



Michael Mantha MPP/député
Algoma–Manitoulin

Open letter to Hon. Caroline Mulroney, Minister of Transportation

February 3, 2020

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

Dear Minister Mulroney,

I cannot begin to describe how disappointed I am with both of your responses to my letters concerning the insufficient access that Northerners have to DriveTest Centres within their region. It is clear that the Ministry has no real understanding of what it means to raise a family or operate a business in Northern Ontario.

To begin, in your most recent letter of December 13, 2019, you stated, “When determining the location of a DriveTest centre, factors that would be taken into consideration would include geographic and demographic data, current and future population growth, and customer demand patterns.” This in no way addresses the concern that individuals and business operators must go literally for **MONTHS** with no access to a nearby DriveTest Centre. The concern is not that the centres are not located well or that they are too far from the many rural communities. The issue is that they are closed for the winter months.

Secondly, the Ministry fails to understand how vulnerable the Northern economy is. Again, within your December 13th letter you state, “All requests for road tests can be met if applicants schedule an appointment in advance.” The problem with this response is that the Ministry is clearly **NOT meeting the needs** of Northerners. Otherwise, my office would not be receiving complaints from local businesses and agencies as well as individual residents. When a driver is needed with specific qualifications and licenses, they are needed at that time or very soon. Not later on next spring or summer. However, it seems that the Ministry gives greater weight to financial efficiencies for the Government rather than to meeting the needs of Northern residents and business operators. Shouldn't a government do all it can to encourage the stability and growth of local business and strengthen the economy? Even if in the end the government service does not break even, they can justify the expenditure by strengthening the local economy. Sometimes it costs money to make money.

Your statement that “Service dates, hours of operation and tests offered are published on the DriveTest website. These dates balance customer demand against the costs of service delivery.” Again, I take exception to this statement, as there is no **BALANCE** as you suggest. Clearly, the only consideration is that of cost to the Ministry for delivery of service.

Finally, I address the matter of scheduling around weather conditions that are favourable to Ministry personnel who must travel to Algoma to provide the needed DriveTest Centre services.

I again quote your latest correspondence in which you state, "Regarding weather conditions, DriveTest must balance weather against the safety of their employees, applicants and other road users as well as their ability to deliver a fair road test. Can you explain how many thousands of Ontarians are able to travel up and down the highways all year safely, but when it comes to asking Ministry employees to do the same the government considers such travel an unnecessary risk to ask them to drive these roads in winter? This is a clear indication that the Ministry of Transportation itself does not have confidence enough in the winter maintenance services provided by their own contractors to permit Ministry employees to travel on the TransCanada, but that they have no qualms about asking the public to drive day after day on these same highways.

You are correct in saying that it is essential that the tests be conducted when weather conditions are reasonable. It would seem more than obvious that when weather conditions are not satisfactory for employees to travel northward, that the appointment could be rescheduled for an alternative date. There is no valid reason to require the appointment be put off for weeks on end until the next time there is an opening in a prescheduled appointment. Even if the schedules for individual employees who are assigned to appear are completely booked up, it should not be any great hardship to send a replacement worker in their stead soon after. This is the commonly accepted practice of almost any business.

In conclusion, I ask you again to reconsider the policies employed by the Ministry of Transportation in scheduling fair, consistent and reliable access to DriveTest Centres in Algoma for Northern residents as do all other Ontarians across the province.

Sincerely,



Michael Mantha
MPP/député
Algoma-Manitoulin

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CC: MPP Jennifer French, NDP Transportation & Highways Critic
Northeast Superior Mayors Group Members,
Mayor Ron Rody, Wawa, ON
Mayor Angelo Bazzoni, Township of White River
Mayor Michael Levesque, Township of Chapleau
Mayor Alain Lacroix, Township of Dubreuilville
Mayor Morley Foster, Mayor of Hornepayne
Mayor Andy Major, Township of Manitouwadge
Algoma Municipal Association