



TRANSPORT ACTION
CANADA



Campaigning for Canada's long distance trains

Hello ,

Throughout August, Transport Action members and supporters sent almost 1,000 letters and emails to members of parliament demanding the reinstatement of all VIA Rail's services, including long distance trains, and the recall of more than 1,000 laid-off train crew and other staff. For these front-line workers, many of whom stayed at their posts early in the pandemic when risks were greater and effective prevention measures less well understood, to be rewarded with layoffs now is unacceptable, as is the complete lack of any public transport whatsoever in many communities along the routes VIA usually serves.

If you haven't sent a letter to your MP yet, [please take a moment to send your letter now.](#)

We welcome the restoration of some additional services in the Quebec-Windsor corridor at the beginning of September, but this doesn't include the early morning trains from London and Kingston into Toronto that provide an alternative to our once-again congested highways. VIA Rail is still looking into November to restore long-distance trains, although these are current only accepting reservations in coach, with a possibility that sleeper services might not even be available for people using the train to visit family at Christmas. **Transport Action Atlantic** has been in discussion with VIA Rail leadership about the future of the *Ocean*, as detailed below.

We need to keep up the pressure on the federal government to make sure VIA Rail gets the resources it needs to serve Canadians and provide dependable transportation from coast to coast. If you are able to, please [make a donation](#) to support this costs of this campaign.

Sincerely,

Terry Johnson, President

PS: Sorry this month's newsletter is a few days late, and best wishes to all of you who also have kids and grandkids going back to school this week.

Annual General Meeting - September 19th

Transport Action Canada's 2020 Annual General Meeting will be held online on Saturday September 19, 2020, starting at 1 pm Eastern / 10 am Pacific.

Our online videoconference will feature three guest speakers:



Kristoffer Vik Hansen
Co-founder and CEO
Spare Labs



Pierre Gourdain
Managing Director, USA
FLiXBUS



Joanna Patterson
Head of Business
Development, FLiXBUS

Vancouver-based **Spare Labs** creates technology that helps transit agencies around the world improve last-mile services, including paratransit and microtransit, and break down barriers to transit access.

FLiXBUS launched its first intercity bus services in Germany in 2011 before expanding across Europe, and entering the North American market in 2018, seeing opportunity where Greyhound services have been cut.

We'll be sending out invites and registration links for the online meeting to all paid-up Transport Action members shortly, so please make sure your membership is up-to-date.

Join or Renew
Now

Transport Action in the News

Many Toronto newspapers and radio stations covered the release of a joint report by Environmental Defence, Sustainable Vaughan and Transport Action Ontario on August 20th, condemning the province's plan to spend \$6bn on a new highway through the Greenbelt, and presenting an option to improve public transit between Milton, Brampton and Vaughan.

['Poor use of tax dollars': 3 groups release report rejecting \\$6B GTA West highway - Vaughan Citizen](#)

Uncertain Future for VIA Rail service in the Maritimes

There are still more questions than answers about the restart of VIA Rail service in Atlantic Canada, and what the Ocean might look like after the COVID-19 threat has subsided. Company officials tell **Transport Action Atlantic** that they are still aiming to resume service in early November on a tri-weekly schedule, similar to that in existence pre-pandemic.



Not even exact dates are finalized yet, and the VIA reservation system currently shows limited availability in November and December, with no sleeping car accommodation offered at this time. That may change in coming weeks, but different scenarios are still being evaluated.

The *Ocean* will not be the train we once knew, even after COVID-19 is history. The removal of the turning loop at the Halifax container terminal adjacent to the VIA station means it will have to run backwards on the return trip to Montreal, with the sleeping cars most likely immediately behind the back-to-back locomotives, ensuring that first-class passengers enjoy the full benefit of the whistle at every grade crossing. Missing from the new consist will be the iconic Park dome car, which has been an added attraction for higher-revenue customers over the past three decades. Some consideration has been given to substituting a Skyline dome car, but there is considerable doubt that this will actually happen. VIA management evaluated a number of alternative options for turning the train or portions thereof, but cost, safety or operational considerations ruled them all out. One consequence of the change is a postponement in the planned retirement of the troublesome British-built Renaissance cars.

It becomes ever more obvious that the Government of Canada must commit without delay to investment in a complete fleet of new long-distance cars for VIA if there is to be any reasonable semblance of coast-to-coast passenger rail in Canada.

