

Stelmach hopes for ring road deal

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Premier Ed Stelmach says he has high hopes that the deal to build Calgary's southwest ring road will go ahead.

The Tsuu T'ina First Nation has authorized their chief and council to reopen talks with the province about allowing the road on their land. Sixty-eight per cent of band members voted at the end of June in favour of seeking a new agreement.

A draft agreement was rejected two years ago.

Under that deal, the First Nation would have transferred 400 hectares of property to the province in exchange for \$240 million and 2,000 hectares of Crown land on the northwest border of the reserve stretching west to the edge of Kananaskis Country. But the lack of specifics about land the nation would receive and future road access to the city of Calgary created uncertainty in the community.

At his Stampede breakfast Monday morning, Stelmach said provincial money for the road is still there. He said a public-private partnership will cover maintenance costs over the next 30 years.

The move toward new talks is positive, Stelmach said.

"It's going to help not only Calgary and the province of course move goods and services. It's also going to help the First Nations expand their business opportunities because they'll have access now to the reservation," he said.

The premier said he's confident the band's concerns can be addressed in a new deal.

"It will be looking at a number of issues that perhaps we couldn't resolve before," Stelmach said.

The premier said he wants a ring road deal reached before he leaves office. He plans to resign as Conservative leader on Oct. 1.

Sandford Big Plume, chief of the Tsuu T'ina First Nation, confirmed in a statement Monday that negotiations are back on. He said he's discussing the key issues that couldn't be resolved last time.

Big Plume said he's pleased by Stelmach's positive statements — and the band is prepared to work quickly. He said he has the same timeline in mind as the premier, in terms of bringing something back to the people for consideration and a vote.



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