The OFIFC is a provincial Aboriginal organisation representing the collective interests of 28 member Friendship Centres located in towns and cities throughout Ontario. The vision of the Aboriginal Friendship Centre Movement is to improve the quality of life for Aboriginal people living in an urban environment by supporting self-determined activities which encourage equal access to, and participation in, Canadian society and which respects Aboriginal cultural distinctiveness.

During a meeting with the Ministry of Transportation (MTO), the Ministry of Northern Development and Mines (MNDM), the Northern Ontario Service Deliverers Association (NOSDA) and the OFIFC, the MTO invited the OFIFC to respond to the draft working papers posted on the NOMTS website. The OFIFC would like to take this opportunity to provide a written response to the third working paper released by the MTO: Socio-Economic Context Working Paper. The OFIFC’s response will focus on five elements discussed, or omitted from the working paper. Namely, NOMTS’ limited understanding of socio-economic conditions; the narrow understanding of the relationship between transportation and socio-economic conditions in northern Ontario; the lack of recognition for the urban Aboriginal reality in northern Ontario; issues with industrial analysis; and challenges with housing analysis.

The Friendship Centres represent the most significant off-reserve Aboriginal service infrastructure in Ontario and are dedicated to achieving greater participation of all urban Aboriginal peoples in all facets of society, inclusive of First Nation – Status/Non-Status, Métis, Inuit and all other people who identify as Aboriginal. The OFIFC manages $45 million in direct delivery funding across the province, not taking into account the direct resources procured by Friendship Centres at the community level.  

There are 15 Friendship Centres and one satellite office located in northern Ontario. Friendship Centres in northern Ontario are located in the communities of: Red Lake; Kenora; Sioux Lookout; Fort Frances; Dryden; Atikokan; Geraldton; Thunder Bay; Timmins; Cochrane; Kapuskasing; Sault Ste. Marie; Sudbury; North Bay; Parry Sound; and a satellite office in Moosonee. In each of these communities, Friendship Centres are community hubs, providing multi-sectoral services to urban Aboriginal people in the area. In many cases they have been serving the community in their respective towns or cities for over 20 years and may be the only urban Aboriginal organisation in their location.

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Considering that 84.1 percent of Aboriginal people in Ontario live off-reserve\(^2\), and that Aboriginal people represent one-third of the total population in northern Ontario\(^3\), urban Aboriginal engagement in creating the Northern Ontario Multimodal Transportation Strategy (NOMTS) is a necessity. Key factors influencing Aboriginal people’s increased migration to urban centres are the perceived educational and employment opportunities, the perception of greater access to supports and services, and the hope of adequate housing. Nonetheless, for many, the socio-economic challenges that have influenced their migration continue to impact their daily lives and a disproportionate percentage of urban Aboriginal people continue to live below the poverty line.\(^4\) Socio-economic challenges faced by urban Aboriginal people are further exacerbated by the inability to access services due to a lack of, or a complete absence of, affordable and effective transportation.

The effects of inadequate transportation systems for northern communities are compounded by extreme weather and a lack of locally available services including health services, employment and affordable food and housing options. Without thoughtful local and regional public transportation, urban Aboriginal people will continue to be isolated from fully participating in their communities and accessing needed services. While Friendship Centres have made real differences in urban Aboriginal people’s lives in spite of the sorry state of local and regional transportation, a lack of funding and capacity continue to threaten Friendship Centres’ abilities to provide transportation-related services. In order to address these issues for urban Aboriginal people, a two-pronged approach is required which must include specific transportation support for urban Aboriginal not-for-profit organisations alongside government-funded transportation systems that support individuals to safely and affordably access essential services including: health care, education and training, social services, housing services, food provisions, and the labour market.

**Response to Socio-Economic Context Working Paper**

**Limited Understanding of Socio-Economic Conditions**

Throughout the Socio-Economic Context Working Paper, the MTO demonstrates a limited understanding of the breadth of socio-economic barriers that are compounded by poor transportation infrastructure and the extent to which these barriers affect individuals and communities in the north. The paper focuses predominately on the relationship between existing and emerging industries and employment opportunities with some consideration for other factors such as housing, unemployment, health care, and access to (education-based) community services and institutions. It is important that the MTO deepen its understanding of the myriad of socio-economic barriers that exist and reflect these in this working paper. For example, analysis should be sought

