

## **2025 FALL MEMBER FORUM**

### **True North, Strong and Free**

**October 29 & 30, 2025**  
**Chateau Nova Hotel, Yellowknife**

Canada's North is at a defining moment—where long-standing aspirations for development, sovereignty, and connectivity must finally translate into action. The 2025 Fall Member Forum will bring together WESTAC members and experts to examine the North's growing strategic relevance to Canada's economic, environmental, and geopolitical future.

Under the theme *True North, Strong and Free*, the Forum will explore how transportation and infrastructure can serve as catalysts for prosperity, how climate change is reshaping risk and opportunity, and how Canada must respond to evolving global threats to assert its sovereignty. With sessions ranging from economic transitions and nation-building infrastructure to Arctic security and permafrost resilience, members will engage with the complex realities and bold possibilities shaping northern development.

This Forum will reinforce that Canada's northern transportation future is not just a regional issue—it's a matter of national importance. Building capacity in the North demands coordinated investments, enduring partnerships with Indigenous communities, and a clear-eyed approach to global realities. Members will leave with a deeper understanding of the opportunities and responsibilities that lie ahead in this rapidly changing frontier.

[Register Online](#)

7:30 am	<b>Hot Buffet Breakfast</b>
8:30 am	<b>Welcoming Remarks &amp; Introductions</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hon. Devin Dreesen, Minister of Transportation and Economic Corridors, Government of Alberta &amp; Chair, WESTAC</li> <li>Lindsay Kislock, President &amp; CEO, WESTAC</li> </ul>
8:45 am	<b>Northern Welcome.</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Indigenous Welcome</li> <li>Hon. RJ Simpson, Premier, Government of NWT</li> </ul>
9:30 am	<b>Setting the Stage – Transportation, Economic Corridors, and the North’s Strategic Moment</b> <p>Renowned historian and policy expert Ken Coates will explore the intersection of transportation, economic corridors, and northern development. Ken will explore why the North holds the key to Canada’s long-term prosperity—and what it will take to finally move from decades of promises to tangible progress.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ken Coates, Professor Emeritus, Johnson Shoyama Graduate School of Public Policy, University of Saskatchewan</li> </ul>
10:15 am	<b>Break</b>
10:45 am	<b>Overcoming Remoteness: Unlocking Economic Opportunities in Canada’s North</b> <p>Canada’s remote and northern regions—including the territories and the full northern expanse of the western provinces—are rich in critical minerals, energy, and other natural resources. Yet development continues to be constrained by one central challenge: remoteness. High costs, limited access, and insufficient infrastructure remain persistent barriers to unlocking economic opportunity. We’ll explore how to overcome those barriers through a combination of innovative technologies, sound economic policy, and real-world experience.</p> <p><b>Speakers:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agata Leszkiewicz, eVinci Regional Manager for Canada and Alaska, Westinghouse Electric Company (<i>invited</i>)</li> <li>NRCan, TBD</li> </ul>
12:00 pm	<b>Lunch</b>

1:00 pm

**Securing the North: Sovereignty in a Shifting World**

This session explores the evolving landscape of Canada's defence and security capability in the North at a time when both the public and government have recognized the need to "up our game." As geopolitical tensions escalate and climate change accelerates access to the Arctic, Canada faces rising pressure to assert sovereignty, protect and open new transportation corridors, and serve as a credible security partner. Evolving threats—from increased foreign activity to cyber vulnerabilities—are reshaping our understanding of risk and readiness. This session will examine national security priorities, defence investments, and the strategic importance of transportation infrastructure in protecting a *True North that is strong and free*.

- **Dr. P. Whitney Lackenbauer**, Tier 1 Canada Research Chair in the Study of the Canadian North and Professor, School for the Study of Canada, Trent University

1:45 pm

**Shifting Ground: Climate Change and the Future of Northern Transportation**

Climate change is transforming the North, with profound implications for transportation infrastructure, supply chains, and economic development. This session will explore how thawing permafrost, shifting weather patterns, and reduced sea ice are disrupting traditional modes of transport and increasing operational risks. At the same time, these changes are creating new possibilities for Arctic shipping and infrastructure development.

Speakers:

- **Dr. Jackie Dawson**, Associate Professor, University of Ottawa *(invited)*
- **Dr. Steve Kokelj**, Senior Permafrost Specialist, NWT Geological Survey *(to be invited)*
- **Jim Coates**, President, Kryotek Inc.

2:45 pm

**Break**

3:15 pm

### **Nation Building in the North: Infrastructure for the Next Century**

Strategic infrastructure is key to advancing the economic potential of Canada's North. This session explores major northern transportation projects that could reshape regional and national trade flows—from the revival of the Port of Churchill as an export gateway, to the proposed Gray's Bay port and road system linking Nunavut to the NWT, to the Slave Geological Corridor connecting rich mineral deposits to global markets. The Canada Infrastructure Bank is emerging as a key catalyst and impact investor in advancing such nation-building initiatives. What is needed to move these bold projects from vision to reality?

#### **Speakers:**

- **Hillary Thatcher**, Managing Director, Canada Infrastructure Bank
- **Michael McNair**, CEO, Arctic Economic Development Corporation
- **Chris Avery**, CEO, Arctic Gateway
- **Brendan Bell**, CEO, West Kitikmeot Resources Corp. on Grays Bay Road and Port project

4:30 pm

Free Time

7:00 pm

### **Aurora Village Dinner and Viewing**

Travel from the hotel to Yellowknife's premier Aurora-viewing destination. Aurora Village is an entirely Aboriginal-owned facility that offers world-class aurora-viewing and outdoor recreation paired with a commitment to top-notch customer service. Guests will enjoy a hearty buffet dinner, followed by an aurora viewing from one of the Village's many teepees.

This activity, including travel, is included with registration. A bus will transfer guests between the hotel and Aurora Village. Expect to return to the hotel by midnight. Members are welcome to bring one guest (for a fee). See checkout at registration for details.

8:45 am      **Breakfast** *(open to all attendees)*

## **WESTAC LEADER'S COUNCIL**

**The Leader's Council is open to one representative of member organizations and excludes non-members. Sustaining members are allowed one additional representative. No reporting will take place.**

9:30 am      Each forum concludes with an in camera, frank discussion among the most senior representatives of member organizations to drive meaningful outcomes for Canada's transportation sector.

More details will be released shortly.

11:30 am      Meeting adjourns

11:45 am      **Board of Directors meeting** (lunch provided)

1:00 pm      **Board meeting adjourns**

**Optional afternoon activities – Details coming shortly.**