



Report on Northern Ontario Context: Implications and Considerations for Strategy Development

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Northern & Eastern Ontario Rail Network

The Northern & Eastern Ontario Rail Network (NEORN) is a grass roots organization advocating for the revival & reinvigoration of passenger rail services throughout Northern Ontario and the creation & development of an interconnected network of rail, motor coach & marine services, consistent with the Growth Plan for Northern Ontario.

The government of Ontario is developing a multimodal transportation strategy for Northern Ontario (NOMTS), an initiative that will define the improvements for the movement of people & goods over the next twenty five years.

The multimodal transportation study has identified a list of seven objectives, challenges and opportunities for Northeastern & Northwestern Ontario.

The Northern Ontario Context Implications & Considerations for Strategy Development

- #1 : Enhancing mobility and connections for Northern communities
- #2 : Improving access for remote communities
- #3 : More efficiently moving people and goods between Northern and Southern Ontario
- #4 : Enhancing interprovincial links and border crossings
- #5 : Identifying and integrating new infrastructure to support major new economic development
- #6 : Supporting Northern Ontario tourism through transportation improvements
- #7 : Connectivity and access for Northern industries

Although the NOMTS strategy development paper contains two objectives that speak directly to personal mobility (#1 and #3), it is disappointing and very concerning that the paper contains little to no mention of the need to reinstate & retain regional / remote passenger train services & their corresponding motor coach / marine shuttles.

The following sections give numerous reasons why passenger rail and connecting feeders are important to Northern Ontario.



AGING DEMOGRAPHIC

Proportionally, the elder demographic represents a higher percentage of the population in Northern Ontario than elsewhere in the province. As this segment of the population continues to grow, the senior residents of this region will require passenger rail & corresponding bus services to complete medium to long distance intercity travel.

Community	Population	Age Median
Elliot Lake	11,348	57.1
Gravenhurst	11,640	49.0
Parry Sound	6,191	47.8
Kapuskasing	8,196	47.7
Bracebridge	15,409	47.2
West Nipissing	14,149	47.1
Espanola	5,364	46.5
Sault-Ste-Marie	75,141	45.7
Huntsville	19,056	45.7
Kirkland Lake	8,133	45.6
Hearst	5,090	45.1
Dryden	7,617	45.0
Temiskaming Shores	10,400	45.0
Kenora	15,348	44.4
Fort Frances	7,952	44.0
Oliver Paipoonge	5,732	43.8
Cochrane	5,340	43.3
Thunder Bay	108,359	43.3
Greater Sudbury	160,274	42.3
North Bay	53,651	42.1
Timmins	43,165	40.7
Sioux Lookout	5,037	36.1
ONTARIO	12,851,821	40.4

Source : Statistics Canada, 2011 Census





ACCESSIBILITY & MOBILITY



Access to frequent, reliable & affordable modes of transportation is essential to breaking down the barriers that prevent people from accessing educational, employment, healthcare, social & tourism opportunities. People (such as the elderly, students & tourists), who are unable to drive, fly, or have limited mobility, are currently left with few choices for getting from point A to point B.

The Canadian survey on disability conducted by Statistics Canada in 2012 showed that almost 14% of the Canadian population aged 15 years or older— 3,8 million individuals—reported having a disability that impacted their daily lives. In Ontario 1,8 million people aged 15 or older have a disability. Therefore, they rely heavily on other forms of transportation, primarily train or inter-city bus services to access services, such as health care and to visit family and friends.

It is challenging for many people with disabilities to travel by bus, due to cramped seating and lack of access. Train travel is much easier, more comfortable and more accessible. It makes sense to take advantage of the existing rail system to make passenger service available throughout the north to improve the lives of people with disabilities.



HEALTH CONCERNS WITH LONG DISTANCE BUS TRAVEL



Based on the province's decision to revoke the Northlander passenger train service in favour of long-distance buses, NEORN is concerned that intercity buses will become the prime terrestrial based means of public transportation in Northern Ontario. Although buses definitely have a role to play in short and medium-distance trips, there are health concerns with long-distance bus travel. For example, **Deep Vein Thrombosis ...**

Definition : "Sitting for long periods of time, such as when driving or flying. When your legs remain still for many hours, your calf muscles don't contract, which normally helps blood circulate. Blood clots can form in the calves of your legs if your calf muscles aren't moving for long periods."

Source : Mayo Clinic

Passenger train coaches are designed to accommodate people with limited mobility & provide considerably more leg room. Contrary to buses or planes, travelers are permitted to stand & walk while the train is in operation. Restrooms are also easily accessible.



ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS

"Transportation has been the most challenging sector in Ontario for reductions in greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. Based on US data, GHG emissions from diesel-based intercity passenger rail travel in Canada are about 2 to 3 times lower per passenger-km than emissions from equivalent travel by car or personal truck. Intercity passenger rail can therefore play an immediate significant role, at low cost and with other social / economic benefits, in achieving climate change targets."

Source : Transport Action Ontario

Given the vast distances in Northern Ontario, reducing GHG emissions through passenger rail is consistent with the government of Ontario's commitment to mitigating climate change.



SAFETY & RELIABILITY

Rail travel is a safe and reliable, all season mode of transportation. Trains are able to circumvent highway closures, provide service despite a majority of inclement weather conditions, and transport people & goods over a vast geography.

In 2013, the Railway Association of Canada reported 51 passenger train accidents nationwide. During the same period of time, Transport Canada reported 124,000 vehicle related collisions on Canadian roadways (of which 1,800 were fatal).