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\(^3\) Service Canada., *Client Segment Profile: Aboriginal Peoples, Ontario* (Ottawa, ON: Service Canada, 2014).

for factors such as food security, health outcomes, justice involvement, experiences of violence, poverty, mental health status, literacy, racism, housing insecurity, etc. The intersections between ineffective transportation systems and higher instances of poor socio-economic status for urban Aboriginal people are clear; without affordable and effective transportation, urban Aboriginal people will remain challenged in accessing needed services, supports and programs. Some relevant data that should be considered include:

- Aboriginal youth (0-19) represent 2.8 percent of the population in Ontario, Aboriginal children made up over 18 percent of children in care in 2014;\(^5\)
- Between 2007 and 2010 the high school drop out rate for off-reserve Aboriginal students was 22.6 percent compared to 8.5 percent for non-Aboriginal youth in Canada;\(^6\)
- The average income of Aboriginal people in Ontario is about $27,944 compared to $39,655 for non-Aboriginal people;\(^7\)
- 36 percent of off-reserve Aboriginal children under the age of 6 live in poverty compared to 19 percent of non-Aboriginal children;\(^8\)
- Each year, on average, over 800 Aboriginal households move into core housing need, with the potential to nearly double the total number of households in core housing need over the next 10 years;\(^9\)
- Aboriginal boys aged 12-17 are incarcerated at a rate five times higher than their share of the general population in Ontario and the proportion of Aboriginal girls in Ontario jails is 10.7 times higher than their share of the general population;\(^10\) and
- Food shortages and insecurity are a reality for many urban Aboriginal families contributing to negative outcomes and inhibiting their health and wellbeing. In 2003, 79 percent of respondents indicated that they worried about running out of food, 35 percent of their children had gone hungry, 11 percent reported that their children had missed school because there was no food, and 7 percent reported that they had been involved with Children and Family Services because of food shortage.\(^11\)

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\(^7\) Statistics Canada., *Census of the Population* (Ottawa, ON: Statistics Canada, 2006).


Without this understanding, the NOMTS will fail to realise its full potential in supporting economic growth for northern Ontario. Without improvements to the quality of life for all community members in northern Ontario, economic growth will be stalled and industries will continue to face challenges in obtaining the needed labour force. Further, an expanded understanding of socio-economic conditions is imperative because of the role transportation plays in supporting individuals’ access to needed services and programs. By emphasising the experiences of mid- to high-income earners, the NOMTS diminishes, or even ignores, the experiences of vulnerable people throughout northern Ontario, a large proportion of which are urban Aboriginal people. For example, in Section 4.2.2 Health Care, the need to travel considerable differences is noted as a result of the limited scope of services available in many local communities. However, the recognition that for many individuals this is not solely an inconvenience, but rather a substantial barrier without access to personal transportation options. The lack of affordable and effective regional public transportation can limit access of critical health care services. In its current form, this working paper is predominately an employment outlook for northern Ontario, rather than its stated purpose of outlining the socio-economic context for transportation in northern Ontario.

Narrow Understanding of the Relationship between Transportation and Socio-Economic Conditions in Northern Ontario

- The overall findings of this socio-economic assessment show that the needs of the economic sectors – in particular mining in the Ring of Fire – are key elements to consider for transportation planning, and that travel demand will be driven by population and employment growth in certain urban and rural areas, and in and around many First Nations communities.\(^\text{12}\)

Not only should transportation planning consider the needs of specific industrial sectors but also the role in which ineffective, and in many cases non-existent, public transportation infrastructure plays in perpetuating poverty and limiting access to essential services and programs which have a detrimental effect on the overall economic health of the area. Conversely, an effective local and regional transportation system can play a significant role in facilitating access to critical services. The needs of specific industrial sectors cannot be the only key elements for transportation planning. When conducting transportation planning, consideration must also be given to poverty reduction initiatives and addressing socio-economic barriers.

Effective transportation systems can also play a substantial role in creating vibrant and healthy communities that are able to grow economically while ensuring that residents have access to needed services. Without this infrastructure, the out-migration of youth and young adults of working age will continue to persist, and as a result, communities will face challenges meeting the changing needs of an aging demographic. While, youth out-migration trends are noted almost consistently across northern Ontario, it is important to recognise that the urban Aboriginal population is younger and growing

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faster than the non-Aboriginal population, a trend that is only attributed to First Nations in this working paper.

