

TRANSPORT ACTION NEWSLETTER

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Improvement requested SOUTHWESTERN ONTARIO WANTS A BETTER TRANSPORT SYSTEM

Transportation expert Greg Gormick wants people to use public transportation to show politicians there is a demand for improvements, including three daily round-trip trains in Sarnia.

Gormick unveiled an improvement plan for rail and bus service in southwestern Ontario during a presentation at Sarnia library on Saturday.

Through the co-operation of municipal, provincial and federal politicians, Gormick wants to have 16 daily round trips on VIA's existing routes and 18 feeder bus lines serving 100 southwestern Ontario communities within five years.

He set the cost at an annual \$60 million operating subsidy and \$400 million in capital investment.

The cost shock was softened by Gormick saying there's a current \$60-million operating subsidy to rail service. Moreover, \$400 million is what will be spent in Toronto to build one kilometre of new subway line.

Gormick's Network Southwest plan was created for the Southwestern Ontario Transportation Alliance (SWOTA), a regional rail advocacy group.

Gormick said the automobile remains the "junk food of transportation", dominating the present transportation system. Yet the auto-

mobile comes with a big cost and yet has left the region with a mobility gap.

His assertion was supported by audience members who don't own an automobile who spoke of their own personal experiences, such as being unable to get to Chatham from Sarnia, and having to endure a 10-hour train ride to Ottawa at a cost of \$400.



CBNS NEAR SHUNACADIE, NS.

Improved bus service is part of the plan, but the service must be integrated into the regional transportation system, Gormick said.

An intercity bus terminal must connect with rail service and local transit. Mobility hubs that bring all services to one terminal are part of the plan.

Such hubs are part of a successful rail renewal plan in North Carolina, where after years of decline ridership has doubled on some of that

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High price of gasoline in Montreal

Gasoline gouging !



Gasoline prices in Québec, especially in Montréal area and some regions, are higher than those in most provinces. Part of this is due to taxes to support such things as urban transit, rural public transport, infrastructure improvements for short line railways, and so

on. People understand that and pay the price. Lately, however, even with the worldwide decrease in crude oil prices, the prices have remained higher than elsewhere in Canada, and there are widespread suspicions of collusion and gouging.

Renewed competition in Québec City, deceptive price stability in Sherbrooke and sharp, unjustified increases in Montréal are among the highlights of Canadian Automobile Association-Québec's

(CAA- Québec) annual review of gas prices. Price disparities saw motorists in some regions penalized, while others enjoyed a respite from unfairly high prices.

What are the implications for public transport? A number of public transport vehicles use gasoline-powered vehicles, including many handi-trans operators, taxis - often used for taxibus services in Québec - and volunteer drivers for seniors and health services. Unwarranted high prices for fuel hurt the bottom line of both the organisations offering these services, and the wallets of the drivers who provide their own vehicles for the last two. Consumers can shield themselves from the gouging to some extent by using public transit and intercity and suburban bus and rail. While most bus lines and VIA Rail maintain reasonable frequencies on weekends, commuter services on rail lines in the Montréal area offer reduced or no services on weekends, when the gas prices are usually at their peak. The CAA is rightly warns consumers to remain vigilant.

—Harry Gow

Opportunity for HSR in Canada ?

The Caisse de Dépôts buys a part of Eurostar

The Caisse de dépôt, the Québec pension fund invests in sure bets to generate money to honour its obligations to retirees. It was therefore not surprising that it took 40% of the international high-speed train operator Eurostar, famous for its London-Paris service using the Channel Tunnel. At a cost of 585 million pounds for shares and 172 million pounds for bonds, la Caisse has enriched the British treasury by nearly a billion dollars.

Eurostar has invested 1.9 billion dollars in a programme to of which 190 millions refurbish the original Eurostar TGVs and 1.7 billion to buy 17 new trains, capable of carrying 900 passengers at 320 km/h, an improvement over the earlier series' 750 passengers at 300 km/h, The new trains by Seimens AG will start service this year.

