



Coalition for Algoma Passenger Trains (CAPT)

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**CAPT SUBMISSION TO THE SECRETARIAT OF THE CANADA TRANSPORTATION
ACT REVIEW**

The Coalition Algoma Passenger Trains (CAPT) is an advocacy group representing communities, First Nations, businesses, individuals and other stakeholders committed to the improvement and restoration of passenger rail services in Northern Ontario. This group has been active for a number of years and is associated with Transport Action Ontario (TAO).

Currently, in Northern Ontario rail passenger services are limited to VIA's 'Canadian' and 'Budd Car' (Sudbury to White River), Algoma Central's (CN) Sault Ste. Marie to Hearst and Ontario Northland's (ONTC) Cochrane to Moosonee. All of these services with their limited schedules do not provide interurban connectivity for most northerners to even reach Toronto or Western Canada.

Is it not time for a new beginning? CAPT believes so, and hopefully this review will address the concerns and lack of rail passenger services in Northern Ontario.

Canada is the only member of the G-8 that does not have a comprehensive plan for rail passenger services. Improving our economy through increased investments in rail infrastructure is greatly needed. Rail as a transportation

mode stands alone in its ability to combine energy efficiency with economic and environmental benefits. Economic benefits include:

- Relief from increasing fuel costs
- Increased accessibility for tourism
- Combats youth out-migration and facilitates return to communities
- Economic diversity, development and skilled labour-force
- New rail technology a prime mover in growth

Environment benefits include:

- Reduction of greenhouse gas emissions from vehicle fuel and asphalt continually used to pave and repave roads and highways—one of the fastest ways to begin addressing the recent call by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate change (IPCC) to urgently and dramatically reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

In the North, harsh winter driving conditions essentially limits travelling; bus travel is at most times crowded and uncomfortable; and, air travel is not for everyone. Restoring passenger train services is urgent for Northern Ontario's sustainability.

The review to be undertaken has two elements that are key to improving rail passenger services not only across Canada but in Northern Ontario as well. A third element is a little too late for one of our earlier endeavors but still all important to maintaining rail infrastructure in Canada.

(1) Legislating VIA Rail so that it is responsible to Parliament is important and would put it on an equal footing with its counterpart in the USA. VIA needs to have a distinct mandate and the necessary funding for it to be effective wherein it operates.

(2) The suggestion of involving provinces in intercity passenger rail is a positive approach that has worked with Amtrak in the U.S. Not only do

some states provide funding to the national service, they also share or provide train equipment for usage on the Amtrak services. This sort of co-operation would undoubtedly be beneficial to some provinces such as Ontario that has the majority of VIA Rail services in Canada.

(3) A branch line abandonment policy is also necessary to maintain the current rail infrastructure. Only this past summer, we lost most of the Ottawa Valley lines of CP Rail and a small CN line from Pembroke, ON to Portage du Fort, QC. CAPT tried in vain to convince Federal officials that the removal of the CP line not only eradicated our efforts to have passenger rail service restored in this region, but it also removed present and future rail services to the major Forces Base Petawawa. (The rail right-of-way should still be retained to facilitate the reinstatement of tracks on it.) Numerous branch lines in Northern Ontario have disappeared in last two decades and there should be a moratorium on any abandonments in the future.

The members of CAPT and the Northern and Eastern Ontario Rail Network (NEORN), the network of all passenger rail advocacy groups in Northern Ontario, agree that it is time that the Federal Government in concert with the Provinces create a 'rail passenger policy' that will benefit all Canadians and enhance current services, develop new services and restore some services here-to-fore displaced.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Dawne Cunningham and Al Errington, Co-Chairs
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