Support our campaign: [VIA Rail Needs New Trains For The Maritimes](#)



New Report Issued on Ontario Highway 413 Proposal

Transport Action Ontario has recently teamed up with two other non-governmental organizations – Environmental Defence and Sustainable Vaughan – to publish a new report entitled “*Is Building Highway 413 the Best Option for Moving People and Goods in the GTA-West Region?*” showing the benefits of a public transit alternative to Highway 413.

Highway 413, officially know as the GTA-West highway corridor, is a project planned by the Ontario government to construct a new 50 km expressway between Vaughan and Milton. Transport Action Ontario (TAO) has been expressing concerns about this highway for more than 10 years. The project was actually cancelled in early 2018 by the previous Ontario Liberal government, only to be revived a few months later by the incoming Progressive Conservative government.

The full report, as well as other initiatives and events associated with this expressway, can be found [on the TAO website](#).

Transit and Maritime Bus ridership trending upwards, NB heads to the polls

Unlike some other transportation companies, Maritime Bus is continuing its practice of not seating passengers in adjacent seats indefinitely. Owner Mike Cassidy tells **Transport Action Atlantic** that he believes restoring customer confidence in motorcoach travel to be of paramount importance, and seating only passengers travelling together side-by-side is part of that strategy. The company has installed Lexan partitions around the seatbacks and headrests in 15 of its vehicles.

All of Maritime Bus's major routes are still operating just four days a week, but Mr. Cassidy says he's encouraged by the recovering ridership, which averaged 1200 per week in August. Demand will be monitored closely as university and college students return to class, and he's still optimistic for a return to daily operation by mid-September. Maintaining service to the public throughout the pandemic has been a tremendous burden for a family-owned business, he says, but he has no regrets, believing that the public will remember that Maritime Bus was there for them when needed.

Transit systems throughout Atlantic Canada continue to see recovery of ridership. Halifax Transit is now essentially back to normal schedule as of the beginning of September - with masks, of course - while Metrobus in St. John's is also stepping up service. Fredericton Transit has adopted a new system that allows riders to buy single fares and monthly passes through a smartphone app.

New Brunswickers will go to the polls on September 14 in the first Canadian election of the Covid-19 era. TAA has prepared an *Ideas in Motion* document containing some appropriate questions to be put to parties and candidates. The document is available on TAA's website:

<https://transportactionatlantic.ca/ideas-in-motion-new-brunswick-election-2020/>



New Money Flows to Ontario Transit, but with Stipulations for Phase II

As part of the Canada-Ontario Safe Restart Agreement, Ontario transit agencies will be receiving up to \$2bn for emergency funding to cover transit operating cost shortfalls. Phase one, \$667 million, be distributed soon. This is a successful outcome to months of advocacy by numerous non-government organizations, including **Transport Action Ontario**.

Subsequent phases of funding have some interesting stipulations. Transit agencies will be required to "review the lowest performing bus routes and consider whether they may be better serviced by microtransit". Presumably "microtransit" is the Government term for approaches involving on-demand, variable routes, as implemented or being tested by numerous Ontario cities. However, we have concerns about the possibility that privatized services like Uber, with inherently low ridership and high subsidy requirements, may also be considered.

In addition, GTHA transit agencies will be required to engage in discussions with Metrolinx about "new possible governance structures" and greater integration of transit fares and services. This initiative is potentially very interesting, and we look forward to progress.

Ontario Auditor General looking into Hamilton LRT Cancellation

As described in earlier newsletters, the Ontario government abruptly cancelled this project in December, 2019, and set up a task force to study how best to invest \$1bn in

future transit and transportation in Hamilton.



The task force report was made public in April, 2020 and recommended higher order transit – either LRT or BRT. The province now appears likely to reach out the federal government for additional funding, even though the project was originally not expected to require federal funds.

More interestingly, a confidential report on LRT costs produced last Fall for the government was released in August pursuant to a Freedom of Information request. Although heavily redacted, the report does not appear to confirm the cost numbers cited by the Province to justify the cancellation.

Transport Action Ontario has been communicating with the Ontario Auditor General (AG) throughout these events. We were pleased to just find out that the Auditor General's office is indeed looking at this project, including the redacted report, and will table the results of its findings in December.

[More details can be found on the Transport Action Ontario website](#)



New air link for Newfoundland

Amid the bleak outlook generally for air travel, a small regional carrier has boldly announced plans to start a five-day-a-week Dash-8 service between St. John's and Moncton, NB on September 21. PAL Airlines is evidently seizing the opportunity created by Air Canada's exit from connecting service linking three Newfoundland airports to Halifax.

