FONOM

Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities

July 15, 2025

The Right Honourable Mark Carney Prime Minister of Canada

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SENT BY EMAIL: PM@pm.gc.ca

The Honourable Doug Ford Premier of Ontario

Legislative Building, Queen's Park

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Dear Prime Minister Carney and Premier Ford,

Subject: *A Nation-Building Case for a 2+1 Highway for enhanced east-west Canadian trade*

in Alignment with Prime Minister Carney's Five Criteria

Purpose

This briefing presents a compelling case for federal investment in upgrading Northern Ontario's Highway 11 and Highway 17, utilizing **the proven 2+1 highway model.** Supported by evidence in infrastructure policy, safety, economic performance, and national security, the proposal aligns directly with the **five nation-building criteria** set out by Prime Minister Carney under the ***Building Canada Act*.**

We propose a two-phase approach:

- **Phase 1**
  - Construct 2+1 on **Highway 11 segments from North Bay to Cochrane**
  - Construct 2+1 on **Highway 17 from Renfrew to Sudbury**

- **Phase 2**
  - Extend the 2+1 **configuration from Cochrane to Nipigon on Highway 11**
  - Construct the 2+1 **configuration from Thunder Bay to Kenora on Highway 11 and 17**
  - Construct 2+1 on **Highway 17 from Sault Ste. Marie to Sudbury**

This initiative is far more than a regional infrastructure upgrade—it is a nation-building investment. It will strengthen Canada's internal connectivity, improve transportation resilience, and contribute to long-term economic growth, safety, and sovereignty.

Background

With the **Building Canada Act** in place, the Government of Canada is proceeding with consultations with provinces, territories and Indigenous rights-holders to determine the initial list of national interest projects. This proposal presents a project deemed of national interest.

The **Building Canada Act** focuses on creating a unified Canadian economy that promotes enhanced trade between the east and west within Canada. It also focuses on the development of major nation-building projects that will likely involve the transportation of large industrial materials for building. With a vast land area and diverse geography, an efficient transportation network is crucial for connectivity and facilitating the movement of materials.

While air and rail form part of Canada's transportation network, **highways and trucking are the backbone of Canada's transportation system**, connecting major cities, towns and rural communities. Trucking companies and drivers rely on governments to ensure a well- connected transportation network, including highways, major routes, border crossings, and ports, for efficient and safe operations. In turn, knowing the most efficient and safe highways and routes helps truckers save time, fuel, and operational costs.

The Trans-Canada Highway itself—of which Highways 17 and 11 are a vital part—is the **longest continuous national highway in the world**, connecting all ten provinces and three territories. During the Great Depression, the federal government funded the highway's early development as a job-creation initiative and a strategic investment in national cohesion. Over $19 million was allocated to the provinces to construct a continuous road, enabling Canadians to travel across the Dominion without entering the United States. **That same nation-building spirit is now needed once again in Northern Ontario.**

Proposal

Except for Newfoundland, Prince Edward Island, and Ontario, most of the routes used by truckers crossing Canada are four-lane highways. In Ontario, truckers heading east from Manitoba or west from Quebec can choose to cross the province via Highway 17, the Trans-Canada Highway, or Highway 11, and what is now known as the **Northern Trans- Canada Route.** Truckers travelling from Toronto to western Canada can choose to take either 1) Highway 69 to Highway 17, then join the **Northern Route** of Highway 11 via West Nipissing and King's Highway 64, or 2) Highway 11 to North Bay, then the **Northern Route**. Almost all sections of Highways 17 and 11 between the Manitoba border and Renfrew in eastern Ontario are two lanes, except for ongoing highway

twinning projects near Nipigon and west of Thunder Bay, as well as a small, complete section east of Sault Ste. Marie. A small section of twinning has also been completed at Arnprior.

With Ontario being Canada's busiest province for truck traffic, these vital highways, which are linked to much of the country's economic activity, need to be considered for continued expansion beyond their existing two-lane profile. From their early days, they have formed part of Canada's **critical national corridor,** from playing a foundational role in connecting Canada's frontier communities to enable economic development and assert national sovereignty across the North. Unfortunately, road safety and infrastructure conditions in northern Ontario are deteriorating, according to the Ontario Trucking Association. Their primary concern is the danger of passing other vehicles. In turn, the Truckers for Safer Highways association recently stated: "People and truckers are dying on these highways!" That is why the Federation of Northern Municipalities, an organization representing 110 cities, towns and municipalities, has been a consistent and vocal advocate for the adoption of the 2+1 highway model in Northern Ontario. This cost-effective, safety-enhancing design has proven successful in many countries, including Sweden, Finland, and Australia. A 2+1 highway expands on a 2-lane road by implementing continuously alternating passing lanes and separates opposing directions of traffic with a crash-rated median barrier, resulting in safety outcomes that are equal to fully twinned highways.

