



TRANSPORT ACTION  
CANADA



## Canada's motorcoach industry responding to Covid-19 crisis

Hello ,

It's been a busy few weeks for Transport Action, with our volunteer board members in both Atlantic Canada and Ontario holding online meetings with VIA Rail management on January 15th and 22nd; online meetings with the policy team at the Federation of Canadian Municipalities; discussions with leaders in the Canadian motorcoach industry; a public meeting about the at-risk Orangeville-Brampton Railway; and presenting our pre-budget submission to Ontario Finance Minister Peter Bethlenfalvy. There's also been a lot going on, including the welcome news of a last-minute deal to save Maritime Bus services in northern New Brunswick, and funding announced to support rural bus services in Quebec through the pandemic.

The situation for bus operators across Canada remains precarious, as they do their part to urge people to avoid non-essential travel while simultaneously attempting to sustain essential services to their communities. Industry association Motor Coach Canada has asked the federal government for \$40,000 in assistance per bus, to save an industry which would normally support more than 100,000 jobs and has seen revenues decline by more than 95%.

Several leaders in the scheduled motorcoach industry are now working to bring together a partnership that would provide better interline connections between regional bus operators, close gaps in the network, and to propose that Transport Canada backstop an "essential bus network" to ensure Canadians in rural, northern and indigenous communities are never again isolated and stranded without access to safe transportation.

This initiative is very much aligned with Transport Action's mission to promote dependable, effective and sustainable public transportation for all Canadians. We have been able to contribute our knowledge to the ongoing process, as advocates for the passenger and the public, and will have more details to share shortly.

Our vision continues to be a Canada with an integrated and sustainable transportation public network, where transit, motor coach, remote air services and passenger rail all work together, strengthening Canada's communities and broaden the range of social and economic opportunities for all.

I hope you enjoy this edition of our newsletter, with details of the developments mentioned above and more.

Your support makes all this work possible and keeps our volunteers going. Please share this newsletter with a friend, and consider setting up a modest [monthly donation](#) to help amplify our efforts if you are able to do so.



Terry Johnson, President  
Transport Action Canada

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## Transport Action Atlantic honours region's transit and motorcoach drivers

**Transport Action Atlantic** has decided to confer its **John Pearce Award** for 2020 collectively on all the transit and motorcoach drivers throughout the four Atlantic provinces who have continued to report for duty without interruption during Covid-19 in order to transport essential workers to their jobs and ensure mobility within their communities. Metrobus operator Amy Bonnington (pictured) is one of hundreds of transit and motorcoach drivers who've faithfully fulfilled their daily responsibilities, and not without significant risk to their personal health and safety despite all the precautions that have been put in place.



[Full story on our Atlantic website](#)

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## Ocean suspension, *Canadian* short-turn extended to May, corridor train frequencies reduced



In what continues to be a pattern befitting the movie *Groundhog Day*, VIA Rail has extended the cancellation of the *Ocean* through at least May 15, 2021. Further resumption of the *Canadian*, now running once per week between Vancouver and Winnipeg, is also now deferred until May 15th at the earliest. This continues the rolling pattern of recent months, where bookings for the next few months were first blocked and then outright cancelled as time approached.

This news guarantees that the earliest possible service resumption on the east coast will be the beginning of what would normally be the peak season for the year, though it's unlikely to be anything resembling a normal travel season, and leaves Atlantic Canada without passenger rail service for more than a year. It still remains to be seen exactly what the service offering will look like when the train does resume, and **Transport Action Atlantic** board members continued to raise this issue in their meeting with VIA Rail management on January 15th.

In the corridor, VIA Rail announced that some train frequencies that had been reinstated in the fall between Quebec, Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto would once again be suspended from February 3rd, although there were no further reductions in southwestern Ontario. While trains are continuing to operate as an essential service during Quebec's Covid-19 curfew, all passengers are expected to ensure their journey complies with the province's measures.

VIA Rail continues to be proactive about fully refunding reservations impacted by the ongoing pandemic-related service disruptions. Updates on train service status can be found at: <https://www.viarail.ca/en/plan-your-trip/service-status>

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## Maritime Bus services to northern New Brunswick saved by last-minute deal



New Brunswickers in the northern part of the province will continue to benefit from motorcoach passenger and parcel service through the remainder of 2021, after an eleventh-hour solution involving Maritime Bus and three levels of government was reached on January 29th.

Although the governments of Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island had declared their willingness to offer financial support to keep buses running through the pandemic, Premier Blaine Higgs refused to contribute, saying his government wasn't going to fund for-profit corporations. The position ignored the harsh reality that the company lost nearly \$4 million on its line-haul operations in 2020 because of Covid-19, while its charter operations were also brought to a standstill by the pandemic. In a rare display of non-partisan solidarity, twenty-one senators from the Maritime provinces signed a letter to the Prime Minister urging help for the struggling bus industry.

Under pressure from a wide variety of interests, including **Transport Action Atlantic**, the New Brunswick government finally backtracked. With a federal government contribution under the *Safe Restart* program on the table, the province allocated some money through its Regional Development Corporation, and saved face by transferring the provincial share to the City of Edmundston to be passed on to Maritime Bus.

