

## Land claim doesn't slow foundation

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It's business as usual for the Island Corridor Foundation in its efforts to rebuild Vancouver Island's long-neglected E&N Rail corridor, despite claims by the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group on much of the land the railway runs through.

Doug Backhouse, executive-director of the ICF, said the claim by the treaty group (comprised of six First Nations on Vancouver Island, including the Chemainus First Nation and Cowichan Tribes) on about 200,000 hectares of railway land that run through their traditional territories is "not a new thing" because the treaty group has been talking about it for years.

"We've recently met with representatives of the Hul'qumi'num Treaty Group and indicated to them that our plans will benefit them as well and, while we don't intend to undermine their process, we intend to carry on with our plans for the corridor's upgrades in the interim," Backhouse said.

The Island Corridor Foundation, which owns the railway corridor, is campaigning to raise \$103.8 million (to be shared three ways between Ottawa, Victoria and the operator) to improve the neglected 290-kilometre rail line to bring the corridor up to North American standards.

However, the treaty group filed a human rights complaint against Canada and B.C. with the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights in the U.S. on Tuesday, claiming that land now belonging to the ICF on Vancouver Island was taken from the bands without their consent or any offer of compensation and given to the Dunsmuir company in 1884 -- and they want compensation for it now.

Backhouse said the land grant given to Dunsmuir in 1884 is an "extraordinary" grant that involved much of eastern Vancouver Island at the time.

He said, over the years, much of the land was sold off privately and the portion of it where the railway now runs is just a small section of it.

"If the underlying land grant is impacted by this, it would have far-reaching implications for much of the Island's southeast coast and homeowners could find themselves as part of this claim as well," Backhouse said.

Backhouse he's also not concerned that Ottawa and the province might reconsider any plans to provide funding for ICF's project as a result of the treaty group's actions.

"The treaty process was set up to deal with these types of issues and, while there might be some impacts on us down the road, we intend to move forward and create economic opportunities that will be in everyone's interests," he said.

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