

Time to Grow

A Regional Economic Plan for
Northwestern Ontario 2025-2035



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Introduction

Municipalities need people. People need jobs. Those are the two fundamental concepts underlying the goals and actions outlined in this Regional Economic Plan for Northwestern Ontario. This plan is intended to focus the efforts of the Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association (NOMA) and its partners to grow the size and number of commercial enterprises operating in Northwestern Ontario over the next decade.

NOMA's partners include the province of Ontario, the federal government, every First Nation government in Northwestern Ontario, Métis leadership, member municipalities of NOMA, the regional Municipal Leagues, key local institutions (hospitals, friendship centres, education facilities (primary, secondary, and post-secondary), community centres, recreation facilities, etc.), local agencies and not for profits (skills and training agencies, workforce planning boards, Community Futures Development Corporations, District Social Services Administration Boards, research and innovation organizations, etc.), local volunteer organizations (Rotary, Young Professionals Networks, Scouts Canada, Girl Guides Canada, etc.), private sector employers and associations, and every resident of Northwestern Ontario. We all have a part to play.

This plan has its foundation in NOMA's 2022-2027 Strategic Plan. Specifically, NOMA's commitment to undertake and support initiatives to bolster progress in Ontario's Northwest Region.¹ This effort is fueled by NOMA's commitment to vibrant, sustainable municipalities. This plan has been prepared as a living document. It is intended to change, as needed, over time. It represents a framework for fostering growth in the region, to attract investment, and to nurture communities across Northwestern Ontario.

Most importantly, NOMA hopes to see this document used to inform and guide planning, decision making, and concrete actions over the next decade. Actions by NOMA, by Canada, by Ontario, by First Nations governments, by Métis communities and by myriad other decision makers and community builders. To encourage buy-in to the goals and potential actions outlined in this document, NOMA has reached out to various sectors to discuss building an inclusive and integrated economic plan, rooted in strengthening Northwestern Ontario, and founded on collective action.

Specifically, this plan is intended to:

- Provide a comprehensive set of action items for NOMA, its member municipalities, and their partners. Actions that can lead to a thriving future for Northwestern Ontario.
- Facilitate decisions for growth that strengthen Northwestern Ontario economy, nurture resilient communities, promote a healthy environment, and embody a commitment to their residents.
- Promote a balanced and rational approach to growth decisions that capitalizes on community priorities, strengths, and opportunities.
- Enable growth planning that takes a comprehensive geographical perspective, integrating across natural and municipal boundaries.

¹ <http://www.noma.on.ca/upload/documents/final-noma-strat-plan-march-2022.pdf>

- Ensure that long-term goals and a shared vision drive growth decisions.
- Provide a roadmap for fostering policy coordination among all levels of government to achieve desired outcomes.

The development of this plan has been a collaborative effort². Driving this region forward will require similar levels of participation from many different people and organizations. By overcoming several of the larger challenges that the region faces, capitalizing on key opportunities, and by creating a shared set of priorities with clear and measurable objectives, the region can thrive.

Context - Northwestern Ontario

In 2021 Northwestern Ontario had a population of 232,299. It covers a land mass of 526,417 square kilometers. According to Statistics Canada, there are 37 census sub-divisions (including organized municipalities and unorganized areas) and 76 First Nations or recognized reserves.

Many Northwestern communities are also influenced by large “adjacent populations”. These are collections of residents who live close to the municipality but outside of its taxation boundaries. Dryden, for example, has an adjacent population equal to roughly 50% of its municipal population.³ In addition, there are significant seasonal population variances as people move into and out of communities on a temporary basis (cottagers in the Kenora area for example, or rural residents accessing services and amenities in relatively larger centers). These populations place special burdens on municipalities called upon to house them or respond to their needs. Such demands are not offset by consumption taxes on purchases while in the community because, of course, those revenues do not go to the municipality. The economic spin-offs of serving this larger population are also not easily captured by municipalities as most of the associated government revenue is tied to personal and business income taxation.

As for businesses, according to the latest data from *Business Counts*⁴, there were 6,654 businesses operating in Northwestern Ontario in 2023. These are entities that reported having at least one employee (this excludes the self employed, like real estate or insurance agents). The largest number of businesses were retail operations (958) followed by health care (869) and construction (858). The fourth largest sector by number of businesses is, unsurprisingly, tourism (806).⁵

If instead of counting the number of businesses, we examine the number of people employed in various sectors: health care moves to number one with 21,195 employees reported by Statistics Canada in 2023. Retail (12,800), Education (10,165), Public Administration (9,885) and Construction (8,115) round out the top five. Tourism comes in at number six with 8,005 employees.

² See the section “A Collaborative Plan” for more on the development of this plan

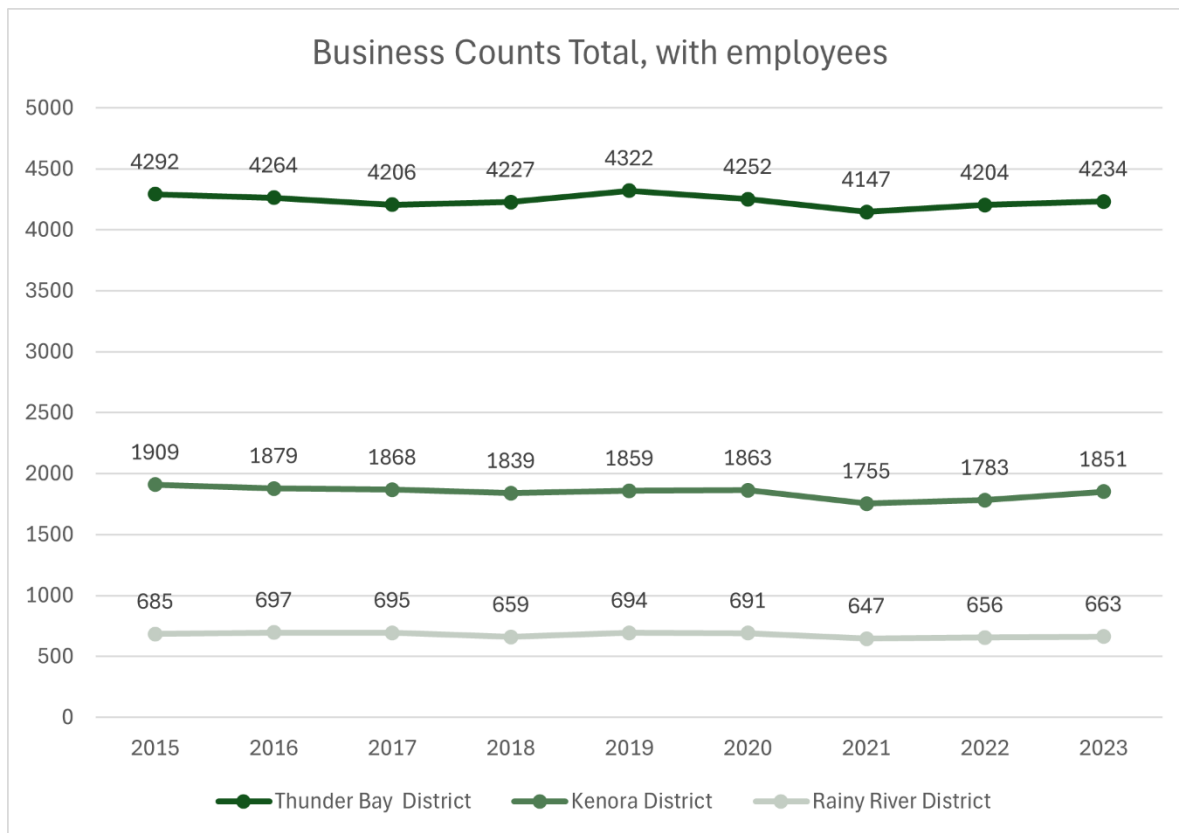
³ www.northernpolicy.ca/upload/documents/publications/reports-new/noga-unincorporated_en.01.03.2021.pdf

⁴ Canadian business counts, establishment and location counts, employment size and North American Industry Classification System (NAICS), June 2015-2023

⁵ This figure was calculated using a definition of “tourism” related businesses from the University of British Columbia [Industry Codes \(NAICS\) | Small Business Accelerator \(ubc.ca\)](https://www.ubc.ca/industry_codes)

As Figure 1 demonstrates, over the last decade the number of businesses in Northwestern Ontario (again, excluding single person firms) has been flat. Recognizing this lack of growth as a fundamental problem, NOMA has focused this plan on actions that will make Northwestern Ontario more attractive to private sector investment. Not just to attract new investors, but to also encourage existing investors to stay, grow their current businesses, and to start new ones - regardless of the industry they are in. The objective is to create an environment where businesspeople see themselves, their businesses, and their employees flourishing.

Figure 1 – Number of Businesses (with employees)



A Collaborative Plan

This plan was developed through engagement with municipal leaders, economic developers, and various NOMA partners from across Northwestern Ontario. Working collaboratively, we identified regional priorities and explored the need for a regional action plan to support our communities in their local economic development efforts. The process included:

- **A survey to municipalities around the region:** Municipalities participated in a survey as part of NOMA's Strategic Plan to identify and prioritize prominent issues experienced by Northwestern Ontario municipalities. A second survey circulated to municipalities in Fall 2023 identified strong support for NOMA to develop a regional Northwestern Ontario Economic Development Plan.
- **Engaged discussion with economic developers:** Economic development officers from each Northwestern Ontario district including Thunder Bay, Kenora, and Rainy River and the City of Thunder Bay were represented in these discussions. They provided insight into the specific needs of the communities that make up our diverse region.
- **Virtual discussion and creation of a working group:** A working group was established to assist in the crafting of this plan. It comprised stakeholders from various sectors in the region, including tourism, forestry, and energy. The group participated in a series of discussions to design and deliver this plan, set priorities for actions and initiatives, clarify the urgent needs of the region, and foster a holistic approach to economic development. (see Appendix C - The Northwestern Ontario Economic Plan Working Group).

NOMA also gathered a cross section of existing economic development plans that have been developed by NOMA members and partners over the last number of years. Table 1 lists the plans that were reviewed for ideas and common themes that could inform a regional plan. We explored each individual plan seeking common priorities and overarching objectives. How items were selected for inclusion in this plan will be described in the sections entitled “Focus on Items that Impact Investment” and “Focus on SMART Goals”.

Table 1 – Existing Plans & Studies Used to Identify Regional Priorities and Action Items

Name	Municipality/ Resource
1. Growth Plan for Northern Ontario	Ontario
2. Strategic Plan 2021-2025	Township of Manitouwadge
3. Economic Development Strategy	Township of Nipigon
4. 2023-2027 Strategic Action Plan Update Final Report	Municipality of Machin
5. 10 Year Community Development Strategic Plan	Township of Red Rock
6. Community Strategic Plan	Township of Terrace Bay
7. 2023-2025 Strategic Action Plan	Thunder Bay Community Economic Development Commission
8. Prosperity and Growth Strategy for Northern Ontario	Federal Economic Development Agency for Northern Ontario
9. Dryden Economic Development and Tourism Strategy	City of Dryden
10. Township of Ignace Community Strategy-Explore our Possibilities 2019-2024	Township of Ignace
11. Strategic Plan 2023- 2027	Town of Fort Frances
12. Strategic Plan Planning to Succeed: 2020- 2023	Township of Hornepayne
13. 5-year Tourism and Economic Development Strategy	City of Kenora
14. Strategic Plan 2020-2024	Municipality of Neebing
15. 2022 Community Economic Development Strategy	Township of Sioux Narrows- Nestor Falls
16. 2020-2025 Strategic Plan	Municipality of Sioux Lookout
17. Destination Northern Ontario Study	Destination Northern Ontario
18. Northern Ontario transportation task force final report	Province of Ontario
19. Building a Digital Ontario	Ontario
20. 2022 Progress 10-year Housing and Homelessness Plan	Kenora District Service Board
21. The Future of Inter-Community Bus Service in Northwestern Ontario	Common Voice Northwest
22. Kenora District Housing Strategy	Kenora District Services Board
23. Connecting the North: A Draft Transportation Plan for Northern Ontario	Ontario Ministry of Transportation

A Plan to Grow Private Investment

To attract, retain, or grow local businesses you first must understand what drives private investment. One way to do this is by looking to site selectors and the literature around site selection. Table 2 summarizes a sample of site selection resources to highlight the most common factors driving site selection decisions. There are four factors that are on every list: *Access to Skilled Labour, Quality of Life, Utilities & Local Infrastructure, and Access to Market*. It seems these are the four factors most likely to influence site selectors and the companies that use them.

A fifth factor was added to this initial list of four: *Housing*. Housing is not always treated as a part of the “economic development” envelope. Particularly as economic development relates to federal and provincial programs to support entrepreneurship, innovation, and investment. Nevertheless, housing is a significant factor that can support or constrain private investment. The significant impacts the current national housing crisis is having on both access to labour and quality of life are proof of that. The decision to add housing as a fifth priority area also reflects the urgency currently assigned to the issue by the federal and provincial governments. Furthermore, housing has been (and remains) a critical issue in many First Nations and in many municipalities where growth is constrained due to lack of housing.

Table 2 – A Sample of Top Ten Site Selection Criteria by Priority b

	List 1 ⁶	List 2 ⁷	List 3 ⁸	List 4 ⁹	List 5 ¹⁰	Average Score	Final Rank
Access to Skilled Labour	2	2	3	1	2	2	1
Quality of Life	4	1	2	9	7	5	2
Infrastructure & Public Services	5	7	4	8	3	5	3
Access to Market	7	4	6	6	1	5	4
Location Incentives	3	5	10*	5	6	6	5
Construction/Land Costs	10*	6	5	4	4	6	6
Responsive Business Environment	6	8	9	3	5	6	7
Cost of Labour	10*	10*	1	2	10*	7	8
Corporate Taxes	1	10*	7	10*	10*	8	9
Proximity to Market/Suppliers	10*	3	10*	7	10*	8	10
Cost of Energy	10*	10*	8	10*	10*	10	11

*Where a list did not cite a factor, it was scored at a 10 for averaging purposes

⁶ <https://siteselection.com/issues/2024/jan/here-come-the-boys-from-the-south.cfm>

⁷ <https://www.thinkcurrutuck.com/blog/what-site-selectors-really-want-9-things-no-corporate-relocation-can-resist#:~:text=Site%20selectors%20are%20keen%20on,the%20company%20time%20and%20money.>

⁸ <https://www.areadevelopment.com/corporate-consultants-survey-results/q1-2023/37th-annual-corporate-survey-decision-makers-feel-economic-presures.shtml>

⁹ <https://info.siteselectiongroup.com/blog/17-site-selection-best-practices-to-consider-before-searching-for-your-next-location>

¹⁰ <https://researchfdi.com/resources/articles/the-power-of-informed-decisions-site-selection-principles-and-best-practices/>

This regional economic plan is predicated on the idea of “stronger together”. The goals set out here are meant to strengthen NOMA, NOMA’s members, and NOMA’s partners. First Nations are central to the growth and prosperity of everyone living in Northwestern Ontario. To encourage growth for all, NOMA and its other partners must be committed to supporting First Nations to grow and achieve their aspirations as well. In 2024 no one should be left behind.

Just focusing on these five priority areas eliminated a considerable number of potential goals and actions from the regional plan. Of note are two groups of ideas that were present in large volume in the plans reviewed. Ideas that were not carried over into this plan as they were not identified as priority factors that drive investment decisions. The first was marketing. Almost every plan reviewed included multiple goals to expand, enhance, or better target marketing efforts and advertising. The second was improving the business environment through reducing red tape, enhancing incentives, or otherwise making it easier to secure permits and approvals. Reading through existing plans and strategies there is a clear sense that communities see their own processes as needing a serious overhaul. While business practices did appear on the top ten list of items site selectors consider when advising for or against investment, the issue did not crack the top three and so these actions are also excluded from the regional plan.

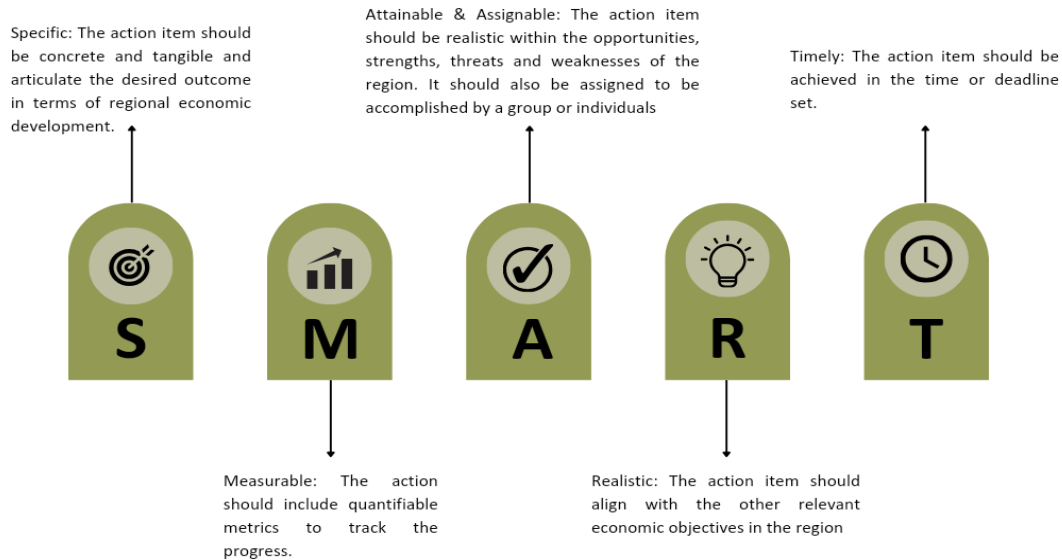
It is important to note that this does not mean that better marketing and improved business climate are not important. It simply means that from the perspective of attracting private investment in the form of business attraction, retention, and growth they are less urgent than other items. (Although it is recognized that once plans for growth have been implemented there will be a need to communicate the strengths of the individual communities in order to attract investment.)

Focus on SMART Goals

Having identified five priority areas for action, the second step to reduce the number of goals (and supporting actions) included in this plan was to ask whether the goal was specific, measurable, assignable, realistic, and time-delimited (e.g. whether it is a S.M.A.R.T. goal see Figure 2).