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

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## TAO makes presentation for 2021 Ontario Budget

Transport Action Ontario was invited to provide a short verbal presentation on recommendations for the 2021 Ontario Budget to Finance Minister Peter Bethlenfalvy on January 29th, and submitted the same remarks, plus supplemental information, to the Ministry of Finance. We proposed a list of items that fell into 4 overarching themes:

- Fulfill promises on intercity public transport, including permanent community bus grants, restoring the “Northlander” and improving passenger rail in southwest Ontario
- Continue to invest wisely in GTHA transit, including Ontario Line and Yonge St. subway projects, GO expansion and various LRT/BRT projects. We expressed concern about the high costs of two other undergrounding projects – Scarborough and Eglinton West.
- Cancel the GTA West expressway (Highway 413).
- Support short-line railways, particularly the at-risk Huron Central, Algoma Central, Barrie-Collingwood, Orangeville-Brampton and Cayuga lines.

[The full submission can be seen on the TAO website](#)

## Campaigns continue for Northern Ontario and Vancouver Island

What do both Ontario's *Northlander* and the revival of train services between Victoria, Nanaimo and Courtenay have in common? Both were promised by provincial premiers in the last election, both have been studied and found to be feasible, neither has been delivered.



On January 7th, Transport Action Canada and **Transport Action BC** board members met with members of the the Vancouver Island Transportation Corridor Coalition, a local advocacy group formed to advance the caused of modern rail service on the island to discuss joint campaign initiatives. Donations toward this effort are being accepted though our [BC Fund](#).

**Transport Action Ontario** has launched a joint campaign with the Northeastern Ontario Rail Network, Coalition for Algoma Passenger Trains, and the Committee Promoting Muskoka Rail Travel to remind the Ontario government of their promise and ask that the *Northlander* be funded in the spring budget, as per our formal submission noted above.

If you live in Ontario, [please write to your MPP using our campaign page](#).

## Save the Orangeville-Brampton Railway Campaign

The Orangeville-Brampton Railway (OBRY) is a 34-mile short line running between Mississauga, Brampton, Caledon and Orangeville. The current owner, the Town of Orangeville, plans to shut down, repurpose or sell the line at the end of 2021. Conversion to a trail has been mentioned. **Transport Action Ontario** has been campaigning to save the line over the past year, including letters to government, discussions with current freight users of the line, and convening an online public meeting held on January 11th.

Due to continued uncertainty about the line's future and recent changes in local businesses, there is not a good freight business case in the short term. However, due to rapid population growth in the area and lands designated for future industrial development, TAO believes there is continued rail potential in the medium term. A letter to us from Minister Caroline Mulroney cited the Greater Golden Horseshoe Transportation Plan study and that the Ministry recognized this corridor as a strategic asset. Transport Action Ontario is planning additional meetings with the Ministry and with Brampton to further explore saving this corridor.

Stay tuned...

## Marine Atlantic raises ferry rates, NL election

## candidates asked to present their positions

On February 1st, Marine Atlantic announced that most of its rates would be going up at the start of the next fiscal year, beginning in April. Both passengers and commercial users of the seasonal Argentia route will pay 2.5% more if the service, which did not run in 2020, resumes this summer. Reservations are now being accepted for two round trips a week beginning in late June.

This fare hike comes at a particularly inopportune time for Newfoundland's hospitality industry. With air transportation in serious crisis and unlikely to recover in the near future, affordable ferry service will be particularly important to the island's struggling tourism sector in the Atlantic travel bubble resumes this summer.

Even more critical is the 2% increase for commercial traffic on the company's main route to Port aux Basques, coupled with a 3.4% hike in the drop trailer management fee. This is expected to have a noticeable impact on the cost of living, as a large proportion of groceries and everyday household needs as well as building supplies are carried by drop trailers.

With no expectation the rate increase was imminent, **Transport Action Atlantic** had already initiated an effort to get the ongoing issue of high ferry rates on the table as an issue in the February 13 provincial election, inviting parties and candidates to present their views on the issue. TAA believes that the ferry service between Port aux Basques and North Sydney should be considered a part of the Trans Canada Highway, and that the cost to users should be comparable to driving the same 180-km distance, in accordance with the principle applied to railway rates, as the dominant mode at the time, in the 1949 Terms of Union, under which Newfoundland and Labrador became Canada's tenth province.

Full story: [Newfoundland Ferry Rates – a provincial election issue?](#)

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## Stop the Highway 413 Campaign in Full Swing

The campaign to stop this proposed 50 km new expressway just west of Toronto continues. The project was revived by the Ford government, and is rapidly proceeding with studies under a streamlined Environmental Assessment process. The campaign is lead by Environmental Defence, with strong support from other non-government organizations including **Transport Action Ontario**. One of the foundations of the campaign is a report ([click to view](#)) issued last summer, co-authored by ED, TAO and Sustainable Vaughan. It summarized the costs and impacts of the Highway and identified viable transportation alternatives, including new rapid transit lines and truck priority on the nearby Highway 407.

