



Connecting the North:

A draft transportation plan for Northern Ontario

December 2020



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Caroline Mulroney

Minister of Transportation

Minister's Message

People across Northern Ontario rely on the transportation network each and every day – whether you're a student in Sudbury, a business owner in Thunder Bay or an elder in Whitesand First Nation, it needs to be as easy, convenient and safe as possible to get where you need to go.

We recognize that the North has unique transportation challenges. Vast distances between communities, winter storms and the natural landscape can make it harder for people to get around.

That's why we have developed this Northern Ontario Transportation Plan. It includes more than 60 actions that will get more people moving, improve travel options for people in remote communities and support economic growth in the North.

Our plan will better connect communities across the region. We are exploring ways to improve the transportation network to make it easier for people to get to jobs, healthcare and other services. This includes continuing to make progress on our plan for passenger rail service in the North.

We know that remote and Far North communities, including remote First Nation communities, also need access to a connected transportation network. Our plan includes actions to improve winter roads and support remote airports to ensure that these communities continue to have a vital connection to supplies and essential services.

This plan comes at an unprecedented time in our province. As our province's economy recovers from COVID-19, highway construction projects in this plan will be vital to driving economic activity and creating jobs in the North. We are moving forward with highway widening projects on key corridors in the region to reduce travel times, make roads safer and help businesses keep goods moving.

We are committed to continuing to work closely with municipalities, Indigenous communities, Francophone communities, transportation agencies, including the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission, industry and businesses to improve transportation in the region.

Working together, I am confident that this plan will help us build a transportation network for Northern Ontario that is better connected and more efficient.

Impacts of COVID-19

The COVID-19 outbreak has had a significant impact on our province, including the Northern Ontario region and its economy. Lives and business have been disrupted in ways that could not have been imagined a year ago. People in Northern Ontario are deeply concerned about the pandemic's impacts on their communities and transportation services.

COVID-19 has created significant financial challenges for transit systems across Northern Ontario. Transit providers have seen costs rise for personal protective equipment (PPE) and cleaning supplies. Travel demand and ridership for intercommunity bus (ICB) services have dropped between 50 and 85 per cent, with some carriers reducing or suspending services entirely. VIA Rail service suspensions impacted Northern Ontario communities, particularly between Sudbury and White River. The Ontario Northland Transportation Commission (ONTC) initially cancelled the Polar Bear Express service to Moosonee on April 7, 2020 and resumed reduced services on June 25.

COVID-19 has also had a significant impact on the aviation sector in Canada. International and interprovincial travel restrictions, combined with the lack of consumer demand for travel and tourism, have severely diminished the financial viability of the aviation industry in Ontario and beyond. Many small air carriers serving Northern Ontario are experiencing operating shortfalls and have either suspended or drastically reduced the number of flights.

These service reductions have the potential to severely affect Northern Ontario's remote communities, as many have limited or non-existent year-round road access. These communities rely on

small commercial air carriers and seasonal winter roads to provide access to essential services and goods such as food, fuel, drinking water, medical services, education, justice, as well as economic opportunities.

Ontario, through the Ministry of Transportation (MTO), owns and operates 29 remote airports in Northern Ontario that provide reliable, year-round air access to support remote and First Nation communities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, MTO allocated an additional \$4 million in funding to ensure that these remote airports were able to continue to operate.

In August 2020, Transport Canada announced \$75 million in federal funding for the first six months of a program to support small air carriers serving remote communities across the country, in partnership with provinces and territories. Ontario is engaged with Transport Canada to explore a potential program to further support air carriers servicing remote communities, including First Nations communities, in Northern Ontario. Recognizing the lead role that the federal government plays in aviation more broadly, Ontario will continue to work with its federal partners to support the movement of people and goods across Northern Ontario.

As part of the first round of emergency funding under the Safe Restart Agreement, Ontario and the federal government have provided \$1.6 billion to 444 municipalities, which includes approximately \$943 million to support municipal operating pressures and up to \$666 million to assist municipal transit systems. Of this funding, northern municipalities will receive \$36 million for operating pressures and up to approximately \$76

million to support municipal transit systems. This funding will help northern municipalities protect the health and well-being of communities while continuing to deliver critical services such as public transportation.

During this pandemic, Ontario's trucking industry continues to deliver essential goods using the provincial highway network. However, general demand is down as many customers have closed or scaled back operations. Between February and April 2020, 10,900 jobs in the freight transportation sector were lost, representing a nine per cent decline in employment.¹ Truck drivers have also encountered challenges accessing facilities such as rest areas and washrooms while on the road. In response, Ontario has worked closely with the trucking industry to address the issues they face and has provided more safe places for truck drivers to stop and rest across the province. This includes our plans to build 10 new rest areas and repair or expand 11 rest areas along highways in Northern Ontario over the next five years.

While the COVID-19 outbreak has created immediate challenges, it has also highlighted

the importance of building reliable transportation infrastructure in Northern Ontario. The transportation network in the North is critical to the supply chain and ensures food security. Investments in highway construction projects will help create jobs in local communities. Funding for local transit will help people get where they need to go as more people return to work. Support for remote airports will maintain jobs and boost economic activity in the North, and together with services like the Polar Bear Express, will ensure First Nation and remote communities have access to critical goods and services. We are also aware that during the COVID-19 pandemic, ports in Ontario and its northern region have been able to ship a greater volume of goods and contribute to economic activity in the province.² Rail freight has also remained vital to the supply chain, moving goods including forest, agricultural and mining products and fuels for businesses throughout the North.

This transportation plan will be vital for long-term economic planning and growth in Northern Ontario as the province continues along the path to economic recovery.

1 [Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey, May 2020](#)

2 [How Great Lakes shipping has stayed afloat during COVID-19](#), October 28, 2020, [tvo.org](#).



Introduction

Northern Ontario's transportation network is made up of roads, winter roads, rail, air and waterways that connect people to jobs, services and tourist destinations across the region. Reliable and sustainable infrastructure also supports economic development in Northern Ontario.

This Northern Ontario Transportation Plan (the plan) serves as a guide to help build a modern and sustainable transportation system for people in the North. It contains actions that will connect communities, provide safer and more reliable travel options and unlock economic potential in the North. The plan sets out a vision and immediate actions to build and maintain a safe, efficient and connected transportation network. It includes 67 actions that will keep people and goods moving, improve travel for people in remote and Far North communities, including remote First Nation communities, and promote economic development in Northern Ontario.

This plan is a living document that will be updated to ensure that it continues to meet the needs of the people of Northern Ontario. We are committed to working closely with the federal government, municipalities, Indigenous peoples, communities and organizations, transportation agencies and local businesses to gather feedback, explore strategies, implement the actions outlined in the plan, and identify new opportunities for improvement.

The plan sets out a vision and immediate actions to build and maintain a safe, efficient and connected transportation network.

Executive Summary

Connecting the North contains more than 60 actions to expand highways and transit services, create economic opportunities for people in the North, keep people safe and provide reliable travel options for remote and First Nation communities. A more reliable and connected transportation network will help businesses keep goods moving and allow people to access jobs and critical services like healthcare.

The actions are organized under six goals to support our transportation vision:

Goal 1: Getting people moving and connecting communities

- This includes actions to advance design work to widen Highway 69 from two to four lanes, improve intercommunity bus service to help connect people in underserved and unserved communities and continuing to make progress on our plan for passenger rail service in the North.

Goal 2: Enabling economic opportunities

- Ontario is committed to supporting economic recovery, with actions such as advancing eight highway rehabilitation projects in Northern Ontario to help create jobs and stimulate local economies.

Goal 3: Keeping people safe and providing reliable transportation options

- Actions to improve safety include working in partnership with the private sector, Indigenous communities and organizations and other groups to raise awareness of human trafficking, and continuing to invest in new, improved and rehabilitated rest areas in the North.

Goal 4: Preparing for the future

- The plan will help transform the transportation network with new and innovative technology. For example, Ontario has committed to providing \$680 million to support improved

access to broadband and cellular services across Ontario.

