



TRANSPORT ACTION
CANADA



VIA Rail receives federal emergency funding, issues plea for long-distance fleet renewal

Hello ,

The federal government's Fall Economic Statement included a much-needed \$188 million in emergency funding for VIA Rail to "...cover operating shortfalls in 2020-21 resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic." The drop in ridership due to the pandemic had a devastating impact on the railway's financial performance, just like all other transportation providers. Hopefully this funding will assist in preparing the company to resume more normal service levels by next summer.

VIA Rail has also released its corporate plan for 2020-24. While acknowledging that the lengthening schedules imposed by host railroads are making it impractical to restore the third frequency of the *Canadian* with the existing pool of equipment, the document finally, publicly acknowledges that there is a dire need to start replacing the non-Corridor fleet – something **Transport Action Atlantic** and **Transport Action Canada** have been emphasizing for years:

"VIA Rail recognizes that despite the inherent quality of construction and intrinsic longevity of the stainless steel used, it is no longer reasonable to expect an extended service life from the Budd manufactured rolling stock equipment (HEP cars) that is approaching or has exceeded 70 years of age. At some point the effectiveness, usefulness and maintenance costs of any product will reach a point where replacement must be considered and unfortunately this also includes the HEP cars."

With this in mind, the plan states that "VIA Rail will explore the replacement of its Long-Distance and Regional fleet." The delivery of the new corridor fleet remains on schedule.

The corporate plan also publicly commits to restoring service to Gaspé once Transports Quebec finishes track and bridge repairs, which is expected by 2024, although it is not clear whether service as far as New Richmond may resume earlier than that. The last train left Gaspé nine years ago, on December 12, 2011.

[You can read a full report on the corporate plan on our website](#)

As you read this, the *Canadian* is resuming service between Vancouver and Winnipeg for the first time since March, but it looks like it could be next March before passenger trains return to Halifax. In 2021, many transit systems will also face budget pressures right at the time when we hope to see a return to normality. Our voices will be needed to ensure that cuts are avoided, and reliable services maintained, to attract passengers back to public transport rather than having our communities and economy bogged down by traffic congestion.

Wishing you the best for the Christmas season, and a healthy and happy new year,



Terry Johnson, President
Transport Action Canada

Elizabeth May reintroduces VIA Rail Canada Act

On November 5th, another welcome development occurred when Elizabeth May reintroduced her private member's bill for a **VIA Rail Canada Act** in the House of Commons.

The new [Bill C-251](#) is not as detailed as [Bill C-640](#) introduced in 2014 by Philip Toone, then MP for Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, but would nevertheless give VIA Rail a long-sought legal charter and legislated mandate to provide passengers rail service for Canadians.



The Liberals, NDP, Bloc Québécois and the Green Party all supported Bill C-640 when in opposition, and it was defeated by the Conservatives when in government, who at the time gave the justification that imposing a duty on private sector host railroads to run passenger trains on time would "deter international investment" rather than resolve an international embarrassment that deters both investment and tourism.

Private member's bills usually need government support to pass a second reading, but in a minority parliament, there's a chance this bill could go forward if enough MPs can be persuaded to support it.

Sending your MP a letter (find addresses on ourcommons.ca) or using our "[click-to-call](#)" advocacy tool to call their office is a good way to let them know that Canadians would like to have a passenger rail network suitable for a great country.

Contact Your MP

CP Holiday Train goes online for 2020



Rather than drawing large crowds across Canada this year, Canadian Pacific are running a "Virtual Holiday Train" this Saturday. Tune in live online and help raise money for local food banks.

