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## Passenger rail service in northeastern Ontario to return by mid-2020s

Ontario Northland's Northlander Passenger Train stopped running in 2012

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The route for further planning has 13 stops, including Toronto (Union Station), Langstaff, Gormley, Washago, Gravenhurst, Bracebridge, Huntsville, North Bay, Temagami, Temiskaming Shores, Englehart, Matheson and Timmins or Cochrane. Bus service will connect with passenger rail to provide service to communities between rail stops. (Submitted by Ontario Northland)

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The plan is to have passenger rail service operational again in northeastern Ontario around 2025, government and industry officials reported today.

In a virtual announcement led by Caroline Mulroney, Minister of Transportation, she said the province, Ontario Northland and Metrolinx are moving forward with further planning for a 13-stop route that would provide service from Toronto to Timmins or Cochrane. They made [the initial business case](#) public today.

Service would be offered based on seasonal travel demands and would range from four to seven days a week. The service would allow passengers coming from the northeast to travel overnight to maximize their day in the Toronto area and reduce the need for overnight accommodations in Toronto, if preferred.

They say the target completion date for the next stage of planning and design work is 2022 which could allow for a potential in-service date in the mid-2020s.

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Ontario Northland's Northlander passenger train stopped service in 2012. Ontario Northland currently operates four buses daily between Toronto and North Bay, and one or two buses daily from North Bay to Timmins and Cochrane.

Back in March, Ontario Northland ran a test train between North Bay and Cochrane — an initial track audit — to see what safety and infrastructure improvements are needed.

The province has already committed \$5 million to support the planning and design work, as part of its latest budget.

"The planning we're doing today will help to determine the details, and we are confident that the proposed service route would provide the best value and options to support economic opportunities, the tourism industry and access to healthcare, education and other critical services," said Vic Fedeli, Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade and MPP for Nipissing.



Corina Moore is the CEO of Ontario Northland. (Markus Schwabe/CBC)

Ontario Northland president and CEO Corina Moore said the business case is "a very important milestone in our plan to reinstate passenger rail. An enhanced transportation network that integrates rail and bus services provides an exciting opportunity for the region to grow and improve."

More feedback is being gathered in the years to come, Mulroney said during the news conference. She pointed out that, from October 23 to November 20 in 2020, more than 7,200 people, including roughly 8 per cent that self-identified as Indigenous, shared their feedback about transportation opportunities along the rail corridor between Toronto, North Bay, Timmins

RAIL CORRIDOR BETWEEN TORONTO, NORTH BAY, THUNDERBAY.

Moore said they will be looking at the station locations and shelters and talking to communities "to make sure we hear their input on what is required and how we can meet their transportation needs and how we will integrate our bus services with the rail service so there's a seamless integration to all of the post-secondary institutions and hospitals in the north."

## 'Another milestone'

The revelation of a business plan is a positive step forward, says Lucille Frith, co-chair of the passenger rail advocacy group Northeastern Ontario Rail Network.

"It's very much an incremental step forward, just as it's been for the last eight and a half years, step by step by step," she said.

"We started off with having to find a political party that would be in power that would actually carry out their agreement to bring back the Northlander. And then we had the situation where the Ministry of Transportation took on the Ontario Northland under their umbrella. So it's another milestone."

She says the release of the business plan is important one.

"It's not as simple as putting a train on the tracks to roll it down from community to community. We want an integrated system ... that links with the rural communities in the north where you use other modes of transportation to go the shorter distances and you use the train to go the longer distances — an interconnected system that is reliable and on time is what we're after."

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Meanwhile, Ontario New Democrats are calling for funding for the Northlander and a clear timeline for when the trains will start running.

"The Liberals scrapped the Northlander, making cuts that left Northerners behind. But Doug Ford and Vic Fedeli have let us down, too — it turns out their election promise to restore the Northlander in their first term in office was hollow electioneering," said Sudbury MPP Jamie West, NDP critic for Northern Infrastructure, Transportation and Roads.

"More than three years later, and nearing the end of their term in government, the Ford government just gave us a plan to build a potential plan for years in the future. Sounds like more election promises with no train in sight."

