



TRANSPORT ACTION  
CANADA

## Transport Action calls for \$5bn Strategic Rail Infrastructure Fund and Fair Rail for Passengers Act



Hello ,

We've just sent our recommendations for Federal Budget 2021, titled [\*Railways as The Key to Unlocking Canadian Productivity, Social Inclusion, and Climate-Change Performance\*](#), to the House of Commons Finance Committee, reflecting needs brought to our attention by Transport Action members across Canada. Thank you for your input, and to the volunteers who helped to draft the submission and hone the text down to the 2,000 words the Finance Committee allows.

The photo above, taken by board member Steve Boyko, shows VIA Rail's *Chaleur* approaching Port Daniel back in 2007. Thanks to investment led by the Quebec government, the line is being repaired and it might not be too much longer before this scene is repeated. As you read this, tie replacement work has already reached Port Daniel, and the Quebec government is looking for ways to accelerate the project. Reopening the line all the way to Gaspé for both passengers and freight will be a tremendous boost to the region's residents, tourism and industries alike.

**That's the kind of economic and social boost all of Canada needs right now.** We also need a huge shift back from long-haul trucking to rail freight and from short-haul flights to passenger rail to cut pollution and meet our climate change commitments. The comfortable passenger spacing possible on a train is an added bonus.

For 25 years, rail policy in Canada has been hands-off. While other countries around the world are investing tens of billions of dollars in their rail infrastructure, the Gaspésie is just one of many regions that's seen railways abandoned or allowed to deteriorate, shifting freight on to

trucks, ending passenger services for residents, and deterring tourism. The Canadian government has been making welcome investments in urban transit, but our national rail network still suffers from decades of political neglect.

That's why our [Pre-Budget Submission for Budget 2021](#) proposes a policy shift, earmarking \$5bn within the *Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program* for a **Strategic Rail Infrastructure Fund** and highlighting eight priority projects, from Vancouver Island to Cape Breton, that could be addressed in the next two years.

The huge volumes of grain that have been moved while other rail traffic has dipped due to Covid-19 just hints at the economic productivity and potential that could be unlocked by reinvesting in our rail network to create capacity for growth, and by enhancing short line rail services to grow industries and protect jobs. Ending "freight congestion" also means getting our passenger trains running on time again, so we're requesting a **Fair Rail for Passengers Act** to ensure that happens, stable funding for VIA Rail as recommended by the Auditor General, plus emergency funding to recall laid off staff and get trains rolling again.

Railway infrastructure and services need visionary public-private cooperation. As an example, the \$48 million in economic activity that would be generated by restoring passenger services in the Algoma region won't all drop into the fare box, but it will recoup the \$2.2 million operating grant needed several times over in new tax revenue, get people back to work, and advance reconciliation in a way that benefits indigenous and non-indigenous communities simultaneously.

[You can read and download the whole submission on our website.](#)

Sincerely,



Terry Johnson, President

## Transport Action in the News

The *Cape Breton Post* published an opinion piece TAA president Ted Bartlett on July 13, supporting infrastructure investment in the island's dormant rail line, and calling on local Liberal MPs to get behind the initiative.

[Opinion: New hope for Cape Breton's rusting rails - Cape Breton Post](#)

Railway Age published an extensive article critical of Amtrak's plan to cut all but one of its long-distance routes to tri-weekly. The story used analysis by TAA vice-president Tim Hayman, based on the experience of VIA Rail's *Ocean*, to support the position that tri-weekly passenger trains are a recipe for disaster.

[Cutting service actually costs more - Railway Age](#)

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## Annual General Meeting

We're planning to hold Transport Action Canada's Annual General Meeting on Saturday September 19, 2020. This will be an entirely online meeting, with guest speakers and presentations in addition to the business meeting to review our financial reports and elect board members for 2020-2021.

Save the date, we'll be sending out a schedule and participation details nearer the time.

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**Ontario community bus progress**

With several new bus routes launching on August 4, including Sarnia to London and Tillsonburg to Woodstock, municipalities across Southwestern Ontario have taken an important next step, working together to form the Southwest Community Transit Association, facilitated by the South Central Ontario Region Economic Development Corporation, to coordinate efforts and facilitate interline connections.



**Transport Action Ontario** has written Minister Mulroney congratulating her on the success of the Community Transportation Grants and this positive development. We also urged her to continue to work on other Actions in the province's draft plan *Connecting the Southwest*, released in January, 2020.

[The letter can be viewed on our website.](#)

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### Early expansion unlikely for Atlantic Travel Bubble

The “Atlantic Bubble”, has now been in effect for a full month, allowing residents of New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador to travel throughout the four provinces without restriction.

Although no new cases of Covid-19 have been attributed to the easing of travel barriers within the region, the premiers have clearly lost enthusiasm for the idea of further opening up to allow visitors from other provinces without the requirement to self-isolate for two weeks.

Maritime Bus is now running four days per week, Marine Atlantic has eased its passenger limits, but air services have been severely curtailed with many routes eliminated and VIA Rail services in the region remain suspended until Nov 4th.

[Read more](#)

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### New Brunswick rejects federal emergency funding for transit

The transportation rotten tomato award must go to New Brunswick Premier Blaine Higgs, whose government has opted out of its share of the \$1.8 billion transit component of Ottawa's pandemic recovery program. The offer is contingent on matching funding from the provinces, and urban transit evidently isn't a priority for New Brunswick. The bus systems in Moncton, Saint John and Fredericton are all experiencing mounting losses, and the mayors of the three cities are deeply concerned.

