

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 ,

A little over a week after the travel difficulties caused by protests and blockades had abated, rail and bus service providers across the country found themselves facing a much larger problem, in the form of the rising Coronavirus infection rate in Canada.

Transport Action salutes everyone, from transit drivers and train crew to leadership teams, working to rise to this challenge and make sure that public transport continues to be available for essential workers and healthcare professionals.

For those of us who need to travel or get to work, all transit agencies are stepping up vehicle cleaning, although most services are operating with reduced frequencies. Public transport remains a sensible way to get around provided basic precautions like hand washing are followed. Look for updates from your

local transit agency, because some have implemented additional measures like boarding buses by the rear doors, or fare-free travel periods.

VIA Rail reduced corridor services considerably first to two daily trains and now to just one in each direction, in response to lower travel demand and to allow time for thorough cleaning between journeys. On-board amenities have been reduced and business class is not available. At the time of writing, the Sudbury-White River, Senneterre-Jonquière, and Churchill trains remain operational, but services on the Canadian, Ocean and Skeena routes are suspended. If you need to travel, please check <https://www.viarail.ca/en/travel-advisory-information> for updates. Ontario Northland has also suspended on-board catering on its train to Moosonee. **Transport Action** is asking our government to consider providing a basic train service along these routes for essential travel. With Orleans Express motorcoaches also cancelled and flights reduced, anyone seeking to get home to the Maritimes has very limited options.

The pandemic situation may persist for several months. This will put smaller transit agencies and independent bus companies under a lot of pressure financially, including the new operators that have taken up some of the vital routes in Western Canada abandoned by Greyhound in 2018. They will not be as vocal as the airlines in calling for government assistance, but will be in more need of support to maintain services for essential travel, and to be ready to provide comprehensive services in future.

At some point, though it may feel a long way away today, life will return to something approaching normalcy. We will see some structural changes in society, including more people working from home on a long-term basis. This may be welcome relief for previously over-crowded transit systems like the TTC, and for congested highways in our biggest cities, but governments may seek excuses to cut services and scale back projects as we all bear the costs of fighting the pandemic. *The need to make sure that everyone, right across Canada, has access to reliable, safe and affordable transportation when they need to travel. Your voice as members and supporters of Transport Action and advocates for universal access to basic mobility could be needed more than ever.*

For the time being, I hope you will stay safe, avoid non-essential travel in order to help keep others safe, and if you do need to make a trip, please remember to thank our transit drivers, train crews, and other staff on the front lines.

Sincerely,



Terry Johnson
President, Transport Action Canada

Annual General Meetings Postponed

In view of the extraordinary circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 virus, both the Transport Action Canada and Transport Action Ontario boards of directors have decided to postpone their Annual General Meetings. The new

dates will be announced when known, and the Transport Action Canada AGM may be held by video conference.

Global News Features VIA Rail Challenges



Investigative reporters Mike de Souza and Megan Robinson from Global News spent January and February researching a series of documentary stories about VIA Rail and passenger train services in Canada, which appeared on TV newscasts and online mid-March, including interviewing Professor Shoshanna Saxe from the University of Toronto, and **Transport Action Canada** president Terry Johnson. These reports aired many important issues, questioning the significant increase in travel time between Toronto and Montreal, exposing the precipitous drop in on-time performance for the Canadian after 2010, and discussing the question of a Passenger Rail Act to provide a legislative framework for ensuring reliable train service across the country.

Does Via Rail's survival depend on a new route through Ontario and Quebec?

<https://globalnews.ca/news/6635203/via-rail-survival-hfr/>

Via Rail said lengthy delays on its flagship train were an international embarrassment

<https://globalnews.ca/news/6591508/via-rail-delays-the-canadian/>

Security logs show rise in anger and violence on Via Rail's Western Canadian trains

<https://globalnews.ca/news/6551471/via-rail-violence-greyhound/>

While any rise in violent incidents on trains is concerning, as are anecdotal reports of some communities providing bus or train tickets out of town rather than a referral to adequate mental health supports, we should be mindful that the overall number of incidents in Canada is still very low.

VIA Rail has been providing de-escalation skills training to its front-line employees to deal with persons in crisis since the early 2000's, and since the creation of own police service in 2015 VIA Rail police constables obtain specific law enforcement de-escalation training every year.

<https://www.blueline.ca/protecting-canadas-intercity-passenger-rail-service/>

Maritime Bus Trials Electric Motorcoach



MCI D45 CRTe LE CHARGE - Photo: MCI

The first-ever demonstration in Canada of a 100% battery-powered inter-city motorcoach took place in the Maritimes in early March. A test model of the new MCI D45 CRTe LE CHARGE vehicle arrived at Coach Atlantic/Maritime Bus in Charlottetown for an initial test run to Summerside, after which the prototype travelled to Amherst, Moncton, Truro, and Halifax. Among the stakeholders who came out to view the new vehicle were Tim Hayman, Howard Easton, and Alex Glista of **Transport Action Atlantic**.

Maritime Bus CEO Mike Cassidy was clearly excited about the demo opportunity, though he cautioned that the first production models won't be ready for regular service for some time yet. "This new all electric coach allows us to demonstrate its revolutionary accessibility features while gathering data to plan our future fleet." Mr. Cassidy said, adding that this particular model does have certain limitations, including a range of only 250-300 kilometres on a single charge, and very little space for baggage or parcels.

Patrick Scully, VP of sales, marketing and customer service at MCI, notes that the Cassidy Group's established record in green transportation makes the company a desired partner for development of zero-emissions technology: "Operators like Coach Atlantic/Maritime Bus and Mike Cassidy are leading the all-electric discussion in North America for scheduled and charter service."

