



# Timmins Chamber of Commerce Chambre de commerce de Timmins

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**Cal McDonald, ADM**  
**Proposed Growth Plan for Northern Ontario**  
**Ministry of Northern Development, Mines and Forestry**  
**159 Cedar Street, Suite 601**  
**Sudbury ON P3E 6A5**  
Email: [NorthernGrowthPlan@ontario.ca](mailto:NorthernGrowthPlan@ontario.ca)

**February 1, 2010**

Dear Mr. McDonald,

The Timmins Chamber of Commerce is a member-driven business advocacy organization with over 760 business members. As the largest accredited chamber of commerce with distinction in northeastern Ontario, our advocacy and policy initiatives focus on ensuring a positive business climate in the City of Timmins.

Following the release of the Proposed Growth Plan for Northern Ontario, the chamber took a number of steps to lead an extensive consultation process with our members. The comments below are supported by the 21-member Board of Directors of the Timmins Chamber of Commerce.

Overall, the Timmins Chamber of Commerce supports the principle backing the Proposed Growth Plan for Northern Ontario but has some concerns regarding its current incarnation. We caution that a comprehensive, "Northern-made" strategy is required for true, economically sustainable growth and resource stewardship for Northern communities. Northern Ontario is world-renowned for its resources and we recognize that the development of resources is irrevocably changing in a global capacity, having profound implications on the way we do business in Northern Ontario. While Northern Ontario owes its existence to mining and forestry, the former is a finite resource with a set life cycle. Many Northern communities, including Timmins, have learned through first-hand experience that mines open to close. As we plan and work to create a resource and knowledge-based economy in Northern Ontario, we must indeed leverage the opportunities created by our current economic successes to develop new businesses, innovative industries and stronger communities.

We support that the plan is protected by legislation, and is therefore less prone to modification resulting from changing government parties or government priority. We appreciate the ideas present in the plan, but have concern that it significantly lacks details, timelines and an adequate implementation process. In general:

- A 25-year plan is a fair timeline for the province and municipalities to make adjustments in capital spending, where required.
- We support that Aboriginal population and participation is highly valued in the plan.
- The alignment of the provincial environmental assessment process with the federal environmental assessment process (Promoting Environmental Stewardship Plan of Action #7) is highly valued in the plan and fully supported by the Timmins Chamber of Commerce.
- There must be greater emphasis on regional approaches to develop Northern Ontario. With almost 90% of Ontario's land mass, the differences across this region of the province must be accounted for within the plan; it speaks of regional centres but does not outline how each region plays into the plan. Implementing regional zones to coordinate provincial ministries could be very conducive to responding to each region's specific characteristics. Quebec has in place a good model of regional development.
- The Growth Plan speaks to importing a southern solution rather than creating a Northern solution; it lacks autonomy, and the perspectives, goals and ideas in the plan do not necessarily reflect a Northern reality.

- The plan needs an attitude of “grown from the north” instead of being framed within a southern context; to that end, there needs to be more consultation in the next review of the plan.
- Funding in the plan: currently indicates there is \$3B allotted over the next three years. There is some question as to the \$2.5B (already announced for hydro generation and transmission in Northern Ontario) is included in that \$3B, leaving only \$0.5B to implement the 73 plan of action items outlined in the proposed Growth Plan. There is question as to whether this is ‘new investment’ in Northern Ontario or whether this is repackaging the budget. The plan lacks an implementation timeline and lacks funding details associated with each action plan item.
- The plan lacks any acknowledgements of weaknesses in the north; this is necessary for Northern Ontario to develop growth strategies.
- The plan must be designated a “living document”; it needs to be dynamic, gain Northern ownership, buy-in (we see this as lacking in the current environment) and control. There must be means in place through which the plan can be modified to quickly respond to and leverage opportunities arising from changing provincial and local economic contexts; a built-in review must be established.

