SYNOPSIS

The Thicket Portage community, with its population of 217, is served by a combination of scheduled railway, winter road, and charter air operation. Access to the community from P.T.H. 6 is assured year-round; however, during the spring, summer, and fall, the community has experienced slow, unreliable, and relatively costly rail freight and passenger service. Air charter services have not always been available when required. During the winter road season, access to the community is much better and cheaper. In the summer, a combination of forestry road and boat travel does provide alternative access for both people and light freight.

There is a general perception in Thicket Portage that the rail service could be improved and that the winter road season could be extended. Also, measures could be taken to enhance the forestry road and boat access option by providing secure landing/storage areas.

An All-Weather Road access for Thicket Portage is estimated to cost more than $20 M and transportation benefits would only cover 20% of the cost. Given the existing year-around service provided by a combination of rail, air, winter road, forestry roads, and boats, the project will face strong competition for funding priority from numerous more remote communities.

As Thicket Portage does have year-around rail access, it is recommended that the short-term focus be on:

- Improvements to the forestry road and boat access system estimated to cost $0.5 M/year, primarily for improved service levels.

- Exploring the feasibility of rail improvement options such as a rail-bus dedicated to the service of remote communities such as Thicket Portage, Pikwitonei, and Ilford. Costs for such a service (not including running rights on the Hudson Bay Railroad), if feasible, would be in the order of $0.5 to $1.0 M per year primarily for improved service levels.

In the longer-term, the community's best interests would be served by an AWR skirting the east side of Wintering Lake (or parallelling the railway) and tying into the East Jonas Road. This would be the most direct and provide the least travel time for traffic to and from Thompson. To maximize the benefits and economic justification, this road should also serve both the Pikwitonei community and the Thicket Portage community.

It is therefore recommended that the best route for an AWR be established at this time in order to focus short-term winter road and forestry road upgrade investments on the optimum solution. This would avoid throw away costs and minimize the environmental impacts. It could also accommodate short-term measures such as dedicated boat service and winter road stream crossing improvements.

A route selection study should be undertaken to establish the optimum alignments for Thicket Portage and Pikwitonei to East Jonas Road. As well, a functional design study should be carried out to determine the necessary alignment and cross-section upgrades to improve reliability and ensure public safety.