



The Bulletin

TRANSPORT ACTION ATLANTIC

FALL - WINTER 2017

Success at Last! ***RuralLynx gets start-up funding***



Years of persistence have paid off for the Southwest New Brunswick Transit Authority and its president Stan Choptiany. Premier Brian Gallant was on hand on July 27 for the long-awaited announcement of provincial funding to enable the return of convenient and affordable bus service to New Brunswick's Charlotte County. The first runs, using equipment and drivers from Maritime Bus, took place on September 25.

From left: Mike Cassidy, president of Maritime Bus; Agriculture, Aquaculture and Fisheries Minister Rick Doucet; Premier Gallant; Stan Choptiany; Tourism, Heritage and Culture Minister John Ames; and New Brunswick Southwest MP Karen Ludwig.

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A very iced up VIA 15, with Budd consist in tow, makes its stop at Ste-Foy QC, after running through the “bomb cyclone” winter storm on Jan. 5th, 2018. While all other transportation in the Maritimes was shut down, the train still made it through with some delay (Photo – Tim Hayman)

Extra Trains and Winter Woes

For the fourth year in a row, VIA ran extra departures on the Ocean for the Christmas holiday season. Three extra departures were added in each direction, and stainless steel equipment once again returned to operate on these extra departures. Unfortunately, the holiday season was a difficult one, as extreme cold temperatures wreaked havoc with the Renaissance equipment. Many departures were several hours late leaving Montreal, and the worst problems culminated in a cancelled train from Halifax on Jan. 7th.

Ultimately, VIA has opted to keep one set of stainless steel equipment in service until at least March (and possibly longer), to allow a Renaissance set to be removed for major servicing. This further highlights the long-standing issues with the second-hand British-built Renaissance cars, which were never intended for service in the frigid Canadian winters, and the desperate and imminent need for new equipment to safeguard the future of the Ocean.

Advocacy award honours John Pearce



On November 18, *president emeritus* John Pearce appropriately became the first recipient of an annual advocacy award established by TAA in his honour. A colour photo of the ongoing award plaque appears on the back cover of this issue.

How does an organization appropriately acknowledge more than four decades of dedicated service to its cause? When *president emeritus* John Pearce advised his TAA colleagues last summer in a brief e-mail that his health no longer would permit him to maintain an active role, that question immediately arose. The answer came from vice-president Ashley Morton: establish an annual award in John's name to recognize outstanding public transportation advocacy. And, let's further honour John by naming him as the first recipient!

So it was that following the TAA fall board meeting on November 18, a delegation visited the Dartmouth seniors complex where John and his wife Karen now reside to personally present the annual award plaque and the recipient's "keeper" trophy. It was obvious during the brief ceremony that, although age and health issues have forced him to the sidelines, they have not diminished his commitment and enthusiasm for the cause.

John joined Transport 2000 Atlantic in the mid 1970s, served for many years as its president, and remained an active volunteer and board member as the organization rebranded itself as Transport Action Atlantic. His primary focus was always passenger rail, and until less than a year ago he could be frequently found in the Halifax VIA station, promoting the cause and chatting with passers-by and railway employees.



TAA treasurer Don MacLeod presents the inaugural John Pearce Award to John Pearce (seated). Looking on, from left to right, are TAA board member Michael Perry, president Ted Bartlett, and membership secretary Christine Mills Garnet. (Photo – Tim Hayman)

The John Pearce Award will be given annually to a group or individual demonstrating outstanding effort in the field of public transportation advocacy. A selection committee will be established to invite nominations and choose the winner each year.