Following its debut in the Maritimes, the prototype bus go to a test facility in California for further R&D work. Builder MCI is hoping the first production models will roll off the assembly line later this year.

Edmonton Valley Line Southeast Delayed



ETS 1002, one of Edmonton's new Flexity LRTs for the Valley Line, on a flatcar in CN's Symington Yard in Winnipeg. Photo by Steve Boyko

The opening of Edmonton's Valley Line Southeast LRT is likely to be delayed further than originally thought, due to COVID-19. Vehicle supplier Bombardier is stopping all non-essential work, and that may delay the construction and delivery of vehicles for the new line. The new Bombardier Flexity vehicles for this line are low-floor and will travel in the street, in contrast to ETS's existing high floor LRT vehicles that run mostly on dedicated right-of-ways. Each of the 26 vehicles on order has 82 seats and can carry up to 275 passengers.

The \$1.8 billion project was originally scheduled to be open on December 15, 2020. Late in 2019, the city announced the opening would be delayed until the summer of 2021 due to delays in bridge construction. Construction of the Tawatinâ Bridge across the North Saskatchewan River was delayed due to the discovery of a giant concrete slab at the bottom of the river. The suspension bridge will lead to the twin tunnels bored under 95 Street. These tunnels are largely complete.

When the 13.1 km line is complete, it will have eleven stops and will connect to the existing LRT network at Churchill Square in downtown Edmonton. Major stops include the Muttart Conservatory, the Bonnie Doon Shopping Centre, the Grey Nuns Community Hospital and the terminus in Mill Woods.

The line is being constructed as a public/private partnership, with partner TransEd constructing and maintaining the LRT line on completion. For more information on the project, visit <http://transedlrt.ca/>

Hamilton LRT Project Update

As reported in our January newsletter, the Ontario government unexpectedly cancelled the Hamilton LRT project in December. It stated that it was still committed to investing \$1 billion towards future transit and transportation in Hamilton and set up a Hamilton Task Force that was to report back in February.

Transport Action Ontario has continued to be active on this file, sending a letter to the Auditor General of Ontario, expressing concerns with the rationale and process for the cancellation. We met with the Auditor General in February, and are hopeful that the office will pursue this further.

Media reports indicate that the Task Force submitted its report to the Minister of Transportation in mid March, but that the report will not be made public at this time.

For further details, see the posting on the TAO website:
<http://ontario.transportaction.ca/hamilton-lrt-project-update/>

Audit of Scarborough Subway Extension

One of the first acts of Ontario Premier Doug Ford was to re-introduce the concept of a 3-stop subway extension concept for Scarborough to replace the Scarborough RT.

Transport Action Ontario has long expressed concern about the Scarborough Subway Extension (SSE) and has advocated for other promising rail transit alternatives to be studied. In February, Metrolinx released a Preliminary Design Business Case for the SSE. Remarkably, it compared the SSE to a bus-only case that has never been proposed by anyone!

TAO has written the Auditor General of Ontario expressing concern that no proper business case comparison of viable rail transit alternatives, such as LRT or a GO RER rail spur, has been undertaken. We are hopeful that the office will follow up on our concern.

<http://ontario.transportaction.ca/audit-of-scarborough-subway-extension-sse-decision-making/>

Transportation Newsround

Global News: How did passenger train service in Canada get so bad?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NfkQrKVCUUg>

VIA Rail has released time-lapse videos of bridge and switch replacement work

<https://corpo.viarail.ca/en/news/2020/watch-how-bridge-replaced-overnight>

Maritime Bus demos Canada's first zero-emissions coach

<https://www.masstransitmag.com/bus/vehicles/hybrid-hydrogen-electric->

[vehicles/press-release/21128960/motor-coach-industries-mci-coach-atlantic-maritime-bus-demos-canadas-first-zeroemissions-coach](#)

Winnipeg city Innovation Committee calls for Transit Plus services to be brought back in-house

[https://winnipeg.ctvnews.ca/it-s-an-opportunity-to-improve-service-calls-to-bring-winnipeg-transit-service-back-in-house-1.4845802](#)

Ottawa LRT recognised for Engineering Excellence

[https://www.progressiverailroading.com/passenger_rail/news/Ottawa-light-rail-line-recognized-for-engineering-excellence--60078](#)

Edmonton Bus driver ferries homeless people to EXPO Centre during pandemic

[https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/edmonton/city-of-edmonton-covid-19-1.5512854](#)

British operator plans "Green" package service by rail. (The way it used to be done...)

[https://www.railjournal.com/freight/new-british-operator-plans-green-parcels-service/](#)

The Gotthard Base Tunnel should be a lesson for California HSR

[https://www.hsrail.org/hills-are-alive-sound-high-speed-rail-california-should-take-note](#)

US Lawmakers challenge Amtrak's arbitration policy

[https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2020/03/05/lawmakers-want-end-amtraks-forced-arbitration-policy-calling-it-anti-consumer-unfair/](#)

NZ considering express commuter services

[https://www.railjournal.com/passenger/commuter-rail/new-zealand-investigating-fast-auckland-hamilton-services/](#)

Second German region invests in battery-electric trains

[https://www.railjournal.com/fleet/baden-wuerttemberg-purchases-20-battery-electric-trains/](#)

Train vs plane: Is rail the more appealing option?

[https://www.globalrailwayreview.com/article/96299/libor-lochman-ulrich-fikar-plane-vs-train/](#)

We 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!

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.

Donate Now!

Our membership is our strength. You can help by recruiting a friend to join our fight for better public transportation across Canada...

Join Transport Action

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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