Goal 5: Maintaining a sustainable transportation system

- This goal will help encourage economic growth and protect our environment for future generations. It includes actions such as using the most up-to-date climate data and information to help ensure that transportation infrastructure takes into account climate change impacts and risks. The province will also continue to actively address the threats and challenges of invasive vegetation species such as Invasive Phragmites on provincial highways.

Goal 6: Reliable travel options for remote and Far North communities

- Actions including supporting remote and northern airports as part of COVID-19 recovery and continuing to support Marten Falls and Webequie First Nations as they advance their Environmental Assessments on their individual road projects for all season roads to connect their communities to the proposed Ring of Fire developments.

Through this plan, we are delivering a better transportation network for the people and communities of Northern Ontario. We are committed to working with the federal government, municipalities, Indigenous communities and organizations, Francophone communities, transportation agencies, industry and local businesses to gather feedback on the plan. Working together, we will help people travel more efficiently, get to work faster, connect to critical services and spend more time with family and friends.

Plan Highlights: Key Actions in Northern Ontario



Advancing highway widening projects

including sections of Highway 69, Highway 11/17 and Highway 17



Adding new ONTC bus routes

between White River and Thunder Bay, and between Thunder Bay and Winnipeg



Continuing to invest in remote airports

to support remote and First Nation communities



Investing in new and enhanced rest areas

including safety improvements and expanded truck parking



Supporting economic recovery from COVID-19

by funding remote airports, public transit and local roads and bridges



Offering the G1 knowledge test in three Indigenous languages

and directly in First Nation communities



Continuing to move forward on plan for passenger rail services

including advancing track audit work along the northeastern rail corridor

About Northern Ontario

Northern Ontario extends from the southern boundaries of Parry Sound and Nipissing, northward to the southern shores of Hudson Bay and James Bay. It covers a vast area of over 802,000 km² – an area as large as Spain and Italy combined or the US states of Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, Illinois and Wisconsin.

Northern Ontario comprises almost 90 per cent of Ontario's land mass, with a population of approximately 807,000 people.

There are 109 First Nation communities and 16 Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) Community Councils in Northern Ontario. This area is home to approximately 130,000 Indigenous people, with about 70 per cent living off-reserve.

Northern Ontario is also home to a significant population of French language speakers; about 16 per cent of the population identified French as their mother tongue.^{3,4}

Ontario's Far North stretches from Manitoba in the west to James Bay and Quebec in the east and is home to 24,000 people, of which 90 per cent are First Nation peoples. It is defined under the *Far North Act* and covers 42 per cent of Ontario's land mass. There are limited options for transportation, and access to and from the Far North is provided by remote airports serving primarily First Nation communities, as well as road and rail links. The winter roads network connects 31 remote First Nation communities and the

Town of Moosonee to the provincial highway network – providing seasonal access for approximately three months per year. These communities rely on winter roads to move critical goods cost-effectively, such as fuel, housing materials, food and potable water.

Increasing challenges to the winter roads network, such as temporary road closures, limitations on load capacity and unpredictable winter roads as a result of climate change, impact the social and economic opportunities in remote Far North First Nation communities. There is growing demand for the expansion of all-season roads in the Far North, driven by a variety of socio-economic factors, climate change vulnerability and in the case of the Ring of Fire region, responsible resource development.

The Near North, comprising the southern half of the region, is served by a multimodal transportation network of roads, rail lines, airports, and marine ports. The Near North contains the largest cities and hubs in the region, including Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Timmins, Sudbury and North Bay. According to the 2016 Census, in the northeast part of the region, about 20 per cent of the population identifies as Francophone and several major cities have significant Francophone populations, such as Hearst (87 per cent Francophone), Timmins (36 per cent) and Sudbury (25 per cent).

3 According to Statistics Canada, Mother tongue refers to the first language learned at home in childhood and still understood by the person at the time the data was collected.

4 Statistics Canada, Census Profile, Census 2016.



Northern Ontario comprises almost 90 per cent of Ontario's land mass, with a population of approximately 807,000 people.



About Northern Ontario



800,000+ people

over 802,000 square km
(Density: 1 Person/km²)



7% of Ontario's population,

approximately 13% are Indigenous



Over 50% of Northern Ontarians

reside in large urban centres



24,000 people in the Far North,

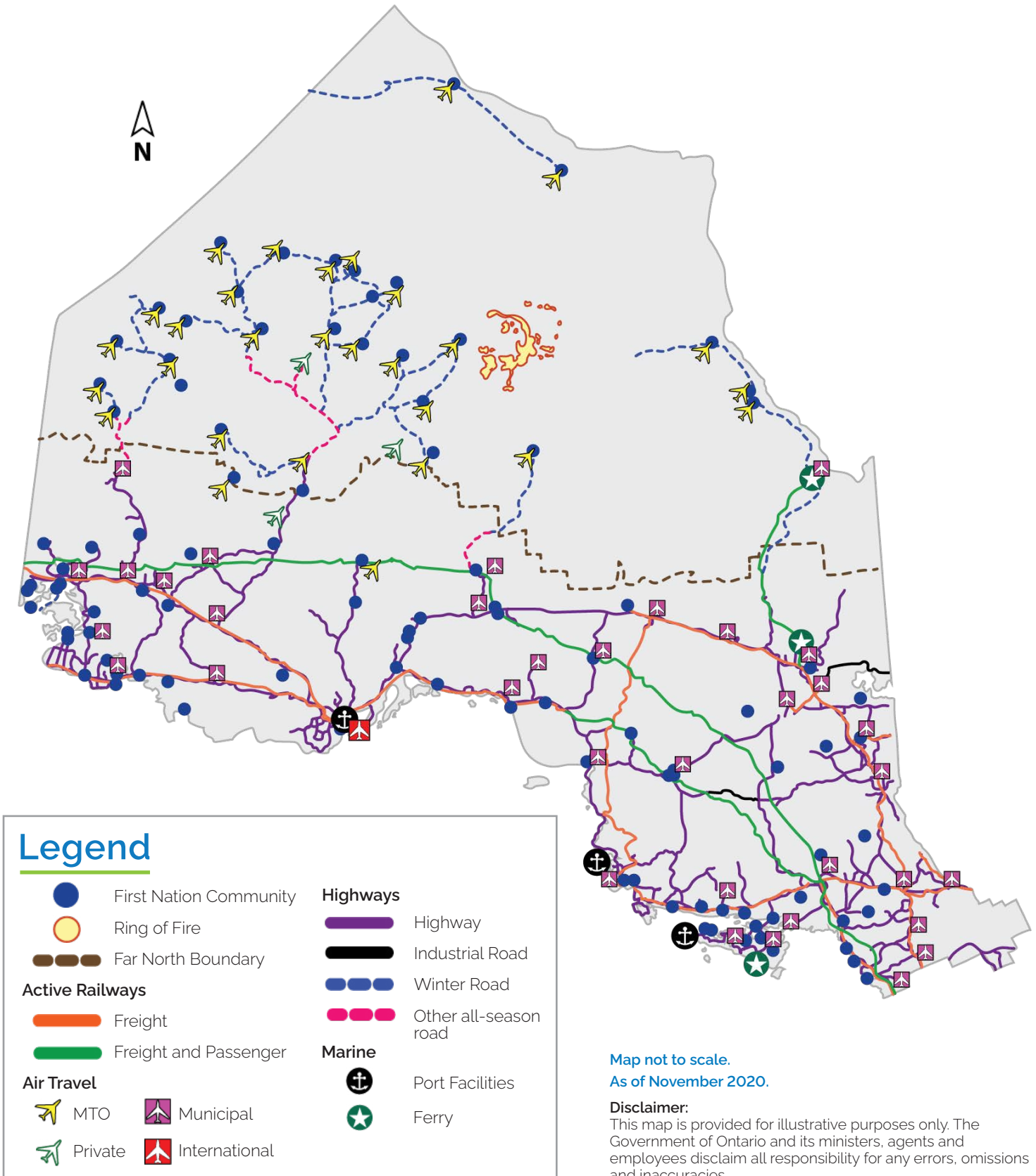
90% are First Nation peoples



Key Industries:

mining, forestry, agriculture, manufacturing, tourism

Figure 1: Northern Ontario's Transportation Infrastructure



Why do we need a transportation plan in the North?

