

EXPANDED DRAFT SYNOPSIS N° 5

ON TRACK STRATEGIES

OSHAWA, ONTARIO – STUDIO CITY, CALIFORNIA



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Northeast Lynx: High-Performance Rail Travel for Northern Ontarians

For

***All Aboard Northern Ontario
Temiskaming Municipal Association
Northeastern Ontario Municipal Association***

By

Greg Gormick

—•—

July 8, 2019

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Abstract

Northeast Lynx is a plan to incrementally restore and improve rail passenger service on the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission (ONTC) route that formerly linked Northeastern Ontario with the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). The ONTC's *Northlander* train on this line was discontinued in 2012 by the provincial government, which cited high costs and low ridership as its motives. Not discussed at that time were the *Northlander's* poor on-time performance, its inadequate equipment and a lack of political, civil service and Crown agency commitment.

Northeast Lynx is based on the high-performance rail concept proven on numerous and varied rail corridors around the world, including several in the U.S. It is derived from *SouthwestLynx: Integrated High-Performance Public Transportation for Southwestern Ontario*, a plan Oxford County commissioned On Track Strategies to produce in 2018. As in that plan, ***Northeast Lynx*** proposes modern rail equipment, convenient scheduling and integrated feeder bus, van and transit connections to provide a publicly-funded service offering safe, swift and affordable all-weather transportation that will effectively compete with car and air travel.

Northeast Lynx recommends the use of sturdy, second-hand passenger equipment obtainable now at low cost from various Canadian and American sources. Full refurbishment would be undertaken at one of three Northern Ontario facilities. Related Moosonee – Cochrane *Polar Bear Express* equipment and scheduling improvements would occur simultaneously.

A key aspect of ***Northeast Lynx*** is incrementalism. It is a six-phase, five-year plan requiring an estimated total capital investment of \$159 million. This would generate at least \$500 million in economic spin-off and job creation, mainly in Northeastern Ontario. The report compares this amount and its return on investment with the public cost of the provincial government's \$169-million, 30-km four-laning of Highway 69 and its \$28.5-billion, four-line Toronto transit vision.

However, based on past experience, the report surmises none of its phased rail improvement elements is likely to be realized. The rail passenger issue has been studied by successive governments since the mid-1980s with no significant action. Currently, Queen's Park and the ONTC have no plans of their own to restore this service, although both say it is under study.

Northeast Lynx concludes with a cautionary quote from a rejected plan by the federal Rail Passenger Action Force of 1984-1985 regarding the urgent need to modernize VIA Rail Canada:

“Studies cause delay and enable government officials to in turn delay making decisions; in this, they are sometimes welcomed by those government officials – the long delay in transcontinental modernization being a case in point.”

Therefore, the expectation of ***Northeast Lynx's*** author is that it may serve, at best, as a starting point for a public and political discussion of an issue one ONTC executive described in an email to him as “one of those political minefields that never dies.”

Foreword: Access + Mobility = Destiny

Can the loss of a single passenger train make much difference in this allegedly modern and upwardly mobile world of ours?

It can and it did. The cancellation of the ***Northlander*** on the Cochrane – North Bay – Toronto route in 2012 struck a blow to mobility from which Northeastern Ontarians have still not recovered. Along with the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission (ONTC) buses and the ***Polar Bear Express***, the ***Northlander*** was part a lifeline for residents, despite several operational and institutional impediments that undermined its effectiveness and ultimately doomed it.

With decisions such as this one, it is little wonder Northern Ontarians often feel their elected representatives at Queen’s Park regard the province as a political-and-bureaucratic fiefdom extending no farther north than Toronto’s Steeles Avenue or Highway 7. This feeling of northern alienation has not improved since the new government was elected in June 2018 after promising immediate action to restore the ONTC rail service. Nearly a year after that election, all that this government has offered are statements that the matter is “under study.”

Northeastern Ontarians quite rightly expect an equitable and justifiable level of all-weather public transportation that is proportionately equivalent to what other parts of the province receive. For them, political statements about more studies have grown tiresome and hollow.