Each shortlisted action taken from a survey, an existing local or regional plan, or suggestions taken from NOMA partners or Working Group members was assessed based on the S.M.A.R.T. criteria. Only those that met the criteria are included in the plan.

Figure 2 – Defining S.M.A.R.T. Goals



To better understand the operation of the two-stage screening of:

- 1) “Is this a top three influencer of investment decisions?” and,
- 2) “Is it a SMART goal?”, consider the following examples:

The *Tourism Modification Pilot Project* referenced in Table 1 includes the following goals:

Undertake an assessment of current and future demographics of resource-based tourism and examine the most appropriate digital marketing tools to attract this demographic to Northwestern Ontario.

Engage resource-based tourism operators to develop and implement a social media marketing campaign utilizing multiple social media platforms such as Instagram and Snapchat, as well as tactics such as social media influencers and photo tagging.

These goals do not meet the criteria outlined for SMART goals. While they are both actionable and realistic, neither of them is specific, measurable, or set to a defined timeline. Furthermore, they deal with enhanced marketing, a factor that is not routinely identified as a leading factor influencing investment decisions.

In contrast, the *Building a Digital Ontario Plan* includes the following:

Ensure 100% of the residents of Northwestern Ontario have access to internet speeds equivalent to 50 Megabits per second download and 10 Megabits per second uploads by the end of 2025.

This goal undoubtedly impacts access to market, one of the top four things that influence private investment decisions. Considering the recent growth in working from home, this goal also impacts access to labour, the number one factor that site selectors see as influencing investment choices.

Furthermore, this goal is specific, measurable, assignable, realistic and time delimited. This goal, therefore, does appear in the regional plan.

Where More Study is Needed

The preference for this plan is not to outline where Northwestern leaders should “explore” or “study” but where they should “act”. Of course, there are and will be many issues where further exploration and research is needed. Those items should be considered during future periods set aside to review and reflect on the actions that are set out and prioritized within this plan. This plan after all is meant as a living document, to be revised and updated regularly as experience and circumstances require.

Goals Overview

In this plan NOMA has set out 15 goals for Northwestern Ontario to achieve over the next decade. Those 15 goals are listed below. The rest of this document contains the analysis underlying these goals and lists proposed actions that could be undertaken to achieve the desired goals. The actions are broken up into three categories: actions that NOMA **will** take, actions that the provincial and federal governments **should** take, and actions that NOMA's many partners **could** take.

Focus for Action 1- Access to Skilled Labour

Goal 1: Increase the number of Indigenous individuals who are employed in Northwestern Ontario by 2% a year from 2025 to 2035.

Goal 2: Increase the migration (interprovincial, intraprovincial, and international) of people under 40 to the following levels by 2025 and stay at or above these figures until 2035:

- Thunder Bay Census Division – 1000
- Kenora Census Division – 200
- Rainy River Census Division – 100

Goal 3: Enhance quality and access to Labour Market Information across the region so that:

- a. By 2025 ensure labour market information (including existing skills inventory, expected retirements by job type, and projected workforce demand) is readily available and updated at least annually for every municipality with a population greater than 1000.
- b. By 2030 similar information is available for every municipality and unorganized area.

Focus for Action 2- Quality of Life

Goal 4: By 2030 60% of Northwestern Ontario's population, and by 2035 80% of Northwestern Ontario's population should be:

- a. within a 30-minute drive of a library, neighbourhood park, primary education, childcare, grocery store, or pharmacy.
- b. within a 60-minute drive of in-person access to government services, health care, post-secondary education, and a recreation facility (pool, rink, recreation centre).

Goal 5: Improve the public "face" of our region so that:

- By 2030 50% of Northwestern Ontario's communities should have completed an entrance, rehabilitation, and beautification project.
- By 2035 100% of Northwestern Ontario's communities should have done so.

Goal 6: Continue to improve high speed internet and cellular access throughout Northwestern Ontario so that:

- By 2025 100% of Northwestern Ontario's population has access to internet services with download speeds of 50 Mbps and upload speeds of 10 Mbps.
- By 2030 100% of communities with a population greater than 10,000 have access to internet services with download speed of 100 Mbps and upload speeds of 30 Mbps.

- By 2035 75% of Northwestern Ontario's population has access to internet services with download speed of 100 Mbps and upload speeds of 30 Mbps.
- By 2025 all remaining gaps in cellular coverage along the primary and secondary highway systems have been measured and accurately mapped based on direct measurement and not tower range estimation.
- By 2030 50% of the identified cellular coverage gaps by confirmed coverage from a least two national cellular networks.
- By 2035 100% of primary and secondary highways in Northwestern Ontario have confirmed coverage for their full length from at least two national cellular networks.

Focus for Action 3- Infrastructure & Public Services

Goal 7: Continue to enhance and improve the electrical transmission infrastructure in Northwestern Ontario by ensuring that:

- By 2030 all communities at the end of existing radial lines will either have parallel/looped transmission lines in place or sufficient local generation has been established to provide a second source of supply.
- By 2030 25% of the transmission and distribution lines identified as having "aged out" will have been replaced.
- By 2035 all of remaining transmission and distribution lines that have "aged out" will have been replaced.
- By 2035 a plan is in place to replace/upgrade transmission and distribution lines going forward so that we do not find ourselves being serviced by "aged out" infrastructure in the future.

Goal 8: Continue to improve scheduled mass transit between communities in Northwestern Ontario so that:

- By 2030, a 7-day a week, same-day, inter-community bus service is in place between:
 - Emo and Thunder Bay
 - Winnipeg and Thunder Bay
 - Greenstone (Longlac) and Thunder Bay
 - White River and Thunder Bay
- The link between Northwestern Ontario and Northeastern Ontario is maintained but shortened to run from White River to Sault St Marie (and beyond).
- By 2035 a separate community shuttle service is in place to feed passengers located on secondary highways into the primary Northwest intercommunity bus service.

Goal 9: Continue to make the primary and secondary highways in Northwestern Ontario safer and more welcoming by ensuring that:

- By 2030 at least 75% of the communities accessible from the primary highway network and 50% of those accessible from the secondary highway network should have signage similar or equivalent to that on Highway 401 for services, attractions, and facilities at highway intersections.

- By 2035 at least 90% of the communities accessible from the primary highway network and 80% of those accessible from the secondary highway network should have signage similar or equivalent to that on Highway 401 for services, attractions, and facilities at highway intersections.
- By 2030 100% of the communities on the primary highway network and 100% of those on the secondary highway network should have distance-to-service warnings for gas, restaurant, accommodation, and comfort facilities immediately before entering each municipality or settlement.
- By 2030 100% of the primary highway network should have access to functional and well-equipped year-round facilities (public or private) with restrooms at intervals no greater than 100km.
- By 2035 100% of the secondary highway network should have access to functional and well-equipped year-round facilities (public or private) with restrooms at intervals no greater than 100km.

Focus for Action 4- Access to Market

Goal 10: Improve affordability, reliability, and safety of connections to remote communities in Northwestern Ontario by ensuring that:

- By 2030, 3 remote runways in Northwestern Ontario have been extended by a minimum of 500 meters provided the community supports such an extension.
- By 2035, at least 5 more remote runways in Northwestern Ontario have been extended by a minimum of 500 meters provided the community supports such an extension.
- By 2030 at least 200 kilometers of “winter roads” have been upgraded to “all season” roads provided the affected communities support such infrastructure investments.
- By 2035 at least another 200 kilometers of “winter roads” have been upgraded to “all season” roads provided the affected communities support such infrastructure investments.

Goal 11: Accelerate improvements to the safety and capacity of the highway system in Northwestern Ontario by ensuring that:

- By 2030 all current twinning projects that have passed the preliminary planning stage as of 2025 are completed.
- By 2030 plans are in place to implement a 2 plus1 highway system for the entire length of any un-twinning sections of the primary highways¹¹ from the Manitoba border to Sault Ste Marie
- By 2040 a 2 plus1 highway system is in place for the entire length of any un-twinning sections of the primary highways from the Manitoba border to Sault Ste Marie

¹¹ Primary Highways: These highways form the “primary” route through Northwestern Ontario, specifically:

- Highway 17 from the Manitoba border to Shabaqua Corners
- Highway 11/17 from Shabaqua Corners to Sistonens Corner
- Highway 102 from Sistonens Corner to Thunder Bay
- Highway 11/17 from Thunder Bay to Nipigon
- Highway 17 from Nipigon to White River

- By 2035 plans are in place to implement a 2 plus1 highway system for the entire length of the secondary highways¹² in Northwestern Ontario.
- By 2045 a 2 plus1 highway system is in place for the entire length of the secondary highways in Northwestern Ontario.

Goal 12: Enhance the viability and sustainability of municipal airports throughout Northwestern Ontario by ensuring that:

- By 2025 100% of municipal airports can qualify for federal or provincial capital and operating assistance.
- By 2030 at least 75% of municipal airports have regularly scheduled service for at least six months of the year.

Focus for Action 5- Housing

Goal 13: Continue to improve housing accessible to seniors so that:

- By 2030, 50% of municipalities with more than 1000 in population should have at least one senior's complex with access to reasonable assisted living supports.
- By 2035, 75% of municipalities with more than 1000 in population should have at least one senior's complex with access to reasonable assisted living supports.

Goal 14: Continue to improve housing for at-risk populations so that:

- By 2030 municipalities with a population greater than 10,000 have the ability to house at least 75% of their previous five-year average of at-risk populations in affordable and supportive housing.
- By 2035 municipalities with a population greater than 10,000 have the ability to house at least 90% of their previous five-year average of at-risk populations in affordable and supportive housing.

Goal 15: Continue to improve housing affordability in Northwestern Ontario so that:

- By 2025 60% of Northwestern Ontario's population has access to housing that does not cost more than 30% of their annual income.
- By 2030 80% of Northwestern Ontario's population has access to housing that does not cost more than 30% of their annual income.
- By 2035 90% of Northwestern Ontario's population has access to housing that does not cost more than 30% of their annual income.

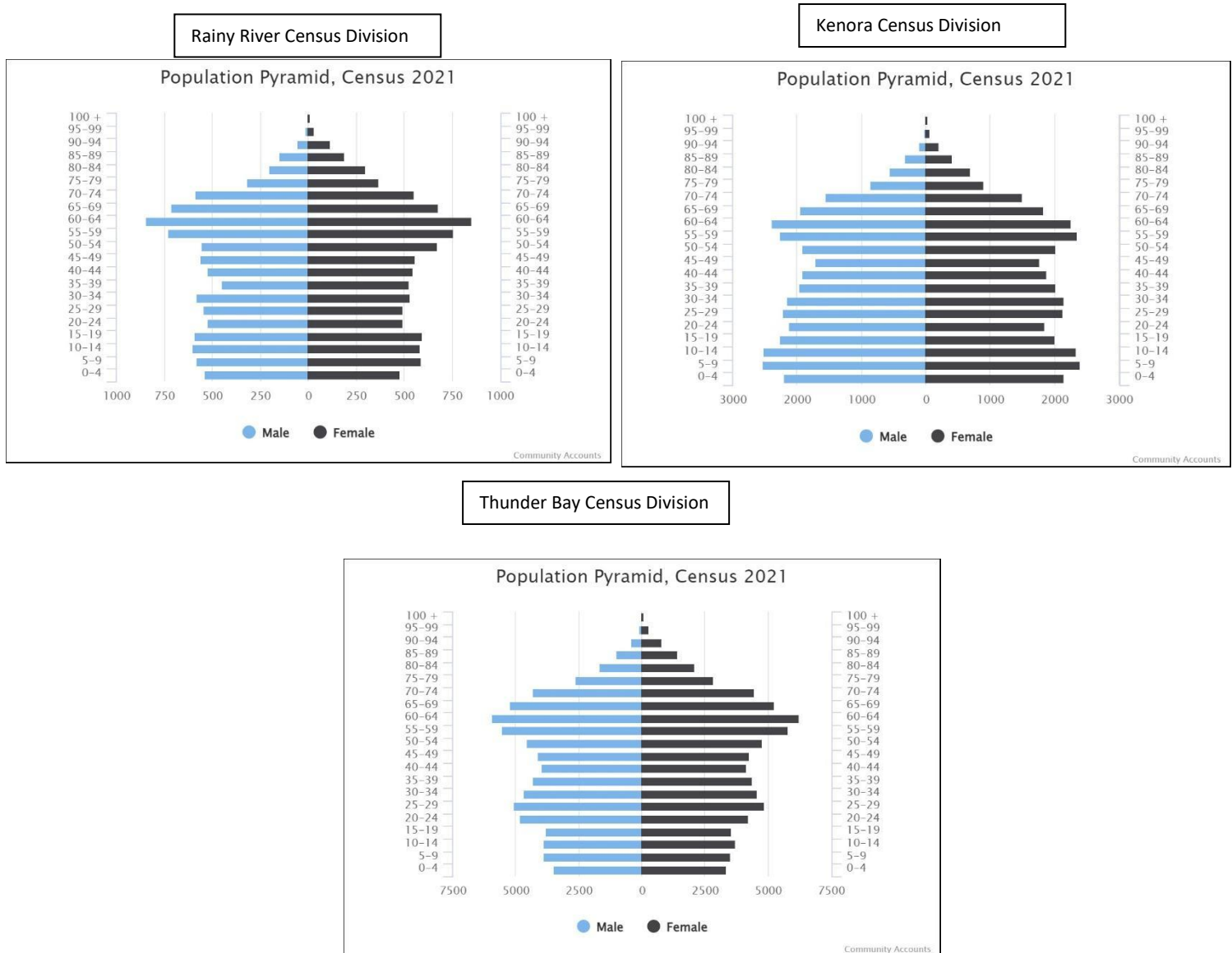
¹² Secondary Highways: These highways serve or connect "larger" population centres that are not on or proximate to a primary highway to the primary system, specifically:

- Highway 11 from the US border to Shabaqua Corners
- Highway 11 from Nipigon to the Thunder Bay census division boundary

Focus for Action 1 – Access to Skilled Labour

Regional economic development depends on the ability to attract, retain, and develop the workforce. Accessing labour has become a challenge in Northwestern Ontario, as it has elsewhere in Canada and globally. With an aging population more people retire and fewer enter the workforce. Only the District of Kenora (see Figure 3) has a more sustainable population pattern with a large cohort of young people balancing out the population nearing retirement age.

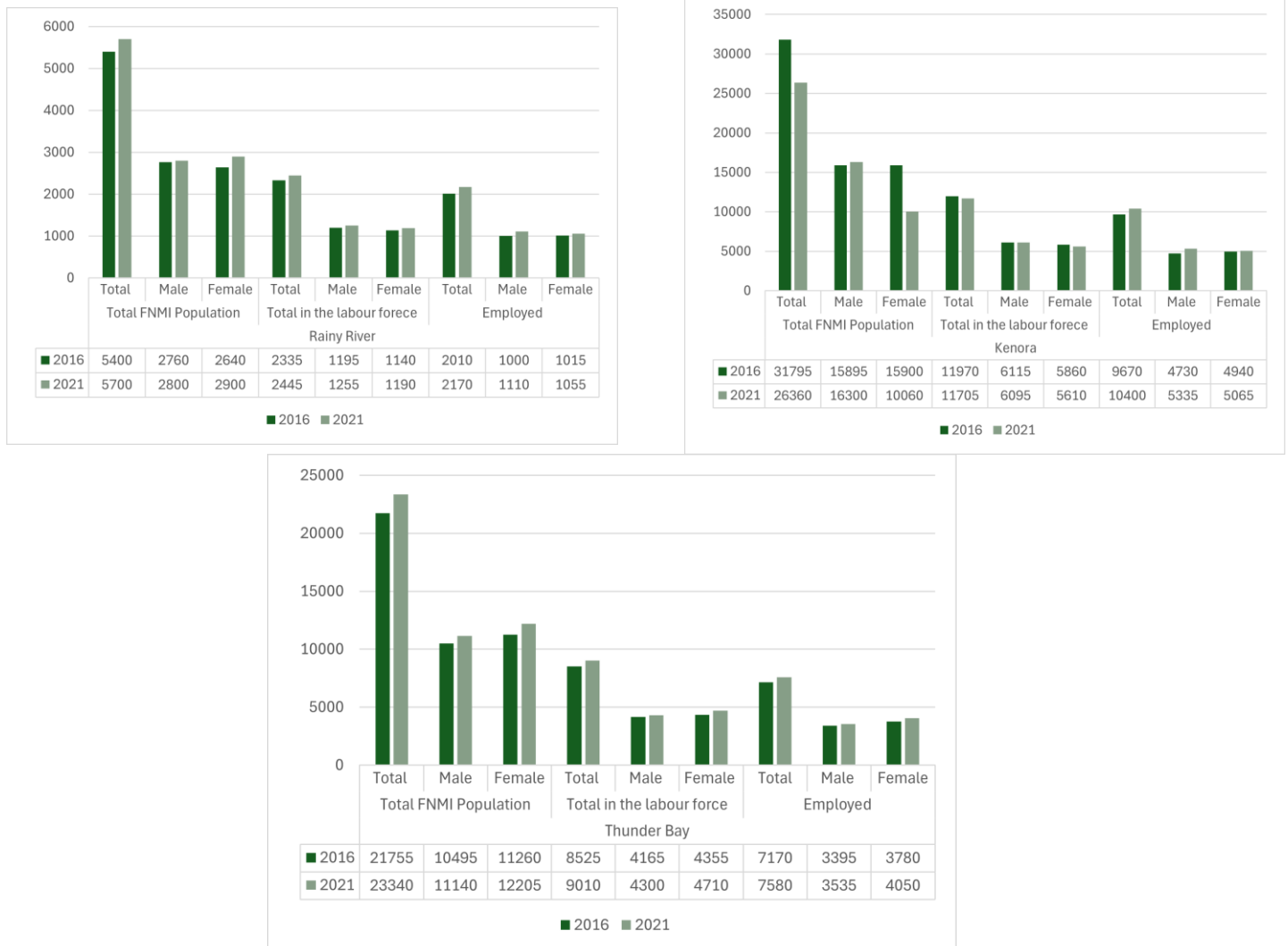
Figure 3 – Population Pyramids 2021



Improving Labour Market Outcomes for Indigenous Peoples

Growing the overall labour pool is important for economic development and growth in the region. First Nation and Métis people who choose to participate in the labour market, for example, continue to see outcomes below the Canadian norm. Continuing to work on the issues and barriers preventing these individuals from fully realizing their career aspirations is critical to the future of Northwestern Ontario. As Figure 4 highlights, progress has been made in this area, but it is painfully slow.

