



Coalition for Algoma Passenger Trains (CAPT)

Coalition for Algoma Passenger Trains' response to the DRAFT 2041 Northern Ontario Multimodal Transportation Strategy

Introduction

The Coalition for Algoma Passenger Trains (CAPT) contends that the Draft 2041 Northern Ontario Multimodal Transportation Strategy (NOMTS) (July 2017) is: completely lacking in vision, is not multi-modal, has recommendations that are not consistent with its stated goals and the contextual reality which it should be addressing, and does not respond to the input from its community consultations.

Lacking in Vision

This report is based on the current transportation that exists NOW, not on what COULD and NEEDS to be developed in the next 25 years. It is based on the fact that in Northern Ontario travellers have no choice but road and air transportation because there is almost no passenger train service. The strategy needs to be far more visionary in order to achieve its stated vision: "Northern Ontario's transportation system is responsive to economic, social and environmental needs and change, and is transformative in supporting new economic activity, healthy communities and a cleaner environment." This vision statement is to be achieved through a strategy based on the following 5 goals:

1. Connected and prosperous: increase and modernize transportation options to support everyday living and economic activity in northern Ontario
2. Safe and reliable: enhance traveller safety and system reliability and minimize travel delays and complications
3. Address remote and far north challenges: work with remote and Far North communities to address unique transportation needs with more reliable connections between communities and to the all-season ground transportation network
4. Integrated and innovative: anticipate and respond to economic, technological, environmental and social change to link people, resources and businesses
5. Healthy and sustainable: create a cleaner and more sustainable transportation system in northern Ontario by reducing GHG and other environmental and human health impacts

Goal 1: Connected and prosperous: increase and modernize transportation options to support everyday living and economic activity in northern Ontario

There is a great need to broaden the transportation mix in Northern Ontario in order to move beyond the very narrow focus on exclusively road and air travel. That need is recognized in the Northern Growth Plan which calls for multi-modal transportation, including rail.

There is so much potential for the ONR to be developed into a highly effective passenger and freight rail service if the proper direction were given to the ONTC, including an effective governance structure. With the energy crisis and climate change, the need for passenger rail to connect our northern communities with each other as well as with the rest of the province and country has become imperative. When it becomes increasingly dangerous due to extreme weather to drive long distances and the urgency to reduce carbon emissions forces us to use rail, train service will be essential to the future of Northern Ontario. Without it our communities could become ghost towns. The need to attract and retain young people, tourists and immigrants to Northern communities, as well as the needs of the aging population, make passenger rail essential.

Replacing trains with buses does not “modernize” transportation. Dependence on roads is a regression to the most primitive transportation infrastructure. For all their costs, highways are essentially paved paths and automobiles are motorized carts. Rail, on the other hand, is a more modern technological innovation--- only a little older than air transportation as a technology. And rail continues to innovate outside Canada. Bombardier, for one, now offers passenger trains that reach 150 km/hour on regular tracks, winter or summer. Most of these trains are running in many countries except Canada because rail is not supported here. Buses are not a comfortable mode of transportation, particularly for seniors and people with disabilities, for long distance travel. From a multi-modal perspective buses are most effectively used as short distance feeder vehicles to transport people to passenger rail lines for longer distance travel. Northern Ontarians urgently need passenger service on the existing tracks to travel to health care, to post-secondary education, for youth retention, to bring tourists to our amazing tourism destinations and to travel long distances in dangerous Northern weather. Our economy, our educational institutions, our health care facilities and our communities are in great need of the reinstatement of passenger train service to achieve Goal 1.

Passenger service in all countries has to be heavily subsidized by governments. The rail beds and passenger service need to be publicly funded as infrastructure. Just like highways and public transit in cities, they cannot be run as businesses. They are infrastructure that businesses require in order to prosper but they themselves cannot be run like a business. Imagine the effect on business development and the overall economy if highways were private businesses rather than public infrastructure.

If the province were to extend the mandate of the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission to cover all of Northern Ontario then it is conceivable that improved connectivity of motor coach services and passenger rail to provide these essential services is possible.