Northeast Lynx is designed to fill the vacuum created by this political and bureaucratic foot dragging. It is based on a need to adopt proven techniques and technologies, adapt them for this region’s conditions, and use them to optimize the assets already on hand. Merely restoring the ***Northlander*** as it was previously operated would be doomed to failure. A new, bold and sustainable concept to quickly create a better service is required.

Northeast Lynx also recognizes that its principal sponsors – the current provincial government – will only commit if the plan can be undertaken at a relatively low cost before the 2022 election, and if it will pay large public and political dividends. Furthermore, the plan must be adaptable and scalable as a template for a larger system plan for the entire region, which is poorly served by all public modes of transportation.

If Northern Ontario is to ever enjoy the access and mobility required to competitively attract and retain residents, tourists, investors and jobs, action is required now. ***Northeast Lynx*** can be the first step in such a region-wide approach: Seamless, affordable and practical rail travel for Northern Ontarians. Such an approach is long overdue.

Greg Gormick
On Track Strategies
July 8, 2019

Conclusion: Northeast Lynx – Carpe Diem

Northern Ontarians are facing a crossroads created by an ongoing failure to address their region's declining mobility and access. This situation is not new. It has escalated ever since various provincial and federal governments, for indefensible reasons, triggered the wind-down of the rail passenger service that once served Northern Ontario and all of Canada for decades.

Northeast Lynx demonstrates what is realistically, affordably and sustainably possible in correcting this corrosive issue, which is threatening the region's destiny. It employs service-proven techniques and technologies that are working daily in the many other regions of North America that compete with Northern Ontario for jobs, residents, tourists and investment capital. Many of those other regions went through the same induced decline in public transportation. They learned their lessons and they are applying them well today.

As Hornepayne Mayor Cheryl Fort pointed out during consultations for the development of this plan, any solution needs to be multi-modal. The rail-based ***Northeast Lynx*** plan can serve as the glue to bind together the other forms of passenger and freight transport across the region. Only in this way can a travel option be crafted that will be truly comprehensive and effective.

By adopting what is working elsewhere, adapting it for the region's unique conditions and then sculpting a new blueprint to make the best use of the extensive transportation assets already available, ***Northeast Lynx*** can dramatically and quickly improve the quality of life and the competitiveness of Northeastern Ontario. It can also serve as a template for the rest of the region and other parts of Canada, all of which need to boost their transportation fortunes in a competitive world where economic, social and environmental health are keys to future success.

Should those who commissioned this report wish to proceed, On Track Strategies is ready to assist on a professional basis, as are many seasoned public transportation veterans who served as this plan's peer reviewers and technical advisors. There is no lack of enthusiasm for the production and adoption of plans such as ***Northeast Lynx***. But there's also the inevitable frustration that comes from watching visionary and innovative solutions that are constantly replaced with indecision, political expediency and endless rounds of foot-dragging study.

Time is growing short. The other regions of North America – indeed, around the globe – with which Northeastern Ontario must compete are making steady progress. This issue needs to be discussed and debated by the public, their politicians, their public servants, and their public and private transportation service providers now. If ***Northeast Lynx*** becomes a starting point for that urgent and long overdue conversation, it will have served part of its initial purpose.

Northeast Lynx. Carpe diem.

