## SYNOPSIS

The community of Ilford with its 230 population is served by a combination of railway/winter road and charter air operation. Access to the community from Thompson is assured on a year around basis.

There is a general perception in the community that the railway service is too slow and not always reliable; this along with poor winter road grades and conditions inhibit efficient transport of goods and people, and that air travel is too expensive. An All-Weather Road connection is viewed as desirable.

An All-Weather Road to Ilford is estimated to cost from $45 to $50 Million. When combined with York Landing, transportation benefit cost coverage on a present-value basis is less than 35%. Given the existing year-around service provided by a combination of rail, air, and winter road, the project will face strong competition for funding priority from numerous more remote communities and would have to be largely justified on a socioeconomic basis.

Given that Ilford does have railway access throughout the year, it is recommended that consideration be given to progressively improve the existing road transportation system. This could largely be achieved by staged construction of 50 km of All-Weather Road from Ilford to Split Lake (on the Nelson River). Ferry service could be provided during the open water season at the Nelson River crossing. This approach would ultimately involve an estimated $23 M capital cost and would achieve better, more reliable access with nominal increases in annual operating and maintenance costs.

As a short-term measure, consideration could be given to improved rail service such as a rail bus operation for several rail dependent communities (e.g., Ilford, Pikwitonei, and Thicket Portage). This approach would involve active support from Hudson Bay Railroad and VIA, as well as the above communities. Further study of the actual costs ($0.5 to $1.0 M/year) and benefit cost coverage (estimated at 15% to 25%) would be required.

In the longer-term, the community's best interests would be served by an AWR. There are currently four potential alignment scenarios for such a road, which are presented in this paper. The relative viability of these alternatives is influenced by as yet undetermined time frames, a go versus no-go decision of Manitoba Hydro's Gull Rapid generating station and considerable range of travel times to and from Thompson. To maximize the benefits and economic justification, there should also be a road connecting Ilford and York Landing.

It is therefore recommended that there be a route selection study undertaken to establish the most cost-effective All-Weather Road corridors and examine in more detail the probable time frames/interim winter road/ferry/rail service strategies. This would permit more appropriate decisions on short-term stream crossing installations to extend winter road operational windows, enhanced ferry and rail services, and acceptable environmental impacts.

The route selection study would initially reduce the number of alternatives under consideration and then identify the further steps necessary to allow a decision on short-term and long-term access strategies and priorities.