Ontario recognizes that the North has unique transportation needs. Northern communities rely on a connected transportation network, but significant distances between communities, long winters and a rocky landscape with many forests and lakes can make travel difficult. These challenges also present an opportunity to build a better transportation network that supports the diverse needs of industries, communities and residents of Northern Ontario.

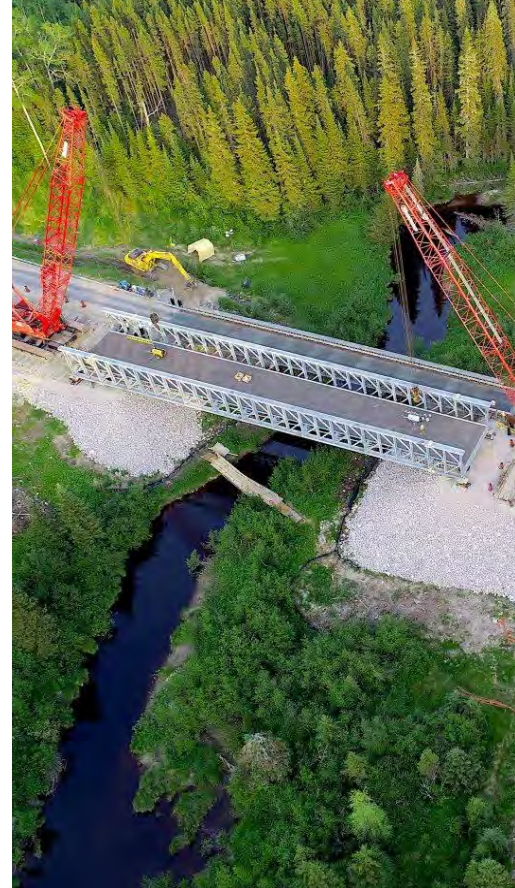
Ontario's mineral exploration and mining sector has become one of our province's greatest success stories, employing more than 72,000 people. In 2019 alone, the industry produced more than \$10 billion worth of minerals, accounting for 22 per cent of Canada's total production.

The Ring of Fire has the potential to be one of the most significant mineral developments in Ontario in over a century. Based on a 2016 study done by the Centre for Spatial Economics, over the first 10 years the development of the Ring of Fire is expected to create an average of over 5,800 jobs per year, grow the economy by a total of \$14.6 billion and generate additional provincial government revenue of \$218 million per year. This is just one example of the many economic development sectors in the North which continue to grow and require a reliable transportation network.

For Northern Ontario's remote communities, including remote First Nation communities, winter roads and air transportation are vital lifelines for fuel, food, basic amenities and access to services. However, a changing climate is creating challenges by shortening the winter road season. There is a need to continue to ensure Far Northern residents in Ontario's remote northern and fly-in communities have access to reliable transportation. The transportation system provides critical support, ensuring food security for people in the North.

Northern Ontario needs a transportation network that is resilient to future changes and embraces innovation and technological change. This plan will prepare the region for the eventual arrival of innovative technology like connected and automated vehicles that could transform the way people live, work and move in the province.

For Northern Ontario businesses, a reliable transportation network is crucial to keep goods moving and drive economic growth. This transportation plan for Northern Ontario outlines key actions to ensure that people, businesses and Indigenous communities have access to a safe and reliable transportation network now and into the future.



This transportation plan for Northern Ontario outlines key actions to ensure that people, businesses and Indigenous communities have access to a safe and reliable transportation network now and into the future.



This plan comes at a unique time for Northern Ontario and the province, as we work to recover from the initial COVID-19 outbreak. The province is committed to supporting Ontarians in the North, and all Ontarians, in the face of impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The province will work with government partners, stakeholders, Indigenous partners and communities, Francophones, and the public to ensure a strong and prosperous region, supported by a reliable and sustainable transportation system.

Northern Ontario Transportation Network



Over 11,000 km

of provincial highways



**5 intercommunity
bus companies**

in Northern Ontario



65 public airports

1 international airport

35 regional airports

29 remote airports in the Far North
that serve 27 remote First Nation
communities



Key marine ports:

Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, and
Meldrum Bay



**Passenger and
freight rail services**

provided by partners including VIA
Rail, Ontario Northland, CN and CP.

Northern Ontario: Challenges and Opportunities

Need for strong highway corridors and reliable local roads

Ontario's road network creates a vital web of connections for people and businesses, with more than 11,000 km of provincial highways in Northern Ontario. Highway 11, Highways 69/400, and Highway 17 are the primary corridors connecting the region's population centres and industries to the rest of the province. There are 7,400 km of other primary and secondary highways that also provide access to communities across Northern Ontario. The provincial highway network is part of a broader road network, parts of which are built and maintained by stakeholders, partners, First Nation communities and governments. This includes transportation infrastructure like international bridges, winter roads, forest access roads, industrial roads, municipal roads, Northern Ontario Resource Trails (NORT) roads, local roads in unincorporated areas and roads connecting First Nation communities.

In 2020/21, the province is committing \$625 million to expand and repair northern highways and bridges, estimated to create or sustain approximately 4,370 direct and indirect construction jobs for the people of Northern Ontario. The ministry has several projects underway to expand northern highway corridors, such as Highway 11/17 between Thunder Bay and Nipigon, and Highway 69 south of Sudbury. Approximately \$10 million in additional funding has been

committed for northern highway rehabilitation projects as part of Ontario's Action Plan: Responding to COVID-19.

Figure 2 illustrates sections of northern highways where a future need may exist to widen or expand the transportation infrastructure system. This map also shows the approximate locations of 10 new rest areas and 11 rest areas expected to be rehabilitated or expanded over the next five years.

Every day, approximately 8,400 truck trips are made on the northern provincial highway network. These trips move more than 87,000 tonnes of cargo valued at over \$200 million daily. Each truck travels on average 350 km on the northern portion of the provincial highway network daily. There is a need to build and maintain a reliable transportation network so that businesses can move goods to their destination faster and more efficiently.

Trucks regularly move oversize overweight (O/O) loads on Northern Ontario highways. These O/O goods often serve resource industries or manufacturers in Northern Ontario, but in some cases can also include shipments of project cargo such as pipelines or refinery equipment to serve oilfield developments in Western Canada. Commercial vehicles are responsible for 20 per cent of all kilometres travelled on northern highways. Trucks are expected to make up about half of the volume on the northern highway



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network in 2041. Figure 3 illustrates the critical O/O route through Northern Ontario that connects Quebec and Canada's East Coast with Manitoba and Western Canada.

The highways of Northern Ontario serve as critical cross-country routes for the movement of goods. Delays due to weather conditions, road closures or other incidents may impact on-time delivery and the cost of moving goods. Maintaining and enhancing connections between major population centres and their global markets supports local economic growth. Northern Ontario requires strong and reliable highway corridors and rest areas to keep goods moving.

Need for ongoing road maintenance

Ontario recognizes that the winter months pose significant challenges for drivers – that's why we have among the highest winter maintenance standards in North America. Winter maintenance crews deploy their equipment within 30 minutes of the start of a winter storm to clear highways, and are active 24/7. The province's goal is to achieve our bare pavement standard 90 per cent of the time across the province each winter. Ontario continues to work with contractors to provide enhancements to winter operations such as additional snow clearing equipment and remote weather information systems. In the summer months, Ontario's contractors are responsible for ensuring sidewalks and bicycle lanes are well maintained. This plan identifies

opportunities to improve safety by increasing training programs through partnerships that allow maintenance firms to share best practices.

Need for options to increase economic opportunities

Key economic sectors in the region rely on the transportation network – including tourism, forestry, mining, agriculture and manufacturing. Building a connected and reliable transportation network will help industry keep goods moving and connect them to economic opportunities locally and beyond.