The NOMTS report does not even consider passenger rail services such as renewing the ONTC’s Northlander between Cochrane and Toronto. Why this train was cancelled was never mentioned in the public domain even while passenger volumes were on the increase. Nor were there any analyses undertaken to determine how to increase passenger traffic by looking into additional services, new equipment, etc. A passenger train from Sault Ste. Marie to North Bay could have easily connected with

both the southbound and northbound Northlander adding additional passengers wishing to travel to Toronto and points north. This option should be investigated before any decisions on bus services are made.

The transcontinental VIA Rail service through Northern Ontario should be switched over from the CN line to the CP line as it would capture many more communities. The Budd Car service from Sudbury to White River could be run on the CN line to service the smaller communities along this route. The Province should meet with VIA and the railways to initiate some dialogue on this idea. The recent criticisms of CN with its ultra-long trains and short sidings forcing *The Canadian* to wait and playing havoc with its schedule should trigger some discussions regarding a switchover to the CP route.

Goal 2: Safe and reliable: enhance traveller safety and system reliability and minimize travel delays and complications

With the increasing number of extreme weather events related to steadily increasing climate change, passenger rail provides a safer way to travel, than road and air travel. NOMTS has to take into account the fact that from November 2011 to October 2014 the following highway closures occurred:

- Highway 11 (Longlac- Cochrane-North Bay-Huntsville): 191 closures; average duration: 6.33 hrs
- Highway 17 (White river-Sault. Ste. Marie-Sudbury-North Bay-Pembroke): 178 closures; average duration: 13.41 hrs
- Highway 69/400 (Sudbury-Parry Sound-Port Severn): 48 closures; average duration: 5.54 hrs
- Highway 101 (Wawa-Chapleau-Timmins-border with Quebec): 30 closures; average duration: 23.45 hrs
- Highway 144 (Timmins-Gogama-Sudbury): 34 closures; average duration: 12.54 hrs

For passengers with accessibility and health issues, travel for longer distances by train is safer and more accommodating than by bus because trains allow people to stretch through moving around and washrooms are more accessible.

Goal 3: Address Remote and Far North Challenges

The communities between Sault Ste. Marie and Hearst ARE remote. The Ontario government should be advocating on behalf of those communities for the Federal government to reinstate passenger train service on the ACR rail line. There are NO alternative land transportation options for over 400 km of that rail corridor. This is an urgently needed essential service.

The Northlander has to be reinstated from Cochrane to Toronto so that passengers from the Far North who take the train from Moosenee to Cochrane do not have to transfer to bus travel from Cochrane to Toronto. This is particularly necessary for people travelling for health care appointments and whose physical or emotional conditions do not tolerate the long travel by bus.

Goal 4: Integrated and Innovative: Anticipate and respond to economic, technological, environmental and social change to link people, resources and businesses.

Restoring passenger rail on the existing rail beds in Northern Ontario is one of the fastest ways to respond to climate change as it is a very effective way to reduce carbon emissions and to link people, resources and businesses during our increasingly extreme weather events.

Goal 5: Healthy and sustainable: Create a cleaner and more sustainable transportation system in Northern Ontario by reducing GHG and other environmental and human health impacts.

The NOMTS report shockingly neglected to propose arguably the fastest and most effective way to reduce GHG: by planning for a well-coordinated, energy-efficient passenger rail service along the existing rail beds in Northern Ontario. Rail stands alone in its ability to combine energy efficiency with economic and environmental benefits. GHG would be reduced considerably by lower fuel consumption and less production and laying of asphalt for road beds due to less damage through fewer vehicles on highways. Fuel is saved at a ratio of 5-1 using rail versus roads for freight. Travel by rail produces 10 times less carbon emissions than by road or air.

