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## Rally cry supports rail-car plant

Ward Holland

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Thunder Bay Mayor Lynn Peterson made a plea to residents Monday to get behind the local **Bombardier** plant by writing letters of support to politicians and turning up the heat on the provincial and federal governments.

Peterson read from a 12-page speech at city hall as she described how important the rail-car plant is to Thunder Bay and what is being done to improve its economic fortunes.

"Public action and support for the plant is critical," she told fellow councillors. "Residents, workers, the business community and others concerned must actively support the facility. We cannot stress this enough."

Peterson asked residents to call, write and e-mail provincial and federal politicians to keep jobs in Thunder Bay, and invest in the company's centre of excellence, which was introduced last week.

She said Thunder Bay must force the provincial government to honour its 1992 memorandum of agreement with **Bombardier**, at least on an interim basis.

That agreement states the province will use **Bombardier's** Ontario facilities as the sole supplier of mass transit rail cars, as long as it provides competitive prices, quality products and on-time delivery.

"It is widely believed that the MOA is still binding on both parties," Peterson said.

Thunder Bay's **Bombardier** plant currently employs about 400 workers. But Peterson said another 400 workers have been laid off due to a lack of contracts.

Two contracts that **Bombardier** workers and managers are eagerly waiting to find out about are from the Toronto Transit Commission and Ottawa's transit service.

The Ottawa contract is for 21 cars worth about \$100 million. But Ottawa is considering looking to other companies, perhaps out of country, to bid on the contract.

Coun. Joe Virdiramo said he has heard that various business groups supporting **Bombardier** were going in too many directions.

"I think we should be the lead on this," Virdiramo said.

Peterson said six or seven groups are involved and the lead agency should be Confederation College.

Coun. Bill Scollie said his research showed that "high-ranking bureaucrats in Ontario" have declared the 1992 memorandum "null and void."

Scollie asked if council should look at the legalities of the MOA. "This is crucial," he said.

Peterson said council should wait for Premier Dalton McGuinty to reply before doing that.

More council news/A

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