Ports are an important component of the northern transportation system and support food security in Canada and abroad. In Canada, all ports are federally regulated. The province will continue to work with the federal government and port authorities in Northern Ontario to ensure that ports continue to be available for the shipment of goods and equipment.

Need for passenger transportation and reliable intercommunity bus services

In Northern Ontario, many residents depend on intercommunity passenger transportation such as buses and trains to access essential services. In the coming decades, the aging population is expected to increase demand for bus service. A lack of frequent, convenient connections between different transportation services can create challenges accessing

health care and higher education. These challenges will become more pronounced as the number of people aged 70 and over continues to grow.

The Indigenous population is notably younger than the non-Indigenous population and is the fastest growing segment of Northern Ontario's population. In the 2017 Aboriginal Peoples Survey, transportation was the most commonly cited barrier to employment by First Nation and Métis men and women over the age of 15.⁵ There is an opportunity to improve intercommunity bus (ICB) service between communities to help more people access jobs and services.

In recent years, private bus carriers have reduced service in Northern Ontario. As a result, scheduled ICB services no longer exist between

certain northern communities, such as Greenstone/Longlac and Hearst. The ONTC has been working with partners, including municipalities and private carriers, to explore opportunities to increase ICB services in unserved or underserved communities in Northern Ontario. The ONTC has improved service in northeastern Ontario, including the addition of a new route from Sudbury to White River.

The province recognizes the critical role that ICB carriers have in Ontario's transportation system. That's why this plan includes actions to add more convenient ICB options to help people get where they need to go safely as the province continues to battle the COVID-19 pandemic.

5 [Statistics Canada Aboriginal Peoples Survey, November 2018](#)



Connecting communities with the Ontario Community Transportation Grant program

Nine municipalities in Northern Ontario are receiving funding for a total of \$3.7 million under the Community Transportation Grant Program over five years. Those are: Atikokan, Central Manitoulin, Elliot Lake, Manitouwadge, Sioux Lookout, St. Charles, Terrace Bay, Val Rita-Harty and White River. Municipalities are using this funding to partner with community organizations, including Indigenous communities and organizations (e.g. Friendship Centres, health authorities) to co-ordinate local and intercommunity transportation services.

Figure 2: Planned and Potential Rest Area and Highway Improvements in Northern Ontario

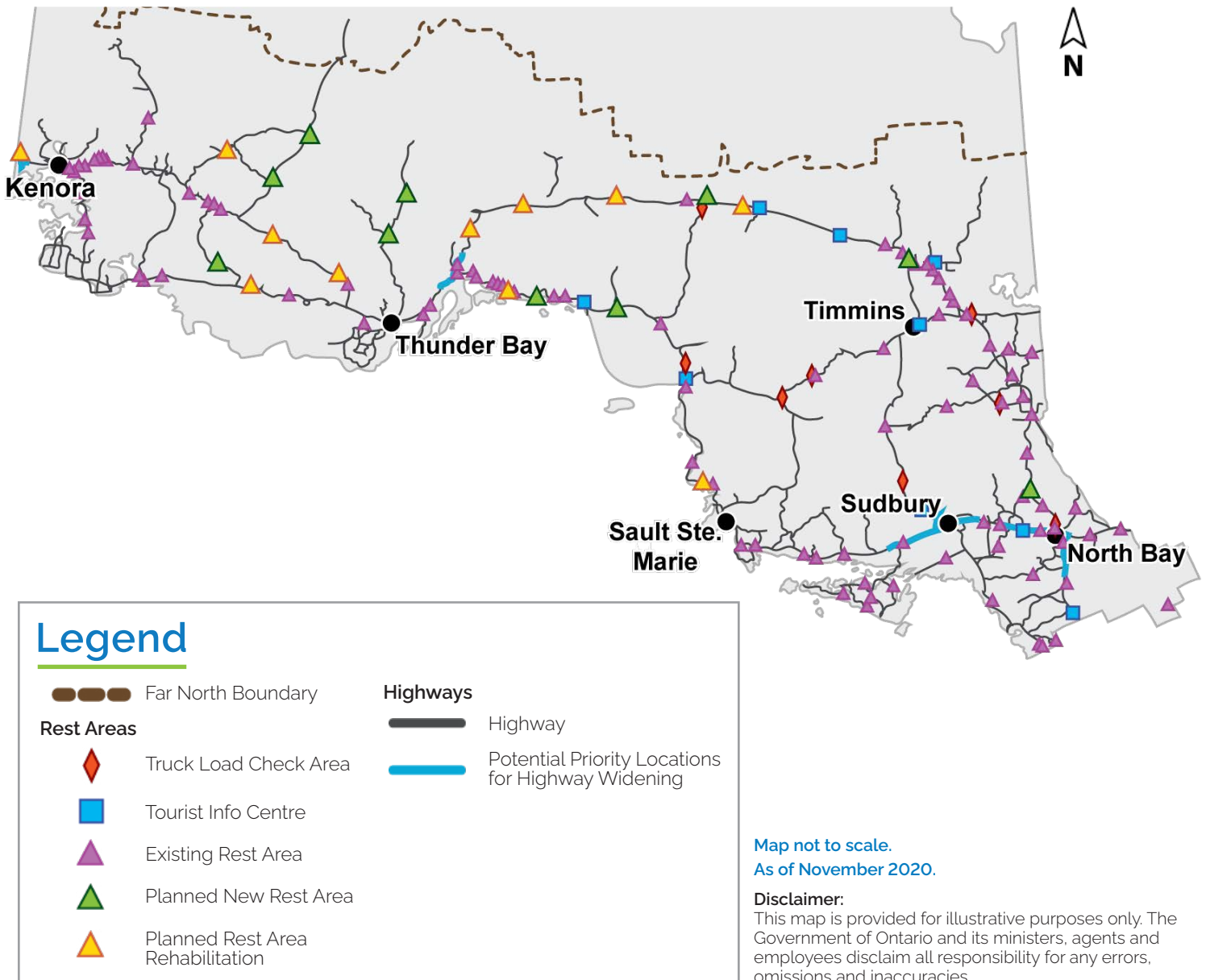


Figure 3: Primary Oversize-Overweight Trucking Route on Northern Ontario Highways



Figure 4: Northern Ontario's Passenger Transportation Services



Map not to scale.
As of November 2020.

Disclaimer:
This map is provided for illustrative purposes only. The Government of Ontario and its ministers, agents and employees disclaim all responsibility for any errors, omissions and inaccuracies.



Opportunity for improvements to rail service

Passenger rail services in Northern Ontario are provided by VIA Rail, CN operating as Algoma Central Railway and the ONTC. Passenger rail provides people in northern communities with access to healthcare, social services as well as connections to visit family and friends.

The Polar Bear Express from Cochrane to Moosonee, operated by the ONTC, provides an essential service where no other year-round ground transportation option exists. VIA Rail provides provincial rail service that connects northern communities to each other and to other provinces.

Freight rail service is vital to our national and provincial economies. In Northern Ontario rail is essential to our natural resources and agricultural sectors, providing cost efficient transport of large, heavy shipments over long distances. It connects Northern Ontario industries to customers and suppliers across the continental rail system.

The North needs an efficient and financially sustainable rail transport network to support and connect its industries and communities. The province continues to work with all partners, including the federal and local governments, and all our private partners.

Ontario has been actively exploring options for passenger rail services between Toronto, North Bay, Timmins and Cochrane. This includes working with the ONTC to accelerate work on a track audit in the North Bay area that will examine safety and infrastructure needs for a potential future train service. Actions in this plan will explore ways to enhance train and bus services in Northern Ontario to give people improved and more reliable options.

Northeastern transportation survey

From October 23 to November 20, 2020, people shared their feedback to help improve transportation along the rail corridor between Toronto, North Bay, Cochrane and Timmins. The survey will help the province better understand transportation needs and opportunities as part of its commitment to improve passenger rail and bus services. Results will be released in the winter of 2021.

