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To NOMTS public comments page: **Please note my comments are in red.**

The following is an excerpt from the draft Northern Ontario Multimodal Transportation Strategy report found at nomts.ca

MTO and MNDM are seeking your feedback on the goals and directions in this draft Strategy.

- Do they capture the key areas and partnerships needed to ensure that the transportation system in northern Ontario meets users' needs over the next 25 years?

No when it comes to passenger rail only statements about previous passenger rail services. No review or forward discussion of opportunities to explore regarding existing rail lines.

No when it comes to climate change issues and roads/weather. Rail may become most important in insuring connectivity.

No when it comes to recognizing VIA is not a community transportation system and no obvious consideration is made for local passenger service – only through intercontinental schedule.

No when the bus service is deteriorating in both frequency and scheduling.

No when the youth of the North might stay put to be educated and work if they could connect by rail to their communities.

No when it comes to meeting senior needs to travel for all reasons.

Recognizing that the strategy has a 25-year vision and that not everything can be achieved at once, tell us which directions are most important over the next ten years, to help focus the Action Plan.

Most important: A multi modal transportation study ignoring the potential of future passenger rail service for the region is poor planning.

1. Reinstate passenger rail service between Cochrane and Toronto
2. Put a moratorium on the removal of any rails in northern Ontario
3. Consider linking existing rail lines in Northern Ontario to run passenger trains with feed-in bus lines to meet train schedules

The following are the Vision, Goals and Directions (taken from the NOMTS)

- [Goal 1: Connected and Prosperous](#)

1.3 Reinvigorate passenger rail service where appropriate

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Passenger rail services and ridership have declined over the past few decades as the provincial highway network has improved and travel patterns have changed, making travel by car and bus faster and more convenient. Rail ridership has declined even more steeply in the last 10 years due to service reductions, inconvenient service hours, and lengthy distances and poor connections between urban centres and stations. *In 2009 the IBI Group indicated in Ontario Northland's Rail Division Sustainability Plan that : "annual traffic on the Northlander is excellent under the circumstances", and that : "generating some 35,000 annual passenger trips out of total market base population of 200,000 (North of Toronto) is an acceptable performance in terms of indicating support of the service by actually using it". This leads me to believe the Government would concede that passenger rail is needed in the North, right? When the Northlander last operated, ridership spiked from 31,494 (in 2009) to 39,579 (in 2011). Perhaps there was a foregone conclusion long before the release of the NOMTS.*

Passenger rail in northern Ontario serves a number of functions. For example, the Polar Bear Express from Cochrane to Moosonee, operated by Ontario Northland Transportation Commission (ONTC), provides an essential service, where no other year-round ground transportation options exist. VIA Rail, a federal crown corporation also provides interprovincial and intraprovincial passenger rail service through northern Ontario. Trips by passenger rail may provide a viable alternative to highway trips where a rail line exists; where it can provide more direct access than other modes and where sufficient passenger demand exists. Rail service in these situations could reduce road infrastructure and maintenance costs as well as decrease greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions as compared to private automobiles.

There is also potential for passenger rail to support local economic development, particularly where communities are interested in partnering to operate a service. For example, the Missanabie Cree First Nation is currently preparing a business case to restore passenger rail service from Sault Ste. Marie to Hearst on the Algoma Central Railway (ACR). (See [Fig. 2](#) for the location of existing rail including the Algoma Central Rail line.)

The draft Strategy recognizes that new and improved passenger rail service could become a reality, where a viable business case and sufficient passenger travel demand exist, and should be fully explored by service providers. Ontario will work with the federal government to review and evaluate rail service business cases, where appropriate.

Sample Action under Consideration

Continue to explore practical opportunities for how and where new or modified passenger rail services could enhance the regional intercommunity transportation network. *In 2012, the proposed "enhanced bus service" was to be the "be all" solution for northern travel needs. Five years later, bus service between Hearst and Kapuskasing (previously daily) has been reduced to three days a week. Small communities like Cobalt saw their intercity services cut from three times daily, to once a day. Flights provided by Bearskin Airlines (between Kapuskasing and Timmins), and Porter (between North Bay to Timmins and Toronto) were abandoned this year.*

Interconnectivity in the north is a must!

