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OPINION LETTERS

Enhanced airport best option

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Letters and feedback

TIMMINS - Fly in. Fly out. It's been the mantra of remote mines since governments and industry realized they were often left holding the bag for mining towns when the minerals were gone. Roads, water systems and schools remained but were not sustainable by the few taxpayers left behind.

It was a hard lesson, so now fly-in operations make sense when an ore body might only last a couple of decades. A temporary camp can be built to house hundreds of workers with all the comforts of home and then be easily dismantled when no longer needed.

But what should the strategic policy be when an ore body is multi-generational? The Ring of Fire is a 100-year resource, with some claiming 200 years. That's a realistic projection based on known mineral reserves and when compared to other large ore bodies like Sudbury.

Sudbury's depth and breadth of minerals is nowhere near exhaustion after 131 years. In addition, the Ring holds more than chromite. A host of other metals are abundantly present, offering mining longevity in their own right.

All this to say that the Ring of Fire may not fit the model for fly-in mining camps. A mining resource that can sustain a community for a hundred years or more has time to diversify beyond dependence on its mining base. Sudbury and Timmins being just two examples in Northern Ontario.

Consideration also has to be given to the quality of life for the workers and their families. All the comforts of home may be present but it's not home. Families don't populate these camps. Common institutions and holistic social patterns are absent. Employees typically work, eat, sleep and repeat on 12-hour work days with one or two weeks at the mine and equal time at home. The alternating schedule facilitates out-of-area workers, which is good for a mining company that may have difficulty attracting skilled people but it eliminates employee-spending and tax revenues locally.

In lieu of a mining camp or municipally run community, there is a third option that would accommodate the needs of the mining industry, First Nations and the gradual growth of a normal community, with less risk to the provincial municipal system or Ontario taxpayers.

That model would begin with the establishment of an enhanced airport. A traditional airport is already a key piece of infrastructure needed in the development of the Ring of Fire. An enhanced airport would include additional services like a hotel, restaurant, medical clinic, small businesses and living accommodations.

It would be a combined land and seaplane base, carved out of an expandable Crown land property under agreement with the Matawa First Nations Management council. The agreement would allow for the airport to grow from an incubator community to a full-fledged town as time and needs warrant.

The facility would be operated under the airport authority model with a board of directors comprised of First Nations, industry, government and residents. The airport/port authority model was recently suggested as a way to develop infrastructure for the Ring of Fire in a paper written for the Northern Policy Institute by former Deputy Minister of Transport Canada, Nick Mulder.

With this model, the costs of building and maintenance would come from a free market of investors and user fees. Therefore, a mine worker and family could rent an apartment from the authority; a First Nations entrepreneur could lease space for a fly-in fishing operation; and a hotel chain could enter into a build-lease agreement. Like other Canadian airport authorities, it would have the mandate of being self-sufficient.

There will likely be a dozen or more mining companies eventually operating in the Ring of Fire and they would play a key role in funding the authority through user fees. Those fees would subsidize housing and common services but these would be offset by reducing the huge costs of operating many individual camps. Synergies would be realized through bulk purchases, shared transportation and a common facility for amenities such as recreation and learning facilities.

As the fledgling community grows, the board of directors might offer governance to the province's municipal system once a sustainable tax base is realized from citizens and industry.

This transformation may be preferable in order to attain broader and more traditional democratic representation and access to provincial and federal programs afforded to municipal government administrations.

Starting the infrastructure planning and spending in the Ring of Fire with an enhanced airport design would be a significant step forward. Such a development would send a clear signal that the Ring of Fire development is moving toward a long and sustainable future that would entice investment not just from the mining industry but from other sectors, as well.

Rick Millette,

senior executive director,

Ring of Fire at Northern Policy Institute

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**bobby bovine** · 17 hours ago

don't waste your time worrying about the ring of fire. with all the feet dragging on all fronts, this will not produce for another century. not so recently, a similar deposit was discovered in the james bay area of "mining friendly" northern Quebec. that being said, I wouldn't be investing or purchasing any real estate with a view to profit from a BOOM!

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**Fred Brown** → bobby bovine · 2 hours ago

Yes, much foot dragging, political posturing at all levels and parties, wild west prospector mineral staking, corporate cut throat, 'stab your partners in the back' greed, court room drama with lawyers everywhere, the Far North Act, tough negotiations with First Nations on revenue sharing, very complicated environmental decisions to preserve the boreal forest with true regional EA's and the low commodities cycle.

Yet, our very own renown Canadian chief geoscientist, Dr. James M. Franklin, (B.Sc.(64); M.Sc. (67); Ph.D (70)), calculated that northern Ontario and the Ring of Fire holds about \$350 billion in untapped metal value (Ni-Cu-PGE: \$50B, Cr: \$50B, V-Au: \$200B, Cu-Zn-Ag: \$50B). He also implies a \$350B value added to Ontario, equating to approximately \$700 billion dollars, much that will be added within the next four decades.

You have to be very brave to invest in NOT, KWG, BOL and others. This story is too big to fade away.

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