Need for access to remote communities

Few communities in the Far North have direct, all-season road or rail connections. Most northern, remote First Nation communities rely on winter roads from mid-January to March or April. Winter roads are vital to the economic and social well-being of remote First Nation communities. They allow for a much more cost-effective means of moving critical goods such as diesel fuel into communities, enable the movement of heavy equipment and provide employment and skills development opportunities for First Nation residents who build and maintain the roads. The province continues to improve winter roads where possible with the use of culverts and bridges.

The Far North is home to 29 remote airports, with 27 serving remote First Nations communities that offer the only year-round connection to Far North communities. As the operators

of these remote airports, MTO is aware of their importance in providing vital connections for remote and First Nation communities. These airports are critical for emergency access and medical evacuation, fighting forest fires, and providing social services and access to courts, justice services and policing. Many of these remote and First Nation communities rely on small commercial carriers for transport and access of essential goods and services. They also provide a vital link to Indigenous communities, enabling shipments of essential supplies, such as food, fuel and water.

With the growing and aging populations, airports in Northern Ontario will be planning for potential future needs such as MedEvac flights and passenger air services to access medical services quickly. Figure 1 outlines Northern Ontario's Transportation Infrastructure, including the Far North's remote airports and the winter road network.





Opportunity to address and adapt for a changing climate

Ontario's climate is changing, bringing with it with more frequent and extreme weather events such as severe rain, ice and wind storms and prolonged heatwaves. Transportation infrastructure across the North may be at increased risk as a result of disruptive flooding, forest fires, or milder winters resulting in impassable winter roads. All people and all sectors of the economy end up paying more for the costs associated with these impacts. Transportation accounts for about one third of total greenhouse gas emissions in Ontario. Ontario is taking meaningful action to lower greenhouse gas emissions to help put Ontario on a path to meet its greenhouse gas emission reduction target of 30 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030.

COVID-19 Pandemic Response

In response to COVID-19, Ontario has committed to help support outbreak planning, prevention and mitigation efforts to ensure the health and well-being of Indigenous peoples and communities in remote and far-northern regions. The province has allocated \$4 million to support remote and northern airports to ensure essential goods and services continue to reach remote communities. The province will continue to work cooperatively with Indigenous communities that wish to enact their own emergency measures related to the COVID-19 pandemic, including consideration of requests for the full or partial closures of MTO airports.

A plan for Northern Ontario

Vision for the transportation system in Northern Ontario:

People and businesses, including Indigenous communities, across Northern Ontario have access to a safe and reliable transportation system that connects smaller communities to large centres and other areas, contributing to the health, well-being and economic prosperity of the entire region.

First Nation and Métis partners in Northern Ontario

There are 109 First Nation communities and 16 Métis Nation of Ontario (MNO) Community Councils in Northern Ontario, which have constitutionally protected Aboriginal and treaty rights. There are also several Indigenous service organizations throughout Northern Ontario.

The government consults and engages with Indigenous partners to ensure ministry projects and activities do not adversely impact Aboriginal and treaty rights and to work together on shared priorities in several areas.

Our plan for Northern Ontario contains 67 actions under six goals to support our transportation vision:

1. Getting people moving and connecting communities
2. Enabling economic opportunities
3. Keeping people safe and providing reliable transportation options
4. Preparing for the future
5. Maintaining a sustainable transportation system
6. Reliable travel options for remote and Far North communities

Achieving these goals will help build a better transportation system for Northern Ontario as the province recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic and the economy reopens. The actions listed under each goal represent a step towards achieving the vision for the North. They are intended to support citizens and businesses in optimizing the existing transportation system while actively working to create a better transportation system today and for future generations.





Goal 1: Getting People Moving and Connecting Communities

Most residents and industries in Northern Ontario use the highway network as their primary means of daily travel. This first goal will include continued investment in highways to get people where they need to go and support economic growth. It is important not only to connect Northern Ontario with other areas of the province and national and international destinations and markets, but also to ensure people and goods can move efficiently and safely throughout the North.

People in smaller communities, including First Nation communities, also rely on bus and train service to access healthcare and other services located in larger cities. That's why we are exploring ways to expand bus service, improve local transit and provide better passenger rail service in the North to help make it easier and more convenient for people to get around.

This goal includes actions such as highway planning and widening, repairing roads and bridges, and improving bus and train services. As well, the government will continue to invest in the rehabilitation and maintenance of the 11,000 km of highway network and bridges to ensure safe and reliable travel across Northern Ontario.

Highway and Road Improvements

1. Advance the four-laning of Highway 11/17 between Thunder Bay and Nipigon. The expansion of this corridor to four lanes

Repairing roads and bridges in Northern communities

In 2020-21, Ontario provided \$14 million to 10 northern municipalities through the Connecting Links program, plus an additional \$4.9 million announced as part of Ontario's Action Plan: Responding to COVID-19. This funding helps municipalities repair designated municipal roadways and bridges that connect two ends of a provincial highway through a community or to a border crossing.

serves national, regional and local economies to ensure the effective, timely and safe movement of people and goods.

2. Advance design work for the widening of Highway 69 from two to four lanes to improve connection to Ontario's North, improve traffic flow and safety and support economic growth.

3. Move forward with the widening of Highway 17 from Kenora to the Manitoba border. Widening the highway from two to four lanes will improve safety, create local jobs and reduce travel times within the region. The province will continue to work with property owners, municipalities, and First Nation and Métis communities on the project.

4. Complete the Environmental Assessment and preliminary design for the Cochrane by-pass from Highway 11 to Highway 652 by Fall 2023. It is anticipated that the bypass could divert approximately 960 vehicles and 195 trucks per day away from municipal roads. The project would improve safety and reduce travel times for families and truck drivers.

5. Complete the planning, preliminary design and Environmental Assessment for the Little Current Swing Bridge on Highway 6 by Fall 2021. The bridge is the only land connection to Manitoulin Island.

6. Continue to repair roadways and bridges as part of the Connecting Links program. Connecting Links are roadways that connect two ends of a provincial highway through a community or a border crossing.

7. Continue expansion of active transportation facilities including cycling lanes and paved shoulders on the cycling network in Northern Ontario.

8. Continue the administration of the First Nations Road Program (FNRP) which receives \$5.5 million annually to fund basic road construction and maintenance projects for on-reserve roads in participating First Nation communities.

9. Continue the administration of the Unincorporated Roads Program, which includes the potential for funding through 50/50 Special Maintenance Agreements for basic maintenance and construction of off-reserve access in areas without municipal incorporation. Funding is for 50 per cent of the road expenses, which are determined by the participating First Nation community's desired level of service.

Moving forward with plans to widen Highway 17 in Kenora

In February 2020, Niiwin Wendaanimok (Four Winds Group), a partnership of four First Nation communities with Aboriginal and treaty rights and interests in the project area, signed an agreement with the province on the widening of Highway 17 between Kenora and the Manitoba border.

Niiwin Wendaanimok is a partnership among the governments of Shoal Lake 40 First Nation, Washagamis Bay First Nation, Wauzhushk Onigum First Nation and Niisaachewan Anishinaabe First Nation.

The memorandum of understanding is an important step for the Highway 17 project and will guide the relationship and the engagement and consultation processes for the project in the spirit of co-operation and collaboration.

Ontario is also engaged with Iskatewizaagegan #39 Independent First Nation on the project and continues to move forward in partnership with that community. The province is also engaging with the Métis Nation of Ontario as part of the planning process for this project.





Improvements to Passenger Transportation Services

10. Establish a task force led by MTO with mayors, Indigenous communities and leadership to improve rail, bus, and local transit services across Northern Ontario. The task force will focus on the transportation needs and opportunities in Northern Ontario with a strong emphasis on ensuring people can travel more efficiently and connect to critical services.

11. Improve intercommunity bus (ICB) service and help connect people in underserved and unserved communities. This includes proposing changes that would cut red tape for the ICB sector and make it easier for new carriers to address service gaps for passengers, leading to more and better transportation options.

12. The province, through the ONTC, has recently launched two new bus routes between White River and Thunder Bay, and between Thunder Bay and Winnipeg to connect people to jobs, hospitals and other essential services.