Advocacy in Action

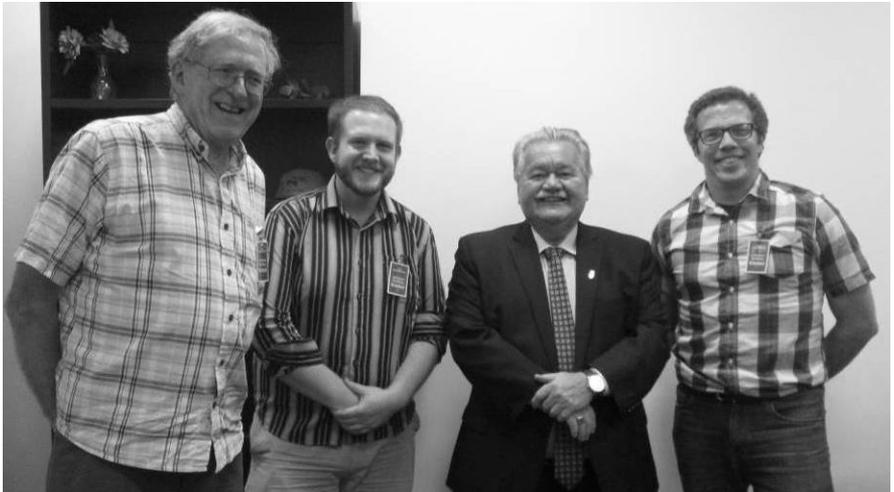
TAA continues to promote its agenda for convenient, affordable and sustainable public transportation among all levels of government throughout the region. Over the past several months, meetings have been held with elected representatives and various officials in both New Brunswick and Nova Scotia, and more are scheduled in the near future.

On the federal level, face-to-face encounters were held with Halifax area MPs Andy Fillmore, Geoff Regan and Darren Fisher during the late summer and fall. Three additional meetings have been confirmed for January during the Christmas-New Year parliamentary break. These involve Moncton-area MP, Health Minister Ginette Petitpas Taylor, Miramichi-Grand Lake member Pat Finnigan, and Bill Casey of Cumberland-Colchester. Others are being sought.

With a provincial election looming on New Brunswick's political horizon, an effort has been launched to promote our agenda among the parties. PC Leader

Blaine Higgs met with a TAA delegation in November, and we will be seeking opportunities for discussion with the other parties as well.

We've also met recently with the mayors of Moncton and Fredericton, with these conversations being focused primarily on urban transit issues.



A Transport Action Atlantic delegation met with Nova Scotia's recently-appointed transportation minister on August 15. The wide-ranging discussion included public transit, VIA, and the derelict Cape Breton rail line. Left to right: Ted Bartlett, Tim Hayman, Minister Hines, Ashley Morton.

Meanwhile, Halifax lawyer Danny Gallivan, appointed earlier this year to the VIA Rail Canada board of directors, has met with us on two occasions. While Mr. Gallivan is quite clear that he does not view his role as being an Atlantic Canada representative on the board, he nonetheless shows strong interest in our vision for the corporation in this region.

- Ted Bartlett

Transportation strategy proposed for NB

The Government of New Brunswick acknowledges that lack of access to transportation poses significant challenges for many residents of the province. Now they have a comprehensive strategy document that seeks to address some of those issues. *From Surfaces to Services: An inclusive and sustainable transportation strategy for the Province of New Brunswick 2017-2037*, was released by the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation (ESIC) on December 11th, during an event at the historic railway station in McAdam.

Development of the strategy was considered a priority action for the corporation in fulfilling its ambitious poverty reduction mandate. This particular task was

handed to a Rural and Urban Transportation Advisory Committee, headed by Yves Bourgeois. The committee heard from a number of experts, as well as hundreds of everyday citizens who voiced the need for integrated, inclusive and sustainable transportation.



A comprehensive transportation strategy document has been presented to New Brunswick's Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation. Public release was on December 11 in McAdam. (L to R) Scott MacAfee, ESIC coordinator; Yves Bourgeois, chair of the Rural and Urban Transportation Advisory Committee; Tourism, Heritage and Culture Minister John Ames, who is also minister responsible for the ESIC; and Stéphane Leclair, executive director of the corporation.

"I am confident that with the recommendations presented in the report, the government will be able to develop a strategy that will benefit the majority of New Brunswickers, whether they live in a rural or an urban area," said Dr. Bourgeois. "For the strategy to bring significant results, our report makes clear that we need not only to rethink transportation options, but also to align them with how we build our communities, with a better understanding of people's needs and travel patterns, while making it easier for people to act on these options."

The report aligns extremely well with the views of Transport Action Atlantic, and is a very interesting read. The full 30 pages of background and recommendations are available on the government website. Some quotes:

- "This is a vision that ensures every New Brunswicker has opportunities to access the transportation they need to achieve economic and social inclusion. It is a vision that builds on the strengths of existing transportation achievements, services and programs, but pivots to a new way of thinking that fosters active and shared transportation alternatives, and includes the broader built environment in our decision-making."
- "This strategy proposes coordinated regional transportation planning and services to help New Brunswickers save money on transportation so they can invest in themselves, their education and retirement."

