

This newsletter is produced by Transport Action Canada for all members of the Transport Action family. If you are a member of Transport Action Atlantic, Ontario, Prairies or BC, you are automatically a member of Transport Action Canada. The regional organizations have chosen to issue a joint electronic newsletter covering all of Canada.



TRANSPORT ACTION  
CANADA

Dear ,

As the federal election nears this fall, a slew of transportation related announcements have been made in the last couple of weeks. The upcoming election also makes this a critical time for our advocacy. Follow our updates on [Twitter](#) and [Facebook](#) as we respond to developments.

## High Frequency Rail moving slowly forward



After two years of waiting, VIA Rail finally received approval from Transport Canada to take the next steps to advance the High Frequency Rail on June 25th. Back to back announcements in Trois-Rivières and Peterborough unveiled a collaboration with the Canada Infrastructure Bank and total of \$71.1 million in funding for future studies.

Crucially, this includes work to enable VIA Rail Canada's trains to share Montreal's Mont-Royal Tunnel with the Réseau express métropolitain (REM) light rail system.

Read the full report on our website:

We urge the government to move faster than the proposed 18-24 month timeline for this phase of the process.

Listen to Terry Johnson's interview with CBC's Chris dela Torre:

<https://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1558216259614>

## **Newfoundland Fixed Link recommended by House of Commons Transportation Committee**

Could the island of Newfoundland be linked with Labrador and the rest of mainland Canada by a 16-kilometre rail tunnel beneath the Strait of Belle Isle?

The House of Commons Standing Committee on Transportation, Infrastructure and Communities believes the idea is worth pursuing. In a report tabled in Parliament on June 14, the committee recommends *"that the Government of Canada partner with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, the Government of Quebec, and the private sector work toward building the fixed link, linking the province of Newfoundland and Labrador and the province of Quebec to increase the reliability of transportation between the two provinces and alleviating an existing bottleneck that exists with the current ferry service."*

One point the committee appears to have overlooked is the suitability of the vessels currently used by Marine Atlantic. Unlike the previous fleet that was retired about eight years ago, the ships now in service were not specifically designed for the Cabot Strait, and certainly not for the challenges of docking in the small and exposed harbour at Port aux Basques in stormy weather.

Bonavista-Burin-Trinity MP Churence Rogers, the only representative from Newfoundland and Labrador on the standing committee, describes the fixed link initiative as a "nation-building" project.

Whether this ambitious idea ever becomes reality is at least a \$1.65-billion-dollar question, according to the preliminary study released by the provincial government in 2018. It certainly will not happen any time soon either, and so Transport Action Atlantic is concerned that the idea may be used as a smokescreen to avoid action on escalating ferry rates - a very real issue that needs to be addressed right now.

With the 2019 federal campaign already effectively underway, TAA is making ferry rates a major focus of advocacy in Newfoundland. During the 2015 election, Justin Trudeau termed the cost recovery demands imposed on Marine Atlantic under the Harper government as "unreasonable", but nearly four years later, the Liberals have yet to act.

The Standing Committee report can be viewed online [here](#).

## **Federal funding for GTHA transit falling short**

Transport Action Ontario has reviewed federal funding support for transit capital maintenance and expansion in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA). No matter how the numbers are displayed, the current federal commitment is very low versus a target of 33% or more.

The federal government must up its game, and the provincial and federal governments need to cooperate to deliver the funds and projects.

The full report can be viewed on the Transport Action Ontario website:

<http://ontario.transportaction.ca/update-on-federal-funding-commitments-for-greater-toronto-and-hamilton-transit/>

## **Ontario Gas Tax for Transit - Promise Made but not Kept**

The government of Ontario currently contributes 2 cents per litre of the provincial gas tax, \$367 million per year to Ontario municipal transit systems. The previous Liberal government had promised to ramp up this contribution by half a cent per year, reaching 4 cents by 2021. This was in response to the province rejecting Toronto Mayor John Tory's request to allow road tolling on some Toronto expressways, and was in recognition that municipalities in the province have very limited revenue tools with which to meet public demand for enhanced transit services.

During the 2018 provincial election campaign, the Progressive Conservative party promised to honour this commitment. However, the government has since backed away from this promise and continues to transfer funds at the earlier rate.

This has caused a considerable budget squeeze for municipalities that had already budgeted for their transit systems based on the promised additional funding. Doug Ford's government has announced that it is "currently examining the Gas Tax program". Transport Action Ontario will continue to track this issue.

## **Cambridge train may GO via Guelph**

The Region of Waterloo has completed a feasibility study of providing GO Train service from Cambridge to Toronto via Guelph on the Kitchener GO line. The connection would use CN's Fergus Sub. Previous studies had assumed a Cambridge-Milton-Toronto route, but foundered on an inability to negotiate track time with CP.