13. The province has also transferred oversight of the ONTC to MTO from the Ministry of Energy, Northern Development and Mines (ENDM). This has allowed the province to centralize ministerial oversight of all government agencies that deliver transportation services to create opportunities to improve services through integrated planning.

14. As part of COVID-19 recovery, work with Transport Canada and ENDM to explore options for a potential bilateral funding program to support air carriers that provide service to remote communities in Northern Ontario.

Ontario Northland Transportation Commission (ONTC)

The ONTC is an agency of the Government of Ontario and as of April 1, 2020, reports to the legislature through the Minister of Transportation. The Agency is a partner in ensuring the delivery of quality transportation services and solutions, particularly in Northern Ontario.

The ONTC provides transportation solutions that include passenger and freight rail services, motor coach service, a boutique railway station hotel (the Cochrane Station Inn), and remanufacturing and repair services for passenger cars, freight cars and locomotives. ONTC services connect the north and ensure safe transportation options for both goods and people including access to hospitals, educational institutions and intercommunity connectivity.

The ONTC continues to make investments in transportation infrastructure in the North, such as bridge and culvert rehabilitation projects and investments in track infrastructure along the rail line from Cochrane to Moosonee.

15. Improve public transit in municipalities across the North through provincial contributions to the Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program (ICIP).

16. Strengthen coordination of schedules, fare integration, signage and co-location of transportation facilities between modes of transportation and providers. This will improve connections, service and travel options, making it easier for people to transfer between bus, rail and local transit to move around Northern Ontario and get to their destinations.

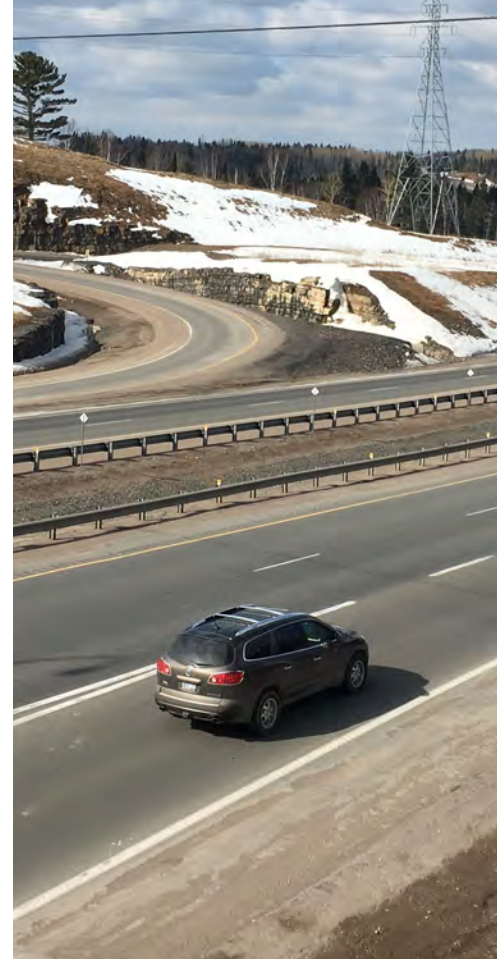
17. Work with Metrolinx and the ONTC to finalize an initial business case for passenger rail service in Northeastern Ontario. The province is accelerating work on a track audit by working with the ONTC to begin an initial audit of ONTC-owned tracks on a section of the North Bay corridor. The track audit is an essential step to identify needs for safety and infrastructure improvements to support a potential passenger rail service expansion in the future.

18. Support local public transportation services in the North and increase overall ridership through Ontario's Gas Tax program. In 2019/2020, almost \$9 million was allocated to northern communities.

In 2019, Elliot Lake used more than \$90,000 towards the purchase of three conventional transit buses, Greater Sudbury allocated more than \$1.5 million for their transit garage, terminal improvements and a route optimization study, while Sioux Lookout used more than \$37,000 towards the purchase of a replacement conventional transit bus.

Investing in Public Transit

Through the first intake of the Public Transit stream of the Investing in Canada Program, Infrastructure Canada approved 46 public transit projects from 11 municipalities in Northern Ontario, which total approximately \$52 million in provincial funding. Approved projects include the construction of a major mobility hub in Greater Sudbury, sidewalk construction and cycling facilities in North Bay, as well as bus fleet enhancements in regions such as Greenstone, Huntsville, Kenora, Sault Ste. Marie, Temiskaming, Thunder Bay and Timmins.



Goal 2: Enabling Economic Opportunity

The Northern Ontario economy relies on a transportation system that can move resources and goods to their destinations efficiently. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is especially important that the province does all it can to support and strengthen our supply chain and protect and grow the region's economy.

The actions under this second goal demonstrate Ontario's commitment to supporting economic recovery and competitiveness in Northern Ontario, such as COVID-19 recovery actions and supporting Indigenous procurement.

COVID-19 Recovery Actions

19. Advance eight highway rehabilitation projects in Northern Ontario, an estimated investment of over \$10 million, to help create jobs and stimulate local economies. This work includes rout and sealing and hard rock blasting along highways throughout Northern Ontario, bridge preservation work on the CN subway bridge south near Thunder Bay, surface treatments and resurfacing

along Highway 17 and along highways in the New Liskeard and Sudbury areas, and hazard rock scaling along Highway 17 east of Nipigon.

Cutting Red Tape and Reducing Burden

20. Develop a new integrated emissions and safety testing program that will provide a one-stop approach – one place, one test, one result – for truck and bus owners to complete both their safety inspection and emissions testing. This will save professional truck drivers and companies time and money without compromising road safety.

21. Implement digital solutions that are available 24/7 to replace fax and mail processes, making it easier and more convenient for truck drivers to access government services. This includes:

- Commercial Vehicle Operator's Registration (CVOR) renewal applications
- Select Annual Oversize/Overweight (O/O) Permits
- Select O/O Single Trip Permits





Sector-Specific Efforts

22. Continue to work with stakeholders and operators to support the recovery and growth of the passenger cruise ship industry. This includes working with the federal government to resolve regulatory issues related to operating cruises in the Great Lakes.

23. Ensure the needs of the tourism industry are addressed in planning for the modernization of Northern Ontario's transportation network.

Support Economic Opportunities for Indigenous Peoples and Businesses

24. Increase contracting opportunities for businesses owned by First Nation, Métis and Inuit people. The Aboriginal Procurement Program helps grow Indigenous businesses by increasing access to Ontario's procurement process. For example:

- Long Lake 58 First Nation partnership on a large value non-competitive procurement for a paving project along Highway 11.
- Area Maintenance Contract request for proposals that includes participation requirements for communities in the Robinson Superior Treaty area.

Improvements to Driver Exam Services for Remote First Nation Communities

25. Continue to improve access to Driver Licensing in remote fly-in northern First Nation communities. This will be achieved through:

- Direct delivery of the Class G1 driver's knowledge test and the Class G1 exit road test in remote First Nation communities
- Class G1 driver's licence knowledge test will be offered at all full time DriveTest Centres in three Indigenous languages – Ojibway, Oji-Cree and Cree in written and audio formats to support language preservation and revitalization.



Goal 3: Keeping People Safe and Providing Reliable Transportation Options

Ontario's roads are among the safest in North America. For more than 20 years, our province has ranked in the top five for road safety among all North American jurisdictions. A safe and inclusive transportation system requires a commitment to ongoing maintenance and rehabilitation of our roads and highways.

This third goal will help ensure people can travel safely and efficiently, regardless of the transportation mode they are taking. It includes actions to raise awareness of human trafficking, improve rest areas and test better pavement marking methods to make roads safer.

Provide Information to Support Safe Transportation for Goods and People

26. Work in partnership with the private sector including the commercial trucking industry (among other transportation stakeholders), Indigenous communities and organizations and other

interested groups, to raise awareness of human trafficking, in alignment with Ontario's Anti-Human Trafficking Strategy. Ensure an Indigenous lens is applied to anti-human trafficking initiatives and that initiatives are in line with the Calls for Justice in the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) report, including public education and awareness efforts and training of front-line staff. Initiatives may focus on key transit and transportation locations such as truck inspection stations, rest areas, remote airports and on provincially owned or subsidized rail, marine and other transportation services. The province will pursue opportunities where feasible to make these areas safer such as providing better parking lot lighting, installing security cameras, site clearing for improved visibility and placing posters with the National Human Trafficking Hotline.

