



Guy Bourgouin

MPP, Mushkegowuk - James Bay | Député, Mushkegowuk - Baie James

Kapuskasing, July 13, 2020

Hon. Caroline Mulroney,
Minister of Transportation
5th Floor, 777 Bay St.
Toronto, ON M7A 1Z8

RE: Re-opening of the Polar Bear Express Passenger Train

Madame Minister,

I am writing to you today to follow up on a letter sent to you on June 17, 2020 by Mushkegowuk Council Grand Chief Jonathon Solomon concerning the re-opening of the Polar Bear Express passenger train.

As you certainly know, the Ontario Northland Transit Commission (ONTC) opted to resume the operations of the passenger operations as of June 25, 2020. The service had been suspended since April 6, 2020 as a result of the general consent of the ONTC, Moose Cree First Nation, the Town of Moosonee, MoCreebec First Nation, Weeneebayko Area Health Authority (WAHA) and Mushkegowuk Council. Virtual meetings were held on a weekly basis in order to assess the situation both regionally and provincially.

In spite of what appears to be an open dialogue with the ONTC, the concerns of Moose Cree First Nation, Council of Chiefs and the Mushkegowuk Grand Chief have been bluntly disregarded.

Most important, the history of chronic underfunding of the James Bay's health system, the ongoing housing crisis throughout this vast region, coupled with the history of colonialism in Canada, make this situation untenable. Certainly, ONTC's jurisdictional autonomy allows its Board of Directors to undertake decisions that are deemed beneficial to the Crown.

However, not only these decisions contravene the explicit pronouncements of Moose Cree First Nation, Mushkegowuk Council and the Council of Chiefs of the Mushkegowuk Council, but also underscore the system racism and bias that still exists today in our governmental institutions.

As Grand Chief Solomon wrote on [June 8](#), Ontario's government is not immune of systemic racism:

In 1905, when Canada and Ontario made a foundational treaty with our people, the government representatives solemnly promised our people that we would be able to continue to use our lands as we always had, forever. Then they opened our lands to forestry, mining, and hydro dams, without our consent, and leaving us with almost none of the benefits.

That was racism, and it was deep, and it was systemic. And some of that continues to this day.

Minister, healthy and meaningful dialogue is a two-way street of talking and listening. This is not, by any means, what has been taking place with the ONTC. The issue at stake here is not *if* COVID-19

will reach the James Bay lowlands but rather *when* - and *how* prepared will Ontario be to ensure the health and well-being of elders, children and families. ONTC needs to listen to the Mushkegowuk First Nations and act accordingly.

I am thus asking you to acknowledge this problematic as inherently embedded in the colonial history of Ontario, to give the re-opening of the passenger train its due attention, and to reach out immediately to Grand Chief Solomon, Chief Cheechoo and myself.

I anxiously await your response.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Guy Bourgoïn', written in a cursive style.

Guy Bourgoïn
MPP, Mushkegowuk-James Bay

CC: Grand Chief Jonathon Solomon, Mushkegowuk Council
Chief Mervin Cheechoo, Moose Cree First Nation
Chief Allan Jolly, MoCreebec First Nation
MPP Sol Mamakwa, Opposition Critic for Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation
MPP Jennifer French, Opposition Critic for Highways and Transportation