, the perception that LGA represents “an agreement between four walls” involving “the government” was also documented. At the same time, Cree do not close the door, but rather demand that “everyone” is informed.

PROTECTING THE CULTURE AND CREE LIVELIHOODS

Cree cultural rights are at stake in any large infrastructure development proposal. Passing down Eeyou knowledge to the youth depends on the integrity and health of the land. But just as cultural survival is important, so is economic development. The importance of traditional harvesting to traditional sharing practices, for example, co-exists with questions about job creation and other economic opportunities.



The above graph shows the proportion of Survey 123 entries that can be classified as concerns and questions about the purpose and “promoters” of LGA, and those classified as demonstrating an interest in how best to carry out infrastructure and economic development in general in Eeyou Istchee. The blue portion of the pie graph hints at an early engagement gap in relation to individuals who were not involved in the study phase. In other words, this was the first time they heard about LGA, which contributed to uncertainty about what contributed to uncertainty is happening with LGA; this uncertainty generated transparency concerns.

On the other hand, as is shown by the green section of the pie chart, most of what the communication phase encountered can be classified as an interest in how best to protect the land and carry out infrastructure development that will serve the connectivity (and economic) needs of communities.

Transportation infrastructure raises immediate concerns, but also hopes. Communities see new road infrastructure, for example, as positive when it can offer safer routes and better access to traplines and camps in spring and winter. Concerns about road extensions and access roads is, however, widespread. Increased traffic leading to thefts in camps, pollution (dust, fires), vibrations that disturb hunting and fishing, trespassing and poaching, and other threats to Cree life on the land are cited. Some tallymen are concerned that roads passing too close to a trapline has a greater impact when that trapline is small. At the same time, many land users would accommodate mitigation measures, such as having gated community access roads to camps, and a guarantee of prompt clean-up response to spills, fires, etc.

Engagement activities reveal cautious optimism among Eeyou stakeholders that ways can be found to have better ground connectivity without sacrificing sacred spaces that sustain Eeyou life on the land. This is mostly true about highways and roads, and less so regarding a harbour and railways.

PROTECTING TRAPLINES

Protection for traditional livelihoods and highly valuable areas (i.e. wetlands, water quality) is an expectation that is shared across the territory. Eeyou stakeholders, including Tallymen, community members, regional and local associations of Elders, trappers, hunters, women, and youth, are keenly aware of what is at stake.

However, Tallymen constitute the main voice regarding infrastructure's impacts on the land. Traplines are vital to Eeyou culture and livelihoods. Tallymen have questions about the possibility of changes to trapline boundaries when they encounter extractive activities, such as forestry. One tallyman expressed that "trapline boundaries are an issue all over [especially in] zones with forestry [as] people want their piece of the pie and [will] change the trapline boundaries." Apart from impacts in terms of environmental effects, transportation infrastructure raises concerns about zoning and land use management. Similarly, throughout the engagement process, the fact of climate change was mentioned, mostly by Tallymen. Tallymen are key witnesses to the effects of climate change, which in their view must be discussed in any infrastructure development proposal.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS OF LGA

In terms of the benefits of better connectivity and transportation, there are mixed positions and perceptions. Some welcome the promise of safety and convenience of new roads, and more convenient and affordable transportation (vis-à-vis flying, for example). Others worry about increased traffic and potential disturbances in highly sensitive and valuable areas, and illegal (and legal) land occupations by non-Cree.

On the coast of Eeyou Istchee, economic opportunities that may be stimulated by LGA are expected to be weighed against higher sea traffic and larger volumes of road traffic, such as could result from linking an isolated community to the Eeyou Istchee road network (i.e., Whapmagoostui).

RAIL DEVELOPMENT

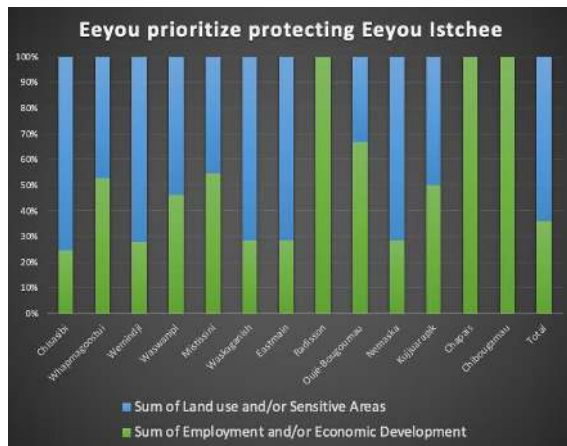
Community members are generally worried about further damaging a territory that has been transformed by major projects. The concern is that the land may not be able to support more large developments. Yet others hold hope that new projects can be aligned to check all boxes of community expectations and avoid sensitive areas. This hope is manifested regarding railway construction in areas that are "already damaged", where land users request that LGA guarantees a capacity to avoid spills near lakes and wetlands during construction.

