



Local News

ACR has all the right stuff to keep on track: study; 'Unique asset' must embrace outdoors

Posted By Liisa McMillan For The Sault Star 10/17/07

Algoma Central Railway can be kept viable, especially with weight put on its potential as a natural attraction, a new study suggests.

At its first public meeting since a high-profiled media rail tour in April, the Coalition for Algoma Passenger Trains presented the findings of an opportunity study conducted on the ACR at a town hall meeting this week held at Algoma University College.

"We're very pleased with the results of the study," said past CAPT co-chair Linda Savory-Gordon. "We're well aware that there are still many obstacles to overcome, but this is an important milestone."

Prepared by Douglass Legg of Malone Given Parsons Ltd., with the assistance of researchers from Algoma's Community Economic and Social Development program, the nearly 80-page document determined that there is a potential for the ACR line to be revitalized with an emphasis on wilderness tourism. "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," Legg said in a press release.

That "go-forward" strategy includes further research on product-market match and market readiness issues, which were included in a list of recommendations set out by Legg in the report. "The opportunity study substantially reinforced all of our previous conclusions in regard to the importance and, opportunities of Algoma's Passenger Trains," said CAPT co-chair Al Errington. "Algoma's passenger trains are a unique asset with substantial opportunities that have been neglected for decades. The obstacles need to be addressed by our federal and provincial governments.

"Algoma's passenger trains need to be an integral part of planning and infrastructure support by both levels of government to realize the economic, employment, and quality of life values our passenger trains can support in our area."

The objective of the study was to determine if market potential existed to justify further research on the revitalization of Algoma passenger trains as infrastructure for a wilderness tourism rail corridor. Further research would have included a feasibility study. However, Legg's findings suggested that such a study would be premature at this point, but that "there are a number of actions that can be taken to improve the probability of successfully developing wilderness tourism by rail in the ACR corridor."

Legg outlined those actions in the form of 18 recommendations that CAPT needs to consider before moving ahead with a feasibility study. In response to those recommendations, and to decide which direction to take, CAPT co-chair Marie Price said steering committee members will rank, in order, their top five priorities. Next, correlated ranking results, along with responses from the public meeting participants, will be considered by the steering committee. Funding will then be sought to begin research on the top priorities, Price said.

According to the report, the scope of the study was to use secondary sources of information to develop a profile of the study area. However, upon further research, it was discovered that pertinent financial data from

Canadian National after 1993 has not been made publicly available, due to confidentiality agreements with Transport Canada.

Savory-Gordon said this information is not available because CN groups all of its passenger rail service data into one, combining information from services across North America.

Their next approach, she said, is to file an application under the Freedom of Information Act, with the assistance of MP Tony Martin's office, to access the data they need in further studies.

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While CAPT officials said they are satisfied with the findings, Savory-Gordon said the group is still looking at a 10-year commitment before it, and municipalities along the corridor, will see successful revitalization of the railway. She maintains that the efforts of all affected by the decline in services need to be combined in order to achieve success. CAPT plans to meet with stakeholders in communities along the rail corridor to build a consensus on how to move forward.

CAPT's 10-year timeline will also coincide with the Group of Seven's 100-year anniversary of travelling and living along the same rail corridor. Savory-Gordon said plans will be made to mark the anniversary of the world-renowned artists.

The study is the most recent action taken by the group. In April, a delegation travelled via rail from Sault Ste. Marie to Hearst, and from Cochrane to Toronto, on a media rail tour intended to raise awareness of rapidly declining rail service, and to increase interest among industry officials.

CAPT was formed in the fall of 2006 after reduction in railway passenger services prompted regular users of the service to devise a strategy to maintain, at the very least, current services, with the ultimate goal of revitalizing the ACR corridor as a tourist destination. coiffure for cancer research

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