- “Although transit, intercity bus, and passenger rail are not currently meeting their potential for ridership, they have strong organizational foundations that, if sufficiently resourced or integrated into a broader vision and plan for mobility, can develop into alternatives to driving that attract users through increased service area and frequency, for example.”

There are five essential recommendations, urging the provincial government to:

- clarify roles and responsibilities for transportation services in New Brunswick.
- improve the planning, provision and alignment of transportation services.
- improve and integrate transportation data for decision-making and trip-making.
- enhance the availability of affordable, accessible and effective urban and rural transportation options, and
- develop an action plan to implement the strategy.

“Our dependence on private vehicles has created a heavy financial burden on middle income families, while posing even greater obstacles to vulnerable populations,” said Tourism, Heritage and Culture Minister John Ames, who is also minister responsible for the ESIC. “The growing number of examples of people unable to find transportation for medical appointments, or who have a disability, highlight the need for a new vision for transportation in the province.”

A committee made up of representatives from various government departments and external stakeholders and supported by the ESIC, will be created to oversee the implementation of the recommendations.

The complete report is available online at:

<http://www2.gnb.ca/content/dam/gnb/Departments/esic/pdf/Transportation-Transport/FromSurfacesToServices.pdf>

TAA Members Event – Bridgewater Excursion a Success!

On October 21st, TAA hosted its second Nova Scotia Members Event. A group of 10 TAA members made their way to Bridgewater NS on what turned out to be a gorgeous fall day, to explore the newest addition to the public transit world in the Maritimes. The Town of Bridgewater recently launched a transit system as a pilot project, with funding support from the Province and a pair of buses generously donated by the city of Halifax. For most of the attendees, the day began at the VIA Rail station in Halifax – a convenient meeting location, though sadly the last train

for Bridgewater departed many, many years ago. Arriving in town, the group made its way to Lanna Thai restaurant on King St., just a few blocks from the bus stop where the main highlight of the trip would begin.

Bridgewater has set their initial system up as a figure-8 sort of loop; it makes a loop on one side of the river, then crosses the bridge and loops on the other side, ultimately returning via the other bridge to the original side. The full trip takes a little under an hour, allowing for an hourly schedule throughout the day. The route provides access to shopping areas,



The bus arrives! Bridgewater has adorned the former Halifax Transit buses in a really attractive new scheme. (PHOTO – Ashley Morton)

major employers, the NSCC campus, the hospital, recreational centres, and plenty of residential areas. For some parts of the route (like King St.) the stops are established, while along other parts the bus can be flagged down at any safe place along the route. The plan is to eventually establish permanent stops around the route, but during the pilot they're aiming to get an idea of where people would most like to use the bus.

The buses themselves are quite comfortable. Both buses have a wheelchair lift and tie-down area, and we were informed that several wheelchair users have already begun to use the bus on a regular basis. They also have bike racks on the front, which have been getting used by some riders.

The next part of the day was no less exciting, as the group made its way into the town hall for a talk with Jr. Planner MacKenzie Childs, who was instrumental in the development of this pilot transit network. Much to our surprise, she was joined by Bridgewater's Director of Planning, Jessica McDonald. The two of them were clearly pleased to see the enthusiastic support of TAA for their transit project, and were more than happy to explain the details of how the system came to be and answer the myriad of questions that the group had for them.

Once again, it became exceedingly clear that they had put a lot of thought into this project, and that they are very serious about making it a success and developing it into a permanent transit network for the town. The focus for now was to set up something that would work and get people used to the idea of using transit, and then hope that it can eventually continue to grow and expand to become an

essential service for the community. One interesting point that was raised was the fact that for many people who grew up in town and had never lived farther away, using transit at all is a foreign concept. As such, the planners have had to try to find ways to teach people how the bus works, and to make it something they'll feel comfortable using.

The pilot has already evolved in its short existence. Small changes like tweaking the schedule for reliable hourly departures are ongoing, in a constant effort to optimize the system. With the level of enthusiasm, commitment, and clever thinking displayed by the planners behind it, there's good reason to be optimistic about the future of Bridgewater's transit system.



