



**Ontario Federation of Agriculture**

**Ontario AgriCentre**

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Ms. Katerina Minaeva  
Senior Policy Analyst  
Ministry of Transportation  
Policy and Planning Division  
777 Bay Street  
Suite 700  
Toronto, Ontario  
M7A 2J8

Dear Ms. Minaeva;

RE: EBR 013-0889 2041 Northern Ontario Multimodal Transportation Strategy

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture (OFA) is Canada's largest voluntary general farm organization, representing more than 36,000 farm family businesses across Ontario. These farm businesses form the backbone of a robust food system and rural communities with the potential to drive the Ontario economy forward.

Ontario agriculture is a major economic driver for the province; \$12.7 billion in farm cash receipts in 2014, with over 770,000 Ontario jobs in farming and food processing. Northern Ontario agriculture is a growing component of the Ontario agri-food sector. Northern Ontario's 2,600 farms generate \$192 million in annual farm cash receipts and support approximately 4,000 jobs.

OFA recognizes the vast geography of Northern Ontario, and the challenges it presents, not only to Northern Ontario residents and businesses, but also to governments building and maintaining the infrastructure necessary to support the region's economic and social growth and development. That being said, OFA believes that the Discussion Paper overlooks several issues that are critical for Northern Ontario farmers. In particular, road networks, including bridges and roundabouts, that enables the free, unhindered movement of large farm vehicles from farm to farm was not identified.

OFA's comments are limited to those themes and goals that directly relate to agricultural activities across Northern Ontario.

**Question 1: How well does the vision statement align with your vision for the Northern Ontario transportation system?**

The Strategy's vision statement does reflect OFA's vision of Northern Ontario's transportation system, in the context of the region's farmers and their transportation-related needs.

**Question 2: Taken together, how well do you think the five goals below respond to the challenges that the northern Ontario transportation system faces now and into the future?**

Firstly, not all of the Goals identified in the Strategy document relate to farmers and farming activities across Northern Ontario. OFA's comments and recommendations on the 5 Goals reflect this.

Secondly, and from OFA's perspective a more significant oversight, the Strategy document ignores the presence of agricultural operations throughout Northern Ontario. That leads to actions that fail to consider their potential impacts on agricultural operations, or take advantage of the presence of agricultural operations throughout Northern Ontario to help further the Strategy's goals and objectives. As noted, Northern Ontario's 2,600 farms generate \$192 million in annual farm cash receipts and support approximately 4,000 jobs.

### **Goal 1: Connected and Prosperous**

OFA agrees that the four highway segments with no alternatives during closures (1.4) must be addressed to improve reliability of travel. OFA recommends a firm commitment from the provincial government to move aggressively to address these route shortcomings. Over the longer term, OFA recommends that the entire Trans Canada Highway through Ontario be widened to 4 lanes to facilitate and enhance goods movement, including the movement of agricultural products, inputs and supplies, tourism and personal travel.

For the most part, Northern Ontario farmers do not rely heavily on rail and marine to ship farm products out of the region, or to ship inputs into the region (1.12; increase market access to rail and marine), although some locally-grown grain is shipped from Thunder Bay. From agricultures perspective, few is any of the Northern Ontario ports are close enough to the agricultural areas to be viable options. That being said, rail does offer alternatives to trucks for inbound shipments of agricultural inputs, equipment and supplies.

With reference to the potential locations for new rail/truck hubs (page 37; figure 7), there are no proposals for hubs in either Rainy River or the New Liskeard areas, both vibrant agricultural areas in Northern Ontario. If a goal of this Strategy is supporting economic development and growth, then the Strategy must recognize the growth potential of Northern Ontario's agriculture sector, including its potential to positively influence employment growth.

However, we do recognize that both rail and marine do play significant roles in the movement of agricultural products originating in Western Canada. For that reason, we support rail and marine system improvements that expedite goods movement.

### **Goal 2: Safe and Reliable**

#### *Improve trip-planning and real-time travel information for road users (2.1)*

OFA supports more real-time information on road and weather conditions. To achieve this, OFA recommends more 511 message board at more locations along Northern Ontario's primary provincial highways.

#### *Expanded cell service across the transportation network in Northern Ontario (2.2)*

Travelers on Northern Ontario's highways deserve certainty of access to phone service along all primary provincial highways. OFA recommends an aggressive program to ensure there is reliable cell service along all of Northern Ontario's primary provincial highways.

#### *Expand and improve provision of rest areas, laybys and roadside pull-offs (2.3)*

The Strategy document notes there are only 7 year-round rest stops throughout Northern Ontario. This is unacceptable. Rest areas should be spaced every 100-160 km along all primary provincial highways. Furthermore, these rest stops should be open year-round, be accessible to large trucks and RVs and offer travellers with phone service, washrooms, and potable water.

### **Goal 3: Address Remote and Far North Challenges**

Goal 3 does not apply directly to farmers and farming activities across Northern Ontario. However, we do recognize the vital role that improved access for remote and far northern communities would play in improving access to safe, healthy and affordable food. Northern Ontario's farmers can provide a range of locally-grown foods. Enhanced access to remote and far northern communities will improve their access to safe, healthy and affordable food.