Figure 4 – Labour Market Participation of FNMI Individuals



In discussing these ongoing challenges with the Northwestern Economic Plan Working Group members and other key partners, it became clear that continued, gradual growth was an appropriate and reasonable target for progress in this area.¹³

Goal 1: Increase the number of Indigenous individuals who are employed in Northwestern Ontario by 2% a year from 2025 to 2035.

Actions in pursuit of this goal

1. In pursuit of this goal NOMA will:
 - a. Create a First Nations, Métis and Inuit (FNMI) liaison committee to identify priority areas where NOMA can lend its support to initiatives that will help this population access and enter the labour force.
 - b. Through its FNMI liaison committee, meet with FNMI leadership, service institutions, and community organizations at least four times a year to promote mutual understanding and identify common goals.
 - c. Work with industry partners and municipalities to identify employment opportunities within the community, and actively share this information to First Nations, and Métis communities in the surrounding areas.
 - d. Collaborate with industry partners and municipalities to develop and aid in the implementation of succession planning strategies. These strategies aim to determine when job vacancies become available, to secure the workforce needed to fill the vacancy and to ensure that there is progression within the industry.
 - e. Advocate for cultural training opportunities to be expanded and utilized when an organization wants to hire Indigenous individuals.
2. The Province of Ontario should:
 - a. Continue to support and expand labour market training and supports for FNMI youth and individuals in transition.
 - b. Continue to support and expand funding for the Ontario Summer Employment Opportunities program, aiming at extending the standard duration of the positions to 16 weeks and to give opportunities for Indigenous youth to gain job experience.
 - c. Launch a pilot mentorship program for Indigenous individuals to create opportunities for professional growth but also focused on elevating educational attainment levels. Through mentorship, Indigenous individuals will be guided to skills and qualification advancement.
3. Canada should:
 - a. Continue to support and increase funding for the Canada Summer Student aiming at extending the standard duration of the positions from 8 weeks to 16 weeks Program to increase FNMI student job opportunities.

¹³ NOMA wishes to especially thank John DiGiacomo at Anishinabek Employment and Training Services and Jordan Hatton, Director of Economic Development, Bingwi Neyaashi Anishinaabek (Sand Point First Nation) for taking the time for extended discussions on this question.

- b. Launch a pilot within the Canada Summer Jobs program to cover 16-week placements for FNMI candidates.
4. First Nations, and Métis communities could consider:
 - a. Joining local boards and commissions to ensure the perspective of First Nations, and Métis communities are represented.
 - b. Working with local agencies and community groups to connect First Nations youth to cross-cultural opportunities and work experience.
 - c. Meeting and working with Local Agencies & Not for Profits and the private sector to identify non-cultural barriers to workforce participation (e.g. transportation, childcare, housing) and experiment with means to overcome them (subsidies, direct supply, coordinating crowd sourced solutions (ride sharing)).
5. Individual Municipalities could consider:
 - a. Hiring indigenous students and indigenous graduates.
 - b. Contributing to the work of local First Nation and Métis organizations working to bring indigenous youth into the workforce. This support can be either financial or through volunteer hours of staff and elected officials.
 - c. Working with industry partners and NOMA to identify employment opportunities within the community, and actively share this information to First Nation and Métis communities in the surrounding areas.
 - d. Collaborating with industry partners and NOMA to develop and implement succession planning strategies. These strategies aim to determine when job vacancies become available, to secure the workforce needed to fill the vacancy and to ensure that there is progression within the industry.
6. Major Institutions could consider:
 - a. Providing cultural supports and workplace training opportunities for indigenous students and for indigenous residents who are not students.
 - b. Fostering partnerships with industry for easy pathways for indigenous student work placements and recent graduate employment.
 - c. Offering supportive services for the broader indigenous population, like on campus public events celebrating diverse cultures and encouraging cross cultural experiences.
7. Local Agencies & Not for Profits could consider:
 - a. Continuing to provide community connections for housing, healthcare, language, and other essential services.
 - b. Offering recreation and cultural programs for community engagement.
 - c. Meeting and working with First Nations, Métis communities, and the private sector to identify non-cultural barriers to workforce participation (e.g. transportation, childcare, housing) and experiment with means to overcome them (subsidies, direct supply, coordinating crowd sourced solutions (ride sharing))

8. Community Organizations could consider:
 - a. Continuing to provide community connections by hosting events on campus or for students off campus.
 - b. Continuing to provide community connections by hosting events for or with indigenous peoples and indigenous support agencies.
 - c. Offering recreation and cultural programs for community engagement.
 - d. Recruit indigenous students and indigenous community members as volunteers and/or paid summer students.

9. The Private Sector could consider:
 - a. Hiring indigenous students and indigenous graduates.
 - b. Providing work-based learning opportunities to develop work experience and to assist in transitioning community competencies to a workplace context.
 - c. Sponsoring public events celebrating diverse cultures and encouraging cross cultural experiences.
 - d. Contributing to the work of local First Nation and Métis organizations working to bring indigenous youth into the workforce. This support can be either financial or through volunteer hours of staff and elected officials.
 - e. Attending training and cultural learning events. Set aside times for employees to attend cultural training opportunities.
 - f. Meeting and working with Local Agencies & Not for Profits, First Nations, and Métis communities to identify non-cultural barriers to workforce participation (e.g. transportation, childcare, housing) and experiment with means to overcome them (subsidies, direct supply, coordinating crowd sourced solutions (ride sharing))

Growing the Labour Pool through Immigration & Migration

With Canada's birth rate reaching an all-time low in 2022 (1.33 children per woman) ¹⁴ growing the domestic population has limited potential as a short to medium term solution for the labour shortage. It should be noted that birthrates among Indigenous peoples is well above that of the general population. But even as the Indigenous population grows, it remains an overall small contributor to the total population generally and to the labour force specifically. In terms of resolving the labour shortage, increased migration is then, a necessary part of the solution.

Northwestern Ontario must improve its ability to attract and retain people from other parts of the province, the country, and the world. The good news is, this effort has been underway for some time now, and is showing results. As shown in Figure 5, the factors that have contributed to very recent positive population trends in Northwestern Ontario.

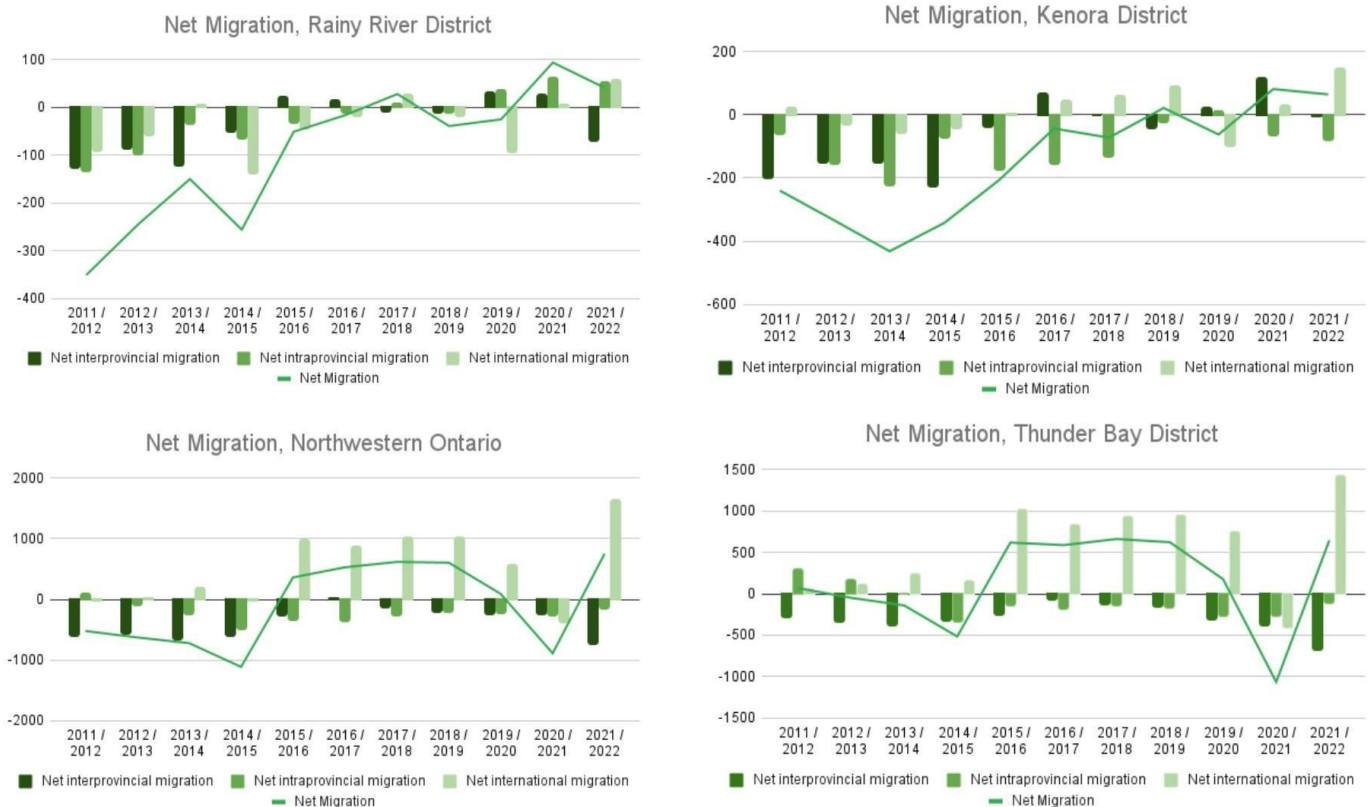
While recent trends are impressive, we still have work to do. In 2017 the Northern Policy Institute (NPI) estimated that to maintain the Northwest's productivity and standard of living at current levels we would need to attract 1861 newcomers to the region, on average, every year

¹⁴ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/240131/dq240131c-eng.htm>

until 2041.¹⁵ It is also important to note that for maximum economic benefit the majority of these new arrivals need to have a considerable number of productive years ahead of them in the workplace.

In 2019 NPI went further and calculated sustainable net-migration targets for every community in Northern Ontario. Based on the historical levels of successful net migration in communities of similar size across Canada NPI estimated, for example, that Oliver Paipoonge could absorb 86 new arrivals a year, Sioux Narrows-Nestor Falls could welcome 28, Terrace Bay 38, and Dryden 111.¹⁶

Figure 5 – Components of Population Change



¹⁵ www.northernpolicy.ca/upload/documents/presentations/2017/draft_presentation_thunderbaylip_bilingu.pdf

¹⁶ www.northernpolicy.ca/upload/documents/publications/commentaries-new/commentary-zefi_newcomers-4-en.pdf

Goal 2: Increase the migration (interprovincial, intraprovincial, and international) of people under 40 to the following levels by 2025 and stay at or above these figures until 2035:

- Thunder Bay Census Division – 1000
- Kenora Census Division – 200
- Rainy River Census Division – 100

Actions in pursuit of this goal

1. In pursuit of this goal NOMA will:
 - a. Advocate for population growth and the need for greater migration to Northwestern Ontario in meetings or briefing with local MPs and MPPs
 - b. Advocate for population growth and the need for greater migration to Northwestern Ontario in meetings or briefing with key federal or provincial ministers.
 - c. Advocate for a set-aside in the Ontario provincial nominee program of 1000 spaces dedicated to Northwestern Ontario.
 - d. Advocate for the inclusion of at least two new Northwestern communities or regions in the new *Rural Community Immigration Pilot*.
 - e. Advocate for the inclusion of at least one new Northwestern community in the *Francophone Community Immigration Pilot*.
 - f. Advocate for the permanent inclusion of Northwestern Ontario with a designated set-aside of at least 1000 immigrants per year as well as an allocation of appropriate federal funding under any new permanent community driven immigration program.¹⁷
 - g. Invite their partners, when appropriate, to join a letter writing campaign to local MPs, MPPs, and key ministers to emphasize the need for greater net-migration to Northwestern Ontario and to call for set-asides in relevant provincial and federal immigration streams.
2. Province of Ontario should:
 - a. Set-aside 1000 spaces in the Ontario provincial nominee program dedicated to Northwestern Ontario.
 - b. Ensure that Northwestern Ontario is included in provincial marketing resources when promoting Ontario to international immigrants.
 - c. Ensure that provincial officials hold at least four sessions per year in Northwestern Ontario to educate local businesses about immigration and to assist them in participating in available initiatives. With another two sessions held online.
 - d. Expand funding for attraction and settlement services in Northwestern Ontario, including partnering with local communities to invest in dedicated multicultural spaces for community events and welcoming activities.

¹⁷ Between the OINP and the new community driven approaches NWO should have a minimum allocation of 2000 spaces. This will allow for natural attrition while still supporting the goal of 1800 net new migrants per year.

3. Canada should:
 - a. Ensure that at least two Northwestern communities or regions are included in the new *Rural Community Immigration Pilot (RCIP)*.
 - b. Ensure that at least one Northwestern community is included in the *Francophone Community Immigration Pilot (FCIP)* (ideally this community would be a different one than the two included in RCIP).
 - c. Specifically include Northwestern Ontario in any new permanent community driven immigration program with a designated set-aside of at least 1000 immigrants per year for the entire region. This allocation should come with appropriate federal funding for attraction and screening of that number of applicants.
 - d. Increase the number of federally supported service provider locations offering immigration and integration services to ensure that a physical office is located within 2 hours drive of every community with a population of at least 1,000 people.¹⁸
 - e. Launch a pilot expansion of the Canada Summer Jobs Program to include international students in Northwestern Ontario.¹⁹
4. First Nations, and Métis Communities could consider:
 - a. Joining the Local Immigration Partnerships to ensure First Nations and Métis perspectives are represented.
 - b. Identifying ways that immigration can enhance First Nation and Métis capacity through filling labour gaps and promoting knowledge transfer.
 - c. Working with Local Immigration partnerships to connect immigrants to existing cross-cultural opportunities.
5. Individual Municipalities could consider:
 - a. Understanding the base of their individual municipal net-migration and then set their own net-migration targets by budget cycle 2025.
 - b. Hiring international students and international graduates.
 - c. Working collaboratively to submit stronger joint or complementary proposals as part of the 2024 process to apply for the two new federal immigration pilots.
 - d. Contributing to the work of Local Immigration Partnerships and other community-based attraction, retention, and settlement initiatives either financially or through volunteer hours of staff and elected officials.
 - e. Publicly endorsing and celebrating cultural diversity through official declarations and events that make newcomers feel valued and welcomed in the community.
 - f. In partnership with the private sector, community organizations, major institutions, local agencies and not for profits implementing 'welcome packages' for new immigrants and international students that include community information, cultural orientation, and local service contacts, making the transition smoother and more welcoming.

¹⁸ Service need not be 5-day a week, but it should be a minimum of monthly service that is scheduled, reliable, and in-person.

¹⁹ Alternatively, such a pilot could be modelled on the recent success of the Rural and Northern Immigration Pilot and focus on rural and northern federal ridings.

6. Major Institutions could consider:
 - a. Providing cultural, language, and workplace training opportunities for international students and for new immigrants who are not students.
 - b. Fostering partnerships with industry for easy pathways for newcomer student work placements and recent graduate employment.
 - c. Offering supportive services for newcomers, like on campus public events celebrating diverse cultures and encouraging cross cultural experiences.
 - d. In partnership with the private sector, community organizations, local agencies and not for profits and municipalities implementing 'welcome packages' for new immigrants and international students that include community information, cultural orientation, and local service contacts, making the transition smoother and more welcoming.

7. Local Agencies & Not for Profits could consider:
 - a. Continuing to provide community connections for housing, healthcare, language, and other essential services.
 - b. Offering recreation and cultural programs for community engagement.
 - c. In partnership with the private sector, community organizations, major institutions, and municipalities implementing 'welcome packages' for new immigrants and international students that include community information, cultural orientation, and local service contacts, making the transition smoother and more welcoming.

8. Community Organizations could consider:
 - a. Continuing to provide community connections by hosting events on campus or for students off campus.
 - b. Continuing to provide community connections by hosting events for or with newcomers and newcomer support agencies.
 - c. Offering recreation and cultural programs for community engagement.
 - d. Recruiting international students and newcomers as volunteers.
 - e. In partnership with the private sector, major institutions, local agencies and not for profits and municipalities implementing 'welcome packages' for new immigrants and international students that include community information, cultural orientation, and local service contacts, making the transition smoother and more welcoming.

9. The Private Sector could consider:
 - a. Hiring international students and international graduates.
 - b. Providing work-based learning opportunities to develop Canadian experience and to assist in transitioning international competencies to the Canadian context.
 - c. Sponsoring public events celebrating diverse cultures and encouraging cross cultural experiences.
 - d. Contributing to the work of Local Immigration Partnerships and other community-based attraction, retention, and settlement initiatives either financially or through volunteer hours of staff and elected officials.

- e. Promoting an inclusive and welcoming work environment that celebrates multiculturalism and diversity, enhancing the attractiveness of Northwestern Ontario to international talent.
- f. Developing and publicizing mentorship programs that pair established Canadian professionals with international students and newcomers, fostering a sense of belonging and community connection.
- g. In partnership with individual municipalities, community organizations, major institutions, local agencies and not for profits implementing 'welcome packages' for new immigrants and international students that include community information, cultural orientation, and local service contacts, making the transition smoother and more welcoming.
- h. Identify and pursue opportunities to increase employee's wages and benefits whenever possible.

A disconnect between labour demand and labour supply.

Since 2010 the phrase “jobs without people, people without jobs”²⁰ has become commonplace when discussing labour markets in Canada. The governments of Ontario and Canada continue to aggressively make policy (and policy exceptions) to incentivize people to pursue “in demand jobs”.²¹ Unfortunately, due to data and measurement challenges for smaller populations, the focus continues to be regional in nature.²² When a region covers 526,417 square kilometers (as Northwestern Ontario does) regional measures are next to useless when local leaders are trying to attract and retain talent. If we are to effectively fill in demand jobs in a timely way at the local level over the next decade we must have access to timely data at the local level.

