



The Honourable Marc Garneau MP  
Minister of Transport  
Transport Canada  
330 Sparks Street  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0N5

8 May 2020

### **Emergency Funding for Passenger Rail, Motor Coach, and Public Transit Services**

Dear Mr. Garneau,

We are deeply concerned that no action has yet been announced to protect Canada's rail and motor coach operators to ensure they can continue to provide essential service, particularly to smaller towns and remote communities across Canada. The United States government acted swiftly to provide emergency funding to Amtrak and public transit, as have other G7 nations.

The *Ocean* train provides a necessary public transport connection for many Maritime residents and is not dependent on tourism. While the border between New Brunswick and Quebec remains closed, thought should be given to an "eastern intercity" service for essential travel, with the through journey to Montreal reinstated as soon as public health restrictions can be sufficiently eased.

While serving remote communities generates a small number of passengers for the *Canadian* long-distance train, and these passenger numbers have fallen further since CN started inflicting unacceptable delays upon the service in 2010, the train is nevertheless a lifeline to many communities along its route. Tourist revenues usually cross-subsidize this vital service for Canadians, but for the train to be withdrawn completely through November 1<sup>st</sup> is not an appropriate reaction to the absence of tourism.

As Covid-19 case numbers continue to trend downward, we urge Transport Canada to work with VIA Rail to restore a basic level of passenger service to northern Ontario and to other smaller communities along the routes of the *Canadian*, *Ocean*, and *Skeena*.

Similarly, the small Canadian companies that have stepped up to fill the gaps left by Greyhound's withdrawal in 2018 are now struggling to maintain services, or have suspended them due to financial pressures, as has Greyhound for the rump of its services in Ontario. This leaves many people reliant on the goodwill of others to drive them to medical appointments or for other essential trips, putting vulnerable groups at increased personal risk.

With layoffs and cuts now being announced at many urban transit agencies due to lack of funding, we believe the government should now act decisively to **fund and coordinate safe essential passenger travel for all Canadians**, both in larger urban centres and across the nation. Canada needs VIA Rail, public transit, and motor coach services to survive this crisis and be ready to support a cleaner and more sustainable economic and social recovery.



We understand that VIA Rail will be working over the summer to accelerate the refurbishment program for their heritage stainless steel fleet and has found that additional work will be needed due to the age of the equipment. We therefore also wish to reiterate the request we made last year that the government also allow the Crown Corporation to order at least 30 new cars to supplement the long-distance stainless steel fleet and meet modern expectations of universal accessibility.

Finally, we ask once again for the government to articulate a *National Public Transportation Strategy* that allows long-term planning and phased investment in equipment and infrastructure. This would ensure that our rail and motor coach network is better prepared for any future crisis, support a green recovery, maximize the level of service delivered with our tax dollars, and encourage a resurgence in private sector involvement in transportation research and manufacturing in Canada.

Sincerely,

Terence Johnson  
President, Transport Action Canada

cc: The Hon. Catherine McKenna MP, Minister of Infrastructure and Communities  
Todd Doherty MP  
Niki Ashton MP  
Jenica Atwin MP