### **Goal 4: Integrated and Innovative**

*Expand broadband infrastructure in rural and remote communities in Northern Ontario to enable enhanced communications for people and transportation providers (4.1)*

OFA is a strong supporter expanded broadband service throughout Ontario's rural areas and remote communities. Agriculture in the 21<sup>st</sup> century needs access to reliable high-speed internet services to search out needed inputs and supplies, to market farm products and to utilize precision agricultural technologies. Without access to reliable high-speed internet services, agriculture is held in a bygone era. OFA strongly recommends an aggressive program to ensure broadband and high-speed internet service is accessible to rural residents and remote communities.

*Promote local production of food and goods to reduce long-distance transportation needs (4.3)*

The opportunities for expansion of agricultural production in Northern Ontario are huge. The Great Clay Belt in Northeastern Ontario covers 16 million acres. Currently, only about 2% of the area is being actively farmed. One of the limitations to further development is restrictive provincial government rules on its sale to farmers.

Action 4.3 only speaks to greenhouses, and overlooks all of the other agricultural activities currently practiced across Northern Ontario. The Strategy should be promoting and supporting the full range of Northern Ontario's agricultural production (field crops, vegetables, livestock, poultry, fish), current and potential, along with the full range of food processing facilities (dairies, abattoirs, food processors, etc.), not only for the public health benefits from easy access to safe, affordable local food, but also for the secondary benefits provided by local food production and processing; both economic and employment.

*Facilitate the adoption of new and innovative methods of goods movement, where appropriate, such as airships and hoverbarges (4.4)*

The government's **sole** role should be to establish the regulatory framework that supports and encourages innovation; its not government's role to pick specific technologies. Furthermore, we believe that the regulation of air traffic is a federal responsibility.

### **Goal 5: Healthy and Sustainable**

Increase the use of renewable energy throughout the northern transportation system, including for vehicular travel, at airports and for remote communities (5.2)

One of the actions under consideration speaks to a shift to “other carbon-based fuels”. For several years now, OFA has been advocating for an expanded natural gas distribution network that would enable more farms, residences, businesses and institutions to use natural gas for heat or vehicle fuel. The limitation is a natural gas distribution network that does not service low density rural areas.

Encourage planning for compact urban form that supports active transportation options such as walking or cycling and increases the viability of local transit (5.6)

Perhaps language here should be stronger than “encourage”. OFA is a strong proponent of compact urban form, through higher densities for “greenfield development” combined with higher density redevelopment within the built boundary. The benefits of compact urban form extend beyond those cited in the Strategy to include reduced demands to convert non-urban lands to urban uses. Rather than “encourage planning for compact urban form”, the provincial government should universally require it across all municipalities; North and South.

*Improve wildlife safety and decrease the impacts of roads on natural heritage and biodiversity (5.7)*

OFA supports identification and public awareness of those highway segments with high incidences of wildlife/vehicle collisions. One possible option to reduce wildlife/vehicle collisions would be through broad open areas adjacent to roadways, to make it easier for drivers to spot wildlife. OFA is skeptical that traffic volumes across Northern Ontario justify building dedicated wildlife crossing infrastructure, i.e. wildlife overpasses & underpasses.

**Question 3: Under each goal, which directions are the most important to move forward on in the next 10 years?**

In no specific order of importance, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture views the following directions as most important to move forward on in the next 10 years;

- 1.4 4-lane or twin portions of TCH (route segments with no alternative) – would like to see action on this begin immediately, with the goal of completing 4-laning or twining by 2022
- 2.2 expanded cell service
- 2.3 expanded network of year-round rest stops
- 4.1 expanded broadband service

**Question 4: Would you add, remove or change any directions under any of the goals? If so, how?**

The document totally ignores the transportation-related realities and challenges faced by Ontario farmers. The Strategy fails to address the impact on farmers and farming activities from any of the suggested actions and directions arising from any of the Goals.

Farm equipment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is larger, principally wider and longer, than the vehicles of other road users. Its slower too, limited by law to a maximum highway speed of 40 kmph. Accommodating farm equipment necessitates the adoption of road design elements that enable the safe movement of farm vehicles on provincial highways and municipal roads. Traffic circles

or roundabouts must be designed with sufficient width to enable large farm machinery to easily pass through. Widths of 16 feet in transport mode are common. Roadway designs should avoid hard 90° curbs, as this feature can easily damage farm equipment. Bridge widths, between railings, also needs to reflect the transport width of farm equipment. Lastly, the safe movement of farm equipment is enhanced by wide, flat shoulders capable of safely supporting the weight of farm equipment in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The Ontario Federation of Agriculture welcomes this opportunity to provide its perspectives and comments on the Ministry of Transportation's 2041 Northern Ontario Multimodal Transportation Strategy. We look forward to continuing to work with the Ministry of Transportation and the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines on the implementation of the 2041 Northern Ontario Multimodal Transportation Strategy.

Yours truly,



Keith Currie  
President

KC/pj

cc: The Honourable Stephen Del Duca; Minister of Transportation  
The Honourable Michael Gravelle; Minister of Northern Development and Mines  
The Honourable Jeff Leal; Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs  
OFA Board of Directors