Northlander TEE Train (Defunct)

INADEQUATE PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

The transportation network in Northern Ontario is suffering from a level of neglect & fragmentation; which has resulted in an increased level of isolation of the communities located in the geographical heart of Canada. The residents of this region who are without access to a vehicle have fewer reliable inter-city transportation options with each passing year.

Service reductions & cancelations

2012



Elimination of Ontario Northland's regional passenger train service (the Northlander) between Toronto, Washago, Gravenhurst, Bracebridge, Huntsville, South River, North Bay, Temagami, Cobalt, New Liskeard, Englehart, Swastika, Matheson, Porquis Jct & Cochrane.

2012



Considerable reduction in frequency and reliability of VIA Rail Canada's transcontinental passenger train service (the Canadian) between Toronto, Washago, Parry Sound, Sudbury Jct, Capreol, Gogama, Foleyet, Oba, Hornepayne, Longlac, Nakina, Armstrong, Sioux Lookout & Western Canada.

2014-15



The elimination of the federal operational investment, its temporary restoration and the subsequent suspension of the remote passenger train service (the Algoma Central) between Sault-Ste-Marie, Heyden, Searchmont, Agawa Canyon, Hawk Junction, Dubreuilville, Franz, Oba & Hearst.

In 2015, the region has also suffered from the elimination or suspension of nine motor coach routes on the Trans-Canada highways (11, 17, 69 / 400). Additionally, as of 2014, there is no longer any direct scheduled flight service between Northeastern Ontario communities & the nation's capital (Ottawa).

RAIL ABANDONMENT

Northern & Eastern regions of Ontario have witnessed the abandonment & removal of multiple shortline, regional & transcontinental railroads.



Algoma Central Railway (AC)
Canadian National Railway (CN)
Canadian Pacific Railway (CP)

1995-96 / 1999	CN abandons line between Capreol, North Bay, Algonquin Provincial Park & Pembroke
1996-97	CN abandons line between Barrie & Longford
1997	CN abandons line between Cochrane & La Sarre (QC)
1997	CP abandons line between Struthers Junction & Geco (Manitouwadge)
2000	AC abandons line between Hawk Junction, Wawa & Michipicoten Harbour
2004	CN abandons line between Longlac & Thunder Bay
2011-13	CP abandons line between Mattawa, Pembroke & Smiths Falls
2013-14	CN abandons line between Pembroke & Nepean

FRAGILE HIGHWAY NETWORK

Northern Ontario has a road network that is increasingly fragile due to climate change, natural disasters & automobile collisions. Between 2011 & 2014, the Northeastern portion of the province experienced a total of 674 highway closures. With the lack of a grid-like road network as found in Southern Ontario, residents & travelers are simply unable to circumvent road closures due to accidents, weather related incidents, forest fires, floods and in some instances, sink holes. As a consequence for a lack of road-based transportation alternatives, Northern Ontario communities are left with little to no transporation options when disaster strikes.

2003



The Sergeant Aubrey Cosens bridge collapses on the Trans-Canada highway 11 at Latchford. Traffic is halted for two weeks.

2012



The Trans-Canada highway 17 suffers a road washout at Wawa. Traffic from White River to Wawa is redirected by an approximate 800 kilometre detour.

2016



The Trans-Canada highway 11/17 bridge at Nipigon is closed to due a partial collapse. The transportation of goods & people is redirected through an international border as no road detours were available.



MARINE TRAVEL



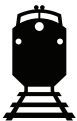
Ontario's far North is far too reliant on airplanes to transport people & goods to & from the communities that are only accessible by air located on James Bay & Hudson Bay.

Given the considerable cost of constructing & maintaining a road infrastructure in an underdeveloped region of Northern Ontario, the federal & provincial governments need to investigate the opportunity to develop an affordable, warm weather ferry service between the coastal communities of Fort Severn, Peawanuck, Attawapiskat, Kashechewan, Fort Albany to connect to Moosonee & the Polar Bear Express train that links to the rest of Ontario.

There are existing year round & seasonal ferry services for remote communities located on the Atlantic & Pacific coasts of Canada.

TRANSPORTATION COSTS IN REMOTE REGIONS

Moosonee to Timmins



Ontario Northland

Polar Bear Express train & bus shuttle
RETURN FARE : \$ 150.72



Air Creebec

Flight
RETURN FARE : \$ 885.92

Attawapiskat to Timmins



Air Creebec

Flight
RETURN FARE : \$ 1,342.44

Peawanuck to Timmins



Air Creebec

Flight
RETURN FARE : \$ 2,067.90

The development of a low level seaport at Moosonee, in conjunction with the use of the existing railway, could alleviate congestion of existing road, rail & marine transportation of goods through the lower Great Lakes region, as well as potentially future transportation of materials from the Ring of Fire.



CONCLUSION

The current state of inequity between rural/remote & urban transportation infrastructure is **unacceptable** in a supposedly developed nation like Canada. As a result, residents of this region are faced with many barriers to employment, education, and access to health care.

Northern Ontario has a network of approximately 6,000 kilometres of rail interlinking a significant portion of municipalities and First Nations throughout the region on which passenger train service can be reinstated. There are a number of economic, environmental, practical, social and health factors that contribute to the importance of frequent and reliable passenger train service for communities, businesses and visitors looking to explore and travel great distances throughout the Cambrian Shield.

Utilizing the existing rail corridor infrastructure, the federal & provincial governments must provide equitable reinvestments in passenger trains & corresponding motor coach / marine services in Northern Ontario. The federal government must also halt any current or future abandonment of rail corridors.



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