Similarly, the preference for specific materials in construction, like "aluminum instead of steel for culverts", is another example of this hopeful attitude towards LGA. Voices opposing rail development include those who are worried about the transparency of interests in rail, as it is seen by some as for transporting minerals but not people. There are also voices that see it likely that rail development can avoid highly sensitive areas.



TRANSPARENCY AND DECISION-MAKING

Transparency, as earlier mentioned, comes through as a key concern in the documented engagement from the communication phase. Transparency in relation to the protection of the rights and interests guaranteed by the JBNQA is one aspect of this concern. People want to know that LGA does not affect or in any way set the stage for affecting Eeyou gains in terms of land use rights. Another transparency concern is about ownership, and about what is happening and when. The Cree Nation Youth Council, for example, spoke strongly about transparency related to land use interests. Similar concerns exist across the territory, from questions about “who is behind the LGA” to questions about the LGA “timeline”.



Concerns about who owns LGA as a process ultimately have very practical considerations at their core, such as how decisions will be made if one community “supports LGA” while another opposes it.

Across the territory, engagement participants expect that all land users should be brought into discussions and decisions. Similarly, people expect a schedule of engagement activities to be made available. The fact is engagement activities generated demands for more engagement. There is a lot to discuss, and this will have to be done in a manner that addresses all types of concerns about transparency.

CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

While the topic of institutional capacity to manage rights and interests was not directly mentioned, the engagement process evidences the need to assess capacity development not just in relation to potential jobs, but in relation to land use management (Category 1). Given that LGA could affect community lands by, for example, requiring zoning, building permits, etc., the question of local capacity regarding rights and interests is potentially relevant.

CONCLUSION: COMMUNITIES DEMAND MORE ENGAGEMENT

Past experiences with development projects have left lasting concerns about potential risks. The potential benefits of LGA, in turn, particularly in terms of connectivity and transportation improvements, elicited mixed views. It can be said that Eeyou have a cautious general view that a balance can be struck between economic progress and preserving the environment, sacred spaces, and traditional livelihoods.

However, communities demand more engagement to address concerns and seek a harmonious integration of economic opportunities with cultural and environmental protection. The documented engagement record suggests that Eeyou in general feel that minimizing negative impacts of future interventions is possible by respecting and using Eeyou knowledge.

While pre-feasibility studies conducted by LGA have been validated through engagement activities that have been documented, the nature of LGA means that demand and views may change. As LGA is a long-term vision for infrastructure development, it will be important to continue documenting community demands and views.

As LGA moves forward, addressing concerns and maintaining an inclusive, transparent planning will be essential.

ADDITIONAL STUDIES

BILLY-DIAMOND HIGHWAY STUDY

Following the tabling of the technical report, an additional study was requested to carry out a cost analysis to improve the Billy-Diamond highway to the extent that the transport planned on the future railway line would be carried out on the road instead. This condition would ultimately increase the size and number of heavy vehicles traveling on it. This complementary study aims to determine the means to allow these vehicles to use the road without compromising its useful life and to evaluate the related rehabilitation and/or construction costs.

The scope of this additional study only concentrates on the territory from Matagami to Km 257 (Rupert River Bridge), on which the Société de Développement de la Baie-James (SDBJ) has performed several rehabilitation works but has not considered the impacts of the potential future increased volumes generated by the mining operations within Eeyou Istchee. The market study has revealed a significant growth in the anticipated demand related to the numerous planned mining projects on the territory.

The expected volume amounts to

2.4M
tons per year

resulting in a substantial flow of trucks

40.5%
of annual average
daily flow on the road

Studies have found that the mining companies are considering the use of double and triple bi-train trucks with respective loads of **85T** and **120T**.

This additional study has determined that the initial construction design parameters were not anticipating the potential mining volumes and daily traffic which is projected. This is further handicapped by the fact that the original road did not address freeze thaw concerns given the very low volumes expected back then. The economic study establishes the net present value of the respective infrastructures as well as the Benefit Cost ratios for each option.

MISTISSINI AIRPORT STUDY

The Cree Nation of Mistissini has asked the CDC to perform an opportunity study on the possibility of constructing an airport near Mistissini. Following this request, the team has conducted the preliminary study to identify the needs and characteristics of a future aerodrome as well as to propose some sites of interest in its vicinity for its establishment.

WASWANAPI CREE LUMBER SAWMILL SPUR

The Waswanipi Cree Lumber Sawmill requested a spur for their operations at their Waswanipi Mill connecting it to the proposed Grevet-Chapais railway line.

The study focused on three possible options:

Option 1a: Changing the alignment of the proposed Grevet-Chapais line to pass as near as possible to the sawmill.

Option 1b: Adding a spur rail line that runs from the sawmill to the proposed Grevet-Chapais line.

Option 2: Building a private trans-shipment area for the sawmill along the 113 at the Chapais trans-shipment area (already planned) and/or at a trans-shipment area in Desmaraisville.

The three additional studies can be found on the website.

