

## The Upcoming Ontario Budget:

### Where is the funding for the Northlander Passenger Train????

Ontario Northland has been providing Rail and Bus transportation services for 120 years. The ON rail line developed northeastern Ontario and their freight and passenger services continue to be an economic stimulator today (attracting industry, increasing tourism, and providing essential transportation linkages).

Ontario Northland is the only organization that offers rail freight, rail passenger, and motor coach services in North America.

Given this history, OUR Ontario Northland understands the current and potential customer base across the North (mining, forestry, agriculture), understands the unique climate and geography, has forged strong relationships with First Nations (Polar Bear Express train), and has implemented the technology necessary to efficiently run integrated transportation services across the North. This is our company, owned by the taxpayers of Ontario!

While this background explains where we are at, the more important question is 'Where is Ontario Northland going?' And that depends on what is in this March's provincial budget.

The Ford government has been clear that its objective is to develop a comprehensive and integrated transportation plan across the Province. Draft plans have been released for various parts of the Province, with little substance. And definitely no timeline for the return of the Northlander passenger train! Nor notice taken of the potential demise of two northeastern short lines along with current and future business along the routes. Hopefully a short-line railroad strategy for the North will be forthcoming as part of the wider regional plan.

Ontario Northland is well positioned to develop and implement the Northern Transportation Plan. Utilizing Ontario Northland will optimize the investments already made by the Province (read TAXPAYER) and provide certainty for businesses and citizens of the North, as well as opportunities for travelers.

What do we need the Ministry of Transportation to include in this March budget for our northern rail passenger? There \*MUST\* be approval (and funding) of the Ontario Northland/Metrolinx business plan in order to implement the Northlander passenger train service prior to next election. Ontario Northland can start this process immediately, optimizing the investments taxpayers have already made in the agency to ensure an efficiently run service that meets the needs of Northerners and visitors to our north. The Northlander service may even be a better financial operation than many other Metrolinx lines. While no public transit service is profitable, the return of the Ontario Northland rail service will provide important connectivity for communities from Toronto to Muskoka to James Bay. The return of this service also aligns with Ontario's focus on post-COVID-19 "Ontario stay-cations". What better way to increase tourism and keep economic stimulus in Ontario, than offering a service that aligns with tourism needs, especially after the Ministry of Tourism announced a 20% tax credit on travel in Ontario during 2021. It is time The Ministry of Transportation shared some of the billions of expansion \$\$ being invested in southern Ontario transportation and invested in our northern rail needs.

The Northlander passenger train must start running again!! Fund it in the March budget!

Our northern rails also carry freight but for two lines, perhaps not for much longer. Currently, businesses lack confidence in our northern transportation. We are at extreme risk of retaining current businesses and attracting new business on both the HCR and ACR lines.

1. Brookfield (Genesee Wyoming/ Huron Central Railway (HCR)) is consistently requesting funding and holding the Province ransom (usually an ultimatum of funding or no rail services to customers)

Minister Rickford admitted working on this particular file has been "frustrating". "We'd like to see an operator that can come in there with a longer-term plan to make a viable short-line railroad that serves not (just) Sault Ste. Marie and those businesses but fits into a bigger plan for short-line and railroad networks, particularly in northeastern Ontario," he said. (Northern Ontario Business Dec.10,2020)

2. CN is selling the Algoma Central Railway assets (ACR is the line from Sault Ste Marie north to Oba which has been providing passenger and freight service for over 100 years), including the assets of the Agawa Canyon Tourist Train.

It is imperative that the Province engage Ontario Northland to understand how the businesses and communities along these lines can be appropriately serviced. Ontario Northland has the knowledge, experience, and technology to develop and implement an efficient and cohesive plan, including operating one or both of these lines, as well as assisting the Missanabie Cree First Nations with the operations of the Bear Train.

That would be a first for the province – a First Nations operated railway!

The government should acquire the ACR assets and mandate the ONTC to operate it. Abandonment would be extremely detrimental to current businesses as well as it would put the development and efficient transportation link for the Ring of Fire mining opportunity at risk.

Having Ontario Northland, a provincially owned entity run the rail lines provides stability to the North and truly "Opens the North for Business".

Our Province invests heavily in the highway network to support businesses including the trucking industry. Rail lines are existing infrastructure, open year-round, good for the environment, often connecting areas in northern Ontario with limited or no road access. Investing in these rail lines through Ontario Northland provides sound oversight of the provincial funding and will attract significant business to the North due to the stability provided in the plan. Investing in the rail lines will also reduce the impact of trucks on the highways (decrease the MTO maintenance budget and significantly increase the safety of those traveling on Northern highways).

It's time our provincial government funded our Northlander passenger train and got on with the job of providing passenger rail travel: as stated in the Northern Ontario Transportation Plan, "a safe, efficient and connected transportation network" ... "Reliable and sustainable infrastructure (which) also supports economic development in Northern Ontario. "

Your words, our taxpayer \$\$\$ – let's stop talking and put the funds in the 2021 Budget!

Submitted January 31, 2021 by:

Lucille Frith and Howie Wilcox, Co-Chairs Northeastern Ontario Rail Network ([neorn.ca](http://neorn.ca))