Facebook Event

Improving passenger rail in Ontario: Learnings from two conferences

Representatives of **Transport Action Canada** and **Transport Action Ontario** recently attended conferences by the Canadian Urban Transit Research and Innovation Consortium (CUTRIC) and the Toronto Region Board of Trade (TRBOT). Both conferences provided learnings on various issues, including passenger rail in the Toronto region and southwestern Ontario. The main points include:

- The Ontario government's interest in transit investment as an economic stimulant after the pandemic remains high.
- Stadler, Siemens and Alstom all have type approval for hydrogen fuelled multiple-unit passenger trains in Europe, but so far only Stadler is progressing type approval in North America.
- Metrolinx has not received any bids using hydrogen fuelled trains for the *On Corridor Works* procurement.
- VIA Rail is awaiting an announcement "soon" on HFR between Toronto and Quebec City.
- VIA has been working with Metrolinx on improving service in southwestern Ontario, but this project is "on the slow track" right now.
- Capital costs for both subway and surface rail projects in Greater Toronto have risen very rapidly, and cost containment must become a priority.

Further details of these learnings are available on the [TAO website](#).

St. John's, NL budget cuts take aim at Metrobus

The City of St. John's, like many municipalities across Canada, is facing a major deficit, partly because of the Covid-19 pandemic, but also due in part to the massive "Snowmageddon" onslaught earlier this year. As a result, more than \$18 million will have to be shaved from the 2021 budget being finalized this month. One of the most conspicuous targets is Metrobus – the transit system that serves the provincial capital and the adjacent communities of Mount Pearl and Paradise.



Next year's subsidy will see a planned cut of \$800,000, which means a deferral of plans to increase frequency on several core routes that had intended to increase ridership. More seriously, the service reductions normally in effect each summer when student ridership drops substantially and more people bike or walk, will begin in January for 2021– meaning users will have to wait longer for their bus during the year's worst weather.

The plan didn't sit well with several councillors. Coun. Ian Froude was sufficiently disgusted to resign from the Transportation Commission. His replacement, Coun. Maggie Burton, told TAA the City needs to find other ways to meet the budget shortfall.

"I'm OK with a temporary delay in increasing service levels," she said, "but cutting service in January is not a smart thing to do. If we reduce service now, ridership will only continue to drop." She pointed out that half of current Metrobus users are people using the provincially-funded transit pass for lower income residents – the most vulnerable members of society.

[Full story and regional updates on Transport Action Atlantic's website.](#)

Transport Action Ontario AGM Completed

Transport Action Ontario held a successful Zoom-enabled Annual General Meeting (AGM) on October 24. Guest speaker Stephen Wickens, noted transit journalist and researcher, summarized his recent report on the alarming cost escalation of subway and LRT projects in Greater Toronto. A good discussion ensued on the cost impacts of deep tunnels, risk sharing in P3 projects, and the value of Ontario's Transit Oriented Communities procurement approach.

At the business portion of the AGM, the close integration of administrative and advocacy functions with Transport Action Canada was noted as a highlight. This has reduced costs and enabled more focus on advocacy. TAO's financial position is good and its advocacy activities are extensive. The Board of Directors for 2020-2021 was elected as follows: President – Peter Miasek, Vice President – Terry Johnson, Treasurer – Tony Rubin, Secretary – Ken Westcar, Directors-at-large – Bruce Budd, Richard Crawford, Lucille Frith and Chris West.

Submission to Ontario Fall 2020 Budget Consultations

Transport Action Ontario made a formal submission to the Ontario's Fall 2020 Budget consultation. The submission contained about a dozen points relating to intercity and urban public transportation. The submission is a good snapshot of our priorities as an organization, and [can be viewed here](#).

The Fall 2020 Budget was released in early November. It reaffirmed the government's commitment to public transit in Greater Toronto, but was silent on improving passenger rail in other parts of the province.