LAND USER'S MEETINGS



OUJÉ-BOUGOUMOU LAND USERS ENGAGEMENT SESSION

Capissisit Lodge, Oujé-Bougoumou | February 6 & 7, 2024

47 PARTICIPANTS OVER THE TWO DAYS

- 32 land users and community members
- 3 Community Information Officers
- 3 Cree Liaison Officers
- 9 consultants study team

INFRASTRUCTURES COVERED

- Grevet-Chapais
- Route 167
- Rail phase 1 – Matagami to Rupert

DISCUSSION OVERVIEW

(80% IN ENGLISH / 20% IN CREE)

Stakeholders raised several questions and concerns during the discussion. They questioned the absence of CNG representatives and inquired about Cree institutions' involvement in railway ownership. Stakeholders expressed various perspectives on the railway project, drawing from personal experiences and historical context.

Some highlighted the impact of past railway developments on traditional Cree activities like trapping, while others emphasized the need for informed decision-making and control over the railway's development. Concerns were also voiced about potential conflicts arising from increased access to the territory and the need to address social issues associated with development, such as substance abuse.

During subsequent discussions, stakeholders continued to express their views and pose questions regarding the proposed projects. Topics ranged from infrastructure maintenance and contract allocation to environmental considerations and the impact on local communities. Participants advocated for improved infrastructure in conjunction with development projects, particularly concerning roadways used by trappers. There were also discussions about the responsibility for road maintenance and the need for environmentally friendly construction practices to mitigate potential risks, such as contamination from wood creosote.



WASKAGANISH LAND USERS ENGAGEMENT SESSION

Kanio-Kashee Lodge, Waskaganish | February 20 & 21, 2024

68 PARTICIPANTS OVER THE TWO DAYS

- 55 land users and community members
- 5 Community Information Officers
- 2 Cree Liaison Officers
- 6 consultants study team

INFRASTRUCTURES COVERED

- Rail phase 1—Matagami to Rupert
- Route-du-Nord between Rupert River bridge and Billy-Diamond Highway
- Eastmain, Waskaganish and Nemaska Access Roads

DISCUSSION OVERVIEW

(50% IN ENGLISH / 50% IN CREE)

The community member expresses skepticism regarding the benefits of a proposed project, particularly emphasizing the historical focus of rail

development on mining rather than benefiting the Cree people. Questions arise regarding previous agreements and concerns about the impact on access roads, transportation, and the disturbance of natural environments, such as goose ponds and hunting grounds. There's a sentiment of frustration towards non-natives and a desire for understanding regarding the importance of indigenous land.

Additionally, there's a recognition of changing environmental dynamics, with a call for youth involvement in decision-making processes. Concerns extend to potential ecological consequences, infrastructure maintenance, and promises made by external entities, such as Hydro-Quebec. The narrative underscores the need for youth engagement in preserving cultural heritage and securing resources for future generations, all while navigating the complex landscape of development, conservation, and community welfare.



CHISASIBI LAND USERS ENGAGEMENT SESSION

Mitchuap Banquet Hall, Chisasibi | February 27 & 28, 2024

96 PARTICIPANTS OVER THE TWO DAYS

- 81 land users and community members
- 6 Community Information Officers
- 1 Cree Liaison Officer
- 8 consultants study team

INFRASTRUCTURES COVERED

- Wemindji Access Road
- Road to Whapmagoostui
- Rail phase 2 – Rupert to La Grande
- Harbour in Whapmagoostui
- Rail phase 3 – La Grande to Whapmagoostui

DISCUSSION OVERVIEW

(100% IN CREE)

The discussion among participants centers on various development projects and their implications for the Cree Nation's territory and livelihoods. Concerns are raised about the lack of prior consultation and information sharing regarding the Grande Alliance, prompting a desire for more inclusive dialogue where community members can voice their thoughts and apprehensions before decisions are finalized. Questions arise regarding the origins of the LGA program, its funding sources, and the extent of control the Cree Nation will have over its outcomes.

Environmental impact emerges as a major point of contention, particularly concerning projects like the proposed rail and road extensions. Participants express worries about potential pollution, habitat destruction, and threats to freshwater sources, underscoring the need to safeguard the natural environment and traditional Cree activities such

as hunting and fishing. There is palpable skepticism regarding the purported benefits of these projects, with concerns mounting over their potential to exacerbate existing challenges rather than alleviate them.

Amidst these concerns, there is a resounding call for comprehensive engagement with all stakeholders, including elders and youth, to ensure that decisions are made in the best interests of the entire community. Transparency, equitable information dissemination, and active engagement efforts by project proponents are emphasized as essential for fostering trust and meaningful participation. There is a prevailing sentiment of unity and determination among participants to protect their land, culture, and future generations from external pressures and encroachment.

The discussion reflects a deep-seated commitment to asserting sovereignty over Cree territory and resources, prioritizing the well-being and autonomy of the Cree people above outside interests. Participants underscore the importance of collaboration, preparation, and advocacy in navigating the complex challenges posed by development projects and safeguarding the Cree way of life. Ultimately, the dialogue highlights the resilience and collective resolve of the Cree Nation in confronting and shaping its future amidst a rapidly changing landscape.



