

Resource Stewardship Committee

Dear Chair Loyola and Committee Members;

Thank you for your invitation to provide a written submission to the Resource Stewardship Committee on Bill 211 – The Alberta Underground Infrastructure Notification System introduced by MLA Schneider in November of last year. This private members bill is in fact very similar to one I had planned to introduce myself in the same session. My own experience with the issue of underground infrastructure damage and its consequences, as well as the experience of colleagues such as MLA Rosendahl, led me to an initial concern with gaps in the current system. Following discussion with stakeholders and stakeholder groups such as Alberta Common Ground Alliance, I believe there are strong grounds justifying the need for a careful study of the existing underground infrastructure notification system for the purpose of developing legislation to strengthen and broaden existing reporting and first call requirements.

My first introduction to this issue was when Athabasca lost all of its telephone, internet, and ATM services for an entire day due to a fibre optics line being cut during construction work along Highway 2. Upon bringing up the matter with Telus, and in discussion with MLA Rosendahl, I discovered that this was not an isolated instance. Grand Cache had its line cut multiple times to the point where Telus provided the town council with satellite phones so they would not be left without communication means. This issue was obviously one that was impacting communities across the province and one that needed addressing. Our caucus rural development committee then extended an invitation for a meeting to Alberta Common Ground Alliance to discuss this issue further and discovered that the problems extended beyond fibre optics. As a result of those meetings, we felt that a review of the issue seemed to be very much in the public interest.

Requesting that an all-party legislative committee be responsible for overseeing a review of this issue and providing recommendations after robust consultations and careful research seems the most fruitful avenue for dealing with this matter. There has been a high degree of support for moving forward on this across party lines and therefore an all-party committee has a good opportunity to develop solutions through consensus that can lead to efficient and productive use of legislative assembly time bringing this forward. This is also a complex issue that cuts across many individual ministries and involves diverse stakeholders in multiple industries across the entire province. It is precisely this type of issue that legislative committees were set up to address.

I would urge the Resource Development Committee to recommend to the Alberta Legislature that this bill proceed. Doing so would be in the public interest by potentially reducing risk of death, accident, injury and economic losses due to avoidable damages to underground infrastructure. I would like to commend MLA Schneider for bring this forward and to Alberta Common Ground Alliance for their tireless advocacy on this issue. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Colin Piquette

MLA for Athabasca Sturgeon Redwater