Other Sample Actions to consider:

1. Explore the concept of Ontario Northland Transportation Commission providing passenger rail service for all of Northern Ontario – ONTC owns tracks and could coordinate bus service with rail service schedules for inter connectivity. They could either directly provide passenger rail service or they could contract out the service but manage the operation to link with buses and other community vehicular service.
2. Explore the concept of expanding Metrolinx to extend their Richmond Hill service once per day (minimum) to North Bay (GO NORTH) there by extending their existing rental opportunity with CN rail for track usage. This would partially meet the needs of the 416/905 commuters who currently turn the highway 400 into a parking lot at times, as well as perhaps provide the opportunity to move some of the population into Northern Ontario. It would also meet the needs of those connecting from North Bay through Muskoka southbound for health, education, etc. needs. Both the Vision and Mission statements of Metrolinx apply to Northern Ontario:
The Metrolinx Vision: To link communities across the region, creating connections that support sustainable growth and prosperity.
The Metrolinx Mission: To champion and deliver mobility solutions which connect people, places and communities throughout our region.
3. Smart Commute, another Metrolinx initiative, was developed to reduce traffic congestion and take action on climate change through transportation efficiency. This is exactly what one of the aims of NOMTS is attempting to present through interconnectivity of services.
4. Explore the concept of moving the operation of ONTC to the Ministry of Transportation, alongside Metrolinx, and then both south and north would be equally served under one ministry.
5. Crucial to the success of a multi modal transportation strategy for Northern Ontario is the development of a Regional Transportation Plan for a seamless integrated transportation network throughout the north, similar to the GTHA plan – The Big Move – where the solution requires the coordination and integration of transit and transportation systems in order to allow growth to happen and help people and businesses move more easily throughout the region.

- [Goal 2: Safe and Reliable](#)
- [Goal 3: Address Remote and Far North Challenges](#)
- [Goal 4: Integrated and Innovative](#)
- [Goal 5: Healthy and Sustainable](#)

My comment on the goals 2-5: Each of these goals applies to passenger rail service but there is no mention as to how they relate to passenger rail service. It appears you have confused the infrastructure with the mode of transportation (air and planes, water and marine craft, roads and vehicles, rail lines and freight / passenger services) and have completely missed the fact that the rail lines are in place and ready for rolling stock (some require upgrades I will admit) but the old Northlander route and the Algoma Central are ready to carry passengers.

When the Government said it wants to "ensure that the transportation system is improved and managed in a way that supports northern prosperity over the coming 25 years", Northerners have reasons to be sceptical. The Ministries of Transportation and Northern Development & Mines co-developed a detailed document recommending improvements to the region's highways, airports, among others. The section reserved for passenger rail is, coincidentally, limited and vague. It states however: "that new and improved passenger rail service could become a reality, should a viable business case and sufficient passenger travel demand exist, and that it would evaluate rail service business cases, where appropriate."

Six weeks prior to unveiling the final draft, Bob Nichols, an MTO spokesperson, revealed in the Almaguin News that reinstatement of passenger rail in the region was not part of the current discussion related to the NOMTS, and that "the viability of passenger train travel depends on a number of factors, including sufficient passenger demand, and the availability of tracks, which are often shared with freight trains".

He also says "Winter weather can be a challenge for all modes of transportation in Northern Ontario. But railways have their own unique winter weather problems. Mechanical switches on railway tracks, when jammed with ice, can affect passenger rail service. Tracks running under bridges can become jammed with ice."... a scenario that curiously is seldom ever reported as a factor to delays or closures of Ontario's highways or other passenger rail services.

The inequality between north and south needs to be addressed in NOMTS. The government of Ontario continues to invest billions of dollars annually into GO Transit, citing that "expanding public transit to improve people's commute is part of our plan to create jobs, grow our economy and help people in their everyday lives", while they've turned their back on Northerners by refusing to invest even a small amount needed to reinstate north/south passenger rail service previously known as the "Northlander").