MISTISSINI LAND USERS ENGAGEMENT SESSION

Lodge, Mistissini | March 19 & 20, 2024

36 PARTICIPANTS OVER THE TWO DAYS

- 30 land users and community members
- 2 Community Information Officers
- 1 Cree Liaison Officer
- 3 consultants study team

INFRASTRUCTURES COVERED

- Route 167
- Route-du-Nord between Mistissini and Rupert River bridge
- Mistissini 2nd Access Road
- Mistissini Airport

DISCUSSION OVERVIEW

(75% IN CREE, 25% IN ENGLISH)

The Cree delegates present at the Mistissini Land Use Information session appreciated the engagement process and being informed of the advancement and status of the LGA studies in Eeyou Istchee and for some it was the first time that they were involved in studies of this type. The main take-aways are the concerns addressed by most of the tallymen that the heavy transportation is damaging and dangerous, and that heavy transport must be legislated and controlled closely in order to improve safety and limit damages.

They also mentioned that an integrated and looped transportation network would be beneficial for the community as well as the EI. They consider that the Land management and ownership (surface and underground) issue be addressed as they consider themselves to be the caretakers for all future generations. However, one tallyman noted that there isn't as much enthusiasm going into the bush today compared to when he was younger, and he believes that this is due to reduced wildlife today.





YOUTH PRESENTATIONS

SCHOOL PRESENTATIONS

As part of the engagement efforts, the LGA team wanted to connect with youth community members, as they were less represented among land users met for the studies and seemed to attend less the public meetings at AGAs and in other settings.

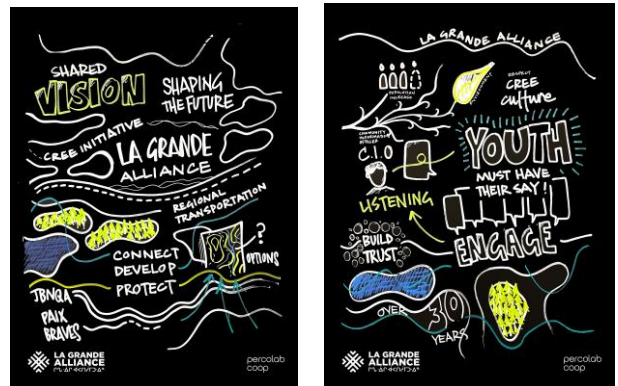
The team initially presented to Mississini secondary 4th and 5th in March 2023. The presentation was on the overall view on the LGA studies and future job opportunities in the region with or without the project. We also presented at the local youth assembly in front of nearly 100 people. The general feedback from the audience was that the presentation focused on promoting jobs and that they had not been consulted about LGA. That was indeed true, based in part on the above points, but that sentiment seemed to also be based on the perception that LGA was “preparing construction”, and that needed to be addressed.

The comments received included the interference of the railroad with the wildlife, the presentation being too technical, and that LGA should be more transparent. They also mentioned they signed a petition about being against the LGA studies and ask that we talk about it. Errol Mianscum, CIO for Mississini, made sure to address their comments openly and positively and offered them to come talk about their concerns in his office.

After that event, the LGA team adapted the presentation to make it more youth-friendly and be less focused on technical details and job opportunities. The second presentation took place in Waskaganish on April 11, 2023, and presented to the secondary 4th-5th programs. The presentation was simpler and was able to engage more youth, however, some students were still expressing their dissatisfaction on the proposed program.

The last school presentation we proceeded with was with Eastmain secondary 3 on August 30, 2023, and they seemed quite interested in the LGA program and we had more interaction than the secondary 4-5 groups we presented to before.

CNYC SUMMIT



The first Cree Nation Youth Council Summit, held in Quebec City from the 25th to the 27th of February, 2024, hosted elected local youth chiefs and guests from all 10 of the Cree communities in Eeyou Istchee. There were 73 youth participants and roughly 135 attendees overall. Relevant organizations and guests to the empowerment of Cree youth all met in the Quebec City Congress Center. 17 organizations held booths and seven of them hosted breakout sessions. La Grande Alliance attended all three days hosting a booth, a presentation and breakout sessions with the purpose of introducing the LGA to the Cree youth and collecting input as well as measuring the level of understanding and engagement within the youth.

On day 1 of the summit, the LGA team provided the large group with a presentation, explaining what the LGA consists of and how it is relevant to the youth. The presentation displayed a very detailed contextual setting, going over the history leading up to the LGA starting from the James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement.

The concrete field of activity of the LGA was explained and specified to be on the feasibility assessment. The team went over what an infrastructure is and what types of infrastructures are studied, the process with which such is achieved and the general vision leading these activities. A special emphasis was expressed on the need for the Cree youth to engage and take up on the responsibility to decide what they want and act on it. "One day, you're going to be an elder, don't forget that. You have the say, you have the things to do." The LGA team then went on to announce the breakout sessions and what they would be held on, encouraging participation and engagement.

