

Brian Stevens – GCA representative

Good morning everyone.

I am happy to be here today to announce a new future for the Ontario Northland; A NEW DEAL for Northern Ontario.

I am here representing the men and women who keep Ontario Northland running every day. I, like many of my co-workers are multi-generational railroaders. We are proud of our history in our supporting role in developing the north. That's what was once painted on the side of every rail car we owned, "Ontario's Development Road". For more than a century, the ONTC has played a significant role in transportation, communication and economic development in Northeastern Ontario. Ontario Northland employs more than 950 workers in the region and has an estimated annual economic impact of almost \$210 million in the Northeast. The ONTC and Northern Ontario is worth fighting for.

As we all know, on March 23, 2012, the government of Ontario announced its decision to divest and liquidate all of the assets of Ontario Northland.

On September 28th, the Northlander passenger train completed its last run. On October 2nd, the government announced that it was moving forward with the Ontera sell off.

We've spoken with one voice and have spoken loud and clear that we must have a NEW DEAL. We all recognize that we need to do something different. It became abundantly clear that finding a solution, crafting a New Deal, wasn't going to come from the provincial government or their hired facilitators. We had to look for an alternative solution and began working in earnest searching for the seeds of a NEW DEAL for Ontario Northland which, we are proud to announce today, has grown into a NEW DEAL for Northern Ontario.

Over the years, I've maintained contact with Roy Hains and following the Ontario government's March announcement, we began to explore possible solutions with him. Our GCA union leadership has been steadfast in its support for this exploration of a NEW DEAL option for Ontario Northland. Roy, as many of you know, was the lead on behalf of the Mike Harris government when they announced the divestment of the ONTC years ago. Interestingly Roy played a key role in getting investments into the modern paint shop facility that allows us to paint rail cars like no one else in the industry can. A new motor coach building went up on Wallace Road, a secondary maintenance shop was built in Cochrane Ontario and he was instrumental in rebranding the telecommunication division - Ontera.

Investments that helped the ONTC turn the corner financially with new customers, new revenue streams and the seeds of a new culture. Older workers retired with dignity and respect and made room for over a hundred new young individuals, and so we sought him out again to assist us in completing what we had previously begun, a New 21st century Deal for Ontario Northland.

The NEW DEAL involves transferring ownership of the provincially-held ONTC to a new Port Authority, which will operate under the federal Canada Marine Act. The first step in this process was recently completed with the creation of the James Bay & Lowlands Ports Trustee Corporation. It is ambitious and well thought out plan.

We believe that this opportunity is truly a catalyst for change.

Ongoing ONTC operations will be strengthened to ensure they are economically sustainable. The existing rail and fibre infrastructure will be enhanced and we will rebuild the former Pagwa Sub from Hearst to Nakina, and then a new rail line into the Ring of Fire mineral deposits in the James Bay Lowlands.

The new line will open the Ring of Fire to development and link remote First Nations communities to badly needed jobs, skills, supplies and essential services. We will ship thousands of tons per day of chromite, nickel and other minerals and finished products to markets around the world.

This opportunity is about building partnerships and working together in collaboration to strengthen Northern Ontario. The First Nations communities will share directly in the wealth generated in terms of jobs and wealth for their communities and infrastructure improvements for their future development as well as the social and environment benefits.

Northern rail and telecommunications expertise that exist within Ontario Northland would be retained and expanded. The existing railway would be preserved and transformed into a private sector – publicly operated Class 1 railroad, followed by fibre and green generated electricity connecting northern communities, mine sites and services that will follow the ribbon on rail. The existing refurbishment shop enhanced and expanded to a model refurbishment shop that we know can generate tremendous revenue.

The plan we propose will enable us to maintain for the North an existing infrastructure and use that as the basis for adding new transportation links to continue the northern development mandate. We will forge a solid working relationships with Metrolinx, to bring work north in the way of rail passenger refurbishment. We have the skills and capacity in our motor coach division and yes, we see a future that restores a rejuvenated passenger rail service re-connecting the north with the south, again.

Mr Aspin will speak shortly, but I must thank him for his leadership, and dedication. Without him working hard on our behalf, opening doors and getting meetings with key decision makers, this plan would not have got off the ground.

Our thoughts are with Grand Chief Stan Louttit and we pray that he overcomes that challenges he is facing and wish him a speedy recovery. Deputy Grand Chief Leo Friday will also say a few words and I want to acknowledge his and the Muschkegowug Council openness to make room for our presentation at a recent council meeting. Our consultation with First Nations makes this announcement today possible.

This new deal for Northern Ontario needs the strong support from a wide array of stakeholders including First Nations communities, Northern Ontario communities and their leaders, along with mining, business and industry. We have asked Mayor McDonald, who has been working hard to bring Northern Ontario together and to unite with one voice, to spearhead this campaign of reaching out to leaders, business, industry and communities in the north.

This endeavour is and will be a team effort.

We plan to meet with Minister Chiarelli, Minister Bartolucci and staff from Infrastructure Ontario. We look forward to their help in accomplishing our plan for a New Deal, reminding them of their obligations and policy commitments to the people of the region. The employees have significant investments in pensions, benefits and the various collective agreements and we will leverage those investments with the provincial government as the New Deal moves forward.

We live in the north,

We work in the north,

We call the north home.

We believe in the New Deal for Northern Ontario.

We are staking our future on it. Thank you