27. Increase availability of near real-time information, to keep travellers aware of current highway conditions, including accidents, road and weather conditions, snow plow locations and construction activities, to make informed travel decisions. Ontario is also exploring opportunities to:

- Improve near real-time updates on traffic and weather conditions on Ontario 511 by testing emerging technologies and partnering with data providers such as Waze.
- Establish partnerships with municipalities and Indigenous communities to explore traffic data integration and pilot project opportunities to improve the movement of goods and people and delivery of services.

Investing in Rest Areas

The province is building 10 new rest areas in addition to the 11 rest areas that will undergo repairs or expansion in Northern Ontario. This is part of the government's plan to better connect communities, build safer highways, and get people and goods moving in every corner of the province. All these projects are expected to be completed by 2025.

Continue efforts to Improve Winter Maintenance on Northern Highways

28. Install eight new Road Weather Information System

stations along Highways 11 and 17 as part of 14 new stations in Northern Ontario in addition to 16 mini-stations across Northern Ontario. These additional weather stations will provide improved weather forecasting that helps contractors respond better to winter weather.

29. Increase proactive use of anti-icing liquids before storms to make it easier to clear snow after a winter storm.

30. Continue to modernize winter maintenance contracts, including adding more equipment where warranted.

31. Keep Highway 11 and 17 safer in winter by launching a pilot project to determine the feasibility for further improvements to maintenance standards and identify sections where there would be a benefit to impose higher winter maintenance standards. The pilot will also look at areas where contractors are having difficulty meeting ministry standards.

Improve the Safety of Northern Ontario's Road Network

32. Continue to invest in new, improved and rehabilitated rest areas in the North, including additional commercial vehicle parking and safety improvements. Rest areas provide travellers and truck drivers with a safe place to take a break, inspect their vehicles or wait out poor weather conditions.





33. Ontario has implemented a pre-clearance system (Drivewyze) at the province's 32 Truck Inspection Stations (TIS). The province will continue to invest in commercial motor vehicle inspection facilities throughout the North to ensure commercial vehicles using the highway are in safe operating condition.

The province is also piloting enhanced screening technology at four TIS truck inspection stations across Ontario looking for potentially unsafe vehicle conditions like faulty brakes or tires. Following an assessment of the technology at the pilot sites, the ministry will consider potential deployment to additional locations.

34. Continue to explore ways to improve uniformity and quality in pavement markings and traffic control devices that may be more durable, visible and better enable automation to improve safety on provincial highways. This includes provincial pavement marking trials using recessed markings and different paint materials on northern highways.

35. Review passing lane needs with a focus on Northeastern Ontario where the highway network is predominately two lanes. This review will help improve highway safety and will support the development of a work plan to improve and construct passing lanes at priority locations.

Investing in Inspection Areas

A new commercial vehicle inspection facility is being designed for Highway 11/17, east of Thunder Bay. This new site will enable enforcement officers to inspect commercial vehicles travelling westbound into Thunder Bay. Additionally, designated spaces for inspection of commercial vehicles have been added to select rest areas to provide drivers and officers with a safe location to inspect commercial vehicles across the northern highway network.

36. To meet updated federal requirements under the *Railway Safety Act*, enter into agreements with railways to update public crossings on resource roads to increase safety at railway crossings and facilitate access to Crown land.

37. Work with municipalities and private sector partners to improve lighting at road/rail crossings, commuter parking lots and rest areas, and find ways to incorporate alternative sources of energy such as solar power in remote locations.

38. Continue to work with local municipalities, townships and private sector partners to design and install lighting for locations where these partners agree to take over the maintenance of the lighting.

39. Undertake further research to identify options for improving transportation safety, security and access for vulnerable and disadvantaged people such as seniors, low-income groups, and others.

Support Northern Ontario's Municipal Airports

40. Explore options to support municipal airports given the role they play in providing critical functions such as provincial aerial firefighting, air ambulance and policing, as well as to connect people and move goods throughout the North.



Goal 4: Preparing for the Future

There are tremendous opportunities to transform the transportation system in Northern Ontario with new and innovative technology. Technology improvements such as reliable internet speeds and improved cellular network coverage will make it easier for people to adopt new technology and better plan their trip. This will allow them to have a seamless experience while taking multiple forms of transportation. In rural and remote communities this could reduce the frequency that people need to travel over long distances and enhance local and regional economic development.

This fourth goal includes actions that integrate new and emerging technologies into the transportation system, such as connected and automated vehicles (CV/AV), alternative fueling options and planning transportation systems for the future.

Improvements to Broadband and Cellular Services

Broadband has become an essential form of infrastructure and the people of Ontario expect access to fast, reliable and affordable connectivity, where they live, work and travel. Improved services are necessary to realize economic growth, job creation, the efficient delivery of government services and improved safety along Ontario's highways and roads, particularly in remote and northern areas.

41. To help people better plan their trips and travel more safely, Ontario has committed to providing \$680 million to support improved access to broadband and cellular services across Ontario. This funding is in addition to the \$315 million that was announced in Up to Speed: Ontario's Broadband and Cellular Action Plan. Under the provincial plan, funding for the Improving Connectivity for Ontario (ICON) program will be doubled to \$300 million. Noting that more than 1.4 million Ontarians, mostly in rural, remote and northern areas, don't have adequate access to broadband or cellular services and there are significant coverage gaps on secondary highways, the province is committed to unlocking new opportunities for business and people, and improving the quality of life for individuals and families in unserved and underserved communities across Ontario.

Connected and Automated Vehicles

In response to rapid advances in CV/AV technology, Ontario is preparing our transportation system, in all regions, to be ready to safely integrate these new vehicles onto our roadways. Through active research, testing and pilots, the province is considering what kind of infrastructure is required to support the use of CV/AVs, such as enhanced road markings and signage, and the type of connectivity required to collect and share information with vehicles.

Ontario 511 app provides truck drivers with updated rest area information

The Ontario 511 app provides all drivers with updated information on accidents, incidents, construction, traffic, and conditions on Ontario highways.

The free Ontario 511 app provides drivers with immediate access to the information they need while traveling across the province. The app features images from over 600 cameras, an easy to use map view, weather alerts and includes a drive mode with hands free audio alerts.





42. Prepare Ontario's northern transportation system and infrastructure for the introduction of CV/AVs and explore the use of CV/AVs to connect rural, remote areas with jobs, goods and services.

43. Support the development and testing of CV/AV technology specifically designed to meet the unique conditions of winter weather through the WinterTech program led by Ontario's Autonomous Vehicle Innovation Network (AVIN).

Electric and Hydrogen Vehicles

44. To support future-ready transportation infrastructure, review locations for alternative fueling stations (including electric and hydrogen) for public use that will support potential private sector commercial partnerships and support competitiveness.

45. Work across government and with key stakeholders to consider approaches that support low carbon vehicles, including electric and hydrogen.

Data Collection and Research

46. Commercial Vehicle Survey data was collected in Northern Ontario in 2019 which provided valuable information on how goods move in the region. MTO will continue to undertake surveys and data collection to understand transportation trends and needs in the North.

Drones: an emerging transportation technology

Drones – officially known as Remotely Piloted Aircraft Systems, or RPAS – are an emerging transportation technology that in the future may become a more common feature in Ontario's transportation network. The technology has promising applications for goods movement, especially in areas with limited access to other modes of transportation, including in northern and remote communities. Cargo drones are already being deployed in Ontario to transport goods to several First Nation communities. MTO continues to monitor developments in the sector to identify opportunities to safely test, pilot, and operate drone technologies.