The breakout sessions held by La Grande Alliance during the event were split into two different content sessions. LGA session 1, History of development in Eeyou Istchee, took place during the afternoon of day 1 and the morning of day 2. A total of 17 youths attended the workshop over the two days. A Percolab associate drew and expressed in visual form a summary of the presentations and discussions during the workshops. The visual supported served as material for a recap of previous sessions to accommodate and get the participants on the same level for each new workshop.

Session 1 was mainly directed on really dissecting the concept of development, and how the past has led to the present and its needs in terms of sustainable infrastructure development. Therefore, the role and concept of the LGA, what it does and what it's for was further explained during the two occurrences of the workshop. Participants were asked to define the benefits of the traditional way of life as well as the more modern industrial society.

Elements raised by participants mostly involved more specific traditional practices, such as hunting; harvesting; and handcraft techniques. More general aspects of culture and tradition were also brought forward by the youth, such as identity healing; culture

and language transmission; and family unity. As for the modern industrial society, diversity, education and modern techniques and resources led the majority of the elements raised. They were then asked to define both the benefits and impacts of the development of infrastructure on the Eeyou Istchee territory.

Concerns of its negative impacts emerged from a deep care for the land. Green House Gas, land disturbance, road accidents etc. It was also brought to light that increased access to the land would allow entrance by both well intended people at the same time as ill intended people. On the other hand, benefits raised by participants mostly revolved around cheaper and faster deliveries and travels and again, the benefits that involves increased access to the land for well-intended people (i.e.: for hunting, connecting with family and the land, etc.). Session 1 allowed to measure the interest in youth and the level of understanding, as well as the general questions and misconceptions. It helped grasp an understanding of what the future infrastructure challenges are through the lens of the Cree youth.

RADIO SHOWS

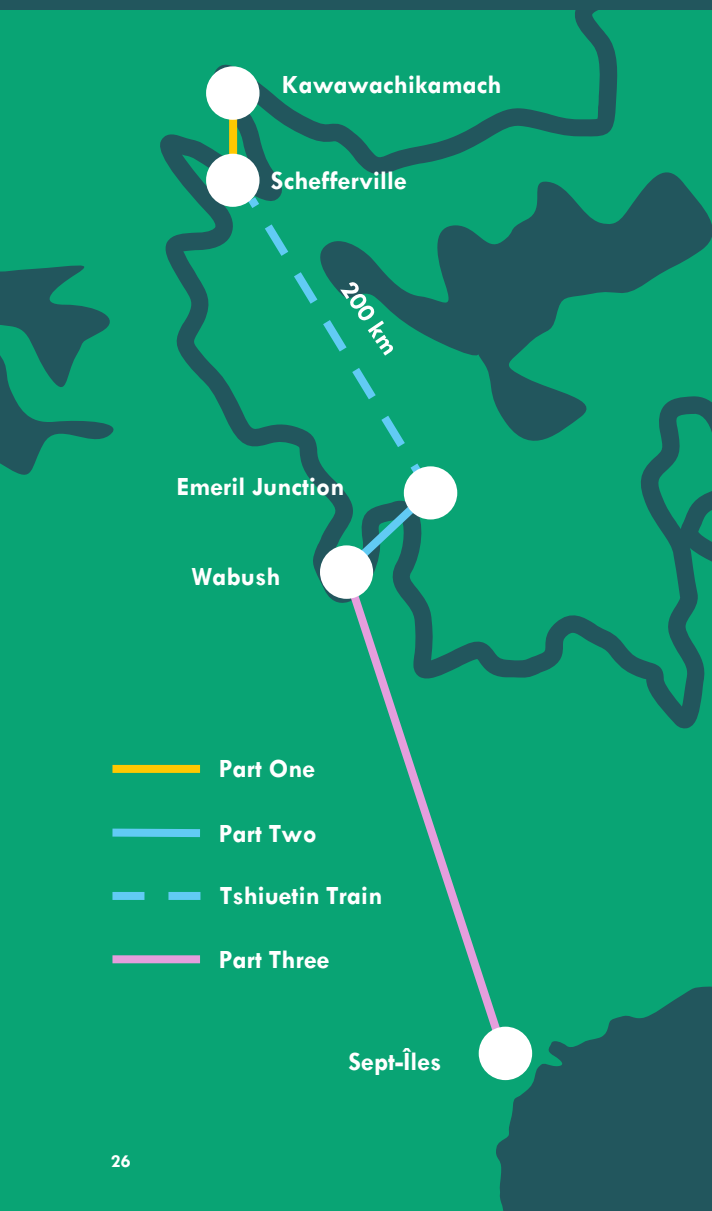
In an effort to increase exposure among the Cree population, the team launched a series of radio shows airing on JBCCS, starting with a 3-hour show in August 2023 and followed by 11 biweekly episodes, on topics such as local AGAs, the Tshivetin train visit, the Secretariat to the Cree Nation Abitibi-Témiscamingue Economic Alliance, and others.



