

Common Voice Northwest

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Draft 2041 Northern Ontario Multimodal Transportation Strategy.

EBR Registry Number: 013-0889

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Transportation Planning Branch
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Dear Ms. Evers

Common Voice Northwest, through its Transportation Task Force, has reviewed the Draft 2041 Northern Ontario Multimodal Transportation Strategy and in general is in support of the vast majority of the policy goals outlined in the draft. The Task Force consists of a number of individuals with extensive knowledge and experience in all modes in the Northwest.

A general observation is that the principles contained in the report are 'motherhood' and are hard to object to. There is frustration that the process is taking so long without the promise of 'low hanging fruit' being implemented before the process has been completed. There is a built-up demand in the North for action, not more studies!

The following are those exceptions to our support or requests for modifications of the principles to reflect the needs of Northwestern Ontario.

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

A comparison between the language of the narrative and Figure 2: Intercommunity Passenger Bus Service and Railways in Northern Ontario suggests that the narrative and the title needs to be modified to be consistent.

The narrative speaks to "establishing a network of core intercommunity services...connecting major centres" leaving the reader with the assumption that only

the larger communities (ie the major ones) are to be served by the intercommunity bus services. However, a close examination of Figure 2, the map of Northern Ontario, indicates that the “Priority Routes for additional bus service” does include the smaller communities, particularly those that are ‘at the end of the line’ such as Red Lake, Rainy River, Sioux Lookout, and Hearst along with the communities between major centres not currently served or underserved, Sioux Narrows, Greenstone and the North Shore Communities of Shuniah, Dorion, Red Rock, Nipigon, Schreiber, Terrace Bay and Marathon.

There are two communities that have not been identified on the map of requiring intercommunity bus services:

Armstrong and Aroland First Nation, at the north end of Highway 527. This service would also provide transportation options to two other First Nation communities as well as providing a connection to the transcontinental VIA Rail passenger service.

Manitouwadge, located on Highway 614. A local shuttle service connecting to the main line service would be the minimum requirement for their participation.

We note with interest that Highway 631, which connects Hwy 17 to Hwy 11 shows on the map as a intercommunity bus service route. We are doubtful that a loop service would work for the benefit of the communities on either highway and ask that if this continues to be a recommended route that a full explanation be given on how the service would be implemented.

Recommendation:

- A) The narrative of Section 1.1 needs to be modified to make it clear as to which communities are being proposed for some form of intercommunity passenger bus service. In addition, the map and in particular the legend for the “Priority Routes for Additional Bus Service” needs to be modified for clarity.**
- B) Service to Armstrong and Manitouwadge must be included in any implementation of the principle.**

1.3 Reinvigorate passenger rail service where appropriate

The narrative fails to reflect the long-standing call to return passenger rail service to the CP line along the North Shore of Lake Superior to Thunder Bay and westward through Dryden and Kenora. Nor does it speak to the current unattractive schedule of the transcontinental service on the Northern CN line which stops at Sioux Lookout, Armstrong and Longlac in the middle of the night. A future report needs to speak to these two aspects of rail passenger service.

Recommendation:

- A) That the implementation phase of the plan identifies specific options to return passenger rail service to the southern CP line and to identify options for enhanced service along the CN northern line.**

1.4 Four-lane or twin segments of the Trans-Canada Highway to improve reliability of travel

The Task Force is supportive of the principal of twinning those sections where Highway 11 and 17 share the same Right of Way, or where there is no alternative Canadian route in the immediate area (ie Kenora to the Manitoba Border.)

However, as this is a 25-year plan, recognition of the need to four lane or twin other sections of the Trans-Canada Highway should be included in the implementation plan.

In addition, there are two projects in the immediate Thunder Bay area that should be identified as improving the highway system. They are:

- 1) Continue the extension of the Thunder Bay Harbour Expressway (also known as the Shabaqua Highway) westerly to connect with Sistonen's Corner, and
- 2) Four Laning of Highway 61 south to the United States Border

Recommendation:

- A) That the 25-year plan identify additional sections of the Trans-Canada Highway that would benefit from twinning or 4 laning, either for safety or economic reasons that would be implemented following completion of the 4 sections identified in the Draft Report.**
- B) That the 25-year plan identify four laning or twinning of Highway 61 to the USA Border and extending the Thunder Bay Harbour Expressway westerly to Sistonen's Corner**