Greg Gormick
On Track Strategies
July 8, 2019

Appendix R: Northeast Lynx Capital Cost Comparison

PROJECT	COST
Northeast Lynx Phases I – III *	\$1,500,000
Northeast Lynx Phases I – IV *	\$2,500,000
Northeast Lynx Phases I – V *	\$32,500,000
Northeast Lynx Phases I – VI *	\$65,800,000
Northeast Lynx Phases I – VII *	\$125,800,000
Northeast Lynx Phases I – VIII *	\$163,800,000
Highway 69/400 Four-Lane Expansion (30 km)	\$169,000,000
Highway 401 Western Capacity Expansion (18 km)	\$400,000,000
Metrolinx Union Pearson Express Phase I	\$500,000,000
Metrolinx GO Bowmanville Rail Extension (preliminary estimate)	\$550,000,000
TTC Yonge-University-Spadina (Y-U-S) Subway Automatic Train Control	\$600,000,000
Metrolinx Toronto Union Station Rail Corridor Upgrading	\$700,000,000
Metrolinx GO Whitby Rail Maintenance Centre	\$900,000,000
Metrolinx Toronto Union Station Revitalization Phase I	\$900,000,000
Hamilton LRT (preliminary estimate)	\$1,000,000,000
Highway 407 Eastern Extension Phase I	\$1,000,000,000
Highway 407 Eastern Extension Phase II	\$1,200,000,000
Metrolinx GO Bowmanville Rail Extension (revised estimate)	\$1,200,000,000
Metrolinx Presto Fare Card System	\$1,200,000,000
Mississauga-Brampton Hurontario LRT (revised shortened version)	\$1,400,000,000
Metrolinx Union Pearson Express Phase II – GO Weston Subdivision 4 th Main Track	\$1,500,000,000
Mississauga-Brampton Hurontario LRT (original full version)	\$1,600,000,000
Highway 69/400 Four-Lane Expansion (original 302-km estimate)	\$1,700,000,000
Ottawa Confederation Line LRT Phase I	\$2,100,000,000
Metrolinx GO Kitchener Line Expansion	\$2,300,000,000
TTC Y-U-S Subway Vaughan Extension	\$3,200,000,000
Ottawa Confederation Line LRT Phase II	\$4,700,000,000
Metrolinx TTC Eglinton Crosstown LRT Phase II (Ontario Vision Plan) **	\$4,700,000,000
Metrolinx TTC Eglinton Crosstown LRT Phase I	\$5,300,000,000
Metrolinx TTC Sheppard + Scarborough Subway Extensions (Ontario Vision Plan) **	\$5,500,000,000
Metrolinx TTC Y-U-S Subway Richmond Hill Extension (Ontario Vision Plan) **	\$5,600,000,000
GTA West Highway (excluding land expropriation)	\$6,000,000,000
Gordie Howe Bridge (including Rt. Hon. Herb Gray Parkway)	\$7,100,000,000
TTC Relief Line Subway (conventional heavy rail)	\$8,300,000,000
Metrolinx Ontario Line Automated Light Rail Subway (Ontario Vision Plan) **	\$10,900,000,000
Metrolinx GO Regional Express Rail Project	\$13,500,000,000
Government of Ontario Transportation Vision Plan **	\$28,500,000,000

* Excludes equipment lease costs, which cease under Northeast Lynx Phase VI

** Ontario Transportation Vision Plan consists of four bundled Toronto transit projects totalling \$28.5 billion

Appendix S: ONTC Rail Passenger Service Restoration Email

from: **NAME REDACTED**
to: Greg Gormick
date: Dec 23, 2018, 3:13 PM
subject: RE: Proof that dinosaurs still roam Northern Ontario

I will tell you where we stand within the ONR.

I am not a proponent (and this coming from a guy who loves passenger trains). A train between Toronto and North Bay might get decent ridership if it runs daily, at the right times of the day, and if transit time could consistently remain below 5 hours. Not having control of any of the line south of North Bay makes me very wary (reference your email on the *Canadian* today).

As a taxpayer, I don't believe the population density north of North Bay is enough to justify the costs of a train. We could easily feed passengers by bus to a train in North Bay at a fraction of the cost. The efforts and daily distractions involved in running passenger trains are considerable.... **REDACTED**

So internally, I advise my colleagues to be careful what you wish for. When asked, I try to make sure everyone knows what is involved so at least they can take an educated position. If we are given the mandate to re-establish a passenger train, of course I would do my best to do a decent job of it.

Corina, obviously, is not as intimately familiar with what is involved, and rightly and admirably wants to grow the company and ensure that ONR is contributing to the development and sustainability of the north. However, she is also not a full-on proponent, just more so than I am. I think I've perhaps influenced her to take a more neutral position.

So we really are just laying low and letting the government decide. If we are asked for information from the Ministry, we provide it.

The fact that Corina has met with some of the other groups doesn't mean she necessarily supports them.

As you have found out, the Northlander always was and remains one of those political minefields that never dies. Vic will ultimately find this out, if he isn't catching on already.

I've given you the benefit of my perspective and our internal thoughts. Please keep these to yourself.

SIGNATURE REDACTED

*The North's Own Travel System
for
The North's Own Travel Needs*



"Here, kitty, kitty, kitty, kitty!"