Goal 5: Maintaining a Sustainable Transportation System

A sustainable transportation system will help encourage economic growth, job creation and self-reliance in communities across Northern Ontario, and help protect our environment for future generations. This fifth goal explores opportunities to rehabilitate and replace aging infrastructure by using the most up-to-date climate data. The actions under this goal include adding wildlife fencing, managing the Invasive Phragmites plant (European Common Reed) along Ontario's highways and assessing the impact of climate change on our roads and infrastructure.

Actions

47. Continue to actively address the threats and challenges of invasive vegetation species such as Invasive Phragmites on provincial highways. Phragmites can impede highway drainage, impair roadway visibility, grow through and damage pavement, and potentially be a fire hazard within the right-of-way. The province will continue to develop a broader strategy to effectively manage invasive species vegetation along provincial roadsides while promoting biodiversity.

48. Increase access to clean and affordable energy for families by continuing to support connecting Indigenous communities in Northern Ontario to the province's clean electricity grid, to replace local diesel and other types of electricity generation and prepare communities for electrified transportation.

49. Continue the construction of wildlife exclusion fencing and consider wildlife crossing opportunities as part of the Highway 69 widening project. Future highway expansion projects will also include these measures.

50. Utilize the most up-to-date climate data and information to make informed decisions, including incorporating findings from Ontario's first-ever Provincial Climate Change Impact Assessment (PCCIA), to help ensure that transportation infrastructure takes into account climate change impacts and risks.



Success Story – Highway 69 wildlife crossing

Ontario is taking an innovative approach to conserve and protect wildlife when designing and building highways. As part of the Highway 69 widening project between Lovering Creek Bridge and Trout Lake Road, the province has added 10 km of fencing and a wildlife crossing over the highway, resulting in a 73 per cent reduction in the wildlife collisions in the area. This infrastructure helps protect animals and improves safety for drivers, while keeping goods moving.

51. Rehabilitate and replace aging maintenance facilities throughout the province, including Northern Ontario, over the next 10 years to support improved snow and ice control maintenance activities. This will be supported by the development of design guidelines for highway maintenance facilities, including garages and material storage buildings.

52. Continue to support a world-class system of diversified trails, planned and used in an environmentally responsible manner, that enhance the health and prosperity of all Ontarians.

53. Explore the potential of new and emerging freight transportation technologies such as drones and airships to help improve the movement of goods in the North. If feasible, such technologies may help improve the transportation of cargo to remote communities and help address the challenges of transporting goods over winter roads.

54. Protect the long-term operation and economic role of strategic marine and rail facilities and ensure they are not impacted by sensitive land uses through the implementation of the [Provincial Policy Statement](#). This will protect opportunities to increase the movement of goods to major markets by boat and rail and enhance connectivity among transportation modes and improve efficiencies.

55. Support the rehabilitation of existing, and the planning and development of new transportation corridors in Northern Ontario by ensuring aggregate resources on Crown land, such as sand and gravel, are locally secured for future needs. MTO will work with the Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry (MNRF) and its partners to make available strategic deposits of aggregate resources for provincial road projects.

56. Continue to conserve natural heritage and cultural heritage while balancing transportation needs.





Goal 6: Reliable Travel Options for Remote and Far North Communities

The Far North is home to 31 First Nation communities, two municipalities and one community with a Local Service Board spread across vast distances. These communities often do not have permanent road access and rely on remote airports or winter roads to connect to larger towns and cities. More reliable connections between communities and to the all-season ground transportation network will improve quality of life and create a clear path forward to unlock unprecedented social and economic prosperity in Far North communities.

Actions under this sixth goal will help provide more reliable travel options for these communities, including improving winter roads, enhancing remote airports, upgrading cellular service in remote First Nation communities and supporting First Nation communities in their efforts to develop an all-season road strategy.

Remote Airports

57. Continue to invest in remote airports to ensure they remain in good operating condition and proactively share information with Indigenous communities and air carriers on planned enhancements to remote airports supporting ongoing operations, safety and security.

58. Support remote and northern

airports as part of COVID-19 recovery to ensure ongoing operations and the continuation of essential material shipments. This includes staffing and additional cleaning and disinfection at each airport.

Winter Roads

59. Explore expanding winter road inspection and oversight using ground-penetrating radar to monitor ice thickness, which is crucial to help ensure safe and predictable travel.

60. Explore improving water crossings on winter roads using portable bridges and arch culverts to help maintain these vital links to remote communities, including remote First Nation communities, during the winter season. ENDM will continue to pursue funding partnerships with the federal government for improvements to these critically important seasonal roads that service remote communities during the winter months

The government decreased the aviation fuel tax rate for purchases within the North. This change took effect in January 2020 and will help reduce the cost of living in Northern Ontario.

61. In partnership with the federal government, create a training program for winter road builders to share construction and maintenance practices with a focus on improving the safety and reliability of the winter road network.

62. Continue to support the Ontario Provincial Police and Nishnawbe Aski Police Service to monitor winter roads, enabling them to spot hazardous driving and respond to emergencies in a timely manner.

Ring of Fire Area

63. The Ontario government remains confident in the economic opportunity in the Ring of Fire area. Building a road to the Ring of Fire is a critical step to unlocking economic benefits in the region. Ontario will continue to support Marten Falls and Webequie First Nations as they advance their Environmental Assessments on their individual road projects for all-season roads to connect their communities and to connect their communities to the proposed Ring of Fire developments. Ontario is also supporting Aroland First Nation to upgrade roads near the community to support the potential for increased traffic from future road developments. All these road projects are important steps to unlocking the development potential in the Ring of Fire.

All-Season Roads

64. Initiate an all-season roads strategy for Far North, in conjunction with a process to coordinate land use and transportation planning on an ongoing basis.

65. Support Windigo First Nations Council in their continuing outreach efforts among member communities in their development of an all-season road strategy.

66. The province has committed to fund long-term maintenance of the Pickle Lake Northern Ontario Resource Transportation (NORT) road extension. It would run from its current endpoint about 200 km northwest of Pickle Lake to North Caribou Lake First Nation and support the First Nation's plan to connect to the all-season road network. This road extension would replace a 42-km stretch of winter road.

Roads Connecting to First Nations

67. Commence a study in partnership with the federal government, municipal partners, and First Nation communities, to identify options for governance, ownership, and roles and responsibilities for roads connecting First Nation communities to the provincial highway network. It would also recommend improvements to ensure these roads can be maintained.



Working Together with Partners

Collaboration and partnerships are essential in order to deliver an integrated transportation network that is safe, reliable and leads to long-term prosperity and more opportunities for individuals, families and businesses. Ontario is committed to working with, and gathering input from, the federal government, municipalities, Indigenous communities, transportation agencies, industry and local businesses to achieve our shared goals and build a better transportation network for the North.

Ontario has a legal obligation to consult with Aboriginal peoples where it contemplates decisions or actions that may adversely impact asserted or established Aboriginal or treaty rights. We are committed to working hand-in-hand with Indigenous communities as we implement this plan.

We also remain committed to identifying and removing barriers for people with disabilities and will continue to work with government, service providers and industry. All actions in this plan will follow the standards as part of the *Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)* and federal accessibility legislation.

Next Steps

Our plan will provide people and businesses in Northern Ontario with a stronger and safer highway system, intercommunity bus service and better access to transit. With new technologies and partnerships, it will make it easier for businesses to grow and for people to get to their destinations. This transportation plan will help drive economic growth for Northern Ontario and create jobs as the province recovers from COVID-19.

Ontario recognizes the need to collaborate with Indigenous, municipal and other public and private sector partners to deliver on the actions in this plan. That is why this plan is a living document – as we receive additional input and technical studies are completed, we will update actions in the plan to reflect the evolving needs of the region. By working together, we will build a safer and more reliable transportation system for Northern Ontario.

The province is committed to improving the transportation system not just for Northern Ontario, but across the province. This plan for Northern Ontario is the second of a series of regional transportation plans that address the unique needs of each region. Last year, we released a transportation plan for Southwestern Ontario and are also developing regional plans for Eastern Ontario and the Greater Golden Horseshoe. Together, these regional plans will form an integrated, long-term transportation plan for Ontario.

Ministry of Transportation
ontario.ca/northerntransportation

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