

STATEMENT | FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE **Cochrane Mayor Peter Politis**

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THE NORTHERN REALITY

In a CBC article dated May 3, 2018, Premier Wynne suggested that a business case could not be made for the Northlander Passenger Rail that used to serve northerners. The Premier went on to say that her and her government have decided to leave Northerners with Bus service as an alternative instead and by this curiously inferred that this was the transportation plan she was advocating for the North's future. As the northerners who actually had / have to live through the calamity of errors and unilateral decisions that the Ontario Government made which led to the divestment and cancelling of the only other public transportation service in all of North Eastern Ontario, besides buses, we can only shake our head and wonder how a province's leadership can become so disconnected from the realities they themselves create. As perspective, remember that the original decision was to divest the entire ONTC and this was made unilaterally and presented to the leaders of northern Ontario on a telephone call that also abruptly ended as soon as the message was conveyed by then Minister Bartolucci, leaving no opportunity to respond.

The reality is that:

- A business case cannot be made for the only other public rail service in Ontario, Metrolinx, either, which serves southern Ontario, yet ...
- The Auditor General identified that the decision to divest was poorly thought out and actually cost Ontarians close to a billion dollars;
- If the leaders of the region didn't push back to stop the entire divestment, the outcome would have been even worse;
- The rail was not planned, managed or invested into properly through years of neglect by the province for the region's only rail service, and the resulting infrastructure cannot support the type of modern cost effective "high speed" passenger service that would make a business case;
- Fourteen hours on a bus for anyone, let alone seniors and people suffering both mental and physical health challenges, while also suggesting that this is the limitation of the future of travel here, is not an acceptable standard for anyone leading a modern, forward thinking province claiming to be investing into its future.

At the same time, the reality also is that southern Ontario which covers about 10% of the provincial land mass is rapidly over populating. Its roads are congested and its transportation problems have reached the point of exasperation. Northern Ontario, which covers about 90% of the provincial land mass is underpopulated. Fiscally responsible management of low density geography suggests that increasing the population and density contributes to lower costs to manage. This begs the very simple question, where is the business case to move populations from the South to the North? Where one can sell their million-dollar home there and buy a comparable home here for a fraction of the cost, which in turn frees up equity and cash for folks, which in turn goes back into the economy and taxes, which in turn pays for transportation upgrades, which in turn solves transportation problems for the province as a whole.

The reality is that if one isn't prepared to value and invest into an area and its inhabitants, if one cannot plan beyond its short term electoral interests, one simply will not find a business case regardless. However, the biggest reality of all is that our provincial government's future for our region with respect to transportation is buses, and their vision for our region is so limited that they've rationalized this as somehow being sound and fiscally responsible leadership.

With respect Premier, a business case has to actually be made and the will to do so must be there to make the case. Genuinely involving the regions leadership upfront, as opposed to unilaterally divesting with a subsequent hand in the face in behind, is not a standard northerners deserve or should ever accept.