1.12 Increase market access to rail and marine modes for freight transport, where appropriate

The Task Force is disappointed that there is no specific mention of the challenges affecting industry and retailers in the Northwest in obtaining rail based container delivery and pick up particularly since the Task Force arranged a specific briefing between Ministry Staff responsible for the development of the Northern Ontario Multimodal Transportation Strategy and the Thunder Bay Community Economic Development Commission. This briefing outlined the current approach by the railway companies with regards to bypassing the Northwest with all container movements (in either direction)

forcing regional entities to truck containers to either Winnipeg or Toronto in order to access rail services, well beyond the 'economical for distances in the range of 50–70 km' identified in the draft report.

At the same time, the CEDC outlined the challenge of getting rail cars placed at a variety of locations and the challenge of timely delivery and pickup. All of this impacts the competitive ability of the region and its industries.

The Northwest needs a unique solution and to date the Northern Ontario Multimodal Strategy has failed to even identify the situation let alone offer a principle that will deal with the issues.

Recommendation:

- A) That the implementation phase of the Strategy includes an analysis of the rail car and container situation in Northern Ontario and identify key strategies and implementation steps to overcome the current situation.**

1.13 Support enhanced marine tourism businesses in northern Ontario

The Draft Report correctly identifies the barrier to growth in cruise services that Canadian Cabotage legislation has created. Unfortunately, the report did also not point to the USA Jones Act which also has acted as a barrier to increased cross border cruising.

The report did also not reflect the reality of the size of the St Lawrence Seaway Locks limit the size of cruise vessels able to ply the lakes.

Recommendation:

- A) That the Implementation Report specifically reference the need to lobby the USA Government to modify the Jones Act to accommodate cross border cruise schedules within the Great Lakes.**

2.4 Make strategic investments in the highway network that will reduce impacts on drivers during highway incidents and closures

There are a number of strategically located logging roads that provide opportunities for bypassing sections of the highways when they are closed due to accidents or weather. These should be identified, upgraded where required and their location shared with providers of GPS and navigation system and marked on provincial highway maps.

Recommendation:

- A) That the implementation phase of the Strategy identifies provincially supported logging road detours and contain recommendations for the design and maintenance of the same.**

4.5 Gather data, and increase monitoring, knowledge and forecasting to support long-term transportation planning

Future data gathering of leisure travelers must be done in conjunction with Tourism Northern Ontario and all of existing Destination Marketing Organizations prior to the commencement of any data collection. As noted in previously submitted material the tourism surveys in the Northwest were done in September at a time when tourism travel is minimal.

Recommendation:

- A) That future data gathering relative to leisure travel be conducted in conjunction with the Tourism Industry of Northern Ontario.**

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

While there is support for the shift to electricity and lower-carbon fuels, there is real concern in the Northwest as to the cost implications to the transportation industry, business and consumers as the cost of electricity in particular has gotten out of hand not to mention the cost of new equipment.

Recommendation

That the implementation report must include government financial incentives that will facilitate the conversion to the new technology as well as reducing the ongoing cost of utilizing higher cost fuel.

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

It was noted that in some areas the cleared right-of-way is too narrow to provide the appropriate notice of wildlife entering onto the highway. A minimum clearing should be determined and implemented as part of the Strategy.

Recommendation

A) That a minimum clearing standard be applied to all Provincial Highways, regarding of their status.

Conclusion

Common Voice Northwest is committed to working with the Ministry of Transportation on the development of a multimodal transportation system that best serves the people, the institutions and the business and industry of Northwestern Ontario. We will continue to monitor the work of the Ministry and will continue to provide input to the planning.

Respectfully Submitted



Wendy Landry

Chair

Supported by:



Wendy Landry, President
Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association



Nathan Lawrence, President
Northwestern Ontario Associated
Chambers of Commerce

Copy to

Hon. Michael Gravelle, MPP, Minister of Northern Development and Mines

Hon Bill Mauro, MPP, Minister of Municipal Affairs

Hon Steve De Duca, MPP, Minister of Transportation

Sarah Campbell, MPP

Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association

Northwestern Ontario Associated Chambers of Commerce

Union of Ontario Indians – Northern Superior Region

Nishnawbe Aski Nation

Grand Council Treaty 3

Metis Nation of Ontario

Ontario Federation of Indigenous Friendship Centres

Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association