The group poses outside the Bridgewater Town Hall, with Director of Planning Jessica McDonald on the far left, and planner MacKenzie Childs on the far right. (PHOTO – courtesy of Marian Ward)

Overall, the day was thoroughly enjoyed by all, and marks a successful second installment in what we hope will be many TAA Members Events. We're planning to hold another event and excursion in the spring of 2018. Do you have ideas for what that could be? Please let us know! For our members elsewhere in the Maritimes, have no fear – we're actively looking at excursion possibilities elsewhere, particularly in New Brunswick, so that more of our members will have the opportunity to participate.

- Tim Hayman

Rail News

VIA tests RDCs on Newcastle Sub First steps toward reintroducing regional train service

It's now been more than two years since VIA Rail first announced its intention to reintroduce local train services in the Maritimes. Rather than restore the tri-weekly *Ocean* to daily frequency – the option favoured by Transport Action Atlantic – the corporation said it would reintroduce local services in the region using rail diesel

cars (RDCs). The equipment was built by the Budd Company of Philadelphia back in the 1950s, and hasn't operated in this part of the country since the major service cuts imposed under the Mulroney Government in January 1990.



Three RDC units passed through Moncton attached to train 14 en route to Halifax on November 9, after a day of test runs on CN's Newcastle Subdivision. (PHOTO – Ted Bartlett)

This fall the first visible step toward making those regional trains a reality was taken. On November 6th a trio of RDCs arrived in Bathurst on the tail end of VIA Train 14. The next day the units made a series of test runs at various speeds on the Newcastle Subdivision, testing the ability of the units to trip grade crossing circuits, among other things. This continues from testing that VIA had previously performed with these units out of Ottawa and in Southwestern Ontario. The results of the tests are not yet known, but the ability of VIA to launch their proposed regional trains is apparently contingent on CN being satisfied with those results.

VIA intends to run the regional trains on a Monday through Friday basis between Campbellton and Moncton, and between Moncton and Halifax, with eastbound trips in the morning and westbound trips in the afternoon/evening. The services were originally proposed to launch in the spring of 2016, then the fall, and then spring or fall 2017. But right now, VIA isn't making any predictions as to when service might begin.

“When we have the results of these test runs we will make decisions on next steps,” says Jacques Fauteux, the company's director of community and government relations. “We're closer to a potential start-up, but we don't have a date yet. We have to work co-operatively with the railway infrastructure owner.”

That owner, of course, is CN – which has made no secret that it has little appetite for continuing to maintain and operate the Newcastle Sub. Despite substantial contributions towards track upgrades over the past several years by both the New Brunswick and federal governments, there are still rumblings that abandonment proceedings might resume for portions of the subdivision as early as 2018. Apparently there was a clause in the 2014 agreement with the Province of New Brunswick – not made public at the time – that gave the railway the right to apply for abandonment if freight traffic continued to decline.

Despite promises of an aggressive marketing program when the provincial funding was announced, there's been little evidence of significant effort in that direction. Anecdotal reports say potential new business for the line is actually being discouraged. Any track abandonment, of course, would make continued VIA operation between Campbellton and Moncton impossible.

Meanwhile, VIA's Jacques Fauteux confirmed that some funding was provided in the 2017-2018 federal budget to undertake underwater maintenance on the piers of the Miramichi bridges, and that work has been partially completed. But he said there has been no money committed for upgrading on approximately 60 miles of deteriorated track between Rogersville and Bathurst that has been restricted to a maximum speed of 30 miles per hour for the past several years.



The RDCs during their layover in Halifax following testing in NB. Access to them was restricted, but photos through the fence are always possible! (PHOTO – Tim Hayman)

TAA maintains that the survival of both the long distance *Ocean* and any new regional services requires that track speeds be restored to the standard of 15 years ago, when passenger trains were permitted to run at 75 mph on most of the Newcastle Sub.

VIA has continued to emphasize its commitment to the regional service plans, while insisting that a return to daily service by the *Ocean* won't happen any time soon. The RDC units used for the November tests were refurbished extensively by the now-defunct Industrial Rail Services in Moncton several years ago.

Following the test runs they proceeded to Halifax on November 9 – again carrying the markers on Train 14. There were apparently no tests on either the Springhill or Bedford subdivisions, with VIA saying only that the units went to Halifax “for storage”. They returned to Montreal attached to Train 15 on November 15.

Mr. Fauteux, meanwhile, expressed optimism that the next federal budget might contain some provision for badly needed new passenger equipment. He pointed

out that the company had made a submission to the shareholder in December 2016, and suggested that sufficient time had elapsed that it was reasonable to expect some indication to be forthcoming in the next fiscal year.