Capital costs, including rolling stock, storage facility and station changes, were estimated at \$85 million, with operating costs at \$10-20 million per year. Ridership is estimated at 400 - 600 per day per direction in 2026, growing with time. Transportation benefits, primarily travel time savings and auto operating cost savings, exceeded \$150 million per year.

The Region intends to conduct more detailed studies and present to the Province and Metrolinx in the Fall. Transport Action Ontario strongly supports this project, as it will provide a badly-needed transportation alternative for this congested part of Ontario.

## **Fraser River crossing options include light rail**

Following the cancellation of the 10-lane highway bridge to Delta, BC proposed by the Christy Clark government, Transport Action BC is following the deliberations of the Metro Vancouver George Massey Crossing Task Force which has been established to look at a range of options.

Some of the options under consideration include capacity to extend light rail services to Delta, a long held dream that was proposed as early as 1972. Unfortunately, other options under consideration include eight lanes of highway congestion.

## **CN derails Halifax commuter service plans**

The dream of commuter rail in Halifax has been shattered - at least for the foreseeable future. The Council of the Halifax Regional Municipality voted unanimously on June 18 not to further pursue a proposal that aimed to establish service on the existing CN right-of-way from Windsor Junction into the downtown VIA Rail station. VIA had made an unsolicited bid to work with Halifax on the initiative some three years ago, and there were tentative indications of support from both the federal and provincial governments.

The sticking point, however, was the unwillingness of CN to come to the table. Councillor Tim Outhit, who represents the bustling suburb of Bedford, was the most ardent proponent of commuter rail - but even he recognized the futility of proceeding any further when faced with the railway company's intransigence.

But Outhit isn't reluctant to place the blame for the failure where he believes it belongs. CN was quite willing to accept public funding for the necessary upgrades to accommodate commuter trains, he says, but they weren't prepared to budge on the issue of dispatching the upgraded track.

This idea is unlikely to lay dormant for long, as traffic congestion around the Bedford basin will only get worse over the next few years.

## Transportation Newsround

Coverage of the VIA Rail HFR announcement

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/windsor-quebec-via-rail-1.5188770>

<https://globalnews.ca/news/5428956/peterborough-mp-mayor-praise-via-rail-project/>

<https://www.railwayage.com/passenger/high-performance/red-over-green-for-via-rails-high-frequency-corridor/>

Why Southwestern Ontario should care about High Frequency Rail

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/windsor/southwestern-ontario-via-high-frequency-1.5189812>

More on the Halifax commuter rail issue...

<https://globalnews.ca/news/5408673/plans-for-commuter-rail-aimed-at-improving-transportation-in-halifax-area-derailed/>

<https://www.halifaxtoday.ca/local-news/commuter-rail-proposal-dead-in-its-tracks-after-unanimous-council-vote-1513538>

<https://www.thechronicleherald.ca/business/halifax-commuter-rail-not-coming-but-councillor-still-holding-out-hope-324307/>

Northern Ontario advocacy ramps up as election nears

<https://www.saultstar.com/news/local-news/train-advocates-plan-to-raise-their-voices-as-election-nears>

Multiple options under consideration for Massey Tunnel

<https://dailyhive.com/vancouver/george-massey-tunnel-replacement-tunnel-bridge-options-june-21-2019>

New Ferries for PEI routes

<https://www.marinelog.com/news/government-of-canada-plans-to-build-two-ferries-at-davie>

London BRT plan receives \$103.5 million in funding

<https://www.londonbrt.ca/province-pledges-103-5-million-toward-improving-transportation-in-london/>

Winnipeg Railway Museum reopens after short hiatus

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/winnipeg-railway-museum-back-on-track-511419862.html>

MassDOT and MBTA proceeding with multi-billion capital plan for Boston commuter rail and transit

[https://www.progressiverailroading.com/passenger\\_rail/news/MassDOT-MBTA-OK-183-billion-capital-plan--57860](https://www.progressiverailroading.com/passenger_rail/news/MassDOT-MBTA-OK-183-billion-capital-plan--57860)

FRA invests \$326 million in passenger and freight infrastructure grants

<https://www.globalrailwayreview.com/news/83697/fra-grants-improve-infrastructure/>

We'd love to hear what you think! We hope you enjoyed reading this newsletter. Reply to this email with any thoughts you may have, and your own local transport and advocacy updates.

Thanks for reading!



Terry Johnson  
President, Transport Action Canada

**P.S:** Transport Action Canada is funded by grassroots members and donors like you. Support our mission to ensure access to bus and rail services for to all Canadians by making a contribution.

**Any amount--** \$25, \$50, \$100, \$200... Even \$10 will be deeply appreciated, and makes a real impact in our ability to continue our work.

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If you prefer to send us a cheque, cheques may be mailed to:

**Transport Action Canada**, P.O. Box 858, Station B, Ottawa ON K1P 5P9

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