It is interesting to see Canadian financial institutions investing in public transport in other countries, yet remaining chilly at the

prospect of doing so in Canada, where railway passenger services sorely need such injections of capital. Note however that the British and French governments do not hesitate to invest

in rail transit and in railways including high speed ones, selling their shares when it becomes advantageous to do so. This kind of leadership is alas lacking in Canada. —Harry Gow, *President Transport Action*



From page 1

state's rail lines, Gormick said.

Municipal transit systems have the operational expertise for intercity bus service but would need financial support from senior governments, said Gormick, citing it as an example of the need for co-operation among governments. Local transit provides a person's first and last miles in an intercity trip, he said.

Beyond the personal hardships, the mobility gap reduces the region's appeal to new business, said Gormick.

Sarnia's transportation accessibility is a factor considered by businesses searching for new locations, said George Mallay, executive director of Sarnia- Lambton Economic Partnership, following the presentation.

Closing the mobility gap does not require a one-time giant step but multiple steps using existing facilities. Buses being sold by seniors levels of government could be given to municipal governments and rebuilt for intercity service.

Rather than jumping to high-speed rail service with trains traveling on specially created tracks at speeds of 240 kilometres per hour, high-performance trains with speeds of 160 kilometres per hour could be a starting point. "That's the beauty of it (the plan). It can be done incrementally," said Gormick.

One of first steps is to get people talking about the plan.

— Neil Bowen, *Sarnia Observer*. Greg's work is funded by Transport Action Canada's McCullum Fund.

Gaspe rail line

Quebec government may save the line !

The Quebec government has laid out a plan to buy the Gaspé Railway Company line between Matapédia and Gaspé in the eastern part of the province. Ownership of the line currently belongs to four county municipalities that are served by the line.

Since 2007, the Ministry of Transportation of Quebec has awarded more than CA\$44.5 million (US\$35.75 million) for the maintenance of the rail network in Gaspé, including CA\$27 million (US\$21.7 million) in the past two years. Between 2007 and 2012, Canada Economic Development has contributed a total of CA\$17.5 million (US\$14.06 million). Despite the investment, a bankruptcy notice was filed on November 21, 2014 and Quebec said the bankruptcy could be declared as early as March 20.

"[Without government intervention], the risk of losing the railway line and the jobs that depend on it was real. We are now putting every effort to safeguard the future of this economic asset and to promote [the] rail potential of the Gaspé Peninsula," said Quebec's Minister of Transport Robert Poëti.

The government would acquire the nearly 202 miles of rail infrastructure between Matapédia and Gaspé and maintain rail operations between Matapédia and Caplan and between L'Anse-à-Beaufils (Percé) and Gaspé. The government would not restore the portion of the network between Caplan and Percé due to the cost prohibitive nature of the repairs given the "low potential traffic," but the infrastructure would not be dismantled leaving the possibility that the line could be repaired at a later date or used for some other use. The Ministère des Transports du Québec would become owner of the infrastructure and ensure the maintenance of priority portions of the network.

Before moving forward, the government's proposal must be approved by the Gaspé Railway Company Board of Directors, as well as the four county municipality owners.—*www.rtands.com*



FAST TRACK

Did you know...

On March 31st, 1995 The Amtrak Montrealer made its final departure from Central Station, ending a era of overnight train between Montreal and Washington DC.

And the number is...

10.8

In 2014, a record of 10.8 billion trips on public transportation across USA were recorded — the highest annual ridership number in 58 years

THE ELEVATOR

RICK GOLDRING
Mayor of Burlington, ON received a challenge from The Burlington For Accessible Sustainable Transit to take the local bus. He did it ... twice!



O-TRAIN 2.0
Sixty millions later, the O-Train failed to even operate on the reopening ceremony ! Then, during the following days, another problems forced commuter to wait for replacement buses.