Goal 3: Enhance quality and access to Labour Market Information across the region so that:

- a) By 2025 ensure labour market information (including existing skills inventory, expected retirements by job type, and projected workforce demand) is readily available and updated at least annually for every municipality with a population greater than 1000.
- b) By 2030 similar information is available for every municipality and unorganized area.

²⁰http://minerandminer.ca/data/CO_PWJ_Brochure_CAN_2010_v4.pdf

²¹ <https://www.ontario.ca/page/oinp-employer-job-offer-demand-skills-stream>

²² <https://www.services.labour.gov.on.ca/labourmarket/regions.xhtml?lang=en>

Actions in pursuit of this goal

1. In pursuit of this goal NOMA will:
 - a. Advocate for funding and resources from provincial and federal government to support the development and maintenance of a publicly available centralized labour market information platform that is all inclusive.
 - b. Advocate for funding from the provincial and federal government to support data collection in Northwestern Ontario.
 - c. Advocate for funding from the provincial and federal government for educational and training programs that align with labour market needs in the region.

2. Province of Ontario should:
 - a. Define a minimum set of labour market measures to be made available by an entity designated by the province to monitor the regional labour market. This data should be made available at the community level and be comparable to data available for every community in Ontario.
 - b. Mandate the provision of Labour Market Information directly to all secondary schools on and off reserve, with a focus on replacement demand and forecast labour demand data to ensure students are aware of what jobs will be available in the near future.
 - c. Mandate the provision of Labour Market Information directly to service agencies and job developers supporting at risk and underemployed populations including, for example, First Nations, Métis, newcomers, and women.
 - d. Ensure adequate funding is in place to support meeting this community level reporting on labour market demand and supply.
 - e. Expand funding for transition support and work-based learning opportunities, including apprenticeships, internships, and co-op programs in Northwestern Ontario.
 - f. Fund additional data collection in unorganized areas and in communities of less than 1000 people to ensure those communities also have access to reliable labour market information.
 - g. Work with Indigenous communities and organizations, Canada, municipalities, and others to establish and monitor the achievement of targets on indicators of education, employment, and training opportunities.
 - h. Promote local jobs and opportunities regionally, provincially, nationally, and globally.

3. Canada should:
 - a. Provide financial support to enhance the capacity for collecting and reporting labour market information at the individual community level.
 - b. Collaborate with the provincial government on labour market data collection.
 - c. Provide targeted funds to support data collection focused on students, graduates, training programs, forecast labour demand, and skills enhancement opportunities.

- d. Provide funding for initiatives aimed at providing labour market information and training to teachers and guidance counsellors targeting high schools in collaboration with provincial government and municipalities.
4. First Nations, and Métis communities could consider:
 - a. Partnering with educational institutions and training providers to gather data on educational attainment and skill development initiatives in Indigenous communities.
 - b. Work with First Nation training institutions to complete labour market information surveys to complete internal skills databases.
 5. Individual Municipalities could consider:
 - a. Supporting initiatives aimed at improving access to labour market information for residents and businesses within the region.
 - b. Partnering with education institutions, employers, and community organizations to identify labour market needs and work-base opportunities within their communities.
 6. Local Agencies & Not for Profits could consider:
 - a. Partnering with NOMA and municipalities to facilitate the sharing and collection of labour market information within the communities.
 - b. Developing and disseminating information resources for teachers and guidance counsellors targeting high schools in Northwestern Ontario
 7. The Private Sector could consider:
 - a. Contributing and giving feedback on the sharing and collection of labour market information to ensure that it is relevant to the needs of the employers.
 - b. Collaborating with educational institutions, municipalities, workforce planning boards to provide input on the skills and labour demand required to their relevant industries for the future employment opportunities.
 - c. Investing in education and training that align with labour market needs with a particular focus on work-based learning for individuals entering the workforce.
 - d. Collaborating with high schools and education institutions to provide labour market information and training to teachers and guidance counsellors.
 - e. Promote their jobs and opportunities regionally, provincially, nationally, and globally.

Focus for Action 2 – Quality of Life

Municipal leaders know that “recreation services (including programs, community facilities, parks, and playgrounds) are highly valued by residents and contribute to the health and wellness of individuals, families, and the community itself.”²³ Potential investors and their employees look carefully at the amenities in the community before making the decision to invest or move. Tourist operators also understand the importance of these amenities in attracting visitors (and encouraging them to “come again”). In Northwestern Ontario, however, many factors (including for example: rising insurance costs²⁴, relatively small tax bases, higher construction and maintenance costs, and staffing challenges) combine to make it more difficult to deliver and maintain the level of access needed to meet demand.

Increasing Access to Quality Services

Access to public services and a mix of amenities is paramount for economic growth and business attraction and retention. Access to schools, health care, cultural experiences, entertainment, and other services make lives richer and communities stronger. Without this access it is much more difficult to attract visitors, temporary residents, and new community members.²⁵

Statistics Canada measures and reports on proximity to key services and amenities. They assign a score of 1 to the neighbourhood (in all of Canada) that is in closest proximity to the service identified and then the scores fall off from there as the relative distance to access that service grows. The District of Rainy River’s score of .0078 on “proximity to grocery store”, for example, means that, for the average neighbourhood in Rainy River, when measuring proximity to a grocery store relative to the rest of Canada, grocery stores are considerably harder to get to in Rainy River. Unfortunately, as Table 3 showcases, Northwestern Ontario scores poorly across the board on these measures, even in our urban centres.

²³ <https://www.greenstone.ca/en/news/household-survey-recreation-and-playground-masterplan.aspx>

²⁴ <http://www.noma.on.ca/upload/documents/2022-02-joint-and-several-liability.pdf>

²⁵ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/london/immigration-rural-ontario-canada-1.7106640>

Table 3 – Relative Proximity to Essential Services²⁶

	Employment	Pharmacy	Childcare	Healthcare	Grocery
Rainy River District ⁱ	0.0011	0.0087	0.0041	0.0020	0.0078
Thunder Bay District - Urban	0.0121	0.0154	0.0253	0.0101	0.0184
Thunder Bay District - Rural	0.0003	0.0017	0.0013	0.0007	0.0045
Kenora District - Urban	0.0042	0.0255	0.0102	0.0057	0.0237
Kenora District - Rural	0.0009	0.0062	0.0030	0.0012	0.0073
Northern Ontario Urban	0.0181	0.0504	0.0467	0.0168	0.0480
Northern Ontario Rural	0.0042	0.0564	0.0194	0.0056	0.0503
Ontario Urban	0.1180	0.0883	0.1236	0.0777	0.0801
Ontario Rural	0.0098	0.0474	0.0262	0.0104	0.0934

Noteⁱ: There are no urban areas in the Rainy River District.

	Education (Primary)	Education (Secondary)	Library	Parks	Transit
Rainy River District ⁱ	0.0121	0.0118	0.0119	0.0045	0.0000
Thunder Bay District - Urban	0.0548	0.0393	0.0085	0.0259	0.0136
Thunder Bay District - Rural	0.0217	0.0235	0.0126	0.0037	0.0000
Kenora District - Urban	0.0325	0.0107	0.0279	0.0088	0.0000
Kenora District - Rural	0.0121	0.0150	0.0117	0.0062	0.0000
Northern Ontario Urban	0.1002	0.0934	0.0457	0.0658	0.0308
Northern Ontario Rural	0.0863	0.0937	0.0744	0.0483	0.0000
Ontario Urban	0.1444	0.1396	0.0660	0.0873	0.0707
Ontario Rural	0.0412	0.0808	0.0500	0.0606	0.0079

Noteⁱ: There are no urban areas in the Rainy River District.

²⁶ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/17-26-0002/172600022023001-eng.htm>

In calculating the proximity scores presented in Table 3, Statistics Canada has defined a basic level of desired access for ten services it has labelled “essential”. The “target” distances for each service are:

- **Proximity to employment:** Indicates whether at least one source of employment exists within the boundaries of a dissemination block of a driving distance of 10 km.
- **Proximity to pharmacies:** Indicates whether at least one pharmacy or drug store exists within the boundaries of a dissemination block of a walking distance of 1 km.
- **Proximity to Childcare:** Indicates whether at least one childcare facility exists within the boundaries of a dissemination block of a walking distance of 1.5 km.
- **Proximity to Healthcare:** Indicates whether at least one health facility exists within the boundaries of a dissemination block of a driving distance of 3 km.
- **Proximity to Grocery Stores:** Indicates whether at least one grocery store exists within the boundaries of a dissemination block of a walking distance of 1 km.
- **Proximity to Primary and Secondary Education:** Indicates whether at least one primary education facility exists within the boundaries of a dissemination block of a walking distance of 1.5 km. Indicates whether at least one secondary education facility exists within the boundaries of a dissemination block of a walking distance of 1.5 km.
- **Proximity to Libraries:** Indicates whether at least one library exists within the boundaries of a dissemination block of a 1.5 km walking distance.
- **Proximity to Neighbourhood Parks:** Indicates whether at least one park exists within the boundaries of a dissemination block of a 1 km walking distance.
- **Proximity to Public Transit:** Indicates whether at least one transit stop exists within the boundaries of a dissemination block of a 1 km walking distance.

Goal 4: By 2030 60% of Northwestern Ontario’s population, and by 2035 80% of Northwestern Ontario’s population should be:

- a) within a 30-minute drive of a library, neighbourhood park, primary education, childcare, grocery store, or pharmacy.
- b) within a 60-minute drive of in-person access to government services, health care, post-secondary education, and a recreation facility (pool, rink, recreation centre).

Actions in pursuit of this goal

1. In pursuit of this goal NOMA will:
 - a. Advocate for provincial and federal support for continued development of essential services around the region.
 - b. Advocate for improved infrastructure and transportation networks, so there is a reduction in travel times between communities for essential services.
 - c. Collaborate with municipalities, to identify the priority needs and areas for the development of service centers.

- d. Advocate for increased funding for the development, maintenance, and improvement of recreation facilities of municipalities across Northwestern Ontario.
 - e. Advocate to the provincial and federal government to create initiatives that support the sustainability and improved accessibility of recreation facilities in rural and remote communities in the region.
2. Province of Ontario should:
 - a. Allocate funding for construction and operation of service centers in underserved areas of Northwestern Ontario.
 - b. Explore the potential for “shared service locations” staffed on a fixed or predictable itinerant schedule by key service providers.
 - c. Allocate funding for the accessibility and maintenance of recreation facilities in Northwestern Ontario communities.
 - d. Provide support to municipalities for improved recreation facilities that meet the needs of the community members served.
 - e. Look at including specific line items for regional collaboration and coordination (association membership, travel, and staff time) in grants and budgets for local agencies and supported not-for-profits.
 - f. Look at including specific line items for mandatory (well defined and consistent) data collection and open data reporting in grants and budgets for local agencies and supported not-for-profits.
 3. Canada should:
 - a. Provide financial support for projects that help improve access to essential services in rural and remote communities in Northwestern Ontario.
 - b. Collaborate with the provincial and municipal government to bring better essential services to underserved communities and implement initiatives that address specifically the unique geographical needs of the region.
 - c. Continue to support and invest more resources in Community Futures organizations.
 - d. Look at including specific line items for regional collaboration and coordination (association membership, travel, and staff time) in grants and budgets for local agencies and supported not-for-profits.
 - e. Look at including specific line items for mandatory (well defined and consistent) data collection and open data reporting in grants and budgets for local agencies and supported not-for-profits.
 4. First Nations, and Metis Communities could consider:
 - a. Pursuing economic development opportunities that would provide services to the region, both on and off-reserve.
 - b. Partnering with businesses that provide services to Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, both on and off-reserve.
 5. Individual municipalities could consider:
 - a. Prioritizing the attraction of private sector providers of services absent from or difficult to access in their community (pharmacies, hotels, restaurants)

- b. Identifying mixed-use spaces that can be revitalized for community areas.
 - c. Creating public spaces that are both kid-friendly and family-friendly.
 - d. Invest in beautification of public municipal areas.
 - e. Leveraging and motivating private investment for community revitalization and beautification.
 - f. Improving the physical state and visual aesthetic of public and private properties and building around the communities.
 - g. Improving walking, cycling and accessibility conditions for the residents in the region.
 - h. Partnering and supporting the provincial government and social service sector to improve access to housing for residents and labour, particularly in healthcare, social services, and wellness programs.
 - i. Supporting organizations and local community groups that deliver programs and services within the community. Allocating resources for cross-cultural education programs for staff in the municipalities as well as the public.
 - j. Developing policies to promote diversification and inclusion among the community.
 - k. Conducting a municipal services review to determine which services need to be maintained, improved, or discontinued, ensuring community consultation is implemented.
 - l. Reviewing municipal services and programs and determine their efficiency and effectiveness and make changes where needed.
 - m. Improving and maintaining recreational facilities and programs that meet the needs of all ages.
 - n. Ensuring that safety initiatives include safe and clean physical environments and that neighbourhoods are walkable.
6. Major Institutions could consider:
- a. Expanding their services on programs and services that can reach residents in underserved and remote areas for essential services like healthcare. (Telehealth, Home Care, etc.)
7. Local Agencies & Not for Profits could consider:
- a. Advocating for projects that align with community needs and enhancement.
 - b. Providing input on development plans and mobilize community support for revitalization and beautification efforts.
8. Community Organizations could consider:
- a. Partnering with municipalities and working with local relevant agencies to explore the development and/or delivery of programs that address adequate access to health care services, enhanced and improved health care services and physical, mental, and psychological well-being.
 - b. Advocating for the needs of the community in matters related to recreation facility development and management.
 - c. Collaborating with municipalities, businesses, and others who can help and share resources to improve, maintain and increase accessibility for recreation facilities.

9. The Private Sector could consider:
 - a. Partnering with the provincial government, municipalities, and community organizations to identify if there are opportunities to have public-private partnerships to maintain or even develop essential services and facilities in the areas that are underserved.

Increasing Community Livability & Civic Pride

“The physical character and the feel of a neighborhood have a great deal to do with each other, and neighborhood beautification isn’t just a matter of impressing the neighbors or trying to make everything “perfect.” It affects the way people interact (with each other), and the way they feel not only about their neighborhood, but about themselves and their neighbors. As a result, it can make a huge difference in the quality of life in a neighborhood or a city.”²⁷ This quote comes from one of hundreds of documents, studies, and toolboxes available online that emphasize the importance of a community’s outward appearance.

Yet, in Northwestern Ontario we see brownfield properties sit ignored or abandoned for years (decades even). We see roadside infrastructure decaying and important properties left undeveloped or underdeveloped. By not treating this visual decay as the emergency it is, the message we send to ourselves and to others is one of either incapacity or indifference. That needs to change.

Goal 5: Improve the public “face” of our region so that:

- By 2030 50% of Northwestern Ontario’s communities should have completed an entrance, rehabilitation, and beautification project.
- By 2035 100% of Northwestern Ontario’s communities should have done so.

Actions in pursuit of this goal

1. In pursuit of this goal NOMA will:
 - a. Advocate to the Ontario Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs and/or the Ontario Ministry of Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing to match local funding commitments for Community Improvement Plan funding.
 - b. Advocate to the Northern Ontario Heritage Fund to continue with grants under their Community Enhancement Program to assist communities in improving the first impression of their community through beautification grants.²⁸

²⁷ <https://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/implement/physical-social-environment/neighborhood-beautification-programs/main#:~:text=Neighborhood%20beautification%20can%20improve%20neighborhood,both%20physical%20and%20psychological%20health.>

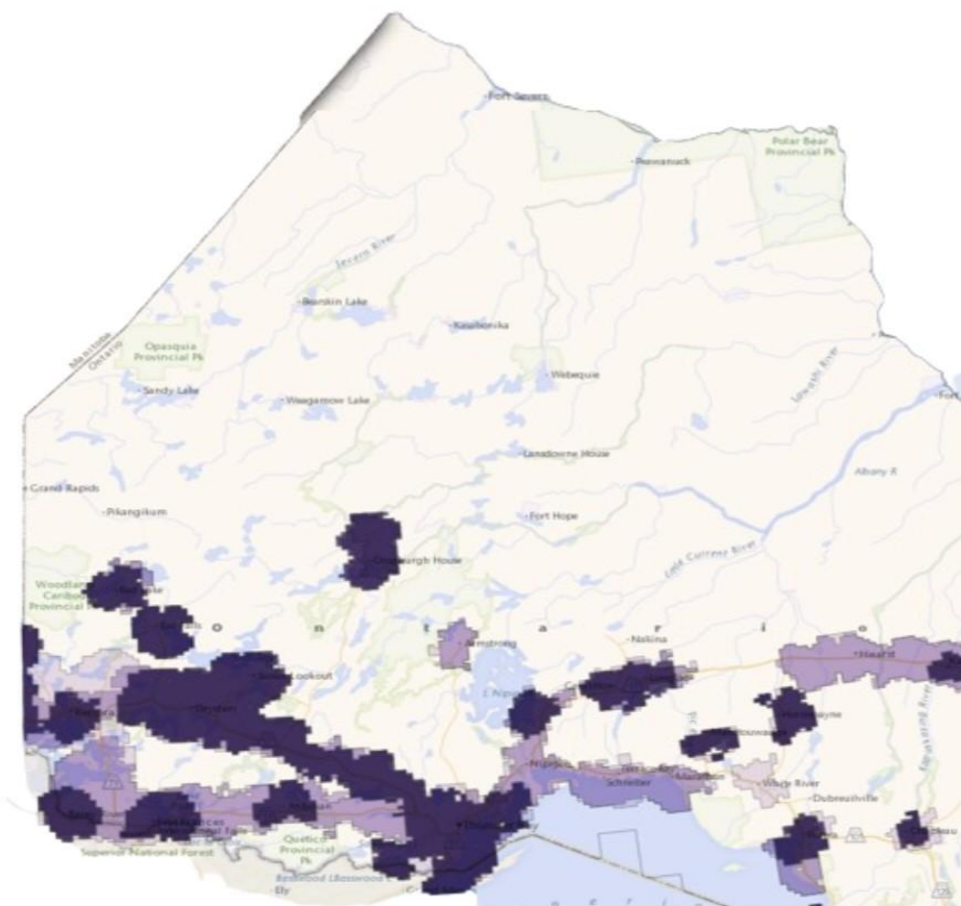
²⁸ <https://kenoraonline.com/2024/03/15/68483/>

2. Province of Ontario should:
 - a. Provide funding for these new revitalization and beautification projects around Northwestern Ontario.
 - b. Should take steps to implement penalties (up to and including forfeiture) for failure by property owners to take reasonable and timely steps to remediate, repurpose, or sell brownfield, neglected, or abandoned properties around the region under relevant provincial legislation.
3. Canada should:
 - a. Should take steps to implement penalties (up to and including forfeiture) for failure by property owners to take reasonable and timely steps to remediate, repurpose, or sell brownfield, neglected, or abandoned properties around the region under relevant federal legislation.
4. First Nations, and Métis communities could consider:
 - a. Working with neighbouring municipalities to promote regional beautification initiatives.
 - b. Having policies or plans in place for the Band to assume control of neglected, abandoned, or brownfield sites where the current owner/occupier fails to take reasonable and timely steps to remediate or repurpose the property to a productive use.
5. Individual Municipalities could consider:
 - a. Developing a Community Beautification and Improvement Plan and implement it.
 - b. Working on developing the Trans-Canada highway corridor into a destination/stopping place by providing businesses along the highway with information on the region and local communities.
 - c. Advocating to the province and to federal authorities for strengthened enforcement powers to address failures by property owners to maintain or develop key lots or prominent locations.
 - d. Taking whatever enforcement action, they can, to address failure by property owners to take reasonable and timely steps to remediate, repurpose, or sell brownfield, neglected, or abandoned properties in their community.
 - e. Developing a vacant land and buildings registration bylaw with associated fees and penalties.
 - f. Developing incentives in partnership with the province to encourage property owners to quickly sell brownfield or otherwise undeveloped or underdeveloped land to other parties. These incentives, whether in the form of priority review of other development proposals, reduced municipal charges, or other direct incentives should be designed to reduce over time. This would incentivize prompt action by property owners.

