

Response to Proposed Northern Rideshare Pilot Consultation (Northlander Corridor)

Purpose	Establish a one-year Northern Rideshare Pilot along the Northlander corridor to improve transportation connectivity and inform potential future province-wide rideshare policy.
Proposal Number	26-MTO006 (Ontario Ministry of Transportation)
Submission Date	April 3, 2026

Overview

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Ministry of Transportation’s consultation on the proposed Northern Rideshare Pilot along the Northlander corridor. As Canada’s largest provincial chamber, representing a network of 60,000 businesses across Ontario, including many in Northern communities, the OCC supports efforts to improve transportation connectivity and address long-standing gaps in mobility that limit economic participation, workforce access, and community well-being.

The proposed pilot is a timely step toward strengthening first- and last-mile connectivity, particularly alongside the restoration of the Northlander passenger rail service. It also aligns with the OCC’s call for a more coordinated, province-wide approach to ridesharing that reduces fragmentation, supports service expansion, and maintains strong safety and consumer protections.

Barriers to Existing Rideshare Frameworks and Anticipated Community Impacts

Across Northern and rural Ontario, limited rideshare availability is driven less by demand and more by structural barriers in the current regulatory environment. The municipal-by-municipal approach has created a fragmented system requiring operators and drivers to navigate differing licensing, insurance, and compliance requirements across jurisdictions, making it difficult for services to scale in lower-density regions where viability depends on serving multiple communities.

This fragmentation has had tangible economic impacts. Approximately 13 per cent of Ontario’s population, nearly 1.9 million people, live in areas underserved by ridesharing services.¹ At the same time, businesses consistently report that access to ridesharing improves customer reach, workforce mobility, and overall operations. In its absence, businesses face reduced customer traffic, challenges with employee commuting, and constraints on growth.

The proposed pilot is a positive step toward addressing these gaps by introducing more consistent, province-led requirements. However, its effectiveness will depend on whether it reflects how Northern communities function, where demand is regional rather than confined to individual municipalities.

¹ Context Research Group, *Economic Impact of Rideshare Expansion in Ontario*, January 2025.

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Recommendation:

- The Province should ensure that the pilot is designed to achieve sufficient scale and reflects regional travel patterns, rather than being constrained by fragmented municipal boundaries.

Impact on Connectivity, Mobility, and Existing Services

The proposed pilot represents a meaningful opportunity to improve transportation connectivity along the Northlander corridor, particularly by strengthening first- and last-mile access. This is critical not only to maximizing the utility of the Northlander service, but also to supporting broader economic participation across the region.

Expanded rideshare availability has been shown to generate measurable economic and social benefits. Research estimates that extending rideshare services into underserved areas could contribute approximately \$580 million in annual GDP growth and generate up to \$1.5 billion in consumer surplus across Ontario.²

At the same time, the proposed 30-kilometre service boundary may limit the pilot's effectiveness. Travel in Northern Ontario is inherently regional, with individuals regularly moving between communities for work, healthcare, and services. A restrictive boundary risks creating service gaps, where users can reach a destination but cannot reliably return, reducing usability and uptake.

Improved mobility supports access to employment, healthcare, and education, while strengthening tourism and regional economic development, particularly in seasonal economies such as Muskoka and Parry Sound. It also has important safety implications. Stakeholder feedback indicates that travelers arriving on Ontario Northland services outside standard operating hours often lack onward transportation, leaving them dependent on costly or unavailable taxis or stranded without access to safe, heated, or secure spaces. This creates heightened risks for students, workers, and other vulnerable travelers, particularly in extreme Northern Ontario weather conditions.

Recommendation:

- Consideration should therefore be given to introducing greater flexibility in the service area or expanding the geographic scope to better reflect real-world travel patterns.
- Expanding access to reliable ridesharing options can help address these safety gaps by providing consistent, accessible, and safe onward travel.

Operating Requirements and Implementation Considerations

The proposed operating requirements, including driver screening, insurance, and vehicle safety standards, are broadly aligned with existing practices in Ontario and are essential to ensuring passenger safety, public trust, and service quality. Maintaining strong and consistent safety standards will be critical to the success of the pilot.

² Context Research Group, *Economic Impact of Rideshare Expansion in Ontario*, January 2025.

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Implementation should also reflect the realities of Northern and rural communities, where lower population density and geographic scale shape service delivery. The focus should not be on relaxing standards, but on ensuring that compliance, onboarding, and training processes are practical and proportionate, so they do not unintentionally limit participation or constrain service availability.

Timing will also be important. Operators will need sufficient time to recruit and onboard drivers, while communities will need time to adopt new services. A phased approach, supported by ongoing monitoring and adjustment, will help ensure the pilot is effective and sustainable.

Recommendation:

- An approach that maintains robust safety and consumer protection standards, while allowing for practical and regionally appropriate implementation, will be important to supporting both participation and service viability.

Regional Viability and System Design

The success of rideshare services in Northern Ontario will depend on how well the pilot reflects regional travel patterns and economic geography. Long travel distances, dispersed populations, and uneven cellular connectivity reinforce the need for a regionally integrated approach rather than one based strictly on municipal boundaries.

Transportation in the North operates on a hub-and-spoke model, with larger centres supporting surrounding communities for employment, healthcare, education, and services. Capturing this dynamic will be critical to ensuring sufficient demand, service reliability, and meaningful uptake. Stakeholder feedback highlights the importance of considering key regional hubs in the pilot design. Greater Sudbury, as the largest urban centre in Northern Ontario, plays a central role in regional mobility, with surrounding communities relying on it for employment, education, and healthcare. Including such hubs supports the scale needed to attract and retain service providers; without it, service availability and overall effectiveness may be limited.

Recommendation:

- The inclusion of key regional hubs, such as Greater Sudbury, or broader service integration across major Northern centres, would strengthen the pilot's viability, better reflect real-world travel patterns, and support meaningful system uptake.

Future Provincial Framework and Data Considerations

The proposed pilot represents an important opportunity to inform the development of a broader, province-wide ridesharing framework. To support this objective, the province should prioritize the collection of robust data on service usage, availability, economic impacts, and safety outcomes.

This data will be critical to understanding how rideshare services function in Northern and rural contexts, including their impact on workforce mobility, business performance, and access to essential services. It will also help identify any unintended consequences, such as impacts on existing transportation providers or gaps in service coverage.

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If successful, the pilot can serve as a strong foundation for a more coordinated, province-wide approach to ridesharing. A future framework should reduce regulatory fragmentation, enable cross-jurisdictional service, and maintain strong safety and consumer protection standards, while continuing to reflect regional differences and local needs.

Recommendation:

- Designing the pilot with scalability in mind will be critical to ensuring that lessons learned can be applied across Ontario, particularly in rural and underserved communities where transportation gaps remain most acute.

Conclusion

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce supports the proposed Northern Rideshare Pilot as a step toward improving transportation access and economic participation in Northern Ontario. Its success will depend on reflecting regional travel patterns, achieving sufficient scale, and allowing flexibility in geographic scope.

Capturing real-world mobility needs, supporting viable service delivery, and maintaining strong safety and consumer protections will be key. If implemented effectively, the pilot can provide a strong foundation for a coordinated, province-wide ridesharing framework that improves connectivity across rural and underserved communities.

About the Ontario Chamber of Commerce

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) is the indispensable partner of business and Canada's largest, most influential provincial chamber. It is an independent, non-profit advocacy and member services organization representing a diverse network of 60,000 members. The OCC convenes, mobilizes and empowers businesses and local chambers in pursuit of its purpose: to bring inclusive and sustainable prosperity to Ontario's businesses, workers, and communities.