



For immediate release

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Research network welcomes Ontario's Northern Growth Plan

North can leverage strategic advantages to succeed in new economy

TORONTO - Ontario's advanced research network organization, ORION, welcomes the visionary recommendations in the Proposed Growth Plan for Northern Ontario and anticipates that it can lay the foundation for the north as a research and advanced technology powerhouse.

The proposed Growth Plan, released jointly by the Ministries of Northern Development, Mines, and Forestry, and Energy and Infrastructure, calls for greater collaboration in economic development and research, proposing a long-term economic framework to guide decision-making over the next 25 years.

The Ontario Research and Innovation Optical Network (ORION), which provides the critical high-capacity fibre-optic network infrastructure for Ontario, believes the North has several strategic advantages that can help drive its transition to an innovative, knowledge-based economy.

"Some of the most innovative research and advanced technology initiatives are taking place today in our northern communities," says ORION President/CEO Phil Baker. "We are only seeing the beginning of northern-driven innovation and leadership," he says, pointing to success stories with the Northern Ontario School of Medicine, the Sudbury Neutrino Observatory, and world-leading distance teaching and learning technologies.

"By necessity, the North has developed leadership in strategic areas, and is now at the forefront in fields that are critical to success in emerging advanced technology and knowledge-based sectors," says Maxim Jean Louis, Chair of the ORION Board, and President/CEO of Contact North/*Contact Nord*, Canada's largest distance education and training network with centres in 94 Northern Ontario communities.

"The plan lays out a truly exciting vision for the future and we're proud that ORION is able to provide the critical infrastructure that can help us mobilize to achieve that vision," he says.

ORION extends into 21 communities across Ontario, including Sudbury, Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie, Timmins and North Bay. Much of ORION's 5,800 kilometres network infrastructure spans northeast and northwest Ontario, bringing world-class research and education connectivity to over 20 institutions, research facilities and school boards in the north. It allows northern institutions to access global resources, do science in new and inventive ways, engage in leading-edge science collaborations, and participate in international "big science" initiatives.

Among the key action plan proposals welcomed by ORION,

- supporting innovative collaborative approaches in health care delivery and strengthening the capacity of the north's broadband network infrastructure to provide greater support for telemedicine and electronic service delivery;
- linking the MaRS Discovery District in Toronto, an ORION-connected facility, with a new Northern Discovery Network, to provide opportunities for increased mentorship, online and videoconference training and placements;

- establishing a Northern Research and Policy Institute in partnership with universities, colleges, Aboriginal organizations and industry to focus on northern research priorities to provide linkages to national and international research initiatives in areas of innovation and emerging sectors, such as green energy, health and education;
- greater collaboration across Ontario among innovation centres, postsecondary facilities and industry to support research that advances innovation in key sectors, such as mining, forestry, energy, agriculture and bioeconomy;
- working collaboratively with postsecondary facilities and distance education providers to provide education programs tailored to northern industry and business needs;
- investing in infrastructure to support distributive education and e-learning and a greater level of collaboration among education providers;
- encouraging northern communities and local school boards to work together to increase student achievement; and
- a regional capital plan identifying strategic community, transportation, information and communications technology, education, research and health infrastructure.

“The North already has the ORION network infrastructure in place, at the cutting-edge of current technology and able to support and help advance these proposals,” said Baker. “We are looking forward to sharing detailed feedback on the proposed Growth Plan as part of the government’s consultation process, and being fully engaged in this long-term process.”

About ORION

The Ontario Research and Innovation Optical Network (ORION) is Ontario’s ultra high-speed research and education network. It connects all of Ontario’s universities, most colleges, several medical and other public research facilities and a growing number of school boards to one another, as well as to CANARIE, Canada’s advanced research and innovation network, and to the global grid of research and education networks. ORION now connects over 1.7 million Ontario researchers, scientists, students and teachers to critical infrastructure for research, education and innovation. Learn more at www.orion.on.ca.

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