- files from Tim Hayman and Ted Bartlett

Rail safety review panel visits Maritimes

In April 2017, Transport Minister Marc Garneau launched a statutory review of Canada's *Railway Safety Act* – one year ahead of schedule. The review panel is headed by Richard Paton, a former senior bureaucrat who has also served as President of the Chemistry Industry Association of Canada. He hosted a day-long roundtable in Dartmouth on October 13. Perspectives and insights gained at this and similar sessions across the country will contribute to developing the panel's findings and recommendations to the minister on strengthening rail safety.

Participants included representatives of the Nova Scotia and New Brunswick governments, Halifax Regional Municipality, Cape Breton and Central Nova Scotia Railway, New Brunswick and Maine Railway, Irving Oil, and the Railway Association of Canada (RAC) – but surprisingly no one from either CN or VIA Rail. Board member Marcus Garnet attended on behalf of TAA, and as a professional planner expressed his views on several topics related to planning and sustainable transportation.

In the following report, Marcus shares his thoughts on each of the themes emphasized at the roundtable:

- Railway Proximity Guidelines endorsed by the RAC and the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) were seen by the railway industry as important for reducing risk exposure, and the RAC would like the provinces to make them mandatory for municipalities. New Brunswick seems willing to do so, but not Nova Scotia as they, like me, feel they are too onerous. I suggested that the Proximity Guidelines need to be more sensitive to Canada's different regions, as they seem to assume that mainline railways carry large numbers of trains travelling at high speed. Maritime mainlines are more like Central Canada's branchlines, so our setbacks and buffers from railways should reflect our relatively low rail traffic and speeds. I also cautioned that the onerous setbacks in the Proximity Guidelines would hamper Transit Oriented Development. I noted that land use planning now favours more integration and less segregation of uses, in an effort to enable more walking and less car dependency. I also noted that good design should be part of the solution, and that our first aim should be to keep the trains on the tracks rather than setting everything back as if they are going to leave the rails! It is a classic risk management issue.
- Trespassing is the Number 1 cause of railway fatalities. Operation Lifesaver is a program to educate the public, and especially schoolchildren, of the risks

around railway lines. The Maritime chapter of Operation Lifesaver recently dissolved, but the national program has been revamped and we should see a revitalization in the Maritimes soon. More enforcement and fines would also help, though shortlines are hampered because they do not have their own police.

- New railway crossings are actively opposed by railways due to the associated risks, but the industry is open to a “corridor” approach whereby the number of crossings is reduced in favour of one or two strategically located and safely designed crossings. I pointed to the problem where pedestrians repeatedly cut fencing and trespass across tracks in following desire lines, such as between apartments and shops, and urged the federal government to provide more funding to enable safe crossings to be installed at such places. The RAC rep said that new federal regulations introduced for private crossings a few years ago will add a heavy cost burden to private landowners who need to cross the tracks for farming and other operations.
- Improved railway crossings: There seemed to be support for the idea of installing advance-warning flashing lights to alert road users when trains are approaching obscured or notoriously hazardous railway crossings. There have been accidents where logging trucks have hit trains, even while the train was in the crossing. I also suggested some kind of “app” that would alert people walking near tracks, when a train is approaching. This would help reduce the risks from people being distracted by their hi-tech devices.
- Railway relocation has become a popular idea since the Lac-Mégantic disaster, but this is not realistic due to costs and the impact on new neighbours of the re-aligned tracks. Also cities often spread outwards so the end up being close to the new route after all. Historically, especially out west, the railways did not impact the town, they created the town. So railways are not going to be moved, and we must work together for a harmonious relationship between them and the communities through which they pass. The Lac-Mégantic disaster was caused by a coincidence of multiple failures and weaknesses, and most of those have since been addressed.
- Rail and truck safety: Rail is inherently safer than trucking because trains are held to their track. Trucks do not have this advantage, and pass within inches of people travelling in their cars; yet we accept this as safe. We must be careful not to hamstring rail with extra rules and costs to such a point that hazardous goods shift to trucking, thereby increasing the risk. Hazardous goods insurance is a case in point: premiums are based on tonnage, not mileage, so a shortline cannot afford the premiums to carry such goods, and so they end up being trucked. Of course a train has a much greater volume of hazardous goods so the consequences are far worse than with a truck accident. Even so, we must beware of a double standard that penalizes rail.

