



Satellites role in addressing the Provinces Broadband deficiencies

Ministers Scott and Clark, 300,000 households in Rural and Northern Ontario do not have reliable highspeed broadband, as 70.5% of rural communities do not have access to 50/10 Mbps. Some of those households will be in the ridings of Haliburton—Kawartha Lakes—Brock and Leeds—Grenville—Thousand Islands and Rideau Lakes. So, when FONOM talks about our communities and residents' experience with connectivity, you know of what we speak. ***We all want better!***

I am sure your ridings are experiencing that same Real Estate boom, as we see the great exodus from the GTHA due to the Pandemic. A reliable and robust connection to the world wide web is the largest impediment, to a more significant influx to the North.

FONOM believes that all efforts need to be explored when addressing our regions' broadband deficiencies and your ridings'. Those include towers, wires, and satellites. We understand that a tower may have a line of sight connectivity of up to 10 miles. Considering the topography of Northern Ontario, not all residences within those 10 miles will have a connection. A wired connection to a house may be ideal but may not be practical for all households for Northern Ontario within our lifetime (with Mac being a Funeral Director, we won't ask him to define lifetime). Therefore, FONOM believes that financial support for Satellite technology is what the Federal and Provincial governments should increase. Telesat and Starlink are presently now well-positioned to benefit our needs. Their beta-tested technology is providing more significant and more reliable connectivity than all other options.

Ministers, we believe all options should be on the table to address the lack of connectivity, with all being given a competitive chance. Therefore, FONOM asks the Province of Ontario to let us know the investment being made to support Satellite connectivity and explore ways to enhance this approach.

Mental Health, Opioid Crisis & Homelessness

The Ministry of Health along with every other Ministry had to radically shift priorities with the Pandemic landing in North America. In January and February of 2020 almost daily were stories in the Media about the Opioid Crisis, Mental Health and Homelessness. Those stories have been set aside, as the public's interest has shifted to the impacts of COVID19. It would be cynical of us to think the media was looking for a story with an identifiable death toll. But in communities across the Province our citizens continue to see and feel the impacts, of this crisis. Our Police Forces, EMS personnel, mental health works, the Emergency Rooms, the mental health workers, the Crisis centres, and the case works in the DSSAB's see and feel the impacts of this crisis. The Public believes every level of government has a role to play to "fix" the problem. But we all know there is no quick solution to address the crisis.

Opioid Crisis

Several Coroner's in the Province have spoken to former high-ranking members of the drug trade, asking about the rise in overdoses. They wanted to know why street drugs are being laced with fentanyl or other fatal ingredients? They responded it is to give people ***the best high of their life*** and they will come back to chase that feeling, and the death's is the cost of doing business. A vast majority of the opioid deaths that the Coroner's are seeing the bloodwork come back with numerous drugs present. We have some in the medical field believe that legalizing all drugs and creating safe injection sites would be a great step in the right direction to saving lives. Some believe law enforcement and the penal system is the answer. A Universal Basic Income is being suggested to local politicians as an important building block. Others believe thousands of more treatment beds and than safe and secure living facilitates need to be created.

A consequence of the addition issues that is also impacting communities, not only in the North, are the needles being discarded in our streets, parks and playgrounds. FONOM is eager to hear from the Minister of Environment on his Ministry strategy to address this issue.

Homelessness

There are individuals for one reason or another living in doorways, parks or bushes, couch surfing, squalor, shelters, or facilities. Due to individuals issues they don't or wouldn't qualify to be admitted to the shelters, so other arrangements are made, or they stay on the street. The project in North Bay **Gateway House**, funded heavily by different Provincial Agencies looks promising. If that project shows it is making inroads to address Mental Health, Addictions and Homelessness, then we believe it should be replicated across the Province.



Mental Health

When we were kids there those with Mental Illnesses were cared for by family or had stays short term or long term in institutions. Yes, there was stigma for those that went into the Ontario Psychiatric Hospital, but individuals received great care and so many were helped. Today, the system is different and those that would 30 years ago be institutionalized are in our communities. Some receive the help offered and are our neighbors. But there are others that place a strain on government resources, and I frighten the public. We need to do better, but don't have the answer but we would like to work with you to find a way to help.

Conclusion

FONOM wants to recognize the work your government has done and continues to do, and your financial investments are appreciated. Municipalities have Board representatives on some of the Agencies, Boards and Commissions that facilitate an important role in providing services and supports to address the needs of the Homeless and those suffering from mental health and addiction issues. We would like to understand your government's approach, to understand how the pieces fit together. There are many different agencies in our communities providing services, we would hope the Province would join us in encouraging them to consolidate, so resources can make more of a difference. We would like to better understand what the roll or the future of the Local Health Integration Networks is? They have dedicated staff that want to help, but it seems they often do not or cannot.

Northern Ontario Transportation Strategy

Minister Caroline Mulroney members of our Board have been engaged in a Northern Transportation strategy for over a decade, first the Northern Growth Plan sessions, then in 2015 and the most recent survey. But I can tell you, Minister, that we are hopeful that this time there will be movement. The reason we have hope now is we have seen what this Government has done on the Blue Box transition, compared to that of the previous Government. To reinforce our confidence specifically in your Ministry Minister is the information tour your Parliamentary Assistance Vijay Thanigasalam did last winter. His tour in our part of the Province we call home in winter is something we appreciate and believe all members of the Cabinet should do. This Government also moved the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission to the Ministry of Transportation, again something we have been asking for over a decade.

I am sure the Minister knows people who work every day at Queens Park that take Public Transportation to work. In the North, we rely on the Highway system, not only for work but also for our economy. Your Ministry can tell you how many transports move commerce on Highway 11 and 17 daily, to locally and nationally, we think 8,700 is a bit low. Intercommunity busing provided by the ONTC and others is used by the elderly to get to medical appointments and post-secondary students to get to school or home. Our four large airports in the Northeast will again soon be busy not only connecting the residents of the seven districts to the world but they provide access to and for our businesses as well. FONOM believes that the four major Airports are *vital* to a healthy intergraded accessible transportation network in the North. Minister very shortly, we would like to ask for your advocacy in lobbying the Federal Government to make all four airports in the Northeast international airports with a port of entry status.

Before we get to the most recent draft transportation plan for Northern Ontario from your Ministry, we just wanted to stop and reinforce our letter to you from December 2020. We all know this Government's election promise from 2018 to bring back the Northlander passage train. The Northlander had a lot of challenges when it previously operated. It not only had to rely on a subsidy from the Government, but the schedule made it a challenge for some riders. But Minister the GO Train, the UP Train, and the TTC receive a subsidy! We believe that the new relationship the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission has with the Ministry of Transportation will benefit in recognizing a better and reliable schedule.

Minister, your plan has sixty-seven recommendations, are all necessary to improve the transportation system in the Northern part of the Province. FONOM wishes to assist your Ministry in moving forward. We would encourage your Ministry to take a leadership role with the Federal Government to strengthen the four Major Airports. We ask that the passage rail between Toronto to Moosonee be reinstated before the next election. That winter maintenance continues to be improved to ensure the free flow of the passage and commercial traffic. We applaud the announced investments to improve the highway system in Northern Ontario, and that it is moving forward so promptly.

Minister, FONOM has several members who have a great deal of knowledge and have been involved in previous Transportation discussions. We wish to offer our assistance in facilitating your municipal interactions as you work through your consultations.