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CAPT sends assessment of CN's Algoma Passenger train to Transport Canada Minister Lawrence Cannon

*Lack of wheelchair access only part of the issues of the
inadequate remote passenger rail service*

SAULT STE MARIE, ONTARIO – On November 13, 2007 CAPT sent an assessment of CN's Algoma Central Railway (ACR) passenger train to Transport Canada Minister Lawrence Cannon. With federal support, CN replaced the aging passenger train coaches and baggage cars with newer equipment last spring, but the replacement equipment has critical deficiencies in wheelchair accessibility, safety, baggage capacity and the service has been decreased to a point that it is seriously discouraging ridership.

Wheelchair access is an issue that needs to be addressed to allow people with disabilities to access public transportation between our northern communities and allow people with disabilities to access the remote wilderness recreation experiences of the rail corridor. CN's replacement equipment fell far short of real accessibility. "Having to be physically carried off a train is not very dignified or even safe for that matter," said Diane Morrell from the Canadian Paraplegic Association Ontario. "The ACR has tried to make their train wheelchair accessible, however future renovations should be done in consultation with an accessibility professional in order to prevent future errors." For resorts wanting to provide wilderness experiences to people with disabilities, the replacement train was a serious disappointment. "We were looking forward to marketing our remote wilderness resort to people needing wheelchair access and were very disappointed," said Al Errington. "The train is not wheelchair

accessible if we have to carry people on and off.”

Snowmachines and ATVs have been a large part of the Algoma passenger train ridership for decades, and a lucrative tourism product for Wawa, Dubreuilville and Hearst, but accommodating snowmachines and ATVs was not considered in the passenger train replacement. “Loading snowmachines and ATVs is an accident waiting to happen unless we get the electric ramps back,” says Errington.

Hundreds of cottagers are also being discouraged from accessing their cottages because the schedule and service is becoming so restrictive. “It has been very difficult to bring friends or relatives up to our cabin because they have to take extra days off work,” says Marie Price. Tourist resorts are also finding the train schedule very restrictive, which is affecting business and employment in this economically distressed Northern Ontario region. “We have virtually empty nights each week because we can’t get people in or out,” says Al Errington.

CAPT recently released an opportunity study conducted on the Algoma Central Railway by Douglass Legg from the prestigious firm of Malone Given Parsons Limited with assistance from the Algoma University College’s Community Economic and Social Development program, with generous funding from the Job Creation Partnership and the Ontario Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities (MTCU). A comprehensive analysis determined that there is the potential for the ACR line to be successfully revitalized with a newfound emphasis on wilderness tourism. Legg states, “The study provides the coalition with a comprehensive go-forward strategy that will support the revitalization of Algoma Central Railway’s passenger train as infrastructure for a wilderness tourism rail corridor.”

CAPT has asked to meet with Minister Cannon to discuss long-term development planning for the Algoma Central Railway regional passenger train corridor.

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About CAPT: CAPT is a regional group of individuals, businesses, communities, First Nations and other interests who recognize the significant social, economic, cultural, historical and environmental value of Algoma's Wilderness Passenger Trains.

The CAPT Opportunity Study can be found on the CAPT website at:
www.CAPTrains.ca/Documents.html

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