The Government of Ontario is responding and has announced two pivotal initiatives that mark a turning point for Highway 11, offering a clear opportunity for federal collaboration. First, a **pilot project** is scheduled to commence in 2026 on a 2+1 highway segment between **North Bay and Temagami**. Second, the province committed to extending the 2+1 configuration further north, from **Temiskaming Shores to Cochrane**. These two segments lay the groundwork for a scalable, long-term corridor strategy—a shared infrastructure vision well-suited to a federal-provincial nation-building partnership that would see a phased approach to northern Ontario's highway development.

Data from Statistics Canada (see Appendix A) highlights that a five-year average from 2013 to 2017, over 925,000 truck shipments were made between Western Canada and the Toronto/Montreal region via two-lane highways in Northern Ontario. By comparison, 960,005 between Toronto and Montréal, 206,574 between Toronto and Hamilton and 96,607 between Toronto and Windsor — routes served by four-lane highways. Put simply, there is as much transport traffic on Highway 17 and 11 as on the Highway 401 corridor—but it is forced to spread over narrower, less safe roads.

Priority should be given to Highway 11, as it offers a **preferred westward route** for commercial carriers. Compared to Highway 17, it is less hilly reducing fuel consumption and is not subject to frequent closures caused by Lake Superior's weather systems. In short, Highway 11 is more reliable and increasingly indispensable to national logistics and supply chains. Highway 11 will also be critical to the rapidly expanding mining and agriculture sectors in the north that depend on a safe and efficient transportation corridor.

Ministry of Transportation **Annual Average Daily Traffic (AADT)** volumes from 2021 confirm this importance:

- **Near Temiskaming Shores**: 7,800
- **Near Englehart**: 6,100
- **Between Kirkland Lake and Cochrane**: 3,200 to 5,500

These figures **meet or exceed international thresholds** for 2+1 highway justification. In fact, Ontario's Ministry of Transportation and Swedish transport authorities both find 2+1 highways are effective and safe at volumes of up to **18,000–20,000 AADT**, which is well above the current corridor levels of 3,200–7,800. This places Highway 11 within the model's ideal "sweet spot"—not only today, but for decades to come.

Moreover, these traffic counts were gathered during the COVID-19 pandemic, when private vehicle use was depressed. Actual normalized volumes are likely even higher.

Despite this high usage and strategic importance, Highway 11 faces challenges stemming from decades of underinvestment. These include:

- **Substandard Road Geometry**
- **Insufficient passing opportunities**
- **Above-average collision and fatality rates**
- **Regular closures due to weather and accidents**

These weaknesses not only endanger lives but also **disrupt freight movement**, **delay goods**, and **increase costs** for industries that depend on timely delivery. The **2+1 model, featuring a crash-rated median barrier and alternating passing lanes every few kilometres, significantly improves safety and traffic flow at a substantially reduced cost compared to** traditional four-lane twinning. This makes it the ideal design for long rural corridors with steady but moderate traffic, such as Highway 11.

Alignment with Prime Minister Carney's Five Nation-Building Criteria

1. **Strengthen Canada's Autonomy, Resilience, and Security**

- **Strategic Defence Logistics**: Highways 17 and 11 support access to key military and NORAD infrastructure, including CFB North Bay. It also offers critical redundancy should either highway become compromised.
- **Nuclear Waste Transport**: The Nuclear Waste Management Organization has identified these highways for the secure transport of used nuclear reactor rods to a planned long-term storage site in Northwestern Ontario. Enhanced road safety is essential.
- **Emergency and Climate Resilience**: These roads play a vital role in wildfire evacuations and emergency response functions that will only grow more urgent with climate change.
- **Critical Minerals Access**: As Canada builds out its critical minerals sector, Highways 17 and 11 are essential for transporting the tools, supplies, and workforce needed to unlock Northern resource potential.

