

NORTHERN HIGHWAY SAFETY PLAN

Introduction

Safety on the TransCanada Highways 11 and 17 continues to be the number one concern for most residents of Northern Ontario because they are our main streets. We use these highways to get to work, school, hockey, and medical appointments, but we share them with thousands of cross-country commercial trucks. As a result, Northern MPPs have had a lot to say over the years about the state of highways in the North and for good reason.

Years ago, the problem was proper and consistent winter maintenance. The Liberal government in power at the time claimed everything was fine, so MPP Vanthof's office created the Northern Road Report to show that it wasn't. The Minister of Transportation (MTO) demanded that the report be taken down, but in the end the Northern Road Report helped prove that even when contract requirements were being met, people were still being put at risk. As a result, the government of the day was forced to make changes to the system.



MPP Bourgooin introduced legislation to make maintenance standards the same across the TransCanada system, so that 11 north of North Bay would be maintained to the same standard as south. The legislation was defeated, but the government did create a separate standard for the northern portion of the TransCanada highway. MPP Bourgooin has also introduced other pieces of legislation regarding driver training and not being able to pass on double solid lines. This was defeated, but he remains committed to finding ways to solve safety issues the same as his fellow Northern MPPs. Similarly, MPP Vaugeois introduced a motion that driver testing be taken back by the MTO which would have been an effective way for the government to control the standard of drivers on the roads. All three members have been vocal in the legislature regarding highway safety throughout their careers.

We are once again facing a highway safety crisis, one that we believe requires a plan designed **by Northerners for Northerners**. It contains clear goals that we can push government of whatever stripe to implement for all our families.



Current Situation

Currently some poorly trained commercial vehicle drivers and the companies they work for are putting all other drivers at undue risk. Incidents have been easy to track on social media. Investigative reports on the problems in commercial truck training and licensing, and from the Auditor General of Ontario identified this problem as far back as 2018. We, Northern MPPs have mentioned this issue many times in the legislature. The response from the government has been that these are the safest roads in North America, and that they are looking into the matter.

Regardless of political stance, we hope that we can all agree that one of the basic jobs of any government is to ensure that people who are issued a driver's license are capable of safely driving the vehicle for which they are licensed. There are over a hundred companies in Ontario who recruit, train, and license their own drivers and they can issue Ontario licenses to them. These are among the worst offenders. Of course there are still good driving schools, and companies that provide excellent training programs to their new drivers, but not all of them. Change needs to happen in the immediate and long term, and we are proposing a plan to address these needs. First, there needs to be immediate action by the Ministry to ensure that only properly-trained drivers are graduating by appointing employees of the MTO to conduct driving tests for all new commercial vehicle drivers before they can receive a license.

Immediate Ask

- Have all new drivers tested by MTO certified inspectors, not third-party private companies. If their student drivers can't pass a legitimate road test, then these driving schools will be forced to change how they conduct business.

Short-Term

- Return the management of highway maintenance operations to the MTO, while working with contractors and providers throughout the North.
- Increase staffing at scales and inspection sites, as well as OPP Traffic enforcement to ensure the laws currently in place are being followed.
- Expedite the 1+2 pilot project and the construction of rest stops. Use the fill that is dug out to rebuild sections of the highway to create parking pull offs.

Medium-Term

- Make snow tires mandatory for all passenger vehicles registered in Northern Ontario. Ensure that driving schools comply with the current MELT training system.
- Reform issues within MELT itself and expand requirements to include winter driving training.
- Address the current abuse of “self insurance provisions” and ensure tow truck operators and other service providers can get paid for services from these schemes.
- Require that all commercial motor vehicles have dash cams.
- Increase the number of cameras and photo radar to slow down traffic.

- Emphasize rail to move goods so not as many loads must travel on the highway.
- Return connecting links to the provincial highway system so that maintenance is uniform.
- Better equip and increase the availability of rest stops with heated, maintained washrooms.
- Direct the cost of repairing damage to municipal roads caused by detour traffic from highway closures to the MTO.

Long-Term

- Widen and pave all shoulders on Highways 11 and 17.
- Make Highway 11 and 17 a divided four-lane highway wherever possible.
- If the 1+2 pilot proves successful, a continuous three lane would be a good intermediate step. The TransCanada Highway is the road system meant to move goods and people across the country, but it is no longer equipped to do that safely here in Northern Ontario.

This plan is designed to be a living document. The goals here have been suggested by industry stakeholders, drivers, municipalities and others. We are open to suggestions, ideas, and constructive criticism. Please send us your comments. By working together, we are hoping to make the highway safer for all our families.