Staying Connected in an Online World

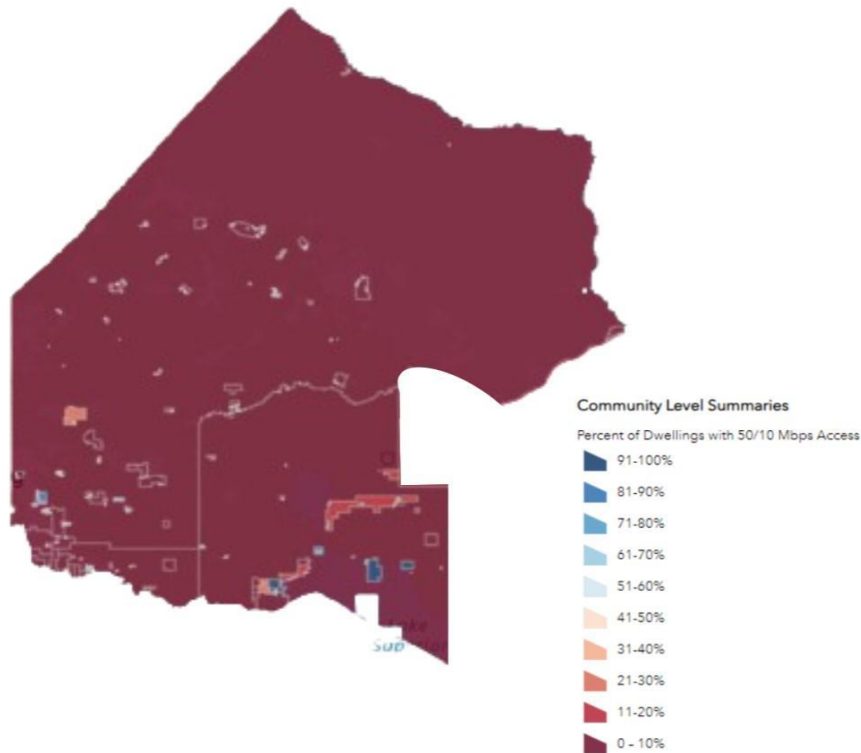
Reliable and consistent cell service has become an important aspect of our everyday life. In Northwestern Ontario, where vast distances and small communities are the norm, staying connected is a priority that should not be ignored. As shown in Figure 6 the Long-Term Evolution (LTE or 4th generation cellular) coverage in Northwestern Ontario continues to have gaps and consistency challenges. Consistent and reliable service are lifelines to communication, healthcare, business, and emergency services while travelling in the region.

Figure 6- 2014- 2019 Expansion of LTE coverage ²⁹



²⁹ https://crtc.gc.ca/cartovista/LTEOverTheYearsYE2019_EN/index.html

Figure 7- Northwestern Ontario Internet Access Map ³⁰



As Figure 7 shows, it is not only cellular infrastructure that is lacking in Northwestern Ontario. Outside of major population centres access to the expected standard of internet download speeds of 50 Mbps and upload speeds of 10 Mbps is non-existent for almost half of the population.³¹ Not only is this problematic for the residents but it is also a barrier to health care, tourism and business activity. Visitors expect to be connected to the world, no matter where they are.

Goal 6: Continue to improve high speed internet and cellular access throughout Northwestern Ontario so that:

- By 2025 100% of Northwestern Ontario's population has access to internet services with download speeds of 50 Mbps and upload speeds of 10 Mbps.

³⁰ <https://www.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=27c55b431b91419f9e0cd9015b3c6e4f>

³¹ <https://connectednorth.ca/northern-ontario-broadband-report-2023/>

- By 2030 100% of communities with a population greater than 10,000 have access to internet services with download speed of 100 Mbps and upload speeds of 30 Mbps.
- By 2035 75% of Northwestern Ontario's population has access to internet services with download speed of 100 Mbps and upload speeds of 30 Mbps.
- By 2025 all remaining gaps in cellular coverage along the primary³² and secondary³³ highway systems have been measured and accurately mapped based on direct measurement and not tower range estimation.
- By 2030 50% of the identified cellular coverage gaps by confirmed coverage from a least two national cellular networks.
- By 2035 100% of primary and secondary highways in Northwestern Ontario have confirmed coverage for their full length from at least two national cellular networks.

Actions in pursuit of this goal

1. In pursuit of this goal NOMA will:
 - a. Advocate for policies and funding to support these infrastructure, telecommunication, and utilities infrastructure enhancements.
 - b. Promote, celebrate, and support partnerships among municipalities, utility providers, the provincial and federal governments, First Nations, and telecommunication companies.
 - c. Advocate for the expansion of broadband in underserved areas and to increase the broadband capacity in residential and urban center across Northwestern Ontario.
 - d. Advocate for funding for the expansion and enhancement of high-speed internet in Northwestern Ontario.
 - e. Showcase the importance of high-speed internet in our communities for economic development and quality of life.

³² Primary Highways: These highways form the "primary" route through Northwestern Ontario, specifically:

- Highway 17 from the Manitoba border to Shabaqua Corners
- Highway 11/17 from Shabaqua Corners to Sistonens Corner
- Highway 102 from Sistonens Corner to Thunder Bay
- Highway 11/17 from Thunder Bay to Nipigon
- Highway 17 from Nipigon to White River

³³ Secondary Highways: These highways serve or connect "larger" population centres that are not on or proximate to a primary highway to the primary system, specifically:

- Highway 11 from the US border to Shabaqua Corners
- Highway 11 from Nipigon to the Thunder Bay census division boundary

- f. Foster collaboration between Connected North, municipalities, provincial government for the improvement of high-speed internet.
2. The Province of Ontario should:
 - a. Make efforts to map broadband/cellular access gaps and areas of underservices assessing on the ground service for emergency calling capacities and the level of reliability of regular phone service in Northwestern Ontario.
 - b. Expand cell service across the transportation network, with emphasis placed on areas where there are current gaps in service, such as Marathon-White River and Hearst-Longlac.
 - c. Develop a plan to achieve 100% emergency coverage on all highway 11/17 corridor and major arterial roads within the next 5 years.
 - d. Work with First Nations communities and organizations to develop strategies to address disparities in broadband/cellular access. This should involve exploring the need for improved consultation as well as improved monitoring and oversight of service providers to ensure that the application and billing models are responsive to the needs of First Nations communities.
 - e. Invest in new, improved, and rehabilitated rest areas that have good cell coverage areas and including signage that encourages people to stop if they need to use their cell phone.
 - f. Ensure that efforts to map broadband/cellular access gaps and areas of underservice involve assessing on the ground service for reliability of regular phone service and emergency calling capability.
 3. Canada should:
 - a. Allocate funding and resources to support infrastructure projects in Northwestern Ontario and rural communities.
 - b. Develop policies and regulations to incentivize telecommunication companies to expand coverage to our region specifically.
 - c. Provide support for planning and coordination efforts led by municipalities, utility providers and any organization working in any type of project for this.
 - d. Fund projects to bring broadband and cellular coverage to rural, remote, and Northern communities (underserved communities across Northwestern Ontario).
 - e. Expand broadband service across Northwestern Ontario's Road network, including roads connecting rural communities and First Nation communities, to ensure that Northwestern Ontario is prepared to adopt emerging transportation technologies such as connected and automated vehicles at the same rate as the rest of Ontario.
 4. First Nations, and Métis communities could consider:
 - a. Working with service providers, municipalities, and any other stakeholder to develop strategies to address disparities in broadband/cellular access.
 - b. Partnering with energy companies to pursue projects that promote First Nation economic sustainability, revenue generation, employment, and contracting opportunities for First Nation businesses.

- c. Working with the province to develop strategies to address disparities in broadband/cellular access. This should involve exploring the need for improved consultation as well as improved monitoring and oversight of service providers to ensure that the application and billing models are responsive to the needs of First Nations communities.
5. Individual Municipalities could consider:
- a. Identifying areas where cellular network coverage is lacking or insufficient within the municipality.
 - b. Working with NOMA, the province, the federal government, First Nations, and each other to provide collective feedback on infrastructure improvement plans and needed priority enhancements.
 - c. Participate in partnerships among municipalities, utility providers, the provincial or federal governments, First Nations and telecommunication companies.
 - d. Collaborating with internet service providers, provincial and federal governments, and other agencies to coordinate expansion projects for high-speed internet access in all Northwestern Ontario communities.
 - e. Advocating for funding to the provincial and federal government for broadband access in rural and remote communities.
6. The Private Sector could consider:
- a. Coordinating with telecommunication companies and any other necessary authority to leverage existing infrastructure and minimize costs.
 - b. Providing the installation of utilities infrastructure needed to support telecommunication enhancements along main highways and needed areas in Northwestern Ontario.
 - c. Investing in expanding cellular network coverage along main highways in Northwestern Ontario.
 - d. Collaborating with NOMA and other stakeholders to identify areas in need of coverage improvements.
 - e. Ensuring that all safe pull-off sites and rest areas are covered by cellular service.
 - f. Participating in cost-sharing initiatives to fund infrastructure enhancements.
 - g. Working with ISPs to build and maintain broadband networks and provide services.
 - h. Investing in infrastructure upgrades for better high-speed internet services for all residential and urban centers in the region.
 - i. Providing affordable and reliable high-speed internet services to all individuals in Northwestern Ontario.

Focus for Action 3 – Infrastructure & Public Services

Locations with adequate roads, water, wastewater, electric, gas and broadband in place (or in progress) are much more appealing than a county or town that needs to start from scratch.

– Currituck Economic Development

Reliable and Affordable Energy

Northwestern Ontario holds great renewable energy potential including wind, solar, biomass, district heat opportunities, and hydroelectric power. Energy infrastructure and energy are a foundation for the region's economic growth and development.

A significant portion of the Northwest is served by radial lines with no redundancy in the event of forest fire, ice storms or even vehicle accidents severing the supply. Those radial lines are at or near capacity and are some of the oldest in Ontario.

Northwestern Ontario, which saw a significant decline in electrical demand due to the collapse of the Forest Industry and the closure of a number of small and large energy users, is now facing a significant growth in that demand. With 40 mining projects under some form of consideration and many of them becoming operating mines, the surplus of electrical power will quickly see the system operating at or beyond capacity. To this end, the Common Voice Northwest Energy Task Force has identified geographic areas where the existing electrical infrastructure will be unable to accommodate any increase in electrical demand and NOMA has for years advocated with the Ontario Government and its agencies to meet this demand in a timely manner. Solutions include significant expansion or upgrade to existing radial transmission lines or the establishment of additional non-carbon emitting generation within the growth area.

Goal 7: Continue to enhance and improve the electrical transmission infrastructure in Northwestern Ontario by ensuring that:

- By 2030 all communities at the end of existing radial lines will either have parallel/looped transmission lines in place or sufficient local generation has been established to provide a second source of supply.
- By 2030 25% of the transmission and distribution lines identified as having “aged out”³⁴ will have been replaced.
- By 2035 all of remaining transmission and distribution lines that have “aged out” will have been replaced.

³⁴ “Aged out” meaning being incapable of safely and affordably meeting at least 80% of current demand due to physical or technological deterioration.

- By 2035 a plan is in place to replace/upgrade transmission and distribution lines going forward so that we do not find ourselves being serviced by “aged out” infrastructure in the future.

Actions in pursuit of this goal

1. In pursuit of this goal NOMA will:
 - a. Advocate for policies and funding to support these infrastructure investments by both the province and by Canada.
 - b. Promote, celebrate, and support partnerships among municipalities, utility providers, and the provincial government.
 - c. Advocate for the expansion of transmission and generation in underserved areas.
 - d. Advocate for funding for the expansion and enhancement of transmission and generation in Northwestern Ontario.
 - e. Showcase the importance of reliable, modern, and sufficient transmission and generation capacity in our communities for economic development and quality of life.
2. Province of Ontario should:
 - a. Undertake an approach to energy planning that supports regional needs by including flexible options that effectively address the unique needs and priorities of all communities, including those not connected to the grid, and well as the industrial sectors in Northwestern Ontario.
 - b. Continue to support and encourage innovation in local energy generation and reduced consumption through supporting research, direct investment in pilot projects, and amendments to regulations and planning rules to facilitate innovation and experimentation.
 - c. Work with Ontario Power Authority and licensed transmission and distribution companies to identify investment opportunities in the Northwestern Ontario system to bring reliable energy into the region and meet the new and growing demands.
3. Canada should:
 - a. Create an electricity strategy to help coordinate funding for rural, small, and northern communities to build infrastructure projects across these communities in Canada.
 - b. Provide funding for the replacement of aging transmission and distribution lines and for the creation of new parallel transmission lines.
 - c. Introduce more programs that can help reduce the costs of new electricity generation and protect ratepayers, specifically in Northern communities.
 - d. Cutting red tape and creating more streamlined approvals processes and fairer pricing for the use of provincial-territorial transmission capacity.
4. First Nations, and Métis communities could consider:
 - a. Advocating for policies and funding to support these infrastructure investments by both Ontario and Canada.

- b. Promoting, celebrating, and supporting partnerships among First Nations, municipalities, utility providers, and the provincial and federal governments.
 - c. Partnering with established transportation businesses to consider offering services to the region.
 - d. Advocating for the expansion of transmission and generation in underserved areas.
 - e. Advocating for funding for the expansion and enhancement of transmission and generation in Northwestern Ontario.
 - f. Showcasing the importance of reliable, modern, and sufficient transmission and generation capacity for economic development and quality of life.
5. Individual Municipalities could consider:
 - a. Analysing and publicly stating the potential value to their residents of expanded transmission and generation.
 - b. Analysing and publicly stating the potential value to the commercial bottom line of their local businesses through expanded transmission and generation.
 6. Institutions could consider:
 - a. Analysing and publicly stating the potential value to their clients/students/users of expanded transmission and generation.
 7. Local Agencies & Not for Profits could consider:
 - a. Analysing and publicly stating the potential value to their clients/users/members of expanded transmission and generation.
 8. The Private Sector could consider:
 - a. Analysing and publicly stating the potential value to their clients/users of expanded transmission and generation.
 - b. Investing in local generation projects especially in the areas of wind, solar, biomass, district heat opportunities, and hydroelectric power.

Accessible, Affordable Mass Transit Between Centers

The following is an excerpt from the Executive Summary of “The Future of Inter-Community Bus Service in Northwestern Ontario” published by Common Voice Northwest in 2015.

In the summer of 2015 three interconnected decisions were made which triggered a reaction by the leadership of Northwestern Ontario. The first was the release of the Mandate Letter for the Minister of Transportation for Ontario that directed him to “develop recommendations on modernizing and appropriately regulating the intercity bus regime to ensure it remains an attractive and affordable travel option for Ontarians.” The second was the posting on the Environmental Bill of Rights web site that the Province was seeking comment on “how people travel between communities by intercity bus in this province.” The third event was the announcement by Greyhound Bus that they were cutting their service through the Northwest in half.

The bad news is that things have gotten worse since then. Greyhound terminated all services in the Northwest in 2018. The good news is that things have also improved. Kaspar

Transportation, a private operator in the Northwest has expanded services since 2015 and the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission (ONTC) implemented a route from Sudbury to Winnipeg in early 2020. That service provides inter community transportation to western communities on both highway 11 and 17 and highway 17 to the east. The ONTC service does not, however, meet the daily needs of residents of the smaller communities seeking health care and other services in Thunder Bay. The current western route is circular, starting in Thunder Bay heading west to Emo, then North to Kenora and eventually east to Thunder Bay creating an extended time on the bus for passengers from the small communities. Yet, the priorities outlined in Figure 8 (an image taken from that 2015 report) still remain largely unmet.



ONTC only provides service on Highway 17 along the North Shore, leaving Highway 11 through Greenstone without service, even though service is provided by ONTC to Hearst from the east.

