

Passenger Train Service is Vital for Economic Development of Both Near North and Northern Ontario Communities

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Bracebridge, ON (Nov. 7, 2017) -- The **Committee Promoting Muskoka Rail Travel (CPMRT)** is a volunteer group of Community leaders who believe that improving and expanding passenger rail service is a good, cost effective and efficient option for reliable passenger travel among communities north of the Toronto GTA – as well as offering a safe, weather independent and environmentally responsible mode of passenger transportation.

History has always shown that economic development follows transportation corridors.

The updated 2017 Transportation Survey commissioned by CPMRT this summer has again re-affirmed the people's wishes and commitment to the resumption of passenger train service connecting Northern and Southern Ontario.

This recent survey was endorsed and promoted with the support of many municipalities, regional media, Chambers of Commerce and First Nations Communities on the rail corridor from the Toronto GTA, through Muskoka and north to North Bay and beyond.

The goals of the CPMRT 2017 Transportation Survey were:

- To assess the population's satisfaction with the current travel practices on the corridor between the Toronto GTA and communities up to and beyond North Bay.
- To create a demographic profile of the responding travelers on the corridor.
- To help identify a demand for the potential return of passenger rail service between the towns in the corridor.

The most significant results indicated in the Survey were:

- An overwhelming number of the respondents (92%) indicated that they would use a passenger rail service if it was reliable and scheduled daily. This is a 10% increase in the potential ridership from the ridership indicated in the 2011 Survey.
- Reliable passenger rail service was strongly preferred over the presently available bus service.
- Majority of the respondents who indicated their preference for rail service over bus service were full year round residents.

- Reasons for travel were divided among employment, education, medical and personal travel needs.
- Most respondents who do not use the bus service must presently use their cars. However, they feel car travel is adversely affected by road traffic congestion delays and dangers especially for trips during inclement weather.
- Primary reasons for their preference for rail service over bus service or cars were travel safety in foul weather conditions, service schedule unaffected by current road traffic conditions, train comfort and work productivity during travel.

The CPMRT recognizes that during the current time of government fiscal constraints, new commitments for funding may not be readily acceptable. The CPMRT suggests a re-balancing of the present government transportation modal priorities, which traditionally favor vehicular travel. The CPMRT notes that the current NOMTS Strategy Report presently seems to indicate a bias toward increased road vehicle infrastructure or improvements. The CPMRT believes the NOMTS Strategy Report unduly overweighs the benefits of augmented road facilities over the internationally proven efficiencies of passenger rail service.

The CPMRT believes the survey results indicate that all Northern Ontario towns and communities and First Nations communities would be beneficiaries of a reliable passenger rail service which would support their economic development and in many cases their threatened community sustainability.

However the re-establishment of passenger rail service will require political will and a commitment to Northern Ontario's transportation services infrastructure. While the volume of passengers may be lower north of the GTA, the areas north of the GTA need the same quality of transportation services as the areas in the east, west and south of the GTA. Public sector priorities and investment should also be made to support transportation options in the North.

In addition, the CPMRT envisions that a significant amelioration to the on-going GTA housing crisis could be offered through the access to the affordable housing available in the communities north of the GTA. Currently, access to this housing opportunity is limited only by the lack of regular, reliable commuter passenger rail service from these communities to the GTA. Convenient access to the housing opportunities available in these northern communities could be a very attractive option if offered to the presently beleaguered GTA housing buyers.

CPMRT's next steps will cover all municipalities from north of the GTA to North Bay on the 'ONR Northlander' corridor and are planned to have an impact on the political decision makers.

- In cooperation with the Northeastern Ontario Rail Network (www.neorn.ca), CPMRT is actively attempting to demonstrate to the provincial and federal governments of the need for publicly supported investments in the reinstatement of passenger rail services, as is the case in every other jurisdiction in Canada. Currently we are working towards initiating an impact study to demonstrate the socio-economic value of reinstating passenger rail service in Northern Ontario.
- CPMRT is working to establish a strong representation of support from the communities (surveys, Town Council Resolutions, petitions, etc) for presentation to the Ontario and Federal Governments.
- CPMRT will petition for support from appropriate Ontario MPP's representing jurisdictions which include the affected towns. These municipalities stand to be negatively impacted by the lack of commitment to passenger train service in Northern Ontario currently stated in the draft report (Northern Ontario Multi Modal Transportation Study www.nomts.ca)
- CPMRT will establish a strong partnership with the First Nations Communities along the rail corridor.

Please contact CPMRT spokesperson Lucille Frith for more information at 705-789-8903 or email: lakeofbays.lucille@gmail.com

Learn more about the how the NOMTS report could impact our region's travel for the next 25 years by visiting www.nomts.ca