Lower health, police and insurance costs would result from greater use of passenger rail. Hazardous road conditions over long distances can increase the number of highway accidents and injuries. Passenger rail can reduce the number of disabilities caused by vehicle accidents. This can result in lower public and personal costs of health care and other accommodations required due to the disabilities.¹

With our vast land mass and sparse population in Northern Ontario, the cost of fuel and climate change: we cannot afford NOT to invest in rail.

The Draft NOMTS Report is not multi-modal

The NOMTS process should have included the undertaking of a SWOT analysis of the different modes of transportation. SWOT analysis is a structured planning method that could evaluate the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats associated with the various modes of transportation. To develop a good transportation strategy, the relative strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats vis a vis the various modes should have been assessed to determine for example which modes are most effective for long distance travel, which are better for short distances, which result in the least or most GHGs, which are most likely to function during extreme weather etc. All modes are useful but the appropriate use of each should be based on

¹ A Transport Canada report by Vodden, Smith, Eaton and Mayhew (2007) entitled *Analysis and Estimation of the Social Cost of Motor Vehicle Collisions in Ontario* outlines and updates a 1994 Ministry of Transportation Ontario (MTO) study on the social cost of motor vehicle crashes. While the 1994 MTO report focused only on Ontario, the new report—based on 2004 collision data—includes estimates for all 13 Canadian jurisdictions, as well as a national estimate. The study measured the economic and social costs of collisions. Some report highlights:

- The study estimates that collisions cost Canada \$62.7 billion each year.
- This estimate represents about 4.9% of Canada's 2004 GDP
- The cost estimate for Ontario is \$17.9 billion or 3.5% of Ontario's 2004 GDP

The estimate of the social cost of motor vehicle collisions includes direct and indirect costs: Direct costs relate to property damage, emergency response, hospital care, other medical care and insurance administration, out-of-pocket expenses by victims of motor vehicle collisions and traffic delays (lost time, extra fuel use, environmental pollution). Indirect costs relate to human consequences of collisions, such as partial and total disability of victims, activity and workdays lost—as well as the pain and suffering of victims and their families.

information about their usefulness for various purposes. For example, based on the environmental, economic and social strengths and weaknesses of buses and trains, feeder buses could be used to transport people for short distances to passenger train lines that would be effective for longer distances.

CONCLUSION

In the south, Metrolinx connects numerous communities to Toronto with annual subsidies in the tens of millions. If this passenger service is considered to be a necessity there, then why can't it be expanded to include the North where it is equally necessary? There is no region like the North that has such a great need for a comprehensive rail passenger service that is more accessible and safer than bus service and less expensive than air. Long distances, the need to reduce carbon emissions, and hazardous winter highway conditions are only a few of the justifications for such a service. Northerners should not be construed and treated as 'second-class' citizens!

The negative economic impacts of cutting the Northlander and Algoma passenger trains have been huge in Northeastern Ontario. Attracting tourists to far away tourist destinations and students to our northern colleges and universities requires safe and affordable transportation. Both the federal and provincial governments state that tourism is an important economic diversification focus to help replace resource-based industries. But how can the tourism sector flourish when there is no passenger rail. It is common knowledge that most tourists will not drive more than 4 hours in the summer and 2 hours in the winter to reach a tourist destination, but many would be happy travelling the long distances by train. Most communities in Northeastern Ontario have policies to encourage more immigrants and people from southern Ontario to move here. Rail connectivity to the south should be paramount for the success of such plans.

Health care in Northern Ontario is highly regionalized. As a result, people have to travel very long distances to receive care. It is unacceptable to expect people with health problems and disabilities to travel hundreds of miles by bus to reach a regional health care centre.

Don't let down the north; instead, improve and increase the passenger rail service with a good train schedule and there will be strong usage. The rail beds are there--seize on the opportunity to use them for passenger service not just freight. This message was expressed very strongly at all of the community consultations, but it is not reflected in the draft report.

CAPT is eager to work with the NOMTS team to create a truly multi-modal transportation system for Northern Ontario---a system that includes passenger rail.

Respectfully submitted

Howie Wilcox
Chair, Coalition for Algoma Passenger Trains
wwilcox@shaw.ca 705 942 9990