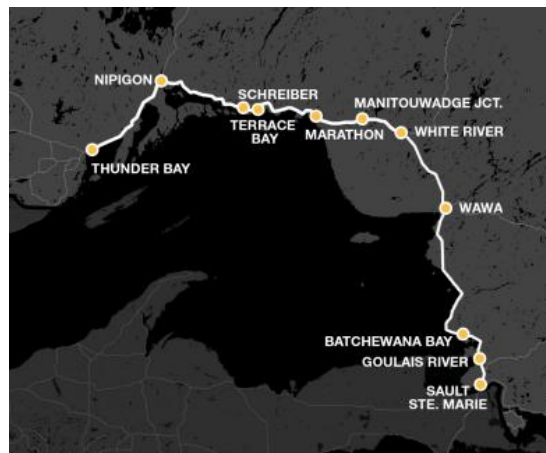
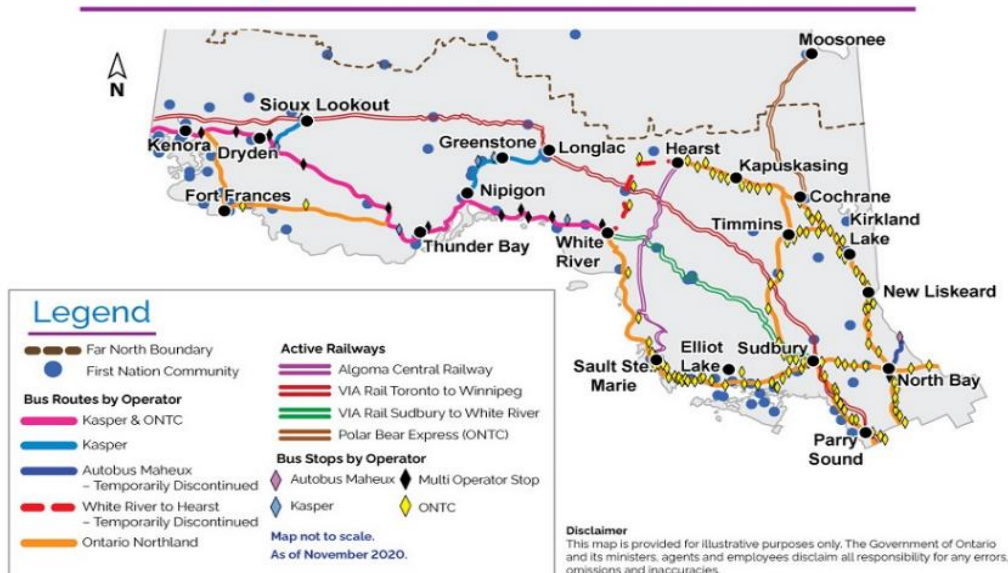


Figure 8- Northern Ontario's Passenger Transportation Services



Goal 8: Continue to improve scheduled mass transit between communities in Northwestern Ontario so that:

- By 2030, a 7-day a week, same-day, inter-community bus service is in place between:
 - Emo and Thunder Bay
 - Winnipeg and Thunder Bay
 - Greenstone (Longlac) and Thunder Bay
 - White River and Thunder Bay
- The link between Northwestern Ontario and Northeastern Ontario is maintained but shortened to run from White River to Sault St Marie (and beyond).
- By 2035 a separate community shuttle service is in place to feed passengers located on secondary highways into the primary Northwest intercommunity bus service.

Actions in pursuit of this goal

1. In pursuit of this goal NOMA will:
 - a. Advocate for the expansion of ONTC operations to Northwestern Ontario including the construction of a regional garage/service hub in meetings or briefings with local MPs and MPPs.

- b. Promote the expansion of ONTC operations to Northwestern Ontario including the construction of a regional garage/service hub in meetings with key provincial or federal ministers.
 - c. Invite their partners, when appropriate, to join a letter writing campaign to local MPs, MPPs and key ministers to emphasize the need for the expansion of ONTC operations to Northwestern Ontario including the construction of a regional garage/service hub.
 2. The Province of Ontario should:
 - a. Allocate funding and resources to support the expansion of ONTC operations to Northwestern Ontario including the construction of a regional garage/service hub.
 - b. Optimize the capacity, efficiency, and safety of the existing transportation systems.
 - c. Strengthen the linkages between major centers and rural and remote communities in Northwestern Ontario by working on intercommunity transportation.
 3. Canada should:
 - a. Allocate funding and resources to support the expansion of ONTC operations to Northwestern Ontario including the construction of a regional garage/service hub.
 - b. Partner with the province to optimize the capacity, efficiency, and safety of the existing highway systems.
 4. First Nations, and Métis communities could consider:
 - a. Participating, at least once a year, in a letter writing campaign to local MPs, MPPs and key ministers to emphasize the need for the expansion of ONTC operations to Northwestern Ontario including the construction of a regional garage/service hub.
 - b. Analysing and publicly stating the potential value to their community members of expanded daily bus service.
 5. Individual Municipalities could consider:
 - a. Participating, at least once a year, in a letter writing campaign to local MPs, MPPs and key ministers to emphasize the need for the expansion of ONTC operations to Northwestern Ontario including the construction of a regional garage/service hub.
 6. Major Institutions could consider:
 - a. Participating, at least once a year, in a letter writing campaign to local MPs, MPPs and key ministers to emphasize the need for the expansion of ONTC operations to Northwestern Ontario including the construction of a regional garage/service hub.
 - b. Analysing and publicly stating the potential value to their clients/students/users of expanded daily bus service.
 - c. Analysing and publicly stating the potential value to their operational bottom line of increased usage of their services by users of an expanded daily bus service.

7. Local Agencies & Not for Profits could consider:
 - a. Advocating for the expansion of ONTC operations to Northwestern Ontario including the construction of a regional garage/service hub.
 - b. Analysing and publicly stating the potential value to their clients/students/users/residents of expanded daily bus service.
 - c. Analysing and publicly stating the potential value to the commercial bottom line of their members or other local businesses entities of increased usage of their services by users of an expanded daily bus service.

More Welcoming Roads Means More Welcoming Communities

Despite all the GPS technology available to travellers, there's nothing like wayfinding signage to assure you of your destination. Or that you're heading in the correct direction. It can also provide a sense of security. And for residents, signage can instill a sense of pride in the community and sometimes even raise their awareness as to the amenities within their own community.³⁵

This is the opening paragraph from a 2020 article entitled “Wayfinding Strategy to be a Key to Tourism Success in the North”. If you read the article, you may be shocked to discover that it is about a wayfinding strategy developed in 2014. A strategy that saw a pilot project funded by FedNor in 2017. Worse, if you travel in Northwestern Ontario, you will quickly discover that signage and wayfinding remain major obstacles to identifying and accessing the vast and varied array of services and experiences located here. It is time to move beyond pilots to a focused, resourced, and region wide effort to address the signing gap between what people expect and receive in Southern Ontario and what we see in Northwestern Ontario.

Goal 9: Continue to make the primary and secondary highways in Northwestern Ontario safer and more welcoming by ensuring that:

- By 2030 at least 75% of the communities accessible from the primary highway network and 50% of those accessible from the secondary highway network should have signage similar or equivalent to that on Highway 401 for services, attractions, and facilities at highway intersections.
- By 2035 at least 90% of the communities accessible from the primary highway network and 80% of those accessible from the secondary highway network should have signage similar or equivalent to that on Highway 401 for services, attractions, and facilities at highway intersections.

³⁵ <https://destinationnorthernontario.ca/wayfinding-strategy-to-be-a-key-to-tourism-success-in-the-north/>

- By 2030 100% of the communities on the primary highway network and 100% of those on the secondary highway network should have distance-to-service warnings for gas, restaurant, accommodation, and comfort facilities immediately before entering each municipality or settlement.
- By 2030 100% of the primary highway network should have access to functional and well-equipped year-round facilities (public or private) with restrooms at intervals no greater than 100km.
- By 2035 100% of the secondary highway network should have access to functional and well-equipped year-round facilities (public or private) with restrooms at intervals no greater than 100km.

Actions in pursuit of this goal

1. In pursuit of this goal NOMA will:
 - a. Advocate for funding for road signage improvement along Northwestern Ontario highways.
 - b. Provide input on signage placement and designs to reflect the communities needs all around Northwestern Ontario.
 - c. Collaborate with municipalities and other stakeholders to prioritize the advocacy of signage improvement projects along Northwestern Ontario highways.
2. Province of Ontario should:
 - a. Reassess the value and relevance of the Tourism Oriented Directional Signing (TODS) program as a means to deliver appropriate and affordable signage in Northwestern Ontario.
 - b. Improve highway and road signage, including directional, wayfinding and highway advertising for tourism amenities. Increase the use of live signage and near real-time road information systems, including through an assessment of technology and processes used in other jurisdictions to better inform drivers of road and weather conditions and to reduce road closure time due to vehicle collisions.
 - c. Provide funding to municipalities located on single-laned portions along the Highway 11 and 17 corridors to increase the number of road signs at strategic locations within municipal boundaries.
 - d. Make improvements on the following rest areas: Highway 17, 1.3 km east of the Ontario-Manitoba border and Highway 11, 8 km east of Hwy 664.
 - e. Create 8 additional areas for new and enhanced safe Pull-Off areas, that have the amenities necessary to match service levels of Southern Ontario, targeting areas with long stretches with no rest areas currently available.
 - f. Consult with municipalities on the location of new facilities to ensure the alignment of investment; and

- g. Ensure all new and existing rest areas are properly maintained and supplied (e.g., ensuring regular cleaning and sufficient supply of garbage bins, toilet paper, etc.).
 - h. Ensure data on alternative washroom locations, such as provincial park facilities, is available on Ontario 511 so that these facilities can help fill gaps between rest areas.
 - i. Once installed, ensure highway signage, facilities, and other infrastructure is properly monitored and maintained.
3. Canada should:
 - a. Allocate funding for highway and road signage improvement in Northwestern Ontario.
 - b. Coordinate planning efforts with municipalities to bring more roadside signage into Northwestern Ontario highways.
4. First Nations, and Métis communities could consider:
 - a. Working with municipalities to provide input on road signage improvement plans along the region's Highways.
 - b. Collaborating on projects that are relevant to road signage improvement.
 - c. Working in collaboration with municipalities to install signage across Northwestern Ontario's transportation and trail network that acknowledges traditional and local Indigenous territory.
5. Individual Municipalities could consider:
 - a. Advocating to the Federal and Provincial Government for road signage improvement and constant updating of information.
 - b. Advocating for funding for the increase of number of road signs at strategic locations within municipal boundaries.
 - c. Collaborating in projects regarding road signage improvement in Northwestern Ontario.
 - d. Working with an important organization (Tourism organization) to identify signage on important tourist attractions and so they can provide feedback on needs for any tourist related signage along the highways. With defined rules and a plan for signage design, placement, and language.
 - e. Applying to Destination Northern Ontario for funding to develop and implement wayfinding strategy.
 - f. Creating better directional signage in and around the community directing residents and tourists to key attractions that are currently not well signed. This will also help to improve linkages to the lake and trails throughout the region.

Focus For Action 4 – Access to Market

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. – Northern Ontario Transportation Plan, Ontario Ministry of Transportation

Multiple explorations of the transportation and communication networks in Northwestern Ontario have demonstrated that it is not “easy, convenient, and as safe as possible to get where you need to go” here in Northwestern Ontario.³⁶

While progress has been made on many fronts, there continue to be multiple issues in need of urgent and significant action:

- 1) Ongoing overdependence on increasingly unreliable winter roads to support remote northern First Nations. And,
- 2) Inferior and dangerous highway infrastructure.
- 3) Ongoing decline in the availability, quality and quantity of air service to and around the region.
- 4) Limited and uninformative road signage and wayfinding.

Improving Links to the far North

Traditionally, between January and March remote communities in Northwestern Ontario depend on a network of winter roads for the delivery of fuel, food, construction material and other essentials. As of early January 2024, twenty First Nations in Northern Ontario were still unreachable by winter road. Ten others were reachable only by light vehicles, and only one had a winter road connection open to full loads such as semi-trucks.³⁷ Impassable winter roads saw leaders of Nishnawbe Aski Nation declare a state of emergency. That action came after four northern Manitoba First Nations also declared a state of emergency over a failing road network in the region.

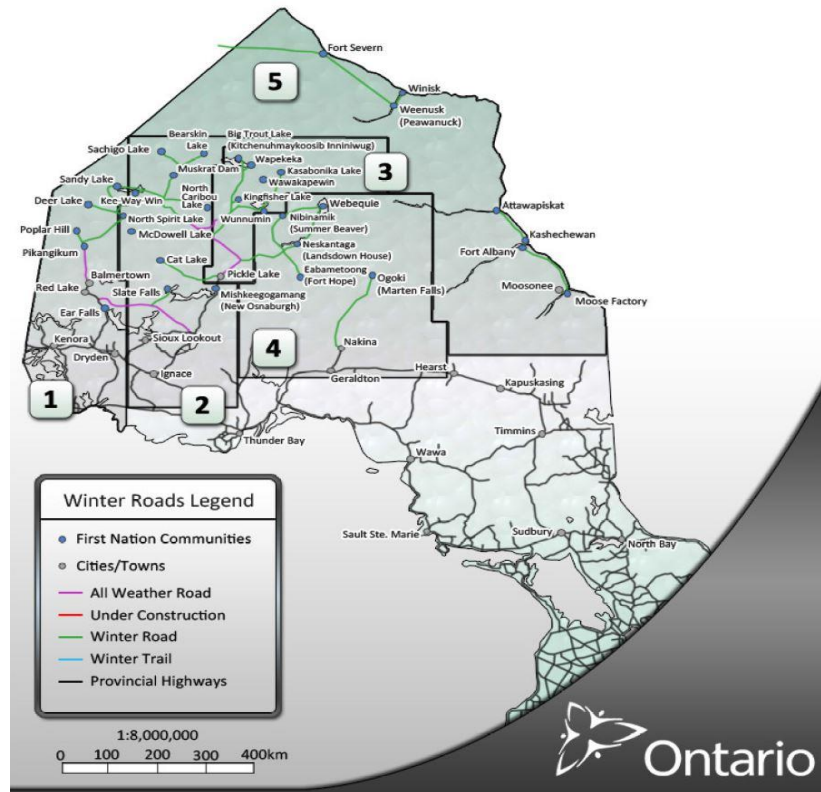
Relying on the existing winter road network is no longer an option and new technologies, like modern airships, are not yet ready to fill the gap. Winter roads must, where possible, and where supported by the communities to be served, be upgraded to all weather roads. Meanwhile, greater air capacity must also be made available, and that means extending northern runways.

³⁶ Cite – CVNW inter-city bus study, province’s multi modal transportation study, NPI’s asset inventories, Blue Sky nets internet data, and the work of the Northern Transportation Task Force

³⁷ <https://northernontario.ctvnews.ca/impassable-winter-roads-create-dire-situation-for-ontario-first-nations-nan-1.6763990>

Figure 10- Northern Ontario Winter Roads Map

Northern Ontario Winter Roads Map



Goal 10: Improve affordability, reliability, and safety of connections to remote communities in Northwestern Ontario by ensuring that:

- By 2030, 3 remote runways in Northwestern Ontario have been extended by a minimum of 500 meters provided the community supports such an extension.
- By 2035, at least 5 more remote runways in Northwestern Ontario have been extended by a minimum of 500 meters provided the community supports such an extension.
- By 2030 at least 200 kilometers of “winter roads” have been upgraded to “all season” roads provided the affected communities support such infrastructure investments.
- By 2035 at least another 200 kilometers of “winter roads” have been upgraded to “all season” roads provided the affected communities support such infrastructure investments.

Actions in pursuit of this goal

1. In pursuit of this goal NOMA will:
 - a. Reach out to First Nations leaders to ask them to identify priority investments for runway extension and road infrastructure to address the ongoing decline of winter roads.
 - b. Advocate for federal and provincial investments to address the gaps identified by First Nations partners.

2. Province of Ontario should:
 - a. Improve highway minimum maintenance standards on Highways 11 and 17, including through highway reclassification or development of new highway classification category for Highway 11/17.
 - b. Improve maintenance along extensions of the Provincial Highway network, such as the Northern Ontario Resource Trail Road beyond Pickle Lake connecting remote communities to the winter road network.
 - c. Improve road signage on Northern Ontario's transportation network to better manage traffic flow and improve road safety, including along winter roads connecting remote First Nations.
 - d. Increase the availability of all-season rest areas in Northern Ontario to ensure that commercial drivers transporting goods in winter have a safe place to pull over.
 - e. Increase funding for the Winter Roads Program and expand project eligibility.

3. Canada should:
 - a. Where the affected communities support such investments, partner with First Nations and the province to make major investments in extending runways in remote communities in Northwestern Ontario.
 - b. Where the affected communities support such investments, partner with First Nations and the province to improve air traffic, weather, and safety equipment at remote airports in Northwestern Ontario

4. First Nations, and Métis communities could consider:
 - a. Sitting down with NOMA to identify priority investments for runway extension and road infrastructure to address the ongoing decline of winter roads.
 - b. Use NOMA's voice to amplify the voices of First Nations in advocating for federal and provincial investments to address the gaps identified by First Nations partners.
 - c. Advocating to the Provincial government to increase project funding of the Winter Roads Program.

5. Individual Municipalities could consider:
 - a. Working with Indigenous communities to extend winter roads, aid with planning and preliminary construction where feasible.

- b. Working with Indigenous communities by sharing and creating bridge design studies and road routing studies, with the intent to support and advance all-season road development.
- c. Working with NOMA and Indigenous communities to identify priority investments for runway extension and road infrastructure to address the ongoing decline of winter roads.
- d. Advocating to the Province through NOMA for the improvement of affordable, reliable, and safe connection of remote communities.

Improving Road Safety and Capacity

After almost a decade of effort by the Going the Extra Mile for Safety (GEMS) Committee of the Temiskaming Shores and Area Chamber of Commerce the province of Ontario announced in 2022 that they will do a pilot of a 2+1 highway in Northeastern Ontario. “A 2+1 highway is a three-lane highway with a centre passing lane that changes direction approximately every two to five kilometres”. A 2+1 configuration will often include a centre barrier for extra safety. The highway model is used in other jurisdictions around the world and is more cost efficient than twinning a highway.”³⁸ Design work is underway with construction expected in 2025 and then pilot assessment and eventual decisions about scaling up to wider or general use to follow at some future date.

In 2023 Northern Policy Institute (NPI) called for this timeline to be significantly accelerated. Referencing already available data and analysis from multiple countries NPI pointed out that the 2+1 model is well understood in all climates, is just as safe as 4-lane twinned highways and can be built more quickly and at a fraction off the cost of divided highways.³⁹ Their conclusion was that existing twinning projects should be completed but that the federal and provincial governments should enter into a major partnership to complete a 2+1 expansion from the Manitoba border to existing highways connecting northern Ontario to Toronto and Ottawa at the earliest completion date possible.