### **Centre of Excellence for Timmins**

- Without an identified centre of excellence (innovation centre), Timmins is at a disadvantage compared to the four other large urban centres in the North who have such facilities; we feel that Timmins should have an established centre of excellence.
- The Province of Ontario should be acting immediately to establish a Centre of Excellence for the Bio-economy in Timmins. Timmins has a number of growing post-secondary institutions that would be well-positioned to launch research plans in conjunction with such a Centre. This would attract jobs, high-skill professionals, and hands-on research that we could all be part of here in the northeast. This Centre of Excellence could – and should - collaborate with CRIBE in the northwest. Other possible Centres of Excellence include: Centre of Excellence for Environmental Stewardship/Land Reclamation; Centre of Excellence for Aboriginals and Cultural Development.
- The government should work with the five ‘large urban’ municipalities to establish a strong, *Northern, connected network of Centres of Excellence*.
- As we attempt to transition from a predominantly resource-based economy to include a knowledge-based economy, there must be some commitment of dollars to Timmins’ region of Northern Ontario; we are concerned that financial support will flow to regions already supported by English and/or bilingual universities or research centres (particularly the four other major urban centres: Sault Ste. Marie, Thunder Bay, Sudbury and North Bay), an outcome that would leave Timmins at a disadvantage in the implementation of the plan.
- Opportunity for Timmins in regional service delivery (expertise sharing etc.) to the north; Timmins has world-class mine processes and suppliers, Timmins mines are among the most varied in the north.

### **Northern Resources**

- The Growth Plan lacks any mention of maintaining resources for processing in Ontario; as a plan for Ontario’s future, we must ensure we protect the jobs and resources that are here to benefit Ontarians.
- The Growth Plan should incite a paradigm shift in the general populace of all Ontarians – rather than ship resources OUT of Northern Ontario, we should create the economic development opportunities HERE – this will result in a stronger overall province, not one that is “bottom heavy”.
- Timmins is facing a challenging short, medium and long-term future with the recent announcement of 680 direct jobs lost through the closure of Xstrata Copper’s copper and zinc smelting operations in Timmins.
- Large, energy-intensive operations rely on affordable power rates; the Government of Ontario will continue to see energy-intensive industries along with resources and jobs, leave our province and move to other jurisdictions if it does not address the increasing cost of power and corresponding decrease in competitiveness of our province.
- There is widespread concern that with the May closure of Xstrata’s Kidd Metallurgical Site, the Ontario Northland Transportation Commission (will also close and/or cut back services, which would drastically affect transportation in our corridor.



- Timmins is typically a different economic zone compared to other Northern communities and the region; it tends to have less similarity with the other major centres in terms of economic cycles.

## **Building Towards a New Economy**

### **Mining**

- There is no local research institute to support mining industry research and innovation in Timmins.
- *Plan of Action #3 - Link potential mine development with regional infrastructure planning.* Is this another level of assessment? Who has the authority to determine whether it (mine development) is the right fit? The community? The province?
- *Plan of Action #8 – Develop initiatives that increase public understanding of current exploration and mining practices, environmental impacts and the importance of minerals and metals to daily lives.* This is an important action item, particularly regarding increasing the public understanding of mining and minerals in day-to-day life as well as its economic impacts. However, it must also be communicated that mining is a finite resource and that it is important for mining communities to leverage the opportunities created by strong mining economies in order to move towards developing knowledge-based economies.
- Consider resource revenue sharing with the north. Ontario exports so many of its natural resources, the government should consider royalties on exports. Already we are seeing First Nation groups get royalties through impact benefit agreements.
- Develop government incentives to promote mine development/retention, including energy consumption & preferred pricing considerations.

### **Forestry**

- *Plan of Action #1 - Introduce a proposed new forest tenure and pricing system to provide more equitable access to forest resources for innovation and growth in forestry, bio-economy and other forest-based industries.* This is key to any major change in forest resources being available to new industry. It is positive that this is mentioned in the plan; however it is a process already in progress. Must ensure adequate funding is in place to support and follow through with this process.
- *Plan of Action #1 (cont'd) - Examine opportunities to reduce regulatory burdens on business and increase the availability of forest resource information.* We should look for changes in how the Endangered Species Act is implemented, accept forest management plans as sufficient support for permitting and speed up decisions at the five year or ten year level.
- Increased support of the forest inventory would benefit forestry as well as wildlife planning. People making investments would have a better knowledge of forestry inventory/biomass. As the owner of forest resources, the crown should work to develop and maintain a comprehensive inventory of what biomass exists.
- *Plan of Action #2 - Create a Forestry Cluster Council to support collaboration among industry, labour, communities, Aboriginal peoples, researchers, the education sector, other forestry organizations and government to contribute to strengthening and diversifying the industry.* This is a task worth pursuing; however, to ensure the integrity, expertise and function of the council, it must not be a politically-appointed group. A mix of accountable, subject matter experts appointed to the council by municipal governments, provincial governments and First Nations/Métis could ensure an adequate representation with the interest of Northern Ontarians well-represented. We see Timmins as a prime location to house the Forestry Cluster Council and recommend that it be housed here.
- *Plan of Action #3 - Focus business supports on knowledge-intensive, value-added products and new markets, including forestry equipment, and supply and services. Increase use of innovative technologies to improve efficiency and product quality.* This should be as open as possible and as entrepreneur-based as possible to facilitate true innovation. Consideration must also be given those existing industries which will evolve and thrive in the future. There must be linkages to the Transportation Plan of Action for business supports to truly be effective.
- *Plan of Action #4 - Pursue innovations to advance forest health, regeneration and new products.*



- a) *Advance research and commercialization expertise in forest health; properties, use and regeneration of Ontario tree species; and climate change adaptation.*

This is a great initiative that should be adequately supported by government incentives and/or funding.