This new offering is a long-awaited replacement for a service operated by the now-defunct regional carrier CanJet with considerable success between YYT and YQM for a number of years prior to 2006. Once the "Atlantic Bubble" restrictions are lifted, PAL Airlines intends to extend the service to Ottawa. (Photo: PAL Airlines)

Transportation Newsround

Go Transit Ramping Up Service Starting in September

<https://www.iheartradio.ca/newstalk-1010/news/go-transit-ramping-up-service-starting-in-september-1.13259706>

Next steps announced for Eglinton Crosstown West subway extension into Etobicoke, Mississauga

<https://globalnews.ca/news/7286235/eglinton-crosstown-west-extension-subway-etobicoke-mississauga/>

Via Rail restores some daily services along Quebec City-Windsor corridor

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/via-rail-restores-services-1.5694233>

Waterloo Region getting \$2.2M, free LRT train from Bombardier

<https://www.kitchenertoday.com/local-news/region-getting-22m-free-lrt-train-from-bombardier-2654080>

New transit route links Belleville and Prince Edward County

<https://www.intelligencer.ca/news/local-news/transit-system-rolling-in-county>

Regina launches on-demand transit pilot project

<https://regina.ctvnews.ca/regina-launches-on-demand-transit-pilot-project-1.5081843>

LiUNA-backed review puts Hamilton LRT cost at \$3.5B, offers funding options

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/liuna-lrt-transportation-hamilton-1.5700819>

Opinion: Bolton GO would be a better way to relieve Highway 427.

<https://www.caledonenterprise.com/opinion-story/10147084-building-commuter-rail-in-bolton-a-better-way-to-grow-the-city/>

North Bay receives federal transit and active transportation funding

<https://www.baytoday.ca/local-news/funding-announced-for-public-transit-active-transportation-road-and-bridge-infrastructure-2671255>

St. Thomas and other SW Ontario municipalities receive federal transit funding

<https://www.therecord.com/ts/news/canada/2020/08/31/st-thomas-among-11-municipalities-to-get-162-million-in-transit-funding.html>

Polar Bear Express third weekly trip restored

<https://www.northernnews.ca/news/local-news/polar-bear-express-back-on-track-2>

Niagara-on-the-Lake joins the on-demand transit trend

<https://www.thoroldnews.com/local-news/niagara-on-the-lake-jumps-on-board-nrt-ondemand-transit-service-2682854>

BC government launches new transportation and development study for Fraser Valley

<https://dailyhive.com/vancouver/bc-fraser-valley-transportation-housing-study>

Fight for Huron Central Railway not over

<https://www.thesudburystar.com/news/local-news/fight-for-sudbury-sault-line-railway-not-over-politicians>

Island Corridor Foundation launches First Nations artist competition

<https://www.islandrail.ca/first-nations-artist-competition/>

Montreal transit officials seek to simplify pricing system for suburban commuters

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/montreal/artm-new-public-transit-fares-system-1.5710892>

USA: Amtrak sets out plans for allegedly temporary long-distance frequency cuts

<https://www.railwayage.com/news/amtrak-spells-out-long-distance-plans/>

USA: Amtrak completes PTC implementation

<https://www.masstransitmag.com/rail/railroad-signals-ptc-control-systems-and-products/press-release/21150382/amtrak-completes-ptc-implementation-45-months-ahead-of-deadline>

USA: First Siemens cars delivered to IDOT

<https://trn.trains.com/news/news-wire/2020/08/31-digest-first-cars-in-idot-order-for-regional-amtrak-trains-arrive-in-illinois>

China to expand rail network to 200,000km by 2035

<https://www.theguardian.pe.ca/business/reuters/china-plans-to-expand-railway-network-to-200000-km-before-2035-484644/>

UK: Stonehaven train derailment: Minute's silence honours victims

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-north-east-orkney-shetland-53817747>

Spain: Hitachi and Bombardier win HSR contract

<https://asia.nikkei.com/Business/Transportation/Hitachi-and-Bombardier-win-940m-Spanish-high-speed-rail-contract>

Europe: Eurostar to launch £40 Amsterdam to London trains

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-london-53890139>

Transport Action Canada is funded by grassroots members and donors like you. Your support enables us to continue our mission to ensure access to bus and rail services for to all Canadians.

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!

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