Lack of Recognition for the Urban Aboriginal Reality in Northern Ontario
Throughout the working paper all references to Aboriginal people’s transportation requirements, contributions to the economy, and socio-economic outcomes are limited to First Nations on-reserve communities. This working paper once again highlights the NOMTS, and by extension the MTO’s, ignorance to the presence of an urban Aboriginal reality in northern Ontario. Population statistics are referenced in a way that diminishes the fact that the majority of Aboriginal people in northern Ontario live off-reserve, focusing instead on the 41 percent of Aboriginal people living on-reserve. This sentiment is repeated consistently throughout the paper, for example:

- A complete chapter dedicated to examining the profile of First Nations Communities, without any consideration for urban Aboriginal communities;\(^{13}\)
- Stated potential impact of First Nations population growth for the declining labour force without any mention to the growing urban Aboriginal population (regardless of status definition);\(^{14}\) and
- Analysis of current status of housing, unemployment and access to education services and institutions for Aboriginal people focuses only on First Nations indicators, omitting substantial barriers that are also encountered by urban Aboriginal people. Challenges in accessing services and employment are not limited to First Nations.

While, the paper does indicate that Métis specific data is enumerated in communities in which they reside at the time of the Census,\(^ {15}\) there remains an absence of any urban Aboriginal analysis. Data for urban Aboriginal people, while limited, does exist and should be included in this paper particularly around socio-economic indicators referenced and others that have been omitted.

Industrial Analysis
Northern Ontario industries are referred to in three broad categories: resource-based sectors, population-based sectors, and emerging priority sectors as identified in the Growth Plan for Northern Ontario.\(^ {16}\) While these three categories are generally representative of the current industries and emerging industries, key considerations have been omitted specifically as they related to the resource and population-based sectors.

\(^{14}\) Ibid. 108.
\(^{15}\) Ibid. 4.
\(^{16}\) Ibid. 10-11.
Resource Based Sectors
The working paper focuses has a predominant focus on the mining industry as a key driver of resource based economies. The working paper highlights the historical and anticipated growth in the mining sector.

With this growth, increased truck and road traffic and potential airport expansions or openings could accompany the opening of new mines and related infrastructure. Such future potential investments in new or enhanced transportation infrastructure would also improve access for those living and working in remote communities.\(^\text{17}\)

While it is evident that urban Aboriginal communities can benefit from local mineral development activities including job creation and community investments, there are a number of parallel socio-economic implications that must too be recognised. These consequences have been observed in Friendship Centre communities and in other parts of the Canada where resource extraction is present.

One of the most common consequences that Friendship Centres reference is the high cost of living that results from successful mineral development projects in their communities. As mines become successful, workers are imported from other parts of the country, and the demand for housing and food increase. Consequently, housing and food costs rise substantially, resulting in local community members who are not employed at the mines struggling to support their families. The OFIFC has heard that in some instances community members are forced to leave the Friendship Centre community altogether for a more isolated community, without social services, but with lower housing costs. When considering transportation routes required to support the growth in resource-based industries, it is critical that the needs of vulnerable community members, including urban Aboriginal people, are considered and addressed. This requires that the NOMTS ensure that affordable and effective transportation is available to people living in mining communities to access needed support services and that transportation is available between affordable housing and essential services.

The fact that current public transportation infrastructure is a limiting factor for community members accessing basic and essential services is a disservice to these resource-based industries and the growth of northern Ontario’s economy. Poor public transportation infrastructure acts as a barrier for individuals’ transition along the education to employment continuum. Considering the projected labour shortages facing these industries, the need for accessible education, training and tangential services are key to economic growth, and therefore require adequate and affordable public transportation. Further, Friendship Centres have reported that even for qualified candidates, the ability to attend interviews and travel to and from job sites is often limited by a lack of transportation. These challenges

are not only limited to resource-based jobs, a lack of transportation can be a barrier to access education, training and employment in all sectors.

As truck and road traffic increase into communities with resource extraction industries, it is imperative that the MTO and MNDM consider the potential threat these activities may pose for Aboriginal women. Aboriginal women are not only disproportionately represented in the rates of missing and murdered women, but also in cases of domestic violence, human trafficking and sexual violence. Research has shown that in some communities with a large presence of extractive industry development there is a higher rate of crime. Further, with an increased number of heavy equipment and vehicles travelling the roads, the risks faced by pedestrians, especially from vulnerable populations, including Aboriginal people, will also increase. The NOMTS should work with Ontario’s Joint Working Group on Violence Against Aboriginal Women to ensure that potential impacts on violence against Aboriginal women are adequately considered.

