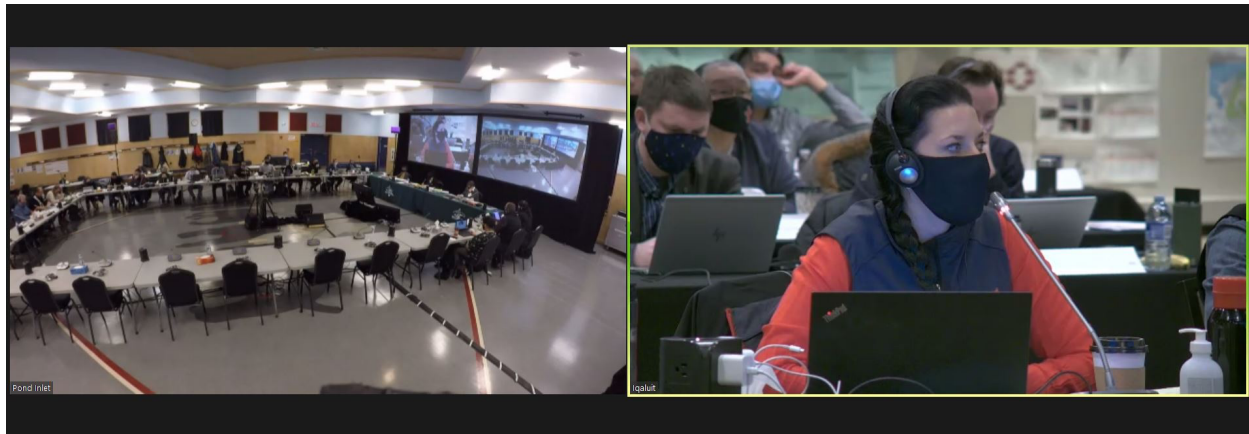


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Baffinland says it won't budge on proposed railway route

Pond Inlet hamlet and hunters and trappers association remain concerned about impact on caribou



Megan Lord-Hoyle, Baffinland's vice-president of sustainable development, says the company is committed to its proposed railroad route. Critics of the company's plans to expand its Mary River mine say more work needs to be done. (Screenshot from NIRB/Zoom)

By David Venn
Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Baffinland says there's no turning back on the route for the 110-km railroad it wants to build to expand its Mary River iron mine, which it says became finalized when the company struck the Inuit Certainty Agreement with the Qikiqtani Inuit Association.

But the QIA sees things differently. In an email to Nunatsiaq News, the association said that under that agreement, struck in July 2020, Baffinland Iron Mines Corp. "committed to determining whether there is community support" for the route during the hearings of the Nunavut Impact Review Board.

"To QIA's knowledge the issue of community support remains unresolved," said QIA's statement.

The hamlet of Pond Inlet and the Mittimatalik Hunters and Trappers Organization remain opposed to the route, which would run from the Mary River mine, northeast to its port at Milne Inlet. They have expressed concerns that the railroad will scare away caribou.

The Nunavut Impact Review Board's final hearing on Baffinland's expansion plans began its second week Monday. Last week, presentations by the company asserted that the railway route was made final by the multi-million-dollar agreement struck with QIA.

<https://nunatsiaq.com/stories/article/baffinland-says-it-wont-budge-on-proposed-railway-route/>

Megan Lord-Hoyle, Baffinland's vice-president of sustainable development, told the hearing Thursday the mine remained committed to the route, despite ongoing concerns raised by community organizations.

Baffinland says the current route, which it calls called Route 3, takes into account earlier concerns raised about the company's first route proposal that would have closely followed the existing tote road. A second route, proposed by local Inuit, was deemed unsafe by Baffinland. The company maintains that Route 3three would have the smallest impact on caribou — as well as the lowest fuel consumption for its trains — of the three routes.

Baffinland's critics, meanwhile, say the company still lacks data on the proposed route.

On, Jan. 28, in a response to a question from Igloolik Mayor Merlyn Recinos, Lord-Hoyle said Baffinland has not completed a geotechnical study of the route, to test the ground's stability.

Baffinland later clarified in an email to Nunatsiaq News that geotechnical work began in 2020 and will continue in 2021 to "define the exact engineering requirements" but not to change the route.

"It is important to note that regardless of them being completed or not, it does not change our commitment that this is the route that we would construct should phase two be approved," Lord-Hoyle said during Thursday's session.

Andrew Dumbrille, World Wildlife Fund Canada's lead specialist on marine shipping and conservation, said in an interview with Nunatsiaq News that without this study being complete, the route could see unexpected changes made after it's already accepted.

The study shows whether "a certain geological area can sustain the full weight and construction of a railroad. And they haven't done that," he said. "With a project of this magnitude, we shouldn't be giving Baffinland a blank cheque."

Baffinland says other studies support its preferred railroad route, with focuses on caribou safety, sustainability and traditional knowledge.

And the current railway route, it said, is a direct result of working with Inuit.