Swipe and go for Edmonton transit users ?



Edmonton transit users could soon use their credit card to pay for a ride while talks with smart fare companies continue, say Edmonton Transit officials. The regional smart fare project could see riders hopping on the bus, wave their credit or Interac card in front of the reader and continue onto the bus. "Still trying to decide if it would look like that out the door but we do like the functionality of it," said Lorna Stewart with the city. "We know the credit card companies are more and more interested in this." The city is looking at transit systems in Portland, Chicago and

Washington, D.C. who use similar technology already, weighing the pros and cons of how the technology operates.—*www.metronews.ca*

A seat for TTC users pls ?

Transit advocates in Toronto want a seat on the bus, and at the table. TTCriders, a group that lobbies on behalf of TTC customers for more service and lower fares, is seeking a spot on the TTC's board.

"We want to make sure there's one voice that represents transit riders," said TTCriders director Jessica Bell. "There's 1.8 million of us, so our voice should be heard." —*www.metronews.ca*



"When you build transit, you get people walking more and driving and polluting less"

- Lawrence Frank, director at UBC's Health and Community Design Lab

Halifax Commuter Rail Study

Preliminary results presented to public

The discussion about a possible commuter rail system for Halifax is back in full swing, as the preliminary results of a feasibility study were released to the public at an open house on February 26th. Hundreds of residents – including several city councilors and members of TAA – came out to the Sunnyside Mall in Bedford to see the preliminary findings from the study being prepared by CPCS consultants, and the response was overwhelmingly positive.

The proposed system being evaluated by CPCS would make use of the existing CN Bedford Subdivision, running from the VIA Rail station in downtown Halifax out as far as either Cobequid or Elmsdale. The existing rail line could be used with relatively few upgrades, mainly the addition of short passing tracks or new sections of double track. Stations along the line would provide access to downtown, the south end universities, shopping areas, communities along the route, and transfer points to connect with buses. Most importantly, the proposed route would help remove traffic from the busy mostly two-lane Bedford Highway, and would offer a faster and more reliable commute to and from the city.

For equipment, CPCS considered the use of diesel locomotive-hauled commuter equipment, refurbished Budd RDCs, low-floor DMUs (like those used on Ottawa's O-Train) or high-floor DMUs (like those built for the Union Pearson Express). Either refurbished RDCs or high-floor DMUs, both of which may be permitted to share tracks with freight trains, appear to be the most likely candidates. Refurbishing RDCs currently stored in Moncton would likely be the most cost-effective solution from a capital expense stand-point, though RDCs have certain drawbacks in commuter service, such as slow boarding through the vestibule end-doors.

Depending on the service scenario, CPCS is estimating that the basic system could carry between 1,600 and 4,000 people per day on weekdays. By comparison, Halifax Transit's average overall weekday ridership is 98,000 people per day. Specific figures on how the commuter rail estimates compare to bus ridership along that particular corridor were not provided in the preliminary report, but it seems likely that the projected figures would represent a significant shift of commuter traffic off of the congested roads.

CPCS is evaluating nine cost scenarios based on the different demand scenarios and operating concepts. The preliminary findings suggest that a basic system servicing Halifax to Cobequid could be set up for as little as \$26 million, while a higher-service scenario stretching all the way to Elmsdale could cost as much as \$130 million. Cost recovery also varies depending on the scenario, with initial estimates ranging from 9% (comparable to the Connecticut

Department of Transportation) to 24% (slightly better than Chicago's RTA).

Of course this is not the first time that commuter rail has been discussed for Halifax. Various feasibility studies have been undertaken over the last two decades, with each one failing to result in any further action. This study got underway in early 2014, after several years of disputes between the city and CN over bridge repair costs



SERVICE COULD BE MADE WITH BUDD RDC EQUIPEMENT

finally wound up, with the courts siding in favour of CN. How CN will cooperate with any proposed plan remains to be seen, if and when it ever becomes a reality. This time around there does seem to be an appetite for new transit solutions, as the strong attendance and enthusiastic response at the open house demonstrated. Traffic congestion is a serious concern in Halifax, especially if the city hopes to continue to grow, and there is an ever growing push for more efficient and sustainable transportation options. Several city councilors attended the open house and have already voiced their support for commuter rail, so there is some reason for optimism when the study eventually comes before council.

