



## The Federal Budget and VIA: Is it just more talk?

It's now over two years since the Liberal government took over from the Harper folks. The Liberals complained for years that Harper wasn't doing enough for VIA Rail's equipment renewals. Once elected the Liberal forgot about VIA and didn't even include VIA in the Minister's mandate letter. With the LRC equipment in the Corridor and the Renaissance trains serving the Maritimes needing ever increasing repairs, the Liberals spent two years giving out only two small grants (about \$3 million each) to do studies stretching over three years on: 1) the requirements for fleet renewal in the Corridor and 2) how to rebuild the old, twisty CP Havelock line from Toronto through Peterborough to Smiths Falls to join up with VIA's existing tracks to Ottawa and on to Montreal.

Now we have some **good news** about new rolling stock for VIA! The budget had three items related to VIA:

1. In "**Renewing VIA Rail's Fleet**" the government said "Funding proposed for Transport Canada to replace VIA Rail's cars and locomotives for use in the Windsor Quebec City Corridor, ensuring that VIA Rail's rolling stock in the Corridor will remain safe and comfortable, and generate fewer greenhouse gas emissions. Funding amounts are not being released due to an upcoming procurement." This is normal procedure.
  - This good news was confirmed in a note I got after the budget from Pamela O'Leary, VIA's Senior Advisor, Government and Community Relations (Ontario and West), stating that "the federal budget in Ottawa ... included a commitment to renew VIA Rail's Corridor fleet of 160 cars and 40 locomotives". While those specific numbers may not actually be in the budget, that is what VIA believes they are now allowed to seek bids for from equipment suppliers. From previous conversations with staff in the Presidents' office, we believe VIA has already issued a RFQ (request for qualifications) to about 20 potential suppliers. From those submissions a much smaller list of suppliers will likely be asked to reply to an actual RFP (request for proposals) that the budget seems to authorize. **Our fingers are crossed** that this order will be finalized in 2018. However, let's remember there was no mention of new equipment for The Canadian or The Ocean services outside the Corridor.
2. Under "**Modernizing VIA Rail Passenger Service**" the budget said "Funding proposed for Transport Canada to support the continued in-depth assessment of VIA Rail's high frequency rail proposal for the Toronto-Quebec City corridor. \$3 million 2018-2019, 3 million 2019-2020, \$2 million 2020-2021". This \$8 million is in addition to the \$3M in a previous budget for the same purpose, but why is it spread over three

more years? Is this another delaying tactic and seems in direct contradiction to Minister Garneau's recent statements in the press that a decision will be made shortly, certainly before year end. If so, what is this additional money for - more design work, or preparatory construction work, but certainly not a commitment to the \$6 billion projected cost. Again no details.

3. Lastly, under "**Maintaining Rail Service to Remote Communities**" one last item: "Funding proposed for Transport Canada for the renewal of the Remote Passenger Rail Program. This program helps support two passenger rail services, the Sept-Îles-Schefferville service in Quebec and Labrador, and the The Pas-Pukatawagan service in northern Manitoba. \$11 million 2018-2019". Okay, but please note the complete lack of mention of the plight of the people of Churchill and the urgent need to get the Hudson Bay Railway rebuilt and out of the hands of OmniTrax who have been ragging the puck since the washouts last May.

All in all, for those of us wanting a real commitment to renewal and expansion of Canada's passenger rail network, this budget was a real step in the right direction that should allow VIA to go to tender for new rolling stock in the Quebec City to Windsor Corridor - **good news for sure** . Maybe there will be something for the Maritimes and for a revival of rail services in Western Canada in the next budget. We all need to continue to push the government and VIA to do better.

Bruce Budd  
President

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## [What we've been reading.](#)



### **Ontario looking to test hydrogen-powered train tech**

Ontario is taking the next steps in exploring the potential of hydrogen rail as an alternative to conventional electric trains, as Ontario transforms the GO network into a rapid-transit system that will provide faster and more frequent service for commuters and families. [More here.](#)

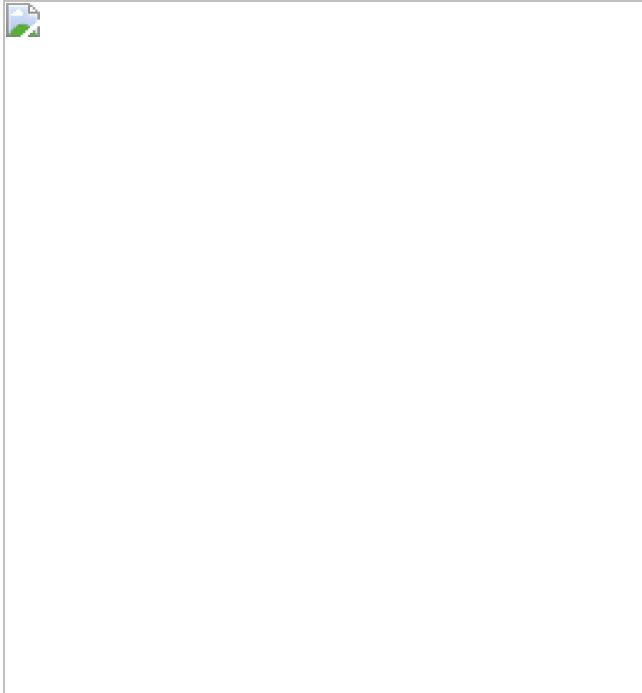
### **TransLink fast-tracks delivery of new SkyTrain cars**

TransLink late last week announced plans to accelerate the delivery of 28 new SkyTrain cars for the



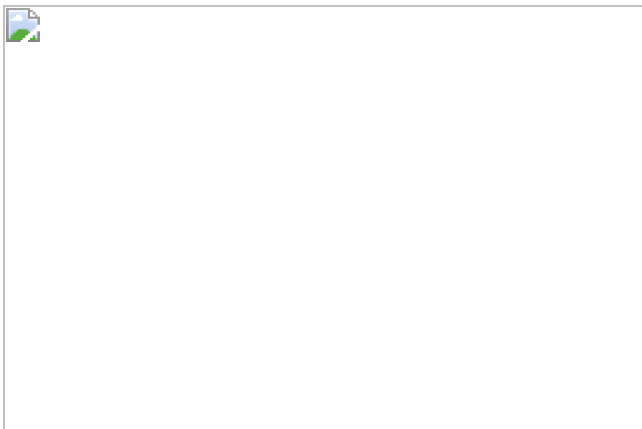
Expo and Millennium lines.

To be built by Bombardier, the units now are slated to arrive by the end of 2019, three years ahead of schedule. [More here.](#)



### **Collenette to chair Ontario high-speed rail board**

The Province of Ontario has appointed former Canadian federal transport minister Mr David Collenette as chair of the Ontario High Speed Rail Planning Advisory board, which will oversee the development of plans for a high-speed line linking Toronto with Windsor. [More here.](#)



### **First driverless train for Sydney metro on test**

Dynamic testing is underway in Sydney of the first of 22 six-car Alstom Metropolis driverless metro trains for the North West Rail Link project. [More here.](#)

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