The Ministry of Natural Resources already has a lab in Sault Ste. Marie that has been conducting research in this area for some time. Strategic funding to SSM and to regional science groups (many already exist in Timmins, Thunder Bay) could help to make real advances in this growing field. We see this as another opportunity for Timmins; it could be part of Environmental Stewardship initiatives and/or a research institute specializing in forestry and climate change adaptation.

- b) *Work with industry to advance innovative uses of forestry biomass for bioeconomy markets.*

There must be a wide focus on this action.

- c) *Adopt innovations in the replanting and regeneration of Ontario's forests as part of a Crown forest renewal strategy.* Northeastern Ontario used to have the biggest planting program in the province; there are numerous greenhouses still in existence, which could be involved in replanting and regenerating Ontario's forests. Replanting and regenerating Ontario's forests should be quantified with wood supply targets and timelines; the government should establish a long-term wood supply in the province. Setting a target wood supply assures investors that Ontario has made a commitment to long-term supply. To that end, the government should revisit the Forest Production Policy of past Ontario governments, which allowed for protected areas to be compensated for by more intensive silviculture efforts, while maintaining the province's wood volume commitment.

*Plan of Action #5 - Recognize wood as a renewable resource and increase its use in construction.*

- a) *Showcase the use of wood in public building projects.*

- b) *Market Ontario's high quality wood and sustainable forest management practices through a "green" branding strategy and export initiatives linked to national and provincial trade initiatives.*

- c) *Amend building codes and construction standards to allow for the use of wood in mid-rise construction.*

- All of Action item #5 should be tied to Forest Certification. Woodworks - using wood in construction promotion/support program. The plan has very clear statements to support certain groups, e.g. "Celebrate use of wood, Woodworks"- support should not be limited to just one group; must include the efforts and provisions that already exist in other businesses, programs and initiatives.
- Must include an action plan item to promote/market "green" nature of forestry; for example, the three forms of acceptable sustainable forestry certification, the wildlife and fisheries gains made by sustainable forest management and certification, the tourism opportunities created by accessing remote areas, carbon credits potential for planting private land, and many more potential ways to promote the "green" nature of the forestry industry.

## **Energy**

- Energy *must* be seen as an economic development tool rather than as an extractable resource.
- To that end, the government of Ontario should implement preferred rates for heavy industry for Northern Ontario.
- Large, energy-intensive operations rely on affordable power rates; the Government of Ontario will continue to see energy-intensive industries along with resources and jobs, leave our province and move to other jurisdictions if it does not address the increasing cost of power and corresponding decrease in competitiveness of our province to attract and retain large industry.
- With the government providing incentives to the southern Ontario manufacturing industry, we assert that similar forms of support should be provided to the industries in the north.
- Timmins and northeastern Ontario are in prime position geographically to establish a renewable energy facilitation office in Timmins.
- The energy issue of pricing for competitiveness is not addressed.
- There is a lack of capacity with community groups to access certain identified programs, e.g. Green Energy Community Energy Partnership Program.



## Green Energy

The Green Energy Act has a southern Ontario focus, with measures to preserve agricultural land; this same approach does not reflect Northern Ontario realities and may stifle development.