The exact details of the proposed system will be revealed when the final study is published. CPCS will now refine their study in light of public feedback, and the final report will be released within a few months. It is difficult to pass judgment based only on the preliminary findings, and there may well be room for improvement, but this does provide a critical step in moving towards establishing commuter rail in Halifax. If a basic system can be set up in a cost-effective and sensible way, it could pave the way for an expanded and successful system in the future.

—Tim Hayman, member of Transport Action Atlantic

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Follow us on



Coming soon...

- the Annual General Meeting of Transport Action Canada will be held in Charny (Qc) at 8041 avenue des Églises, at 1:00 PM on Saturday May 9th, 2015.
- L'AGA de Transport Action Canada aura lieu au 8041, av. des Églises à Charny, Québec le samedi 9 mai 2015 à 13h00.

More News from Transport Action Canada

Transport Action Canada AGM/AGA

The **Annual General Meeting** of Transport Action Canada will be held at “Le Restaurant Normandin” in Charny (Qc) in the City of Lévis at 8041, avenue des Églises, at 1:00 PM on Saturday May 9th, 2015.

The meeting agenda will be published on the website of Transport Action Canada www.transport-action.ca and it will include the usual business and will be preceded by lunch at 12 noon at the restaurant and will commence with speakers: Jacques Vandersleyen, professor and (on screen) Bruce Campbell, Executive Director of the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives; on oil-by-rail safety. Harry Gow will chair the session and the question period.

A programme of visits to sites of railway interest during the weekend will be organised for those interested.

Information on accommodation will be published on the Transport Action Canada website and other local information is available from Mr. Louis-François Garceau of the Groupe TRAQ at info@groupe-traq.com

Avis est donné que l'**Assemblée générale annuelle** de Transport Action Canada sera tenue au Restaurant Normandin, au 1841, avenue des Églises à Charny, Ville de Lévis, à 13h00 le samedi 9 mai 2015.

L'ordre de jour sera publié sur le site web de Transport Action Canada au www.transport-action.ca et on y trouvera les éléments habituels. Un repas sera servi au restaurant à midi (12h00). L'assemblée débutera avec les conférences de M. Jacques Vandersleyen, professeur, et, à l'écran, de M. Bruce Campbell, directeur-général du Centre canadien des Politiques alternatives au sujet de la sécurité dans le transport ferroviaire du pétrole. M. Harry Gow animera le panel et la période de questions et commentaires.

Un programme de visites à des sites d'intérêt ferroviaire sera organisé pendant la fin de semaine pour les participant-e-s intéressé-e-s.

Les informations sur l'hébergement seront publiées sur le site web de Transport Action Canada et des informations d'ordre général seront disponibles auprès de M. Louis-François Garceau à : info@groupepetraq.com

Financial Statements for the AGM

Under the new Not for Profit Corporations Act, we are required to make our financial statements for 2014 available to the membership 21 days prior to the AGM. A copy must also be sent to Corporations Canada. This is a new requirement, as previously we only had to send the financial statements to the Canada Revenue Agency, Charities Division, within six months of the end of the year and after approval at the AGM.

We plan to email the financial statements to all current members for whom we have email addresses by 19 April. Any members who do not have email or who do not receive the emailed copy can request a mailed copy or a followup email.

