



**NORTHERN ONTARIO
SERVICE DELIVERERS
ASSOCIATION**

January 6, 2016

Hon. Michael Gravelle
Minister of Northern Development and Mines
5th Flr Rm 5630, Whitney Block
99 Wellesley St W
Toronto ON
M7A1W3

RE: Multi-Modal Transportation Study and Social Infrastructure

Dear Minister Gravelle:

We are writing to thank you and to follow up our discussions held between yourself and our delegation on December 15 in Thunder Bay. Specifically, this letter relates to the current Multi-Modal Transportation study undertaken by the Ministry of Transportation in conjunction with your Ministry.

We thought it would be helpful at the outset to outline the role of NOSDA and our members in the fabric of Northern Ontario's social service delivery system.

The Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association (NOSDA) is an incorporated body that brings together Northern Ontario's 11 Municipal Service Managers. It is comprised of ten District Social Services Administration Boards (DSSABs) that are unique to Northern Ontario; and one Consolidated Municipal Service Manager (CMSM) – the City of Greater Sudbury.

NOSDA members:

- serve the needs of nearly a million people spread over 800,000 square kilometers
- respond to over 82,000 EMS calls per year
- subsidize over 17,000 spaces in the Early Learning System

- operate about 12,000 social housing units representing over a billion dollars in housing assets
- address the needs of 16,000 most vulnerable citizens through Ontario Works each month.
- provide discretionary assistance to the ODSP caseload of over 30,000
- operate with approximately 1,200 full-time staff
- have an annual operating budget of nearly half a billion dollars.

There are several key reasons why the Multi-Modal Transportation study is of importance to NOSDA and its member organizations:

A. Non Emergent Patient Transfers

Emergency Medical Services providers continue to struggle to meet the emergency medical needs of the citizens of their communities due to aging-in-place populations and increased emergency demands for service. Non-urgent patient transportation for many rural Northern Ontario centres has become and continues to be the exclusive responsibility of the local Emergency Medical Services providers with current demand reaching a critical level. As a result, many communities are left without EMS service as their sole ambulance is often off site delivering a non-emergent patient to a major medical centre.

Many of the non-emergent patient transfers that occur annually in the North are due to the lack of any scheduled inter-community bus service in vast areas of the Province, particularly in Northern Ontario. Many patients transferred in this way are not only ambulatory but do not need any medical attention during the ambulance ride and could easily be accommodated in an inter-community bus.

Inter-community bus service or some other type of rural and northern transportation system, regulated and funded in the appropriate way, could enhance the appropriate use of provincially and municipality funded resources and ensure people receive the right service, at the right time, in the right place. It is our view that the Multimodal Transportation Strategy is the appropriate vehicle to identify and deliver a solution to this problem.

B. Delivery of Social Services in Northern Ontario

Under Provincial regulations, applicants for Ontario Works must present themselves at a District Social Service Administration Board (DSSAB) Office in order to have their application verified and ongoing clients need to attend one of the offices for various reasons including employment training. As many of the smaller communities in Northern Ontario do not have a DSSAB office residents must find a way to get to the closest office and a lack of a bus service constitutes one more barrier for people living on the margins of society. MTO and MNDM must examine this issue in the context of what costs are currently borne by all orders of government under the need for and the provision of a Multi-Modal Transportation 'system' serving Northern Ontario, and in particular an inter-community bus system serving all of our communities on a regular basis.

The following outlines some of the issues and impacts of an insufficient inter-community bus system in Northern Ontario:

1. Impact on Transient Population.

The reduction in the current Grey Hound and Ontario Northland bus service and change in time of day the bus service is available in our communities is having a significant impact on the transient population that we have across the North. DSSABs rely on the bus service to help individuals that end up in our communities and find themselves in financial trouble by providing them with the bus fare they need to get to their destinations. The reduced bus schedules are resulting in these individuals having to spend additional time in the destination community and most often they have no place to go while they wait. We are seeing individuals trying to use various agencies and services while they wait and in places where the bus service is scheduled for a middle of the night stop individuals are seeking shelter on the streets, as most communities do not have bus depots where they can wait. More concerning, is the impact this will have on individuals during the winter months when temperatures fall below freezing. NOSDA members are seeing and anticipating an increase in the demand for emergency shelter resources, land ambulances services and Emergency Room visits as these individuals seek shelter and a place to keep warm waiting for transportation.

2. Impact on the Vulnerable Population Sector.

The reduction in or the complete lack of bus service is having an impact on our vulnerable population sector, especially on senior and low income single parent households. The reduction in bus service is resulting in individuals having to spend more time during transit and in the larger communities and thereby increasing their costs for accommodations and food while travelling. The other important factor to consider is the logistics that a significant portion of the population living in remote and

rural communities is faced with when required to travel to the communities that have the existing bus services simply to utilize the transportation service.

For example, the Kenora District Service Board reports that they had a single mom who had to travel to Dryden with her young child in order to take the bus service to Thunder Bay for a medical appointment for the child. She and the child had no place to go while they waited until 3am to take the bus.

With the winter months upon us and without a change in the current bus service model, we will need to plan for additional accommodation needs in circumstances such as mentioned in the example. That will end up costing the Provincial Government more as we move to 100% provincially funded Ontario Works. In addition, health services are not provided equally across all municipalities. In fact, we have seen a continual centralization of health service into the few urban centres in recent years. While social assistance and the Northern Health travel grants offer some financial supports, low income vulnerable residents often do not have the means to travel for the medical services necessary or spend inordinate amounts of time waiting to receive those services. One northern community reports individuals spending thirteen hours waiting for and in transit to receive methadone treatment on weekends.

C. Community Stability

Transportation of its citizens is an important component to the stability of many of our communities. As transportation options diminish, our older residents find themselves drawn to relocate to the more urban settings across the North in order to be closer to the medical services and other supports that they now require. That shift in turn impacts the services that the DSSABs are required to provide. Without grandparents many families with younger children turn to local child care providers (who are funded by the DSSABs) for assistance. That adds to the cost that the Ontario Government must pay to ensure these services are in place. Departing seniors also leave vacant social housing units, increasing the overall cost to the Municipalities. In addition, the lack of sufficient long term care facilities in many of our communities, not only force seniors to relocate from family and friends, but those family and friends spend time on the highways visiting their loved ones, increasing risk – particularly in winter months. This adds to the infrastructure costs of the highway system. The availability of inter-community transportation is a key element to the sustainability of many of our communities and must be viewed as such by the Province.

Minister, the above are just a few of the examples of the impacts of an inadequate inter-community bus transportation system across Northern Ontario. We would encourage you

to review the work of Common Voice Northwest as found in their Inter-Community Bus System Report of December of 2015. The principles in this report, while written in the context of the Northwest are applicable across the entire North and we would encourage your government to adopt those principles in the overall Northern Ontario Multi-Modal Transportation Strategy.

We would be pleased to work with you and your staff to address this issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Iain Angus". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "I" and a long, sweeping underline.

Iain Angus, Chair

cc. Steven Del Duca, Minister of Transportation
Helen Mulc, Assistant Deputy Minister, MNDM