Goal 11: Accelerate improvements to the safety and capacity of the highway system in Northwestern Ontario by ensuring that:

- By 2030 all current twinning projects that have passed the preliminary planning stage as of 2025 are completed.
- By 2030 plans are in place to implement a 2 plus1 highway system for the entire length of any un-twinning sections of the primary highways⁴⁰ from the Manitoba border to Sault Ste Marie

³⁸ <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1002467/ontario-moving-ahead-with-first-ever-21-highway-in-north-america>

³⁹ www.northernpolicy.ca/upload/documents/eng_cost-of-highways-paper-layout-23-11-.pdf

⁴⁰ Primary Highways: These highways form the “primary” route through Northwestern Ontario, specifically:

- Highway 17 from the Manitoba border to Shabaqua Corners
- Highway 11/17 from Shabaqua Corners to Sistonens Corner
- Highway 102 from Sistonens Corner to Thunder Bay
- Highway 11/17 from Thunder Bay to Nipigon
- Highway 17 from Nipigon to White River

- By 2040 a 2 plus1 highway system is in place for the entire length of any un-twinning sections of the primary highways from the Manitoba border to Sault Ste Marie
- By 2035 plans are in place to implement a 2 plus1 highway system for the entire length of the secondary highways⁴¹ in Northwestern Ontario.
- By 2045 a 2 plus1 highway system is in place for the entire length of the secondary highways in Northwestern Ontario.

Actions in pursuit of this goal

1. In pursuit of this goal NOMA will:
 - a. Prioritize the introduction and expansion of a 2+1 highway system in Northwestern Ontario in meetings or briefings with local MPs and MPPs.
 - b. Prioritize the introduction and expansion of a 2+1 highway system in Northwestern Ontario in meetings or briefings with key provincial or federal ministers.
 - c. Invite their partners, when appropriate, to join a letter writing campaign to local MPs, MPPs and key ministers to emphasize the need to prioritize the introduction and expansion of a 2+1 highway system in Northwestern Ontario.
2. The Province of Ontario should:
 - a. Partner with Canada to fund the expedited introduction and expansion of a 2+1 highway system in Northwestern Ontario.
3. Canada should:
 - a. Partner with the province of Ontario to fund the expedited introduction and expansion of a 2+1 highway system in Northwestern Ontario.
4. First Nations, and Métis communities could consider:
 - a. Participating, at least once a year, in a letter writing campaign to local MPs, MPPs and key ministers to emphasize the need for the expedited introduction and expansion of a 2+1 highway system in Northwestern Ontario.
 - b. Analysing and publicly stating the potential value to their community members of the expedited introduction and expansion of a 2+1 highway system in Northwestern Ontario.

⁴¹ Secondary Highways: These highways serve or connect "larger" population centres that are not on or proximate to a primary highway to the primary system, specifically:

- Highway 11 from the US border to Shabaqua Corners
- Highway 11 from Nipigon to the Thunder Bay census division boundary

5. Individual Municipalities could consider:
 - a. Participating, at least once a year, in a letter writing campaign to local MPs, MPPs and key ministers to emphasize the need for the expedited introduction and expansion of a 2+1 highway system in Northwestern Ontario.
 - b. Analysing and publicly stating the potential value to their residents of the expedited introduction and expansion of a 2+1 highway system in Northwestern Ontario.

6. Major Institutions could consider:
 - a. Participating, at least once a year, in a letter writing campaign to local MPs, MPPs and key ministers to emphasize the need for the expedited introduction and expansion of a 2+1 highway system in Northwestern Ontario.
 - b. Analysing and publicly stating the potential value to their clients/students/users of the expedited introduction and expansion of a 2+1 highway system in Northwestern Ontario.
 - c. Analysing and publicly stating the potential value to their operational bottom line of the expedited introduction and expansion of a 2+1 highway system in Northwestern Ontario.

7. The Private Sector could consider:
 - a. Analysing and publicly stating the potential value to their customers expedited introduction and expansion of a 2+1 highway system in Northwestern Ontario.

Reverse The Decline of Regional Air Services

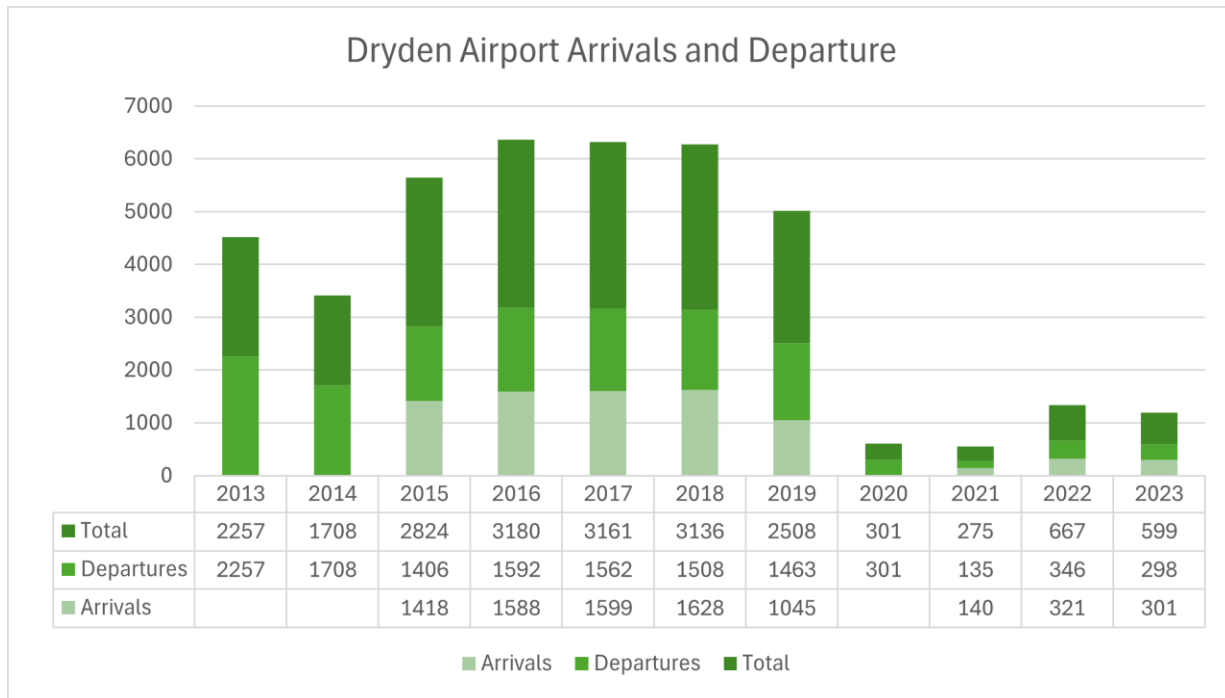
In the final months of 2023, it has become evident that air service in Northwestern Ontario is facing a live or die inflection point. The 2020 COVID pandemic and the many retirements and shutdowns of airlines and air training facilities has created a shortage of pilots and pilot training facilities. That shortage was made worse by new rules intended to reduce fatigue related risk by increasing mandatory pilot rest periods.⁴² This pilot shortage has combined with other factors, like high inflation and increased reluctance to fly post-COVID to see airlines cutting routes and reducing service.⁴³ Finally, many municipalities are facing increased costs across the board, particularly in the face of the national housing crisis. Municipal airports find themselves even lower on the priority list for local budget allocations for operation and maintenance, let alone capital upgrades.⁴⁴ Figure 12 showing the decline in arrivals and departures at just one airport, Dryden municipal, in the last decade is indicative of the region wide decline.

⁴² <https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/airlines-vital-to-life-in-the-north-facing-headwinds-from-worker-shortages-1.6300374>

⁴³ <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/thunder-bay/bearskin-flights-discontinued-1.7085282>

⁴⁴ <https://www.northernontariobusiness.com/industry-news/transportation/future-of-airports-is-up-in-the-air-says-advocacy-group-8168044>

Figure 12- Arrivals and Departures in Dryden Airport 2013-2023



Goal 12: Enhance the viability and sustainability of municipal airports throughout Northwestern Ontario by ensuring that:

- By 2025 100% of municipal airports can qualify for federal or provincial capital and operating assistance.
- By 2030 at least 75% of municipal airports have regularly scheduled service for at least six months of the year.

Actions in pursuit of this goal

1. In pursuit of this goal NOMA will:
 - a. Advocate to the Federal and Provincial government for funding for the expansion of the airports in the region and for funding that helps alleviate operational and capital costs.
2. Province of Ontario should:
 - a. Fund the infrastructure needed to encourage development and use of municipal airports.
 - b. Work to grow and diversify the air transportation in rural and remote communities.
 - c. Meet with air operators (passenger and cargo) to identify barriers to market entry by these firms and to explore options to offset, reduce, or remove these barriers.

3. Canada should:
 - a. Review existing air transportation funding models to ensure adequate financial support for both airport and air service providers.
 - b. Increase capital funding and federal funding so it contributes to operating costs of remote airports in Northwestern Ontario.
 - c. Improve standards for remote airports in Northwestern Ontario to ensure that the airports are equipped with official aircraft de-icing services and have enhanced operational efficiency.
 - d. Explore operational funding support, particularly for those municipal airports that provide critical delivery functions for public services such as critical emergency services.
 - e. Develop options for capital assistance funding program to support infrastructure needs of smaller and medium sized municipal airports; and
 - f. Conduct surveys of municipal airports every 5 years to track improvements and identify priorities.
 - g. Meet with air operators (passenger and cargo) to identify barriers to market entry by these firms and to explore options to offset, reduce, or remove these barriers.

4. First Nations, and Métis communities could consider:
 - a. Advocating to the Federal and Provincial government for funding for the expansion of the airport in the region and for funding that helps alleviate operational and development costs.

5. Individual Municipalities could consider:
 - a. Advocating to the Federal and Provincial government for funding for the expansion of the airport in the region.
 - b. Providing any input and assistance on Airport development plans.
 - c. Collaborating with airport operators, airlines, contractors, and any relevant individual for the enhancement of airport capacity and the reduction of operational costs in Northwestern Ontario.

6. Local Agencies & Not for Profits could consider:
 - a. Identifying infrastructure needs and creating a plan for infrastructure upgrades.
 - b. Extending runway lengths at Northwestern Ontario remote airports to help increase airport capacity, enable larger planes to access, improve goods movements, reduce cargo costs, and increase emergency response capabilities.
 - c. Consulting with municipalities, businesses, agencies, and other organizations that support air connections to the airports.
 - d. Implementing Localizer Performance with Vertical Guidance approaches for the northern remote airports to improve situational awareness for pilots, reduce missed approaches and increase access safety.

7. The Private Sector could consider:
 - a. Analyze and report on the negative impacts on their business bottom line of declining air access and reduced scheduled services.
 - b. Analyze and report on the potential positive impacts on their business bottom line of reversing the decline in air access and reduced scheduled services.
 - c. Meet with federal and provincial representatives to identify barriers to market entry by air cargo and air passenger services and to explore options to offset, reduce, or remove these barriers.

Focus for Action 5 - Housing

Housing is a fundamental part of the economy; it contributes to the wellbeing and safety of the communities in the region. Increasing the number of residents living in Northwestern Ontario communities and urban areas is essential for growth and their function as economic and social centres for the surrounding rural areas. Getting the right housing, as well as affordable housing, is essential to attract and retain skills that will keep Northwestern Ontario profitable and growing. Beyond providing shelter, it influences population dynamics, employment markets, stability in the community and population behavior making it something fundamental for the region.

Seniors

Showcased in Figure 3, Northwestern Ontario has a greater aging population, except for the district of Kenora, where they have a more sustainable population pattern. Nonetheless, as most of the population in the region ages, the demand for senior housing escalates, making it important to have supported living facilities and senior complexes in place.

Goal 13: Continue to improve housing accessible to seniors so that:

- By 2030, 50% of municipalities with more than 1000 in population should have at least one senior's complex with access to reasonable assisted living supports.
- By 2035, 75% of municipalities with more than 1000 in population should have at least one senior's complex with access to reasonable assisted living supports.

Actions in pursuit of this goal

1. In pursuit of this goal NOMA will:
 - a. Advocate to the province and federal government for funding regarding assisted living facilities for seniors.
 - b. Advocate for affordable social and senior housing in the region.
2. Province of Ontario should:
 - a. Fund plan development for seniors housing development and assisted living opportunities.
 - b. Create different funding for rural and remote communities for senior housing development in the North.
 - c. Provide programs that facilitate aging at home to allow seniors to live healthy, independent lives in the comfort and dignity of their own homes.
3. Canada should:
 - a. Fund plan development for seniors housing development and assisted living opportunities.
 - b. Create different funding for rural and remote communities for senior housing development in the North.

4. Individual Municipalities could consider:
 - a. Identifying opportunities for supportive housing.
 - b. Exploring funding opportunities for living facilities and supported accommodations for seniors in the community.
 - c. Advocating for affordable social senior housing to be developed in Northwestern Ontario.
 - d. Expediting the permit processes for senior construction residence projects and providing zoning approvals for assisted living facilities for seniors.
 - e. Assessing current bylaws to determine if any can be amended to be more supportive of residential development.
 - f. Working with the province to offer financial initiatives or grants for developers to come to Northwestern Ontario and build here.
 - g. Coordinating with assisted living facilities and transportation services to provide access to public transit or specialized transportation options for senior residents in these facilities.
 - h. Providing information on how residents could make their current homes more senior-friendly to allow them to stay in their homes for longer.

5. Major Institutions could consider:
 - a. Identifying the needs of seniors in the community regarding housing.
 - b. Providing input on facility design and services for assisted living facilities for senior residents of the community.

6. The Private Sector could consider:
 - a. Identifying suitable sites for residential development according to senior housing standards.
 - b. Partnering with municipalities to communicate the land development opportunities for senior housing and
 - c. Collaborating with healthcare providers on the facilities requirements to maintain the best and comfortable environment for seniors.
 - d. Submitting the proposals to the municipalities for possible land repurposing projects.

Affordable Housing for At Risk Populations

Northwestern Ontario's landscape, low population density, high cost of construction in the smaller communities and weather conditions can create and bring challenges in building affordable housing for the region. For small towns where a certain population is growing and homes are not keeping pace, the support for affordable and accessible housing is essential. Certain groups in our communities are more likely to experience homelessness and housing insecurity. These include, low-income households, homeless individuals, newcomers, and many others. Therefore, getting the right housing, affordable housing, is essential to protect, attract and retain our population to keep our region profitable and growing. High demand for affordable

housing comes from the influx of students to Thunder Bay specifically. Northwestern Ontario has a higher percentage of older housing, and houses continue to deteriorate and be removed from the market. Making this an issue that is essential to tackle and address the affordable housing for individuals.

Goal 14: Continue to improve housing for at-risk populations so that:

- By 2030 municipalities with a population greater than 10,000 have the ability to house at least 75% of their previous five-year average of at-risk populations in affordable and supportive housing.
- By 2035 municipalities with a population greater than 10,000 have the ability to house at least 90% of their previous five-year average of at-risk populations in affordable and supportive housing.

Actions in pursuit of this goal

1. In pursuit of this goal NOMA will:
 - a. Advocate for increased financial support from the province and federal government for affordable housing initiatives in Northwestern Ontario.
 - b. Advocate for allocation of funding for housing needs for the at-risk population in Northwestern Ontario.
 - c. Advocate to develop a coordinated housing strategy between federal, provincial, and municipal governments to clearly determine housing solutions.
2. The Province of Ontario should:
 - a. Provide the housing, health, and social services people require to transition out of homelessness into permanent, accessible housing.
 - b. Dedicate funding to meet the housing needs of FNMI people, regardless of their residency.
 - c. Ensure that income security programs provide sufficient benefits to enable people with disabilities, lone-parent families, and other low-income individuals to access housing.
 - d. Work in intergovernmental collaboration, research and innovation, and statistics gathering.
 - e. Ensure the accessibility standards are legally enforceable with the aim of removing and preventing barriers in the built environment for persons with disabilities, and all people who use it.
 - f. Broaden dedicated social and financial support for people with disabilities as well as supportive housing in recognition of their unique needs.
 - g. Increase the percentage of fully accessible units required for new builds to receive federal funding to 100%.
 - h. Develop a coordinated housing strategy with federal and municipal governments to clearly determine housing solutions.

3. Canada should:
 - a. Work with the province to target and sustain investments in affordable housing with the goal of maximizing impact and minimizing the effort needed to identify and access programs.
 - b. Expand long term funding for housing initiatives for creating homes that are affordable and accessible for at-risk populations.
 - c. Provide funding to enable municipalities, non-profits, and co-ops to purchase housing stock and make renovations to aging buildings, which will protect affordable housing, increase non-market housing options, and counter the financialization of housing.
 - d. Provide funding for municipalities, so they can extend and provide shelter and services for at-risk populations.
 - e. Dedicate resources to increasing the supply of adequate and affordable housing for at-risk population over the long term and to preventing the loss of affordable housing.
 - f. Ensure collaboration and coordinated actions with provincial, territorial, municipal and Indigenous governments on implementing housing strategies.

4. First Nations, and Métis communities could consider:
 - a. Having representation of Indigenous communities at decision-making tables for housing solutions.

5. Individual Municipalities could consider:
 - a. Developing a coordinated housing strategy with federal and provincial governments to clearly determine housing solutions.
 - b. Using planning and zoning to prioritize the development and preservation of housing that is affordable and accessible for those at-risk population.
 - c. Ensuring that all new housing starts including at least 30% low income or affordable housing units.
 - d. Supporting affordable and supportive housing development in the region.

Housing that is Available and Affordable for Renters & Buyers

Northwestern Ontario, relatively speaking, does not have a housing affordability crisis. Housing continues to be much more affordable in Northwestern Ontario than in the rest of the province. According to CMHC, the average rent for a one-bedroom apartment in Thunder Bay in October of 2023 was \$1,054, while the average rent for Ontario at that same point was \$1,482.⁴⁵ . CMHC data from 2020 indicates a similar affordability advantage for smaller Northwestern Ontario communities. Sioux Lookout's average one-bedroom apartment rental price was \$925 making it about 15% lower than Thunder Bay, Fort Frances with an average of \$801 was 27%

⁴⁵ <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/professionals/housing-markets-data-and-research/housing-data/data-tables/rental-market/rental-market-report-data-tables>

lower than Thunder Bay, whereas a one-bedroom unit in Dryden was \$716 making it about 34% lower than Thunder Bay.