The statements take two pages and include the balance sheet and the statement of income and expenses for 2014, and the 2013 amounts for comparison. The accounts are structured in the same way that Canada Revenue Agency asks charities to

report their financial information. These reports for prior years are found on CRA's website: www.cra-arc.gc.ca/charities

The AGM will be asked to approve appointment of a public accountant for a review engagement of our financial records, rather than a full audit, which can be very costly. A review provides an opinion on whether accounting methods follow generally accepted accounting principles, but does not examine individual transactions. The AGM may also vote to require a full audit.

Elections at the AGM

In prior years, our nominating committee has proposed a slate of names for the executive positions. The AGM has had the opportunity to nominate additional persons in which case a secret ballot has been held for the positions in contention.

Under the new Not-for-Profit Corporations Act, the members elect the Board of Directors. The nominating committee will propose a slate of directors with a regional balance, reflecting membership numbers in the different regions. The committee takes input from the regional and associated organizations.

The AGM can nominate additional directors and may vote on the number of directors to be elected, (within an authorized range of 5 to 16). This may result in a contested election if the number of nominees exceeds the number of positions. In a contested election, family members are entitled to two votes.

The new Board of Directors then appoints the executive officers, at its next meeting, (president, secretary, treasurer, VP East, VP West), and confirms that the past president is prepared to serve.

Revision of Bylaws

The current board may submit bylaw amendments to the AGM for approval. Such bylaw amendments are in effect from the time the board approves them until the members' vote at the AGM. Members can propose bylaw changes, at least 90 days before the AGM and with signatures of 5% of the membership. Any such proposal must be sent to all members with the notice of the meeting.

Absentee Voting at the AGM

For any motion that is listed on the agenda, a member who will not be present may send a vote to the secretary of Transport Action in advance of the meeting, either by email or by regular mail. Please mark "AGM vote" on the outside of the envelope or the subject line of the email. The contents of the email or envelope will be kept confidential except for vote counting purposes. There is no provision for proxy voting for matters not on the agenda. (See page 8 for address).

Examples of matters for absentee voting will include:

- election of the nominating committee slate of directors
- approval of the financial statements
- approval of the public accountant appointment
- approval of any proposed bylaw amendments

We look forward to seeing you in Charny, QC on May 9th!

Update on Cape Breton railway discontinuance

Tim Hayman and Ted Bartlett, Transport Action Atlantic

As 2014 drew to a close, the last train on the Cape Breton and Central Nova Scotia Railway's (CBCNS) Sydney Subdivision made its trip from Sydney to Port Hawkesbury. From the perspective of the railway's owners – Genesee and Wyoming Inc. (GWI) – the line is already finished. Yet despite their adamant intentions and ultimate follow-through with ceasing rail service by December 31st, the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board (UARB) had yet to issue its ruling on the required period before discontinuing service.

At the formal hearing on 8-9 December, representatives for GWI bluntly told the UARB that no trains would operate after 31 December 2014, under any circumstances, and the line has now effectively been shut down. But the UARB's ruling on 15 January set a different date for the end of service: 1 October 2015. Until then, the UARB says, "CBCNS must deliver goods by rail if that service is required by a shipper and the shipper is prepared to pay a reasonable rate for that service".

The UARB cannot order the company to continue an uneconomic operation, but does have the authority to set the timeframes for discontinuance of service. Under amendments to the *Railways Act* that received speedy passage in the Legislative Assembly last fall, the actual physical abandonment of a line now falls under the jurisdiction of the provincial transportation minister. That role is currently filled by the Honourable Geoff MacLellan, a Cape Breton native who has openly supported the retention of rail service, including at a public meeting held in Sydney on December 8.

The UARB also ordered CBCNS to file an amended discontinuance plan by 29 January. The company moderated its tone slightly, but much hangs on the interpretation of the term "reasonable rate", and it remains to be seen whether delivering goods by rail really means actual operation of trains. The railway has thus far insisted that providing alternative service by truck constitutes providing "adequate service", but at least three of the railway's industrial customers say they are not prepared to accept their raw materials by alternative means, and others who have switched under the duress of dramatic rate increases from CBCNS have said they are not satisfied with the alternatives as long-term solutions.