2. **Deliver Economic Benefits and Support Growth**

- **Economic Resilience and Supply Chain Reliability**: Highways 17 and 11 are a lifeline for national industries such as mining, forestry, agriculture, and manufacturing. Collisions and closures in this corridor disrupt supply chains, delay shipments, and raise costs—undermining productivity and competitiveness. A safer, more reliable route will protect against these losses and help sustain Canada's industrial and export performance, particularly as interprovincial trade barriers ease and east-west commercial traffic increases.
- **Workforce Access and Regional Efficiency:** Improved traffic flow enhances access for workers, goods, and services, strengthening regional economies and making it easier for businesses to attract and retain talent.
- **Job Creation and Indigenous Participation:** Construction and long-term maintenance will create employment opportunities, with strong potential for Indigenous training, contracting, and equity partnerships.
- **Tourism and Local Business Vitality:** As the primary transportation artery for dozens of rural communities, Highways 17 and 11 support tourism, retail, and service sectors. Safer, faster routes help keep these towns economically viable and socially connected.
- **High Return on Investment:** According to the Northern Policy Institute, the proposed 2+1 pilot for Highway 11 delivers a benefit-cost ratio of **1.0 at 20 years**, rising to **3.6 at 60 years**—clear evidence of enduring value.

3. **High Likelihood of Successful Execution**

- **Shovel-Ready Projects**: Ontario's North Bay–Temagami pilot is fully designed and poised to go to tender
- **Provincial Commitment Already Secured**: The province has also announced plans to extend the 2+1 model northward between Temiskaming Shores and Cochrane.
- **Proven Design Model**: The 2+1 design has achieved fatality reductions of up to 76% in countries like Sweden, Finland, and Australia. It offers a practical model for safe, efficient travel across long rural corridors. Ontario's projects benefit from this international evidence.
- **Faster Cheaper Delivery**: By leveraging existing roadbeds, 2+1 roads require less land acquisition and construction time, avoid delays from environmental permitting, and can be implemented in phases. Ontario's own pilot designs incorporate global best practices from around the world.
- **Expandable by Design**: 2+1 highways can be converted to 2+2 highways in the future when traffic volumes warrant it, making 2+1 roads a flexible and cost- efficient steppingstone, ideal for future-proofing national transportation infrastructure.

4. **Advance the Interests of Indigenous Peoples**

- **Early and Ongoing Engagement:** Highways 17 and 11 intersect the traditional territories of several Indigenous Nations. Their early and ongoing involvement ensures meaningful participation and long-term benefits.
- **Pathways to Economic Reconciliation**: Indigenous-led training, employment, and equity stakes can be prioritized into project delivery, creating generational value. With designs that are modular, the Proposal also supports phased contracting models.
- **Improved Safety for Remote Access**: Both Highways are a lifeline for many Indigenous communities, enabling access to healthcare, food, education, and evacuation routes. Safer highways are a matter of equity.

5. **Contribute to Clean Growth and Climate Objectives**

- **Lower Emissions from Freight**: Improved traffic flow reduces idling, braking, and congestion, directly cutting greenhouse gas emissions. Infrastructure for electric vehicle (EV) charging can be integrated into the design.
- **Sustainable Construction Practices**: Ontario's design process is already integrating lower-emission materials and recycled aggregates to help Canada reach its climate goals.
- **Reduced Environmental Footprint**: Compared to full twinning, 2+1 highways use less land, preserve wildlife corridors, and prevent overbuilding—balancing transportation needs with environmental stewardship.

Conclusion

Transforming the Trans-Canada's Highway 17 and its Highway 11 Northern Route into 2+1 corridors is not simply a matter of regional equity—it is a strategic investment in Canada's future. It safeguards our autonomy, strengthens our supply chains, advances reconciliation, and supports economic growth—while reinforcing the vital national bond between northern and southern Canada. FONOM believes this project reflects the values and vision of a confident, resilient country—one that invites its northern regions to be equal partners in prosperity. **We now call on the provincial and federal government to build a Trans-Canada Highway worthy of our national ambitions—modern, safe, autonomous, and truly coast-to-coast.**

Sincerely,

Danny Whalen President Federation of Northern Ontario Municipalities

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Appendix A

Number of Truck Shipments by Routes Note 1						**# of lanes in Ontario**
	2013	**2014**	**2015**	**2016**	**2017**	
Truck shipments to and from major destinations in western Canada to Toronto and Montreal	1,019,899	927,405	986,136	924,682	767,998 **NOTE: 5 year average 2013 to 2017= 925,224**	2 lanes northern Ontario / 4 lanes southern and eastern segments
Truck shipments to and from Toronto and Montreal	867,321	894,068	1,237,732	916,433	884,474 **Note: 5 year average = 960,005**	4+ lanes
Truck shipments to and from Toronto and Windsor	67,119	100,507	97,640	80,267	142,502 **Note: 5 year average= 97,607**	4+ lanes
Truck shipments to and from Toronto and Hamilton	181,567	191,839	186,954	332,986	139,044 **Note: 5 year average= 206,514**	4+ lanes

Note 1: Statistics Canada. Table 23-10-0142-01 Origin and destination of transported commodities, Canadian Freight Analysis Framework (see Appendix A). Shipments represent the aggregate number of shipments transported.