



Hon. Pablo Rodriguez
Minister of Transport
330 Sparks Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0N5

February 10, 2024

Dear Minister Rodriguez,

Renewal of VIA Rail's Long Distance Train Fleet in Budget 2024

In our advocacy for passengers and sustainable transportation, we have been communicating with the government, both in meetings and through our pre-budget submissions since 2020, the urgent need to invest in VIA Rail Canada's long-distance fleet. This is required to ensure that all routes offer equipment that meets modern accessibility standards, to address fleet shortages, and to replace the 1955 heritage equipment before it reaches end of life. We know that VIA Rail has communicated a similar message, both in the corporate plans tabled in Parliament and in direct communication with Transport Canada.

This matter has now become time critical. Any further delay in the procurement would extend the timeline for manufacturing, delivery, and commissioning of new equipment beyond the remaining life of the current fleet. The deployment of unoccupied buffer cars, in fall 2022, to protect passengers in the event of a collision while the fleet's remaining structural integrity was verified, was a stark warning.

You and your cabinet colleagues have sought to reassure the travelling public that the change in procurement model for High Frequency Rail to outsource operations and revenue risk, rather than transferring only the manageable and priceable risk of infrastructure provision, does not represent the privatization and demise of VIA Rail Canada. However, unless the future of passenger rail outside the Quebec-Windsor corridor is secured now, through renewal of the long-distance fleet, all remaining services would have to be withdrawn in the early 2030s, just as HFR is expected to come to fruition.

Cancellation of the *Canadian* and *Ocean* due to lack of equipment would embarrass Canada in the international tourism market, but attracting tourists is a side benefit of providing a high-quality public service. More importantly, failure would also mean the complete loss of service for Canadians to travel visiting family and friends, to college, to access advanced medical services, or on business.

The government also acknowledges, regularly, the needs to reduce GHG emissions without sacrificing economic and social progress, and to improve connectivity to northern and indigenous communities, goals which a modernized long-distance and remote rail service could significantly contribute to.

It's time for the government to make a firm commitment to passenger rail as the backbone of sustainable ground transportation for all of Canada, by authorizing VIA Rail Canada to commence procurement for a new long-distance fleet, in budget 2024.

Sincerely,

Terence Johnson, President