TSHIUETIN TRAIN VISIT

In November 2023, with the goal of better evaluating the benefits and impacts that a railway could generate in Eeyou Istchee, a delegation of James Bay Cree visited Schefferville and Sept-Îles to tour the facilities of Tshiuetin Rail Transport Inc. This delegation, comprised of nearly 70 individuals, included Community Information Officers from LGA, trappers, students, representatives from the Cree Trappers' Association, band council members, economic development officials, entrepreneurs, and land users from each community.

Tshiuetin being the first railway owned and operated by First Nations (communities of Uashat mak Mani-Utenam, Kawawachikamach and Matimekush-Lac John), the LGA team felt that its example could provide a good case study to explore the various aspects involved in managing a train. This included understanding the operations, its governance structure, assessing the environmental and industrial activity impacts, as well as the associated challenges and opportunities.



TOUR ITINERARY:

- 01** The first part of the journey took place in Schefferville, where the delegation met with members of the local council of the Innu nation of Matimekush-Lac John, and in the Naskapi community of Kawawachikamach, where a tour was organized. The delegation visited the school, band council, community center, and arena with local representatives, discovering the numerous cultural and linguistic ties shared between the Naskapi and Eeyouch.
- 02** For the second part of the journey, the delegation boarded the Tshiuetin train in Schefferville and traveled approximately 200 kilometers to Emeril Junction in Labrador, making stops or slowing down to observe some Innu camps along the way. From there, the delegation boarded buses heading to Wabush before flying to Sept-Îles.
- 03** Finally, for the third and last part of the journey, the delegation visited the administrative offices and garage of Tshiuetin in Sept-Îles and Uashat mak Mani-utenam. A visit took place at the band council of the Innu community, including a discussion with Chief Mike McKenzie and some members of his council. In the afternoon, the team gathered in Sept-Îles to discuss the lessons learned from this brief visit.

The following table summarizes the main conclusions of the group:

MAIN LESSONS FROM THE TRIP	MESSAGES TO THE FAMILY BACK HOME
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Meeting and learning from other nations• Scenic landscapes along the route• 100% Indigenous ownership of Tshiuetin• Inspirational stories/knowledge-sharing with elders• Emphasis on safety on the train• Sharing opinions and concerns about the train with other Crees• Learning through observation of railway operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Landscape similar to Eeyou Istchee• If the Naskapis can do it, the Crees can do it• Possibility of finding win-win solutions by working together• Perspective after seeing a real railway (theory vs. practical experiences)• Better understanding of what LGA is• Getting to know the train (operations, impact, finances)• Higher prices for food and materials on-site
POSITIVE EFFECTS OF THE RAILWAY	NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF THE RAILWAY
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Convenient access to camps• Increased job opportunities (89% Indigenous workforce)• Improved transportation• Unity around a common project• Employment, training, and development opportunities• Service for tourism and outfitters	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Potential opening to mining• Concerns about wildlife• Concerns about connecting to Radisson instead of Chisasibi• Environmental impacts• Business challenges• Controlled access

The delegation engaged in highly constructive and sincere discussions regarding their experience during the visit to Innu and Naskapi territories. These enriching exchanges will provide them with valuable insights to support any potential decisions that the Eeyouch may have to make regarding transportation infrastructure in the future.

Furthermore, a film crew accompanied the delegation throughout the event to thoroughly document this unique experience, ensuring the immortalization of the observations and findings expressed by the Cree delegates.



OVERVIEW

As stated, the Communication Phase seeks to inform people and communities regarding the results of the feasibility studies. For most people, this discussion starts with sensitizing people to the need for such a study, to re-imagine transportation infrastructure on the territory that is more responsive to community needs.

With the exception of the southern end of the territory, the first roads built into the Eeyou Istchee territory occurred as part of the La-Grande Complex, in particular the Billy-Diamond Highway. According to Section 8.1.1 of the James Bay and Northern Québec Agreement:

The roads built by La Société d'énergie de la Baie James and/or La Société de Développement de la Baie James for Le Complexe La Grande (1975) in the territory may be used by the Crees [...] as soon as such roads have been completed and are safe, subject to the observance of regulations applicable from time to time.

Re-imagining the transportation network therefore must go beyond simple usage towards design that is more responsive to community needs and concerns. This remains a novel concept for many community members, and one that is often met with cynicism and mistrust.

Eeyou Istchee is currently moving towards one of the most unprecedented mining booms in its history, driven mainly by critical minerals. Three projects (James Bay lithium, Rose lithium and Wabouchi lithium) are already approved and scheduled to open in the coming years. It is still too early to tell if any new projects will be approved in the future, but exploration activity is high.

Communities are often more concerned about the environmental and social impacts these new projects may bring with them than their potential benefits. As such, creating an openness to the results of the study and engaging people in a balanced discussion of the study components require overcoming the effects of past traumas related to development largely imposed on them. This takes time and effort. Often, it requires multiple discussions spread over time to allow people sufficient time to reflect on the ideas being shared. Evidently, some communities and people may take longer than others. The community of Chisasibi, on whose territory eight reservoirs are found, provides a salient example.