“I don't need to go put a subway here in Fredericton because there's federal money to spend,” the premier was quoted by Brunswick News. That flippant comment from the man who polls indicate is currently the most popular premier in all of Canada completely ignores the vital role that bus transit plays in all three cities – and they are in grave danger of collapse. Whether the mayors – supported by **Transport Action Atlantic** – will be able to persuade Mr. Higgs to abandon his short-sighted position remains to be seen. **TAA** reminds the premier that a progressive nation is not one where the poor all have cars; it's where the wealthy ride public transit!

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## Brampton rejects Highway 413

The City of Brampton's Planning and Development Committee unanimously approved a recommendation by city staff to study an urban boulevard in lieu of the province of Ontario's planned 413 expressway between Vaughan and Milton, across the northwest part of the city.

**Transport Action Ontario** made a deputation supporting the recommendation.

[Read more](#)

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## NPI report lukewarm on rail

Northern Policy Institute released a report downplaying the economic case for passenger rail in Northern Ontario, although noting other rationales, especially improved connectivity for First Nations communities, justify investment. Transport Action Ontario released a statement concurring with portions of the report, but disagreeing with others.

[Read our response](#)



# Transportation Newsround

VIA Rail lays off 1,000 previously furloughed employees

<https://globalnews.ca/news/7153130/coronavirus-via-rail-layoffs/>

Halifax pushing NS to support BRT project

<https://www.halifaxtoday.ca/local-news/pushing-the-province-to-get-onboard-with-bus-rapid-transit-2563638>

Alberta: Snow Travels launches Calgary-Edmonton bus service

<https://calgary.ctvnews.ca/snow-forecast-for-alberta-on-wednesday-in-the-form-of-a-new-bus-service-1.5035043>

Kasper Transportation resumes service from July 20th

<https://www.tbnewswatch.com/local-news/kasper-transportation-resuming-routes-on-monday-2571115>

Vancouver: European firms selected to build \$2.8 billion Broadway Subway

<https://dailyhive.com/vancouver/broadway-subway-skytrain-millennium-line-contractor>

"LRT is the only shovel ready transit project in Hamilton" - McKenna

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/catherine-mckenna-says-lrt-is-the-only-shovel-ready-transit-project-in-hamilton-1.5664592>

Hudson Bay Railway needs additional funding in wake of Covid-19 freight and tourism downturn

<https://www.winnipegfreepress.com/local/line-to-churchill-needs-more-funding-owners-571926642.html>

Translink, Calgary Transit and STM make rail station accessibility improvements

[https://www.progressiverailroading.com/passenger\\_rail/news/Canadian-agencies-make-rail-station-accessibility-improvements--61142](https://www.progressiverailroading.com/passenger_rail/news/Canadian-agencies-make-rail-station-accessibility-improvements--61142)

Canadian Pacific issues Climate Change statement

[https://www.progressiverailroading.com/canadian\\_pacific/news/Canadian-Pacific-issues-climate-change-statement--61156](https://www.progressiverailroading.com/canadian_pacific/news/Canadian-Pacific-issues-climate-change-statement--61156)

Inter-community bus service starting between Tillsonburg and Woodstock, Ontario

<https://www.tillsonburgnews.com/news/local-news/tgo-expands-with-four-new-intercommunity-routes>

Inter-community bus service starting between Sarnia, Strathroy, and London, Ontario

<https://www.theobserver.ca/news/local-news/inter-community-bus-service-starting-aug-4>

Oxford County seeks input on intercommunity bus service north of Woodstock

<https://www.woodstocksentinelreview.com/news/local-news/oxford-looking-to-hear-input-on-proposed-regional-bus-service>

Stratford seeks extension of Community Transportation Grants

<https://www.stratfordbeaconherald.com/news/local-news/community-transportation-pilot-projects-on-hold-as-stratford-and-local-partners-look-to-province-for-extensions>

UK: Transport Action Network permitted to challenge Government road building plans

<https://www.transportxtra.com/publications/local-transport-today/news/66301/transport-action-network-permitted-to-challenge-government-road-building-plans/>

USA: Virgin Trains advances financing for Vegas high-speed rail

[https://www.progressiverailroading.com/high\\_speed\\_rail/news/Virgin-Trains-advances-financing-for-Vegas-high-speed-rail--61093](https://www.progressiverailroading.com/high_speed_rail/news/Virgin-Trains-advances-financing-for-Vegas-high-speed-rail--61093)

USA: Metra petitions STB over UP disruptions

<https://www.railwayage.com/passenger/commuterregional/metra-at-odds-with-up-petitions-stb/>

USA: NJT orders eight more Bombardier locos

<https://www.railwayage.com/news/for-njt-eight-more-dual-powers>

USA: Missoula joins Big Sky Passenger Rail Authority to revive service in Montana

<https://missoulacurrent.com/business/2020/07/missoula-rail-authority-4/>

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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.

Join or Renew  
Now

If you would prefer to join or make a donation by mail, please [download our printable membership form](#) and post it to us at the address below with a cheque.

Thank you again for your continued support,

Terry Johnson, President

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