CBCNS 302 at Island Pond, Tim Hayman, 2014

One customer reports that the per carload rate quoted by CBCNS in January had increased almost threefold in a move

clearly calculated to drive traffic away from the railway – a tactic GWI representatives openly acknowledged during the UARB hearing. GWI attributes the massive hike to the end of the provincial subsidy – a decade long agreement that had allowed the operation to break even – but the company fully recognized that they willingly declined the subsidy so they could abandon the line for the scrap value, rather than continue with a break-even or low profit operation.



Grand Narrows, Tim Hayman, 2014

The UARB ruling, with a summary of evidence presented at the hearing (including from Transport Action Atlantic) can be found at their website: http://nsuarb.novascotia.ca/sites/default/files/decisions/decision_cbens_rail.pdf

An advisory task force appointed by Minister MacLellan (Minister's Rail Advisory Committee, MRAC) is probing all aspects of the issue, including an assessment of shipping by rail vs. truck, pending economic opportunities in Cape Breton, and the level of investment required to upgrade the rail infrastructure. Minister MacLellan has made it clear that the Province has no interest in running a railway, but hasn't ruled out the prospect of provincial ownership of the line with operations contracted out to a suitable partner.

There is also strong citizen support for examining alternative methods of keeping the rail line afloat. Many of these options were discussed at a public meeting following the UARB hearing on Dec. 8, and a separate citizen-run initiative was put forward under the leadership of Cape Breton University Dean of Business Dr. David Rae. This group is awaiting the results of the MRAC study before proceeding, but has already begun to gather support from the public.

Transport Action Atlantic (TAA) has been active on the Cape Breton file, and appeared as an intervener at the UARB hearing. We presented our position in support of rail as an environmentally responsible, socially beneficial, safe and efficient mode of transportation. We raised particular concerns about the ever increasing strain and danger of heavy trucks on Cape Breton's deteriorating road network, and also pointed to the artificial reductions in demand brought about by repeated rate increases by the CBCNS, which were then used as further justification for cutting service and once again increasing rates.

Transport Action Atlantic will continue to work on this file, maintaining communication with the provincial transportation department, rail customers, and other interested parties. The fight is a long way from over – and there's still a glimmer of hope that this may not be the end of rail service to Sydney.

Vancouver Transit and Transportation Plebiscite

Rick Jelfs, Transport Action British Columbia

Ballots for the plebiscite will start arriving in Greater Vancouver voters' mail boxes in the week of March 16, 2015.

This is the culmination of a long and arduous process that began with a, seemingly off-the-cuff election promise made by the BC Liberals in the May 2013 election campaign. A referendum was mandated for any new taxation sources for TransLink, Metro Vancouver's regional transportation authority. Existing taxes could be modified without the necessity of a vote.

The Liberals originally planned to hold the referendum with the November 2014 municipal elections. Municipal politicians opposed this timing because they feared that a tax referendum during a municipal campaign would dominate the campaign, to the detriment of debate on other urban issues and their political survival. Eventually the provincial government agreed to hold a mail-in referendum in the spring of 2015. The province also handed responsibility for proposed transportation improvements, funding sources and the referendum question wording to the TransLink Mayors' Council (<http://mayorscouncil.ca/about/>), a body created by the provincial government when it last re-structured TransLink.

This large and disparate group of politicians was able to come up with a broad plan (<http://mayorscouncil.ca/transportation-investments/>) of regional transportation improvements that would be funded by a 0.5% sales tax that would be added to the provincial sales tax in Metro Vancouver. The Mayors' Council also crafted a referendum question.

Proposed improvements include increased transit services across all modes, more B-line express routes, 2,700 kilometres of new bikeways and 2,300 kilometres of road upgrades.