The campaign has garnered extensive mainstream media coverage, social media attention, lawn signs, letters to elected officials and public meetings. To date, both the Provincial NDP and Green parties have come out in opposition to the Highway. Recently, Ecojustice, a legal group acting on behalf of numerous groups including TAO, submitted a well-researched brief ([click to view](#)) to the federal government requesting a federal Environmental Assessment.

For further information or to join the campaign, please go to the [Stop the 413 website](#).

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## Montreal's MR-90 trains face uncertain future



Following the end of commuter rail service on the Deux-Montagnes line December, Exo has moved the 58 MR-90 cars by truck from Saint-Eustache to Saint-Jérôme, and then in convoy by rail to their Pointe-Saint-Charles maintenance center.

Because the Deux-Montagnes line, which is being replaced by the REM automated light rail system, was the only electrified line on the network, these electric multiple unit trains can not be used elsewhere by Exo and their future is still to be determined. Built in 1994-95 by Bombardier, they may have many years of useful life left, and Exo recently released a call for expressions of interest to identify potential buyers. (Photo: Exo)

## Transportation Newsround

Pandemic pushing bus companies to verge of collapse

<https://toronto.ctvnews.ca/bus-companies-on-the-verge-of-collapse-amid-covid-19-pandemic-industry-says-1.5286715>

Elevated “REM de l’est” raises many questions

<https://journalmetro.com/local/pointe-aux-trembles-montreal-est/2598829/rem-de-lest-les-questions-se-multiplient/>

Last train to Deux-Montagnes, uncertain future for MR90 fleet

<https://www.tvanouvelles.ca/2021/01/16/la-ligne-de-train-deux-montagnes-a-ferme-pendant-la-pandemie-et-les-nostalgiques-se-souviennent-1>

Crosstown LRT station box at Eglinton station finally complete

<https://blog.metrolinx.com/2021/01/13/crosstown-eglinton-station-sees-all-excavation-under-ftc-box-complete/>

Metrolinx begins Malton station improvements on the Kitchener GO line

[https://www.progressiverailroading.com/passenger\\_rail/news/GO-Transit-to-begin-Malton-Station-improvements--62527](https://www.progressiverailroading.com/passenger_rail/news/GO-Transit-to-begin-Malton-Station-improvements--62527)

Scarborough Subway Extension may derail transit-oriented development plan

<https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2021/01/26/meant-to-attract-density-ontarios-scarborough-subway-plan-would-scuttle-1200-unit-housing-development.html>

Outgoing Translink CEO Kevin Desmond on commuting through COVID, steel vs. rubber and a transit ‘love affair.’

<https://theyee.ca/News/2021/01/21/After-Five-Years-Kevin-Desmond-TransLink-Terminus/>

Rail paramount for SWO transportation task force

<https://london.ctvnews.ca/mobile/the-issue-of-rail-is-paramount-london-mayor-on-new-sw->

[transportation-task-force-1.5282309](#)

High performance rail, intercity bus both on task force agenda

<https://lfpres.com/news/local-news/group-set-to-improve-regional-transportation-but-what-most-needs-work>

North Bay Council presses Ontario to set date for Northlander restoration

<https://www.midnorthmonitor.com/news/province-urged-to-keep-passenger-rail-promise>

Local opposition to highway 413 continues to grow

<https://www.thestar.com/news/gta/2021/01/27/this-is-a-stupid-place-to-put-the-highway-doug-fords-government-has-fast-tracked-a-new-gta-freeway-during-covid-19-sparking-local-opposition.html>

First electric buses arrive in Brampton

<https://www.brampton.ca/EN/City-Hall/News/Pages/Feature-Story.aspx/13>

Safe Restart flows \$86 million to BC Transit

<https://www.iheartradio.ca/am-1150/news/kelowna-to-receive-5-9m-through-bc-s-safe-restart-plan-1.14445222>

Ontario continues to drag out the process of restoring the Northlander service

<https://www.saultstar.com/news/province-wont-be-rushed-to-restore-northlander-fedeli>

Saskatoon politicians continue their efforts to get long freight trains out of town

<https://globalnews.ca/news/7601627/saskatoon-city-hall-moving-rail-lines/>

USA: Siemens Venture train on test in Michigan

<https://www.railwayage.com/passenger/intercity/watch-siemens-midwest-amtrak-ventures/>

USA: Amtrak pledges support to Montana rail authority in quest for passenger service

<https://missoulacurrent.com/business/2021/01/amtrak-passenger-service/>

USA: 'Amtrak Joe' and 'Mayor Pete' plan Gulf Coast rail visit

<https://www.al.com/news/2021/01/amtrak-joe-and-mayor-pete-new-administration-vows-gulf-coast-visit-fueling-amtrak-momentum.html>

USA: Amtrak proposes five routes in Ohio

<https://www.daytondailynews.com/news/amtrak-proposal-could-expand-passenger-routes-through-dayton/JGI6VVRW4RGKXGGM7SD6EYBGY4/>

Europe: Brexit and Covid-19 pose existential risk to Eurostar's cross channel train service

<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2021/jan/17/eurostar-warns-of-risk-to-survival-without-government-help-covid-pandemic>

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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!