Relative price advantages, particularly during a national housing crisis, do not tell the whole story. Yes, it is still cheaper to rent or buy in Northwestern Ontario than elsewhere in the province (a point regional advocates should continue to highlight) but prices are rising. That competitive one-bedroom in Thunder Bay saw its price increase by almost 10% between 2022 and 2023, and prices continue to rise. Additionally, it is not just rental prices that are rising, the median price for a single detached home in Thunder Bay rose 3.6% over that same period.⁴⁶

In addition to rising prices, renters and buyers are faced with increasing scarcity. By October 2022 vacancy rates in Thunder Bay for all types of apartments had fallen to 1.6%. They have since improved to 2.9%, likely tied to recent additions to the available rental stock.⁴⁷ Housing starts across Northwestern Ontario continue to be sluggish⁴⁸ and the number of houses listed for sale continues to fall.⁴⁹

Housing affordability is also not just about price, it is also about relative share of income. According to Statistics Canada housing is considered unaffordable if it represents more than 30% of a household's total pre-tax income.⁵⁰ In 2020 Ontario's median household income (before taxes) was \$91,000. That is considerably higher than the median income in the census districts of Thunder Bay (\$79,500), Kenora (\$78,500) and Rainy River (\$78,000).⁵¹ So even a 10% price advantage for housing is offset by the roughly 15% gap in income.

Goal 15: Continue to improve housing affordability in Northwestern Ontario so that:

- By 2025 60% of Northwestern Ontario's population has access to housing that does not cost more than 30% of their annual income.
- By 2030 80% of Northwestern Ontario's population has access to housing that does not cost more than 30% of their annual income.
- By 2035 90% of Northwestern Ontario's population has access to housing that does not cost more than 30% of their annual income.

⁴⁶ <https://creastats.crea.ca/board/thun>

⁴⁷ <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/professionals/housing-markets-data-and-research/housing-data/data-tables/rental-market/rental-market-report-data-tables>

⁴⁸ <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/professionals/housing-markets-data-and-research/market-reports/housing-market>

⁴⁹ <https://creastats.crea.ca/board/thun>

⁵⁰ <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/98-200-X/2021016/98-200-X2021016-eng.cfm>

⁵¹ <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>

Actions in pursuit of this goal

1. In pursuit of this goal NOMA will:
 - a. Advocate for funding to be provided to build the housing needed and to provide the proper infrastructure relating to roads, sewers, affordable home energy, and water supply.
2. The Province of Ontario should:
 - a. Make it easier for local communities to identify and move forward with opportunities to acquire Crown, public, private lands (i.e. former mill properties, brownfield sites, or derelict/abandoned properties) and make them available for municipal and private commercial, residential, and industrial development.
 - b. Offer financial initiatives or grants for developers to come to Northwestern Ontario and build here.
 - c. Continue to expand funding available to municipalities to maintain and expand critical infrastructure needed to support expanded housing supply.
 - d. Protect tenants' rights and preserve the affordability of rental housing by regulating rent increases for the region.
 - e. Dedicate funding to meet the housing needs of FNMI people, regardless of their residency.
 - f. Facilitate housing development to support regional growth and employee recruitment and retention.
3. Canada should:
 - a. Create different funding for rural and remote communities for housing development in the North.
4. First Nations, and Métis communities could consider:
 - a. Providing input on land repurposing projects that can benefit both municipalities and indigenous communities.
 - b. Collaborating with municipalities, governments and developers on consultation and engagement processes for lands.
5. Individual Municipalities could consider:
 - a. Exploring opportunities to acquire Crown, public, private (i.e. former mill properties, brownfield sites, or derelict/abandoned properties) and make them available for Municipal and private commercial, residential, and industrial development.
 - a. Continuing to work with the province, First Nations, and each other to creatively address the ongoing shortage of Chief Building Officers in Northwestern Ontario.
 - b. Working on accelerating the permit process for building more cost-effective housing projects including multi-unit properties or innovative building materials/approaches.
 - c. Working on improving community design plans, zoning bylaws, property and engineering standards, property tax by-laws and building application process to be able to build more affordable housing in a faster way.

- d. Undertaking land use analysis to determine if there is need to develop service lands for residential development.
 - e. Utilizing surplus and vacant lands effectively to increase housing supply and address housing shortages in Northwestern Ontario. Develop a plan to identify and repurpose surplus and vacant lands for residential development within the next 2 years and hit the provincial targets.
 - f. Identifying opportunities to extend municipal services to key municipal surplus lands to enable development and disposition.
 - g. Encouraging use of public vacant land and underutilized lands to enhance their capacity to enhance economic activity.
 - h. Showcasing the opportunities for development on municipal surplus lands.
 - i. Advocating for funding for the development of surplus and vacant municipal lands.
 - j. Working with the province to offer financial initiatives or grants for developers to come to Northwestern Ontario and build here.
 - k. Working on expediting the permit processes for land repurposing projects.
6. Local Agencies & Not for Profits could consider:
- a. Coordinating with developers, municipalities, and any other stakeholder to build affordable and service housing.
 - b. Providing water, sewer, and electricity services to new residential properties.
 - c. Assessing infrastructure needs for affordable housing projects.
 - d. Collaborating with developers on utility planning for affordable housing.
7. The Private Sector could consider:
- a. Helping improve the tenant selection system.
 - b. Building housing that is more affordable in Northwestern Ontario by embracing alternative construction processes, multi unit properties or other cost saving solutions.
 - c. Identifying suitable sites for development around the region.
 - d. Ensuring that they are compliant with each municipality's building codes and most importantly their affordability standards.
 - e. Identifying suitable sites for residential development within vacant and surplus municipal, provincial or federal lands.
 - f. Partnering with municipalities to communicate the land development opportunities for these surplus and vacant lands.
 - g. Collaborating with local governments on land use planning.
 - h. Submitting proposals to municipalities for possible land repurposing projects.

A Living Plan

Reporting on Progress

This plan is a roadmap to guide planning, decision making, and concrete actions over the next 10 years in Northwestern Ontario. To succeed, the plan will need to be a “living plan”. It will need to be monitored, discussed, revised, and referenced constantly.

A monitoring framework for the plan will mirror the structure of NOMA’s own Strategic Plan. A dedicated page on NOMA’s website will serve as a monitoring section. This page will highlight the strategic goals alongside their deadlines and an update on progress to date.

This approach will facilitate transparency. More importantly it will showcase the plan as a living document and ensure a sense of urgency exists where progress on certain goals is not proceeding as expected. That urgency may lead to adjustments in the plan itself, or more intense action by NOMA and its partners to bring actions in line with expectations to ensure the goals are met within the deadlines stated in the plan.

Reviewing the Plan

The NOMA Board will receive an update on progress against the plan goals at every regular Board meeting going forward. This will allow the NOMA Board to decide if more in depth analysis of plan goals or proposed actions is necessary as a result of changed circumstances. It will also allow the NOMA Board to consider whether more urgent action by NOMA should be undertaken to bring progress back in line with stated goals and plan timelines.

NOMA will also host an annual, public, review of the plan in September each year from 2025 to 2035. This will provide an opportunity for exploration of progress against the plan. There would also be presentations by NOMA and any interested partners about actions they have taken (or will be taking) that align with the plan objectives. Collective exploration of current circumstances and changed local, regional, provincial, national, or international conditions could also occur. Any annual revisions to the plan would be informed by the recorded proceedings of this event.

The Economic Action Plan Working Group could be maintained throughout this period as a resource to assist NOMA in developing this annual event, compiling feedback, and making annual revisions. At a minimum, a similar working group should be formed at the five-year mark of this plan (2030) and tasked to fully review the plan in the light of the regional context at that time and propose revisions as needed. By doing this, the plan will not lose relevance and it will continue to be aligned with regional priorities, policies, or initiatives.

Resourcing the Plan

It is unreasonable to expect the NOMA Executive Director to monitor progress on this plan in addition to their other responsibilities related to the day-to-day operation of NOMA in representing the interest of its members. When considering the work required to contact, collaborate with, and support the actions of NOMA's varied partners in pursuit of goals outlined in this regional economic plan the need for additional human resources becomes all too clear.

Reporting could, conceivably, be done through the hiring of a summer student each year, provided reporting on the plan was reduced to once a year instead of quarterly. This would limit momentum and reduce the sense of urgency and the capacity for rapid decision making or the seizing of unique opportunities in furtherance of plan goals.

To ensure the successful implementation and coordination of this plan, a full-time individual will be needed to serve as plan coordinator. This role will be necessary to ensure regular monitoring of progress against plan goals and actions undertaken in pursuit of those goals. This individual can also ensure that regular publicly available updates about the plan are made to the NOMA Board, NOMA members, and NOMA partners. The Plan Coordinator could also serve as a single point of contact for every individual or organization contributing, directly or indirectly, to progress against the plan. This individual should be tasked to look beyond silos, to share best practices, to communicate success widely, while also assisting (when needed) in identifying resources to overcome barriers.

The funding for such a position could be raised in a variety of ways, some of which include:

- a. A (renewable) 5-year project cost shared three ways between NOMA, FedNor, and NOHFC.
- b. A campaign seeking contributions from NOMA partners to support the costs of this initiative in two five-year increments.
- c. A shared position hosted (and funded) on a cyclical basis by NOMA members either individually or as regional groupings.

Appendix A- About Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association

NOMA was organized in 1946, incorporated on September 18th, 2001, and is made up of four components: the Kenora District Municipal Association, the Rainy River District Municipal Association, the Thunder Bay District Municipal League, and the City of Thunder Bay. Other than the City of Thunder Bay, membership is attained by being a member of the district organization. NOMA represents municipalities in Northwestern Ontario from the Manitoba border to the Algoma District border.

NOMA's mission is to "advance the needs of municipal governments whose services contribute greatly to the community well-being in Northwestern Ontario. It will promote activities and support partnerships that contribute to our vibrant and vital region."

NOMA's vision is to "amplify the collective voice of Northwestern Ontario as a superior place to work, play, and raise families in caring and prosperous communities."

NOMA's core values and guiding principles are:

- NOMA is non-partisan and objective in how it presents itself and undertakes its work.
- NOMA builds trusting relationships by acting with honesty and integrity.
- NOMA brings creditable solutions for matters broadly shared by Northwestern Ontario.
- NOMA communicates appropriately and timely.
- NOMA values diversity.
- NOMA attaches importance to partnership and teamwork.

NOMA is a unified voice that plays a vital role in advocating for the needs of the residents in Northwestern Ontario. Through NOMA's actions, advocacy, and collaboration, it strives to build a region that is vibrant and livable for residents.

Appendix B- Northwestern Ontario Communities

Table 4 - Northwestern Ontario Municipalities ⁵²

Population 2021		Index of Remoteness ⁵³	Population density ⁵⁴
Thunder Bay	108,843	0.2953	332.1
Kenora	14,967	0.4222	70.7
Kenora, Unorganized	7,475	0.4838	0.02
Fort Frances	7,466	0.4708	292.2
Dryden	7,388	0.4697	112.7
Thunder Bay, Unorganized	6,221	0.4620	0.1
Oliver Paipoonge	6,035	NA	17.2
Sioux Lookout	5,839	0.5071	15.4
Greenstone	4,309	0.5561	1.6
Red Lake	4,094	0.5538	6.8
Shuniah	3,247	0.3138	5.7
Marathon	3,138	0.5271	18.8
Atikokan	2,642	0.5454	8.4
Neebing	2,241	0.3300	2.6
Manitouwadge	1,974	0.5539	5.6
Terrace Bay	1,528	0.6331	10.1
Nipigon	1,473	0.4288	13.6
Rainy River, Unorganized	1,423	0.5482	0.1
Ignace	1,206	0.5882	16.7
Emo	1,204	0.5068	6
Schreiber	1,039	0.6427	29
Machin	1,012	0.5081	3.5

⁵² Statistics Canada's "Index of Remoteness" assesses the relative proximity between a community and other communities. It also accounts for the size of the communities in proximity to each other. A community that is farther away from larger population centres will have a higher index of remoteness

[Index of Remoteness \(statcan.gc.ca\)](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/92-627-x/2018001/article/00001-eng.htm), [Index of Remoteness 2021: Update with 2021 census geographies and populations \(statcan.gc.ca\)](https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/92-627-x/2018001/article/00001-eng.htm)

⁵³ Index of remoteness is only available for municipalities with a reported population in excess of 1000.

⁵⁴ Population density is only available for municipalities with a reported population in excess of 1000.

Table 4 Continuation - Northwestern Ontario Municipalities

Population 2021		Index of Remoteness ⁵⁵	Population density ⁵⁶
Alberton	954		
Ear Falls	924		
Red Rock	895		
Conmee	798		
La Vallee	788		
Chapple	763		
Rainy River	752		
Sioux Narrows-Nestor Falls	727		
O'Connor	689		
Morley	493		
Gillies	441		
Dawson	399		
Pickle Lake	398		
Dorion	375		
Lake of the Woods	308		

⁵⁵ Index of remoteness is only available for municipalities with a reported population in excess of 1000.

⁵⁶ Population density is only available for municipalities with a reported population in excess of 1000.

Appendix C- First Nations in Northwestern Ontario

Table 5 - First Nations located in Northwestern Ontario

	Population	Index of Remoteness ⁵⁷	Population Density ⁵⁸
Sandy Lake 88	2,100	0.5824	47.4
Attawapiskat 91A	1586	0.5831	905
Deer Lake	1,087	0.8452	79.6
Kasabonika Lake	1,060	0.6114	10.4
Kitchenuhmaykoosib Aaki 84	1,029	0.8678	3.7
Lac Seul 28	1,022	0.5525	4.2
Fort Hope 64	977		
Fort William 52	964		
Weagamow Lake 87	921		
Wabaseemoong	815		
Webequie	723		
Poplar Hill	663		
Cat Lake 63C	651		
Couchiching 16A	633		
Whitefish Bay 32A	610		
Sachigo Lake 1	608		
Wunnumin 1	587		
English River 21	584		
Osnaburgh 63B	524		
Kingfisher Lake 1	511		
Wapekeka 2	456		
Bearskin Lake	447		
Shoal Lake 39A	445		
Long Lake 58	410		
Kee-Way-Win	409		
Kenora 38B	402		
Sabaskong Bay 35D	383		
Pic River 50	372		
Fort Severn 89	364		
Summer Beaver	355		
Manitou Rapids 11	300		
Slate Falls	299		
Whitesand	297		
Seine River 23A	270		

⁵⁷ Index of remoteness is only available for First Nations with a reported population in excess of 1000.

⁵⁸ Population density is only available for First Nations with a reported population in excess of 1000.

Table 5 Continuation - First Nations located in Northwestern Ontario.

	Population	Index of Remoteness ⁵⁹	Population Density ⁶⁰
Eagle Lake 27	257		
Big Grassy River 35G	251		
Peawanuck	247		
Neskantaga	244		
Marten Falls 65	243		
Lake Helen 53A	240		
Rainy Lake 17A	234		
Osnaburgh 63A	233		
Ginoogaming First Nation	200		
The Dalles 38C	180		
Aroland	178		
Wabigoon Lake 27	175		
Rat Portage 38A	171		
Rainy Lake 26A	158		
Rocky Bay 1	154		
Pic Moberg North	138		
Saug-A-Gaw-Sing 1	136		
Pic Moberg South	127		
Whitefish Bay 34A	125		
Rainy Lake 18C	125		
Neguaguon Lake 25D	118		
Gull River 55	110		
Pays Plat 51	100		
Shoal Lake (Part) 40	96		
Whitefish Bay 33A	94		
Ojibway Nation of Saugeen (Savant Lake)	88		
Shoal Lake 34B2	81		
Wabauskang 21	57		
Northwest Angle 33B	52		
Lake of the Woods 37	49		
Sand Point First Nation	30		
Wawakapewin	16		
Sturgeon Falls 23	10		
Big Island Mainland 93	5		
Rainy Lake 17B	5		
Lansdowne House	0		

⁵⁹ Index of remoteness is only available for First Nations with a reported population in excess of 1000.

⁶⁰ Population density is only available for First Nations with a reported population in excess of 1000.

Agency 1	0		
Assabaska	0		
Lac des Mille Lacs 22A1	0		
Lake Nipigon	0		
Red Rock 35	0		

Appendix D - The Northwestern Ontario Economic Plan Working Group

Name	Role and Organization
1. Andrea Strawson	Executive Director, Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association
2. Brenda Gignac	Red Lake Community Development and Communications Manager
3. Charla Robinson	President, Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce
4. Charles Cirtwill	President & CEO, Northern Policy Institute
5. Dan Bevilacqua	Executive Director & President, Superior Country
6. Dan Elliot	Marathon Economic Development Officer
7. Doug Hartnell	Mayor, Township of Dawson & NOMA Executive Board Member
8. Fred Mota	Mayor, Municipality of Red Lake & NOMA Vice President
9. Gajith Jinadasa	Rainy River Economic Development Officer
10. Garry McKinnon	Executive Director, Atikokan Economic Development Corporation
11. Heather Gropp	Community Development Officer, Township of Sioux Narrows-Nestor Falls
12. Henry Wall	CAO, Kenora District Social Services Administration Board
13. Iain Angus	Ontario Energy Board, Common Voice Northwest Energy Task Force
14. Ian Dunn	President and CEO, Ontario Forest Industries Association
15. Jordan Hatton	Director of Economic Development, Bingwi Neyaashi Anishinaabek (Sand Point First Nation)
16. Katia Borjas	Strategic Plan Intern, Northwestern Ontario Municipal Association
17. Kevin Kahoot	Mayor, Township of Ear Falls & NOMA Executive Board Member
18. Kristen Oliver	Councillor, City of Thunder Bay & NOMA Executive Board Member
19. Martin Chitohwa	Fort Frances Economic Development Officer
20. Max Nagy	Machin Economic Development Officer and Executive Director, Kenora District Municipal Association
21. Michelle Hiscox	Economic Development Officer, Chukuni Communities Corporation
22. Megan Dokuchie	Kenora Economic Development Officer
23. Nikita Cava	Executive Director, Thunder Bay District Municipal League
24. Peggy Johnson	Executive Director, Rainy River District Municipal Association
25. Rick Dumas	Mayor, Town of Marathon & NOMA Executive Board Member
26. Tyler Peacock	Dryden Economic Development Manager
27. Tejraj Shah	NWO Local Immigration Partnership Coordinator, Thunder Bay Multicultural Association
28. Wendy Landry	Mayor, Municipality of Shuniah & NOMA President
29. Will Windigo	Indigenous Representative, Past Chief