COMMUNITIES

WHAPMAGOOSTUI

CIO: John Shem

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

- Effective communication, including the Inuit, is a priority for community involvement in decisions
- Environmental concerns, like wildlife preservation, were key, reflecting shared values for Cree and Inuit
- Economic talks, especially youth employment, emphasized sustainable development benefiting all

CHISASIBI

CIO: Christopher Herodier

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

- More dialogue & Talk needed
- Lots of interest to participate and ensure participation of all community members
- Lots of misinformation and negativity because of past hydro development

WEMINDJI

CIO: Dennis Georgekish

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

- Most members support the process, but want to hear more for future projects
- Land users have concerns about environmental impact on sensitive areas
- More gathering of information with and for land users is required

EASTMAIN

CIO: Norman Cheezo

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

- General public has concerns regarding some components, but they feel strongly about upgrading the access road.
- Land users have concerns about environmental impact of railways on wildlife on their trapline. They feel youth should be engaged on these topics considering the timeline of LGA.

WASKAGANISH

CIO: Raymond Blackned

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

- General public was surprised by the proposed railroad.
- Land users want to know when the roads would be built.
- Tallymen generally support the road but are cautious for rail.

MISTISSINI

CIO: Errol Mianscum

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

- There is a general support for the study process in the community.
- Youth has shown to be very interested and concerned and ask a lot of precise questions.
- Road 167 is generally agreed with, airport project is positive, but people have questions

COMMUNITIES

OUJE-BOUGOUMOU

CIO: Sydney Coonishish

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

- Most of the people concerned about the railroad approach it from the mining angle, not the infrastructure angle. This is due to past experience with mining and would require a technical discussions about it before looking at the LGA program.
- Land users/Tallymen ask for a better consultation process when it comes to extraction of natural resources and especially forestry. They want to have more say on how and where road should be constructed.

NEMASKA

CIO: John Henry Wapachee

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

- Concerns about job displacement and environmental harm from the proposed railway were raised by community members, alongside worries about trapline impacts and Route du Nord traffic.
- Participants expressed frustration over delayed LGA discussions, highlighting concerns about people influx and suggested standby medical vehicles.
- Discussions addressed broader LGA implications, including effects on community livelihoods and infrastructure, fostering an exchange between the team and community.

WASWANIPI

CIO: Edward Diamond

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

- Land users and tallymen like the idea of getting easier access to their traplines but are also worried about opening access to poachers.
- Community members are interested by economic development while they fear losing access to Grevet-Chapais multi-use trail and to the territory in general.
- While the absence of a local CIO between November 2021 and January 2024 delayed communications and general understanding of LGA, the work accomplished in the last three months proved to be very worthy, and proof that further work is required to maintain momentum and engage more with youth, local CTA and land users.

WASHAW SIBI

CIO: Andriana Trapper

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

- The public has a general understanding that LGA is not a project and only a study for the time being. On the positive side, the Economic development that could be brought by LGA would benefit the community, but there are major concerns on the future of the environment, mainly trapping and hunting grounds.
- Hosting engagement sessions and presentations at the Local General Assembly was appreciated. The inclusion of Washaw Sibi members' feedback is a plus, as they haven't got the opportunity to voice their concerns often.
- Continuing the engagement is essential, especially with tallymen and land users on trapping and hunting ground in the impacted areas, and of course with the young generation.

JAMESIAN

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

- Jamesians tend to understand the rationale and motivations behind LGA and agree with the idea of re-thinking the way development takes place on the territory. However, their main concern is with the role they will be allowed to play in the LGA process, and in the potential "Cree projects".
- Some clarifications on the role of the various government actors in LGA might be required, especially the regional government (Gouvernement régional Eeyou Istchee –Baie James).
- Eventually, joint meetings between Jamesian and Cree communities could be explored to increase connections.



QUEBEC GOVERNMENT ENTITIES

Société du Plan Nord

Société de développement
de la Baie James

Ministère des Transports
et de la Mobilité durable

Ministère des Ressources
naturelles et des Forêts

Ministère de l'Emploi et de la
Solidarité sociale

Ministère de l'Environnement,
de la Lutte contre les changements
climatiques, de la Faune et des Parcs