## Bioeconomy

- Opportunities within the bioeconomy are vast for Timmins and Northern Ontario. It is of concern that there is only one Action Plan Item in the proposed growth plan.
- *"Through the Centre for Research and Innovation in the Bioeconomy"* [CRIBE]: CRIBE is in Thunder Bay. All communities MUST have input into the "plan" and access to the funds CRIBE controls.
- The opportunities to participate in the bioeconomy must not be clustered or centralized in one or two large urban Northern municipalities. Each of the 5 major centres should be encouraged and supported in establishing a niche.
- *"aligned with Provincial bioeconomy initiatives"*: The province must clarify what its provincial bioeconomy initiatives are. Currently they cannot be found in one place, but range over several initiatives from several ministries and departments.
- It appears as though the government's strategy is to replace coal at Nanticoke and Atikokan power plants. This strategy relies upon the production of wood pellets in Northern Ontario and the shipment of these pellets to the coal plants. We assert that Northern Ontario should be producing its own power – here. Moreover, shipping the biomass south has its own environmental impacts and greenhouse gas emissions; in the long term, producing the fuel and the power in Northern Ontario may in fact be 'greener' when the full-cost environmental accounting is considered.
- Our communities must get an opportunity to use the wood basket to generate community bio-energy as well. We should not ship wood or wood pellets out as a "commodity" to any market.
- Northern Ontario must not enter into long-term contracts for the pellet supply that will tie our hands in the future, therein limiting the control of our resources. This is not the best use of our wood resources.
- *"a bioproduct market analysis and development strategy"*: The study must be initiated in the north, and draw from other studies that have already been completed. There must be opportunity for consultation and input. The Northern perspective is a very different perspective than the south. This cannot be a study that is driven by the needs in the south for the supply of bioproducts manufactured there using raw Northern resources.
- *"including related manufacturing activities"*: The focus must be on establishing the manufacturing facilities in the north so that we are shipping out finished products, not shipping our bioproducts to the south for processing. The southern Ontario-driven mentality that Northern resources should be shipped to support southern manufacturing industries must change.
- As with any new markets, we have to ensure that the regulatory framework is not so onerous as to exclude the small players, and we should ensure that as regulations come forward, business has an opportunity for input before the regulations are enacted through organizations like the Small Business Agency of Ontario, Northern chambers of commerce, etc.
- The Province of Ontario should act immediately to establish a Centre of Excellence for the Bio-economy in Timmins.

## Agriculture & Aquaculture

- There is no mention of a research institute for agriculture or aquiculture.
- In the past, the Ministry of Agriculture removed staff from Northern Ontario.
- There are concerns that the current agricultural model will not work in Northern Ontario.

## Tourism & Cultural Industries

- Tourism and cultural industries are great tertiary offshoots for any community, but we do not feel it should not be a major focus of the plan.



## Attracting Investment and Business Growth

- *Plan of Action #1a) Align provincial investment programs with Growth Plan Priorities.* Does aligning existing Northern Ontario funding streams to the Growth Plan's priorities mean that funding agencies (NOHFC, etc.) can only fund those ideas included in the plan? If so, it may remove the ability for communities to be innovative in their own regions; such a policy would continue to foster the spirit of creating projects to match funding envelopes instead of funding community/regional-based projects based on their inherent value.
- *Plan of Action #3: Increase public procurement opportunities through local procurement.* This recommendation is appreciated and fully supported; however it must be noted that this policy is contrary to existing government policy, as demonstrated by programs such as OntarioBuys and OECM.
- There needs to be a harmonization of Federal and Provincial development policy.
- The provincial government should encourage its federal counterpart to establish a federal development agency in place of FedNor. There is an imbalance between the newly established federal development agency, "FedDev", for southern Ontario and FedNor, the federal develop program administered through Industry Canada.
- Policies for the far north should be established in advance, not as reactionary measures.
- The plan mentions particular acts that, if passed, play a major role in economic development in the north, yet the plan fails to indicate how these acts and their regulations will play into the (either suppress or support) Growth Plan; e.g. The Far North Planning Act.
- Businesses must know the "rules of engagement" for investing in the far north; business and economic development is a tool for driving social development; we must ensure we do not stifle economic development in the areas in which it is so clearly needed.
- Strategies must be customized to Northern Ontario; must be considered unique in Ontario.
- Angel investment is not as widely accepted or present in Timmins, due in part to the life cycle of business investors and in part to the population compared to other major centres.
- The plan must focus on growing new industries while retaining and strengthening existing industries. The continuance of existing, and creation of new, business support programs is essential to help businesses adapt to mine closings, improve global reach, etc.
- Need to collaborate between labour, education and industry to meet workforce needs.
- Explore new opportunities: evaluate the potential to open a deep water port at Moosonee; fresh water is a resource that will increase in demand while supply continues to decrease, while also providing more international/direct link to northeastern Ontario.
- Picks winners and losers without notifying losers; for example, the plan proposes a merged Policy Institute into Policy & Research Institute and an increase in services of Small Business Enterprise Centres without providing information about funding.