Major capital projects proposed such as a SkyTrain extension along Broadway in Vancouver, LRT in Surrey and the Patullo Bridge replacement would require additional provincial and federal funding. The sales tax increase would fund Metro Vancouver's portion of these projects

The Mayors' Council referendum question was sent to the provincial government for approval. After some delay, the province returned a revised question for a "Congestion Improvement Tax" that would be voted on in a non-binding plebiscite (<https://voony.wordpress.com/2014/12/18/metro-vancouver-transit-plebiscite-first-thought/>).

Unfortunately, the lengthy time span between the provincial election (May 2013) and the plebiscite question approval (Dec. 2014) allowed those opposed to increased transit funding to frame the 'referendum' debate as one of giving more money to TransLink, which is regularly vilified by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation. A number of well-publicised transit system failures only added to the negativity. TransLink's inability or unwillingness to forcefully defend itself reinforced the perception of an organization out of touch with its customers and undeserving of increased funding.

TransLink has:

- survived several external audits that found no impropriety in its finances,
- regularly receives high-rankings in customer service surveys,

- is responsible for regional transit, cycling facilities, and roads and bridges (it is not just a transit agency) over a large urban, suburban and rural area, including First Nations,
- has been saddled with costly provincial initiatives such as the money-losing Golden Ears Bridge (a P3 project) and the installation of fare gates in the rapid transit system,
- has been applauded in the transit and planning community.

None of these successes has been able to improve its image.

Several coalitions support the "Yes" side. The major one is the Better Transit and Transportation Coalition (<http://www.bettertransit.info/>). Transport Action BC is a member of this coalition. Our members have written blog posts and appeared in local media in support of a "Yes" vote. We've defined our role as one of correcting, as much as feasible, misinformation that is published.

The broad-based nature of the "Yes" support groups and a well-funded advertising campaign, have not been able to change the "No" side's characterization of the plebiscite as a vote on TransLink's (alleged) wasteful spending of taxpayer dollars.

Recent polls indicate the plebiscite may fail. However, recent BC polling history is not consistent, and the pollster frequently consulted on the plebiscite is the one who predicted an NDP landslide in the last provincial election. Also, pollsters may not be experienced in dealing with the lengthy voting period – March 16 to May 29 – which means existing polling methodologies may not apply. The long voting period gives the "Yes" side more time to get its message out.

VIA Rail looks for Pension Fund Investment

Harry Gow, President, Transport Action Canada

VIA Rail Canada CEO Yves Desjardins- Siciliano has been speaking to the media of late, sharing his views on the future of VIA's railway passenger service. Reacting to delays to passenger trains from line-sharing CN freights, he has come to the view that new lines or at least additional tracks are more than ever needed. Speaking to Bloomberg Media he referred to the rising tide of oil trains bringing ever more congestion to the CN network on which VIA runs most of its trains.

Desjardins-Siciliano has been speaking with bankers and investors about a 3-billion dollar 'dedicated track' for the Montréal-Ottawa-Toronto corridor. While nearly a billion dollars has gone into CN and VIA infrastructure in that part of the network since the year 2000, it is still not enough to bring the higher speeds that passenger executives have been hoping for ever since the creation of VIA in the 1970s. The lesson for the rest of the country is clear, though. Money may become available for the Corridor, but other solutions are needed for other parts of the country.

The repeated shutdowns of the CN mainline across the Prairies and Northern Ontario as a result of oil train derailments has led to cancellations of the sparse *CANADIAN* transcontinental train service, and it does not look like there will be an improvement other than the respite summer weather may bring to the winter-challenged railway. Another solution seems to be needed and calls by area Member of Parliament Bruce Hyer to switch the train to the farther-south Canadian Pacific mainline may be the only way forward, as CN has

ripped up alternative tracks on the Kinghorn Subdivision and elsewhere and its tracks seem to suffer from the heavy traffic, maintenance issues and northern Nature. As we go to press VIA reservation clerks are saying Winnipeg-Toronto service will be restored on March 29th, but there are indications that VIA and CN were unable to agree on scheduling priorities.

