

Greater Sudbury



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Full steam ahead for expansion

Northern Ontario
Railroad Museum
and Heritage Centre
is proposing a
\$4.7-million expansion

By **Laura Stradiotto**
THE SUDBURY STAR

Board members of the Northern Ontario Railroad Museum and Heritage Centre are proposing a \$4.7-million expansion project.

Bob Michelutti, president of the museum board, and other members said the expansion would attract more visitors to the museum.

The museum, now run by volun-

teers, is open during the summer. The vast majority of its 2,000 visitors a year are from the Greater Sudbury area.

A \$75,000 feasibility study indicated the museum could draw 22,500 visitors a year. But the location of the museum and its distance from the city centre had a negative impact on that number.

Expansion plans include a new exhibit hall, locomotive shed, garden and courtyard.

The museum already has major exhibits, such as electric locomotives, but no room to showcase them, said Michelutti.

City kicked in \$25,000 for the feasibility study. FedNor paid the rest.

The study also indicated the museum would lose about \$60,000 in its

first year of operation. In fact, the museum would lose money in its first five years, but the loss would diminish over time, the report said.

Michelutti said that with improved marketing it will probably take about 10 years for the museum to break even.

Although the project doesn't appear to be a good business move, Michelutti and board members are convinced otherwise.

"If you look at the benefits you have from museums in creating jobs and keeping tourists in the Sudbury area a little longer," the economic impact on the whole city is greater, he said.

In the initial stages, one curator and several part-time employees would be hired.

Michelutti said the cost of insurance is a major reason why the study has projected a loss.

But if the city covered the insurance, that would resolve part of the problem.

"I'm not deterred by the loss that the consultants show," said Michelutti.

"We just have to be careful and create a facility that is not a burden on the taxpayers. We want to proceed very cautiously."

In the meantime, board members will establish a committee, apply for federal and provincial grants and continue to work with the Greater Sudbury Development Corporation.

The group will also work with Science North to develop design concepts.

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