

A revised MNDM (ONTC) mandate could allow extended passenger rail service in Northern Ontario – the government needs to decide!

Corina Moore, ONTC CEO spoke last week about the future of transportation at a Canadian Club luncheon in North Bay. In the Q&A that followed, local media quoted Moore as saying she “hopes as Ontario Northland continues to build momentum that one day soon the north will see the return of passenger rail service to the north. Moore believes finding more ways to connect to the south is key for the north”.

NEORN confirmed these statements today with Moore, who further stated “*Ontario Northland is solely focused on delivering on our current mandated services safely, efficiently and sustainably and are proud of the expanded bus services we are now providing.*”

Ontario Northland has provided passenger rail services for decades. We currently operate the Polar Bear Express passenger rail service which connects Cochrane to Moosonee. Expanding passenger rail service beyond this would require equipment, consultation with communities, negotiation with other railways and analysis.

Ontario Northland is a public transportation agency and will use our proven skills and experience to provide input to government with regards to future transportation solutions for Northern Ontario. We are in the business of providing transportation solutions. If a decision was made to introduce new passenger rail service in the region we have the operating expertise, maintenance facilities and the workforce to do so.”

A mandate is the direction ministries are given by the government in power to proceed with the work of government –the decision to do something. The September 2016 Mandate letter to Northern Development and Mines stated: “Continuing to support the Minister of Transportation in developing a Northern Ontario Multi-Modal Transportation Strategy by 2017 that includes consideration of all-season roads in the Far North and intercommunity bus travel.” **Nothing highlighted about passenger rail. This needs to be changed.**

Could a new mandate letter with direction to actively pursue a plan for passenger rail service for Northern Ontario, suggest immediate action -Toronto to Cochrane? The plan could include longer term opportunities to use existing rail infrastructure to extend the service to Hearst, Sault Ste Marie and Sudbury. Could this actually be part of the Liberal election platform? Other political parties have included passenger rail service for Northern Ontario in their announced platforms already. Our present government could amend the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines’ current mandate for ONTC to include new passenger rail service for the north (now - before the election) but at the moment Moore’s hands are tied. It is not her decision to implement renewed passenger rail service – the government makes that decision and ONTC would implement it.

Another issue - all political parties need to recognize: it is **NOT** the Northlander train we need returned to service but the Northlander **Route**. The political parties should be talking about a **passenger rail plan for Northern Ontario** with a spring election on the horizon. And then implement the plan! Or better still, amend the mandate now and begin the work needed to get train wheels turning as soon as possible.

**NEW RAIL TECHNOLOGY FOR PASSENGER RAIL SERVICE
ON THE EXISTING RAIL BEDS IN NORTHERN ONTARIO -
INNOVATIVE, EFFICIENT, AND INTEGRATED**