VIA services in Southwestern Ontario have been declining as a result of single-tracking, freight train preference and even competition from GO Trains. VIA arbitrarily reduced service in the area under the previous CEO, so Transport Action Ontario is part of SWOTA, a coalition working for more and better train service from Toronto west to Windsor and Sarnia. It is however beginning to look like VIA may get squeezed out of the region by the Province of Ontario, which has its own plans for more GO service and a higher-speed passenger network.

In other parts of the country, challenges abound; for example VIA has yet to conclude a final agreement with the Island Corridor Foundation to return passenger service to Vancouver Island, and in the Gaspé far to the east the Québec provincial government is moving to buy the municipally owned railway, but it would restore only the eastern extremity for a tour train, and the western end of the line for freight. Returning the former VIA *CHALEUR* service to the line is getting harder to even imagine.

Transport Action Canada, through its National Dream Renewed programme has contributed to efforts to save passenger train service in several regions, most notably in the Maritime provinces where it was part of a coalition which got the federal government to order VIA to spend ten million dollars to rehabilitate a threatened section of line on the Newcastle Subdivision. The *OCEAN* train service on the line has been saved, and VIA has cut an hour from the schedule. Passenger ridership seems to be creeping back up, based on observations and head counts by long-time passenger advocate John Pearce of Halifax.

To return to VIA's Corridor ambitions, Bloomberg reports that a recent announcement of a plan by the Caisse de Dépôt pension fund and the Government of Québec- to invest in two transit lines in Montréal to the South Shore and the West Island - has encouraged Yves Desjardins-Siciliano to hope that the same formula could be applied to speed up trains from Montréal to Toronto. We wish VIA's CEO good luck with the idea; fresh ideas are needed and with them, new sources of funding for passenger railways and not only in Central Canada.

VIA Rail Canada Act - Private Member's Bill

(MPs Canada-wide need to be contacted to support Bill C640. The momentum builds! ... Harry Gow)

House of Commons Debates Friday, February 20, 2015

Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP) moved that Bill C-640, An Act respecting VIA Rail Canada and making consequential amendments to the Canada Transportation Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: "Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to begin the debate today on Bill C-640, the VIA Rail Canada Act. This bill, which is long overdue, directly addresses the cause of many of the problems that have been facing our public passenger rail

service ever since it was created in 1977. The bill provides the main, most crucial measure needed to resolve those problems."

(for the rest of his speech, see Private Members' Business at: <http://www.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?Pub=b=hansard&Language=E&Mode=1&Parl=41&Ses=2&DocId=7847578&File=0>)

Jean Sivardière, Transport Crusader in France

President of France's Fédération nationale des usagers des transports (FNAUT) since 1992, Jean Sivardière will "pass on the torch" and become vice-president in April this year. The FNAUT absorbed Transport 2000 France some years ago with the consent of his colleague and rival, Dr. Pierre Bermond. While the latter's generous internationalism was not Sivardière's cup of tea, he was a formidable advocate for rail and transit within the borders of France. A physicist at the University of Grenoble, he became a full-time president and public transport advocate on his retirement. One of the first to actively promote reserved lanes for cycling and better paths for walking, he has lived to see them become *de rigueur*, as have tramways and some kinds of rail passenger services. (Sivardière was a member of the Board of the SNCF from 1983 to 1993 tenaciously representing passengers).

Bonne retraite, M. Sivardière! H G



Source: La Croix, photo Eymard-Duvernay/Alpaca/Andia.

Recent Transportation Conferences

Transport Action Canada president Harry Gow and National Office Manager Bert Titcomb attended the Railway Association of Canada's Rail-Government Interface Conference in Ottawa on 26 February. One focus of the half day event was Canada's grain transportation.

Harry will also attend the TRAQ symposium in Quebec City on 25-26 March. COLLOQUE 2015 : l'intermodalité maritime / ferroviaire

Contacting Transport Action Canada

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