Hydro-Québec

Investissement Québec

Centre de formation professionnelle de la
Baie-James

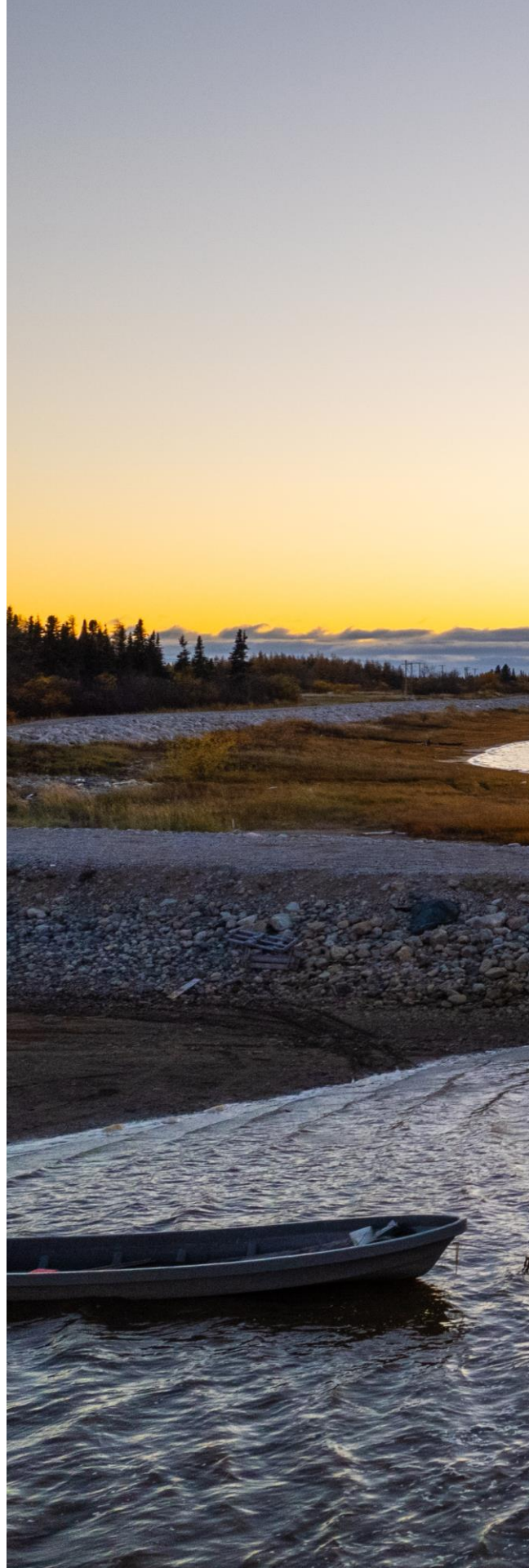
Université du Québec en
Abitibi-Témiscamingue

Cégep de l'Abitibi-Témiscamingue

NEXT STEPS

As part of the engagement since the signature of the LGA MOU in February 2020, the team has developed a solid understanding of present and potential future realities of Eeyou Istchee. While many possible solutions can be found in the reports, there are a few key items that would require more attention, including to:

- Pursue engagement with the Kuujjuarapik Inuit, especially regarding a road connection
- Address the issue of long term deterioration of the railway in light of potential economic changes over time spans beyond the LGA studies
- Continue the conversation with the youth, who have requested more specific actions especially at local community levels and content that is adapted to their needs
- Conduct more technical work to move forward certain files that important to communities such as the Mistissini airport, Whapmagoostui road connection and the Community Access Roads
- Keep a close eye on the evolution of lithium mining on the territory, including global prices, as the mineral is the current driver of industrial transportation demand increase on the territory
- Follow-up with land users as their understanding of the LGA process is still developing and directly influences their level of understanding of its long-term aspect
- Carry on engagement with communities particularly impacted by past development, as they require more time and effort to fully understand the implications of the LGA studies
- Ensure that any future engagement follows the same long-term approach as LGA, and ensure local input from the beginning in order to build and maintain trust
- Adjust engagement approach and content to each community's reality, especially to focus on areas that have been less affected by past development
- Assemble a diverse team with local knowledge to diversify viewpoints





CONCLUSION

The LGA studies have compiled over 10,000 pages of content in the final reports, the result of hosting 120 presentations in 15 Cree communities and Jamesian municipalities engaging more than 80 organizations, companies and government ministries and departments and tallymen from 86 traplines.

While the mandate to conduct the studies has ended, the underlying factors which triggered them are probably still present. This is why we believe that the conversation must continue, ideally under the same process. Indeed, these studies represent:

- A key planning tool for transportation development in the territory
- The most extensive data gathering efforts at the feasibility stage of any infrastructure in the history of the territory
- A Cree-led process in which Crees can participate in their language, thanks to a network of 10 Community Information Officer and 3 Cree Liaison Officers
- A methodology that can be used for any potential transportation corridor in the future, covering any mode of transportation (road, rail, water, air)
- A guideline in which sectors requiring immediate attention for each infrastructure are identified and explained
- A holistic and comprehensive way of balancing development and Cree traditional way of life, identity, language and values
- A proof that technical teams mixing Crees and non-Crees can accomplish more than the standard composition
- An example of reconciliation of the need to protect Cree culture and the right to develop the territory as stipulated in the JBNQA
- Finally, a predictable framework for development, both for Crees and non-Crees, helping to build consensus around a difficult topic

CONTACT US





SEE OUR VIDEOS
ON YOUTUBE



SEND US YOUR
THOUGHTS



READ THE
REPORTS



