



Transportation Fact Sheet

October 2009

Transportation challenges in Fort McMurray and the Wood Buffalo Region are a result of oil sands development. OSDG member companies work with the Government of Alberta and the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo to develop safer and shorter commutes while planning transportation options to improve efficiency and quality of life.

The current situation

Fact: The population of Fort McMurray and the Wood Buffalo Region has grown substantially and quickly.

- The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo is the largest municipality in Canada. At more than 68,000 square kilometres in size, it is larger than the province of Nova Scotia.
- Fort McMurray and Sapræe Creek's permanent population has doubled over the last decade to approximately 73,227.
- In 2008, the region has hosted 22,700 mobile workers in camps and lodges which are located close to oil sands projects throughout the municipality.

Fact: The region is connected by two highways, a railway and air service.

- Fort McMurray is accessible via Highway 63, a single-lane highway with some twinned sections and Highway 881, a single-lane highway with no twinned sections.
- A freight rail service extends from Edmonton to the Lynton rail yard south of Fort McMurray. The oil sands projects north of Fort McMurray and many to the south are not connected to the line. Goods sent to and from the Lynton yard must be unloaded and trucked.
- Fort McMurray is serviced by a municipal airport located 16 kilometres south of the city that accommodates commercial and private flights.
- Some OSDG member companies have private airstrips to service their workforce needs.

- Highway 63 is the main highway used to travel the 450 kilometres from Edmonton to Fort McMurray.
- Highway 881 can be considered an alternate route to Edmonton and other northeastern Alberta communities such as Lac La Biche, St. Paul and Cold Lake.
- Highway 881 is used less than Highway 63 but is an important connector to communities such as Anzac, Janvier and Conklin which are located close to current and future in-situ oil sands projects.

Fact: There are extraordinarily heavy transportation loads and traffic volumes in the region.

- Highway 63 carries the highest tonnage per kilometre in the country.
- Highway 63 accommodates the largest and heaviest loads ever carried on highways anywhere in the world.
- Tens of thousands of residents and workers use Highway 63 and 881 to move between work sites and communities.
- Many workers commute regularly to the region from locations across Canada.

Fact: Transportation priorities have been identified and are being addressed.

- Improved traffic flow in and around the Wood Buffalo Region is considered a high priority by residents, industry and governments. Easing mobility in the region improves quality of life and the efficiency of oil sands development.
- Alberta Transportation has announced approximately \$1 billion in funding for future transportation projects in the region and is executing an additional \$600 million in current transportation projects.
- Several oil sands developers are investing millions in coordination with the Government of Alberta to better link public and private roadways to improve safety and efficiency.
- Several companies have also invested millions on private aerodromes and airstrips to provide workers with safer and easier access to remote work sites.

Solutions for increased traffic

Fact: Extreme stresses on local roadways are being addressed with dozens of new projects.

- The Government of Alberta is building interchanges at Thickwood Boulevard and Confederation Way to improve traffic flow and reduce congestion. It is estimated that about 50,000 vehicles use these intersections daily.
- Suncor Energy Inc. paid for and built a freeway-style interchange north of Fort McMurray to improve safety and access to the company's planned upgrader site and existing facilities. The interchange is expected to be turned over to the province.
- OSDG member companies and Alberta Transportation have improved the intersection of Highway 63 and the road accessing Fort McKay to improve safety. Peak traffic volume at this turn off has doubled since 2002 with up to 6,000 vehicles per day using the intersection.
- The Government of Alberta has announced funding to twin Highway 63 south to Edmonton. This is a significant project given the distance and difficult terrain. An initial 16 kilometres has been twinned with 224 kilometres remaining. The cost of the entire project has been estimated at more than \$1 billion.
- In 2009, 40 kilometres of land near Wandering River and 55 kilometres near Mariana Lake will be cleared to prepare for twinning.
- Highway 881, a secondary highway stretching south of Fort McMurray to Lac La Biche, was paved in 2006 to provide an additional route to Highway 63.
- Several parking-staging areas, used to manage truck traffic, have been built along Highway 63. Seven more are under consideration for the high-load trucking corridor that connects the fabrication and rail yards around Edmonton to oil sands projects.
- A 70-kilometre section of Highway 63 north of Highway 55 will be repaved, and two new southbound passing lanes will be added.

Bridging the river

Fact: A new city-centre bridge over the Athabasca River will ease congestion and improve traffic flow.

- To better accommodate oversized truck loads, a new bridge is being built across the Athabasca River. Located adjacent to the two existing bridges, the new bridge will be five lanes wide and will be dedicated to northbound traffic. It is scheduled to open in 2011.
- About 50,000 vehicles per day use the existing bridges over the Athabasca River. The new bridge will reduce current stresses and accommodate future growth.
- The new bridge will have the largest deck in Alberta and will be as long as five football fields.
- The bridge is engineered to support 1.1 million kilograms, equal to the weight of four Boeing 747 aircraft. It will withstand more than 12 times the weight of a typical bridge.
- A new automated system will spray a de-icing liquid from the bridge's barriers during the winter months to mitigate safety concerns.
- Upgrades to the two existing bridges will be completed after the new five-lane bridge is built, increasing traffic capacity and improving overall flow.

Safety first

Fact: Oil sands developers are employing specific initiatives to improve traffic safety and reduce congestion in the region.

- Companies provide bussing for their employees to project sites.
- Oil sands developers coordinate their shift change schedules and patterns to reduce traffic congestion and coordinate large load movements.
- Companies provide training and other programs to employees to encourage safe driving behaviour.
- Companies use a variety of programs and technology such as vehicle use policies and GPS monitoring to enforce safe driving practices with their employees.
- Oil sands developers work with local policy and community traffic groups to address road safety issues.

- Some companies house workers in camps and lodges close to work sites, reducing traffic on local roadways.
- Some companies fly workers in and out of the region, reducing traffic on highways.

Transit

Fact: Fewer vehicles carrying more people help relieve congestion on roads.

- The Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo's transit system moves about 900,000 riders annually and links all of Fort McMurray's subdivisions.
- Fort McMurray is host to the world's largest private bus fleet (Diversified Transportation Ltd.) which helps deliver thousands of workers to and from the oil sands worksites every day. This significantly reduces the number of vehicles on the road, improving safety and environmental impacts. OSDG member companies and some local contractors pay for this service.

Air service and railway improvement

Fact: Investment in the railway and airport will help movement in and out of the region more efficiently.

- The operator for the rail freight line linking Fort McMurray to Edmonton has announced a \$135-million upgrade in projects.
- Upgrades to the existing railway aim to reduce the current transport time from Edmonton to Fort McMurray by up to 50 per cent.
- One railcar can carry the equivalent of three standard truck loads.
- The Fort McMurray Airport oversees the single busiest airstrip of any small or medium-sized city in Canada. More than 500,000 passenger movements and 70,000 take offs and landings occurred at the airport in 2008.
- The Fort McMurray Airport plans a \$100-million expansion that would triple its size by adding a new terminal, additional gates and more retail space to accommodate up to one million passenger movements per year.

Sources for all facts available upon request