## People can't wait half a decade

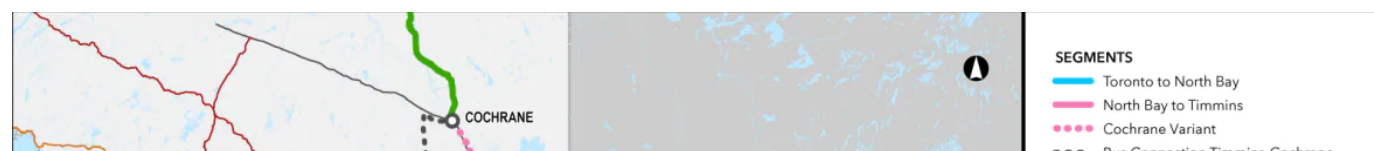
- Ontario Green Party Leader Mike Schreiner

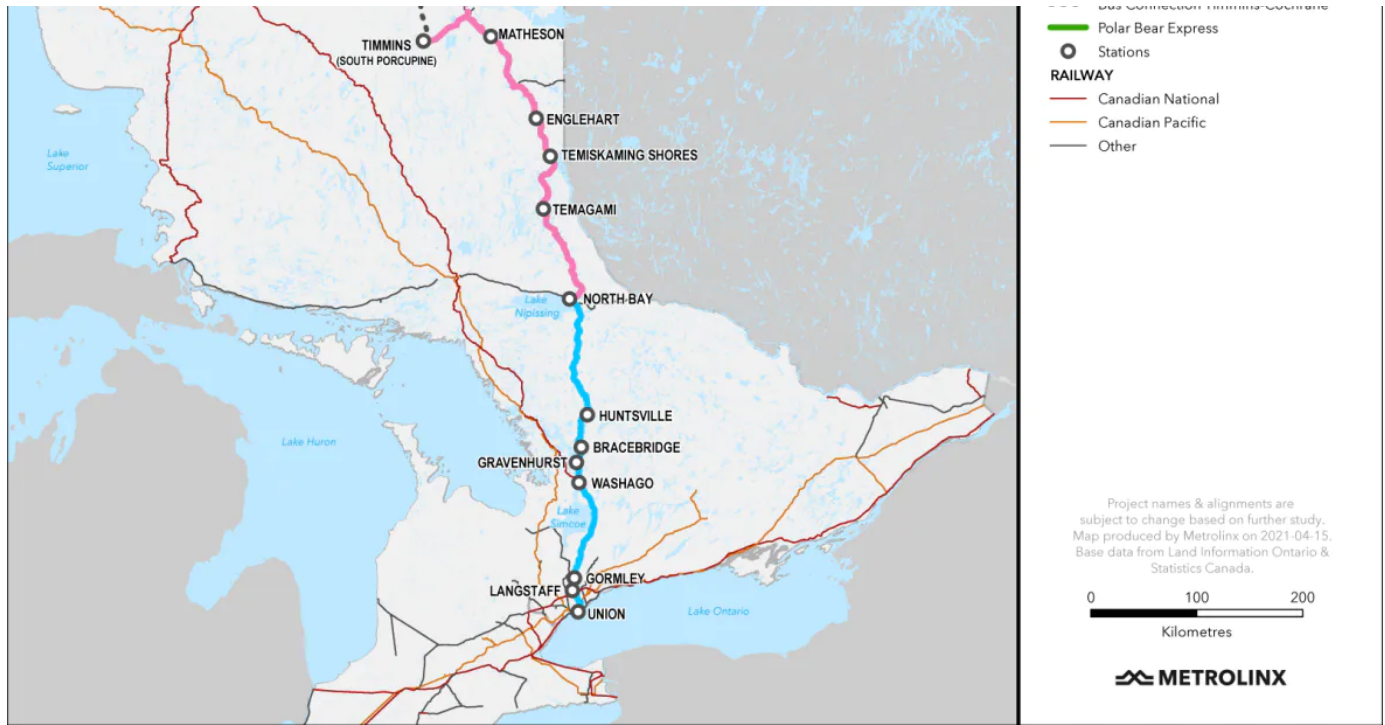
He says the NDP is committed to reviving the Northlander, and the essential transportation service it provided for northern communities.

Ontario Green Party Leader Mike Schreiner said he welcomes today's announcement but "people can't wait half a decade."

He notes that Greyhound's recent shutdown exposed gaps in inter-regional transit in Ontario, "leaving many Ontarians — particularly lower-income individuals, students, those in rural and remote areas and First Nations communities — out of options."

He said today's news was a "re-announcement of what was already in the March budget", and called on Premier Ford "to get to work, make inter-regional transit a priority and provide northern communities with the transit options they deserve."





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