Transportation Newsround

Guelph may switch some public transit trips to ridesharing
<https://www.guelphmercury.com/news-story/10235767-guelph-transit-could-save-money-by-replacing-some-buses-with-on-demand-rides-report-says/>

Demand-responsive transit (DRT) is coming to St. Thomas, Ontario in the new year. <https://fpress.com/news/local-news/st-thomas-to-expand-transit-system-with-on-demand-buses>

Durham region on-demand transit reports strong early ridership numbers.
<http://oshawaexpress.ca/high-demand-for-drts-on-demand-service/>

Crunch time for REM Airport link and Dorval connection
<https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/west-island-gazette/crunch-time-for-dorval-rem-extension-as-big-alice-tunnels-to-airport>

REM work on Mount Royal Tunnel interrupted by century-old dynamite, thankfully no injuries

<https://montrealgazette.com/news/local-news/municipalities-eye-transit-pilot-project-tunnel-rem>

Regional transit partnership forming around Brockville Ontario

<https://www.recorder.ca/news/local-news/municipalities-eye-transit-pilot-project>

Guelph transit may add routes to Kitchener and Waterloo

<https://www.therecord.com/news/waterloo-region/2020/11/17/guelph-transit-looking-at-adding-routes-into-waterloo-kitchener.html>

CN 6167 moved to a new home, making way for second platform at Guelph Central Station.

<https://www.guelphtoday.com/local-news/a-great-day-to-move-a-locomotive-16-photos-2879346>

Chatham-Kent sells former CSX line to numbered company, future remains unclear

<https://chathamvoice.com/2020/04/24/all-but-118k-recouped-from-municipally-owned-idle-railway>

Bas-Saint-Laurent Regional Environmental Council to design regional public transport network [FR]

<https://unpointing.ca/sinspiner/transport-en-commun-bas-saint-laurent/>

Ottawa City Council approves LRT from Gatineau over Portage Bridge

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/transportation-committee-sto-light-rail-sparks-street-1.5803392>

Duncan mayor Michelle Staples calls for E&N passenger service restoration

<https://www.capitaldaily.ca/news/vancouver-island-esquimalt-nanaimo-rail-corridor-transit-transportation-victoria-langford>

RapidBus service extension to Delta, BC planned, but not until 2023.

<https://www.delta-optimist.com/news/rapid-bus-coming-to-delta-1.24241632>

Cochrane on-demand transit battles Covid-related ridership challenges

<https://www.cochranetimes.com/news/local-news/the-colt-covid-transit-dance-continues>

Waterloo unveils plans for LRT, bus, GO and VIA Rail multimodal #transit hub

<https://www.engagewr.ca/king-victoria-transit-hub>

USA: Deutsche Bahn joins US High Speed Rail Association

<https://www.globalrailwayreview.com/news/114192/deutsche-bahn-us-high-speed-rail-association/>

USA: Brightline reaches agreement for Disney World station

<https://www.travelandleisure.com/trip-ideas/disney-vacations/disney-world-new-brightline-train-station>

USA: Amtrak expresses interest in restored NYC-Scranton service

https://www.citizensvoice.com/news/amtrak-proposes-adding-passenger-train-route-to-scranton/article_e4f1b31a-5a4d-5ef2-8e51-dbf275bfdde.html

Australia: Sydney Metro West megaproject gets underway

<https://www.sydneymetro.info/article/metro-west-construction-underway>

Germany: Siemens "Mireo Plus H" hydrogen fuel cell trains ordered for Baden-Württemberg

<https://www.kten.com/story/42951331/hydrogen-powered-trains-could-replace-diesel-engines-in-germany>

Italy: Alstom wins contract for six hydrogen fuel cell trains

<https://www.railway-technology.com/news/alstom-contract-hydrogen-trains-italy/>

Spain: Talgo to add hydrogen fuel cell trains to its stable by 2023

<https://bioenergyinternational.com/storage-logistics/talgo-unveils-talgo-vittal-one-release-timetable>

Spain: European Atlantic Corridor High Speed Rail line progresses with investment bank support

<https://www.railway-technology.com/news/eib-high-speed-rail-line-spain/>

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!

Transport Action Canada | Charity Number: 11926 8571 RR0001 | www.transportaction.ca