Targeted growth and investment in transportation infrastructure to support resource based sectors must be done smartly and in a way that considers uses for transportation beyond resource extraction. Resource based developments are often temporary sources of employment and therefore investments made in related transportation must also serve to meet the needs of community members past project end dates.

**Population-Related Groupings**

- Population-related employment makes up the largest share of total employment in Northern Ontario, approximately 57% according to the 2011 National Household Survey. These categories will be major drivers for passenger travel demand in the region, most heavily concentrated in larger communities and urban centres.20

While, demands for these services are likely more concentrated in larger communities and urban centres, access to these services are required for all individuals regardless of where they reside. Where services, such as health care, are only provided in larger communities and urban centres, transportation systems must be created to ensure access to these services is reliable, affordable and efficient.

This section notes that there are increased transportation needs for the health care sector, primarily increasing road and air access. Throughout the working

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paper, the need for improved transportation infrastructure that uses these various modes of transportation has been overlooked. Without this infrastructure (publicly funded local and regional transportation options), investments in roads, rail, and airways will continue to fall short of meeting the needs of vulnerable community members in need of increased access to the most basic services.

It is also important that the relationship between resource-based and population-related groupings of employment is considered. The working paper indicates that resource-based sector generates the highest share of economic output while population-based sector generates the highest share of employment.21 Considering the above mentioned socio-economic consequences of resource-based employment for local communities, the relationship between these two sectors should expanded.

Housing Analysis
The profile of housing in northern Ontario provided in this working paper does not characterise the urban Aboriginal experience. While the overall trends are accurate, there is a substantial population, specifically urban Aboriginal people, who experience high rates of overcrowding and deep core needs for housing. Core housing need is more prevalent in Aboriginal households than non-Aboriginal households. In 2006, 18.7 percent or 18,935 Aboriginal households living in urban and rural communities were in core housing need compared to 14.4 percent of non-Indigenous households.22 These issues are raised in regard to First Nations in section 5.3.4, but is limited to people living on reserve, excluding consideration for Aboriginal people living in urban and rural communities off-reserve regardless of status. Development in northern Ontario continues to drive up housing prices and is increasingly pushing already marginalised people out of communities. Furthermore, there is no contrast made between the increasing interest in market-based housing and the lack of social and affordable housing.

Recognising that homelessness is a component of the broader housing continuum, rates of homelessness in northern Ontario urban communities should also be taken into account when conducting housing analysis. Some significant data include:

- In North Bay, Aboriginal people comprise over 25 percent of the absolute homeless but are just 6 percent of the total population.23
- In Timmins, 39 percent of homeless people are Aboriginal.24

In Sioux Lookout, a staggering 99 percent of homeless people in the municipality are Aboriginal.\textsuperscript{25}  
In Cochrane, 41 percent of the homeless population is Aboriginal.\textsuperscript{26}  
In Thunder Bay, 55 percent of the homeless population is Aboriginal.\textsuperscript{27}  
In Sudbury, approximately 45 percent of the homeless population is Aboriginal.\textsuperscript{28}

The exclusion of housing needs for marginalised people in northern Ontario, including urban Aboriginal people, effectively diminishes the need for increased transportation supports for this population. While the above data is staggering, it is important to note that in some instances the rates of homelessness and housing insecurity may be much higher when considering the high rates of couchsurfing and overcrowding of residences. Transportation is a critical service for housing insecure individuals in urban centres. The NOMTS should consider the relationship between housing and transportation in a more wholistic manner that does not ignore the most vulnerable people in northern Ontario.

**Recommendations**

It is recommended that:

- The MTO make substantial revisions to the Draft Socio-Economic Context Working Paper to more accurately reflect the full spectrum of socio-economic issues;

- The NOMTS recognise the urban Aboriginal reality in northern Ontario and ensure the equitable inclusion of urban Aboriginal organisations, issues and solutions is achieved; and

- The revised working paper and all future NOMTS documents and correspondence:
  - Demonstrate an improved understanding of the intersection between socio-economic conditions and affordable and effective transportation;
  - Accurately reflect on the urban Aboriginal experiences in comparison to non-Aboriginal experiences; and
  - Recognise and address the unintended socio-economic consequences of industrial sectors’ transportation system expansions.