



**Official Opposition • l'Opposition officielle**

Ontario NDP Caucus • Groupe parlementaire du NPD de l'Ontario

April 24, 2020

Hon. Doug Ford  
Premier's Office  
Room 281  
Legislative Building, Queen's Park  
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

RE: Rural and Northern Access to Broadband

Dear Premier,

The reality of almost everyone in our province drastically changed last month. It became evident that to save ourselves from COVID-19 and to curb the spread of the virus, we would have to self-isolate. For a great number of people this means to work and learn from home via the internet.

As you are aware, some internet providers have decided to enhance internet services. These enhancements came with specific conditions. In all cases, the results were that people living in Northern and rural Ontario are left behind.

As you also know that some communities in our ridings were waiting to be upgraded to proper broadband before this pandemic started. The Official Opposition has been very insistent in pushing your government to act and make sure that people have guaranteed access to this essential service wherever they live in our province. We have made this a priority since before the last provincial election. We continue to believe that a \$1 billion investment in infrastructure is needed, to make sure that all communities across rural and northern Ontario are able to access quality internet services.

To quote the Northern Policy Institute: "The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) states a target bandwidth of 50 Mbps (megabits per second) download speeds and 10 Mbps upload speeds to smoothly participate in the digital economy (CRTC 2019). In Northern Ontario, there is a significant lack of access to this target speed. In fact, 15.5 per cent of the population still have bandwidth speeds below the 50/10 Mbps target through any delivery method.



## Official Opposition • l'Opposition officielle

Ontario NDP Caucus • Groupe parlementaire du NPD de l'Ontario

That is 120,932 residents out of 780,140 Northerners. For these households, their main options are DSL, cable modems, and/or fixed wireless.”

We have been very disappointed to hear time and time again that your government, and the previous one, were going to make significant investment in broadband, and yet nothing has moved or been announced for Northern communities. In two years of being in government, there has been no public mention whatsoever of investing in broadband for Northern Ontario. And now that a pandemic is forcing everyone to work from home and depend on their internet, the damage is done and people are stuck without high-speed internet, putting our region once again at a disadvantage to the rest of the province.

Now that we are in the middle of a pandemic, and that internet companies are providing a service that had been deemed essential long before this crisis, we ask that you take actions to correct the inequity. Premier, take the necessary steps to ensure providers grant the same enhancements for all customers, so that we all have access to the adequate internet. We ask that these enhancements be extended for the duration of this pandemic as people have no other choice but to work and learn from home. People need the internet to continue working and bringing an income. People need the internet to apply to emergency help from governments and to pay their bills. People need the internet to continue receiving an education and graduate in time. People need the internet to stay connected with their friends and families, and continue to be able to keep track of the daily announcements about the pandemic.

It is unacceptable that companies continue to apply the “normal” rules and to charge people hundreds of dollars extra because they went over their monthly limit, while enhancing internet services for urban customers and denying rural and northerners the same enhancements. This is unfair and unacceptable to people living in rural and northern communities.

We look forward to your prompt response and more importantly your action to correct the matter.

Sincerely,

Gilles Bisson  
MPP/député  
Timmins

Guy Bourgouin  
MPP/député  
Mushkegowuk-James Bay



**Official Opposition • l'Opposition officielle**

Ontario NDP Caucus • Groupe parlementaire du NPD de l'Ontario

France Gélinas  
MPP/députée  
Nickel Belt

Sol Mamawka  
MPP/député  
Kiiwetinoong

Judith Monteith-Farrell  
MPP/députée  
Thunder Bay-Atikokan

Michael Mantha  
MPP/député  
Algoma-Manitoulin

John Vanthof  
MPP/député  
Timiskaming

Jamie West  
MPP/député  
Sudbury

CC: ROMA  
NOMA  
AFMO  
OFA  
All governing bodies within our ridings