

# OPINION / EDITORIAL | OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

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Cochrane Mayor Peter Politis | Cochrane, Ontario – August 12, 2013:

## RETHINKING THE ONTC REQUIRES A PLAN

Growing the North as opposed to simply stopping the bleeding or minimizing the pain as we seem to be resolved to do, cannot be done without an effective multimodal transportation system. That system requires rail and not just the current rail but investment into growing the rail and accessing the vastly under realized northern development potential. While there seems to be a concerted effort to convince us Northerners that all of this is being addressed, as Mayor of a municipality precariously dependent on the outcomes associated to the ONTC, I'm just not at a point where I can drink the proverbial Kool-Aid.

For example, while the government says some of the things we want to hear, creates a Minister's Advisory Committee after ignoring all the overtures by the regional leaders to mutually correct the haste in heading down this path in the first place, and while suggestions are being made that multi-modal transportation is important and on the radar, the current situation of unilateral rail divestment continues unabated. Rethinking an asset key to a region's future requires planning. Building a future requires planning. And of course, engineering a society requires actual planning - Not just calling things a plan. I sat on the Northern Growth Plan Northern Advisory Committee and was part of the refined Design Team. We spent two years putting together a plan for economic development in the North that sat on someone's desk for another year and has been rejected by the government with no explanation or revised direction since – done, all except the optics of planning taking place! The difference between optics management and actually creating a direction is an actual plan with a strategy for outcome, actions, responsibilities, goals and expectations that are all followed up with implementation strategies.

Rethinking the ONTC will never meet the expectations we as northerners have if “optics” are the goal as opposed to developing a workable plan. Knowing the complications that come along with being government, we can give the benefit of the doubt where required and continue to reach out constructively looking for opportunities at collaboration. In doing this I politely suggest to Minister Gravelle that it's time for a proper plan, with all key stakeholders playing a role (including the employees) in the rethinking process. Where a roadmap is “planned” out, a resource support group is put together to support the team, the current divestment process is suspended until this option is explored, and the team is given all opportunity to restructure the ONTC to in effect become the key asset to growth we urgently need here in the North. All of which would best be led by someone with skin on the line who can give the government and Ministry credible recommendations, developed from the ground up by the very people who must live with the results, the stakeholders themselves. My suggestion would be that one of the three most impacted communities who actually have to live the outcomes take the lead (Cochrane, Englehart or North Bay). Subject to Englehart's thoughts, my support would go squarely behind Mayor McDonald of North Bay as he has a clear understanding of the issues and needs, as well as a strong relationship with the employees and regional municipalities.

Being part of a home grown plan that everyone can take ownership in is a critical piece of a successful rethinking process. As the old saying goes, if you don't have your own plan, you are usually part of someone else's! Premier Wynne and Minister Gravelle, it's time to recognize that the North needs to plan its own future.

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