5.1 Reduce GHG emissions from car and truck transportation in northern Ontario by decreasing reliance on diesel and gasoline fuels and shifting to use of electricity and lower-carbon fuels



This draft Strategy supports Ontario's *Climate Change Action Plan* and a path to a lower carbon future. While long-distance travel is necessary for people and goods moving throughout northern Ontario, emissions can be reduced through a shift to electric vehicles and low-carbon fuel sources, more efficient vehicles and improving access to other transportation modes such as rail, marine and bus.

Again there is no mention of future option of passenger rail service in reducing GHG emissions. And this needs to include passenger rail, not just freight. Move people in a more environmentally friendly way by taking the train.

5.3 Consider impacts and risks associated with climate change when making decisions on transportation infrastructure investments for northern Ontario

Variable weather events are likely to lead to increased flooding, more frequent washouts, hazardous winter driving conditions and route closures.

Trains continue to roll when the roads may be closed. People prefer to take the train in bad weather or during periods of road closures – rail becomes an alternative when there is no detour road unlike Southern Ontario where the roads are on a grid system and detours are easier.

Climate Change

Climate change will have effects on life in northern Ontario and on the ability of northern residents and visitors to make use of its transportation system. With increasing temperatures and a changing climate, many aspects of the transportation system are threatened – more frequent and severe rainstorms or freezing rain may result in flooding, road and rail washouts, ice formation on roads and power lines. Together these possible impacts mean more hazardous travelling conditions, if travel is possible at all.

Milder temperatures and longer summers are expected to lead to enhanced opportunities for tourism and economic development in the north, such as skiing and snowmobiling and warm-weather activities such as fishing, boating and visiting the region's parks. Changes to the seasons in the north could lead to more warm-weather visitors for popular outdoor activities.

Residents and visitors alike will prefer to use the train to travel the long distances in Northern Ontario – and they will bring their bikes on the train! – which is why you will be looking to 5.5 Increase cycling opportunities by connecting the province-wide cycling network, accommodating cycling where appropriate in road rights-of-way and supporting the construction of cycling infrastructure in cities, towns and First Nation communities Ontario is also working to identify a province-wide network of cycling routes to promote cycling tourism and recreation.

5.7 Improve wildlife safety and decrease the impact of roads on natural heritage and biodiversity



While the highway network in northern Ontario benefits local communities, roadways have a direct impact on wildlife mortality along with habitat loss, fragmentation and quality. Conserving resources and maintaining biodiversity are essential to the health of northern communities.

In northern Ontario, where higher densities of wildlife live near highways, the proportion of collisions involving wildlife is greater than the provincial average. There are initiatives in place and others underway to reduce collisions, including infrastructure that supports wildlife crossings or directs wildlife away from highways.

By reinstating passenger rail where possible, fewer cars will be on the highways therefore improving wildlife safety and decreasing the impact of roads on natural heritage and biodiversity.

This draft Strategy is one of the last steps towards a final Northern Ontario Multimodal Transportation Strategy and accompanying Action Plan anticipated by the end of 2017.

Unfortunately the opportunities available to Northern Ontario by including planning for passenger rail service in this multi modal transportation strategy have not been included to this stage. This can be remedied NOW with a concerted effort by the consultants to restate their commitment to serving the needs of Northern Ontario with multi modal options and include passenger rail service in the 25 year plan. The rails are in place. The province owns a transportation company (ONTC). The municipalities want it for their residents and businesses. As a matter of fact, to date, 95% of municipal councils of in Northern Ontario on the old Northlander train route have signed resolutions supporting the grassroots

efforts to reinstate passenger rail to their communities. Their voices should not be ignored!
(Documentation can be provided if you do not already have these resolutions).

Transportation that is safe, reliable, comfortable, and affordable. Most Ontarians would agree this should be the barometer when providing transportation for our seniors, students, medical patients, and people with limited mobility let alone ordinary residents and visitors! Whether they are in southern Ontario or northern Ontario!! Most would agree it's humane to provide these options to our most vulnerable and to the next generation, when many are unable to drive great distances to receive health care or an education. Without hesitation, Greater Toronto benefits from GO Transit services.

NOMTS must recommend investing in passenger rail service for Northern Ontario.

NOMTS must recommend investing in connecting northerners to the rest of Canada by rail.

Not just more roads.

Respectfully submitted.

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