## Investing in People and Progress

- Timmins and northeastern Ontario are already on the forefront of bringing broadband technology to rural and underserved communities via NEOnet, yet much work needs to be done in providing equitable, affordable access to broadband technology throughout northeastern Ontario and particularly its remote Aboriginal communities.
- Education efforts in Northern Ontario: we caution that in the present draft of the plan, too much focus is on eLearning. Admittedly, this is an important component of the strategy to connect communities and invest in people, but it simply cannot replace the growth needed for post secondary education institutes in Northern Ontario and in Timmins.
- Immigration is not mentioned as a component of the plan, yet it is often cited as larger provincial and federal strategies to meet future workforce needs. How does immigration play into the Growth Plan?
- Educating literate people: literacy rates in Ontario are typically lower in Northern Ontario and literacy issues tend to be more prominent in Aboriginal populations; there is no talk in the plan of working with the Ministry of Education, MTCU, or Ministry of Culture. We question to what extent they have been consulted and what buy-in they have to the plan.



- Details surrounding the plans and financial supports backing the goal of preparing “Northern youth for postsecondary education and training” are lacking.
- The Growth Plan should support the access to university courses through the college network.
- *Action Plan #5 – Strengthen collaboration among postsecondary facilities and industry to adapt apprenticeships, co-op programs and skills development initiatives to prepare students for market-relevant and emerging employment opportunities.* Northern Ontario needs linked, connected innovation centres throughout the region, not clusters of centres in Sudbury and Thunder Bay; innovation centres must be a physical presence in each of the five urban centres.

## **Research & Innovation**

- As stated throughout this document, Northern Ontario should have connected and collaborating centres of excellence/innovation in each of the five urban centres.
- Currently, Timmins is the only major urban centre without an English language university and/or research institute. However, it should be noted that research can be supported and can be taking place in advance of the establishment of an English-speaking university through the college networks.

## **Forging a New Relationship with Aboriginal Peoples**

- Currently, First Nations individuals cannot secure loans or investment on reserve land, which inhibits economic development on reserve land. (Aboriginals cannot use reserve belongings as collateral to secure loans.) There is room here for the province to help. INAC funding can be obtained depending on which Band or Council is involved. The Indian Act needs changes that allow for the securing of loans to start a business. The province should look at ways to achieve this in order to encourage economic development in First Nations communities.
- First Nations often have different values systems that must be understood. Two-way cultural understanding is a mandatory component of this plan.
- Basic and adult education is unequivocally needed to help aboriginal populations – how this is going to be addressed is absent in the plan. The plan must contain the goal and necessary supports to increase education and literacy rates among Aboriginals.
- Aboriginal Education & Skills Development: there needs to be a combination of both in-class and eLearning to facilitate skills development.
  - Internet connections are often not reliable in Northern Ontario’s remote communities; need funding in order to invest in the necessary fibre optics stability.
  - Aboriginal culture and its traditional form of communications is not conducive to eLearning.
  - The plan should support or lead to building education capacities into communities; many of these communities (such as Moosonee and Moose Factory) now face outmigration of youth in seeking education opportunities.
  - Many impact benefit agreements are seeing education, training and employment components being included, however there are no public or legislated standards; this means that in many situations an un(der)developed First Nation must effectively ‘wait out’ economic development opportunities in order to stimulate education and/training opportunities for its First Nations residents. This is not proactive policy on the part of the Ontario government and is not in the best interest of our region nor our country.

## **Connecting and Strengthening Northern Communities**

### **Regional and Economic Planning**

- Another level of bureaucracy is not in the best interest of Ontarians.
- Implementing regional zones to coordinate provincial ministries could be very conducive to responding to each region’s specific characteristics. Quebec has in place a good model of regional development.
- *Plan of Action #1e) Proceed with implementation of regional economic zones within a year. Establish a technical advisory group to examine approaches of other jurisdictions and provide input on proposed principles/models for regional economic zones in the North. Begin regional economic planning pilots*



*among interested communities.* Currently, there are a number of zones of natural economic partnership that already exist and should be explored prior to implementing the regional economic zones. The time frame associated with this action item is recognized and supported by the Timmins Chamber of Commerce.

- The feasibility and role of a deepwater port development in James Bay should be investigated.

### **Regional service delivery**

- Northern Ontario is a vast and expensive area to serve.
- Development should include private sector development and support, combined with dispersal and, where necessary, relocation of public jobs (for example, there is no substantial Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs located in Northern Ontario).

### **Info & Communications Technology**

- More funding is needed to fill technology gaps.
- There are no clear definitions in support of action statements, for example, the meaning of what constitutes “adequate internet” is unclear.

### **Quality of Place**

- The market must be supportive of quality of place initiatives.
- Recreation, an area of development very important to many Northerners, is not mentioned in Quality of Place.

We look forward to continuing the stakeholder engagement process and learning which improvements are incorporated into the Growth Plan for Northern Ontario.

Regards,



Fred Gibbons  
2009-2010 President  
Timmins Chamber of Commerce

