

Common Voice Northwest

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MEDIA RELEASE

Common Voice Northwest Welcomes Ontario's Commitment to Establishing an Inter-Community Bus Service

Common Voice Northwest has welcomed the release of the Province's Draft Multi-Modal Transportation Strategy for Northern Ontario and is particularly pleased that its' Transportation Task Force recommendation that Ontario establish an inter-community bus system across the Northwest has been reflected in the draft.

"Our Transportation Task Force Bus Working Group worked hard to provide the rationale for the creation of a bus system that would connect the majority of the highway communities in the Northwest" said Task Force Chair, Gary Woodbeck. "It is clear that the government heard what we, and our regional partners were saying and that is why they state in the draft report that 'A core network of intercommunity passenger services that offers an increase in daytime pick-up and drop-off times is required to meet peoples needs.'"

Common Voice Northwest Chair, Wendy Landry also welcomed the report and the recommendations. "Once again the importance of having a regional public policy research organization is paying off by it being able to present a united position on matters affecting the economy and life in Northwestern Ontario" she said.

The Transportation Task Force will spend the next month reviewing all aspects of the draft multimodal transportation strategy and will submit its comments directly to the Ministry. Common Voice Northwest is also asking all municipalities and other organizations who depend on an effective and efficient transportation system to review the draft and provide their input to the Task Force.

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Attached: Section 1.1 of the MMTS.

The report can be accessed at <https://nomts.ca/>



1.1 Establish a network of core intercommunity passenger bus services across northern Ontario, connecting major centres

Many residents in northern Ontario are dependent upon intercommunity bus services—regularly scheduled motor coach services between regional centres—to access essential services. Over the past few decades, intercommunity bus service has been affected by reduced frequency, inconvenient schedules and poor connections in urban centres. For some communities, service has been discontinued all together. In particular, gaps in the core network exist from Fort Frances to Kenora and Dryden to Red Lake.

A core network of intercommunity passenger bus services that offers an increase in daytime pick-up and drop-off times is required to meet people's needs. This would provide service between larger centres and/or along major provincial highways, and, where feasible, same-day return travel options to and from regional centres. Figure 2 shows existing core intercommunity bus service routes, as well as locations where there is limited or no bus service.

Currently, intercommunity bus service in northern Ontario is provided by both public and private operators and regulated by the provincial government. The Ontario Northland Transportation Commission (ONTC), a provincial agency, is an important public provider of these services,

specifically along main highways and corridors in northeastern Ontario. Operating conventional, market-based, scheduled bus service that provides adequate services can be economically challenging for northern Ontario service providers, given the long distances and dispersed population of the north.

Provision of new intercommunity bus services should include better coordination of travel schedules between modes and providers to optimize connections, as well as deployment of technology to ensure the services are modern and reliable. For example, expanded use of automatic vehicle location systems for real-time reporting of expected arrival times would greatly increase travellers' convenience.

This draft Strategy recognizes the importance of intercommunity bus service and connections. As service improves, better scheduled and more seamless connections will be possible for bus users to transfer to and from other modes, such as air or rail.

Action Underway

- The Ministry of Transportation and the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines are developing recommendations on an improved intercommunity bus regime. The recommendations will give special consideration to the needs of those northern, rural and First Nation communities where intercommunity bus service is not currently in line with demand.