- Autonomous trucks are coming. They will operate in long platoons (to reduce air drag), will need only one driver at the head of each platoon, and will take advantage of publicly funded freeways. I suggested that they could put the railways out of business east of Montreal, and that we should try to imagine a typical container rail freight train operating instead on our provincial freeway system as a virtual road train. The NSTIR reps seemed taken aback by this prospect! But I fear that is what could happen unless the Province introduces some form of weight-distance road pricing before autonomous trucks become common.
- Lighter-weight passenger railcars: I noted that the US Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) has recently adopted an Alternative Compliance protocol for Crash Energy Management (CEM), which enables European-style lighter-weight self-propelled passenger trains to operate. The idea is that, instead of building the train like a heavy battleship that survives an accident even if the passengers don't, one builds the train so that, in an accident, the ends collapse in an orderly fashion to ease the impact on passengers – more like automotive crash energy management. I urged Transport Canada to keep abreast of this approach, as it would facilitate commuter rail and also make it safer – lighter-weight trains could stop more quickly.
- I emphasized the importance of seeing rail as an asset rather than a threat or nuisance, and that many people would like to see more rail service, for both passengers and freight, in Atlantic Canada.

The atmosphere in the meeting was constructive and cordial, and there was a general consensus that the various sectors should work together closely and each be willing to show some give-and-take. It was time well spent indeed.

Marcus Garnet

Cape Breton Rail Update

Provincial investment to help rail line stay in place

The Cape Breton and Central Nova Scotia (CBNS) Railway reached a deal with the Province of Nova Scotia to keep its rail line through Cape Breton in place for at least another year. The province will pay CBNS up to \$60,000 per month to cover valid expenses, including salaries, insurance, security and building maintenance directly attributed to the line between St. Peter's Junction and Sydney. Repairs or improvements to the line will not be reimbursed under this agreement. In exchange, CBNS will not apply to abandon the line for the next year. This arrangement has been set up to be renewable on an annual basis.

From the September 2017 provincial news release: *“This agreement preserves the existing rail line, which is a key component of the proposed container terminal*

in Sydney,' said Geoff McLellan, Minister of Business. 'Government continues to work together with businesses, community and municipal leaders on economic development related to Cape Breton. Strong transportation links are a key component of building a stronger economy.'"

From CBNS, in the same release: *"'We are pleased to work with the Government of Nova Scotia to allow economic development initiatives like the proposed container terminal unfold,' said Louis Gravel, president of Cape Breton and Central Nova Scotia Railway. 'We would like nothing more than to one day see a thriving operating railway between Port Hawkesbury and Sydney.'"*



A typical view of the Sydney Subdivision, as weeds surround the rusting rails. It's good that the tracks are still in place, but it is becoming increasingly evident that they haven't seen a train in some time. (Photo – Ted Bartlett)

Any action from the province to help maintain this rail line is valuable, and it maintains the possibility that it may once again see trains at some point in the future. Losing the right of way and basic railway infrastructure would all but guarantee that trains would never again run across Cape Breton. However, this agreement will not do anything directly to restore service on the line, nor does it seem to suggest that there is any thought of re-opening the line unless the proposed container terminal in Sydney goes ahead.

On September 10, TAA board member Tim Hayman attended a meeting of the Scotia Rail Development Society, which is continuing to advocate for restoring rail service to Sydney. The turnout was impressive, with close to 100 people in

attendance, including MP Mark Eyking, MLA Derek Mombourquette, folks from the Port of Sydney, and representatives from both GWI/CBNS and Kameron Collieries. The major news on the Sydney Subdivision was that a study is underway to evaluate the cost of repairing and upgrading the line.

The overwhelming emphasis in the meeting was on the potential container terminal. One thing was very clear - the attendees of this meeting feel like the federal and provincial governments are heavily biased towards Halifax, and feel that Cape Breton is being ignored and left out. The container terminal is seen as one of the only options to restore some "fairness" in the province.

One of TAA's concerns with this issue has been that the focus is almost exclusively on the potential port, which has the serious danger of setting the railway up to fail if that project doesn't go through. Tim took the opportunity in the Q&A to express TAA's support for SRDS's efforts, as well as to emphasize that the business case needs to look at more than just the container terminal, lest it should lead to losing everything if that fails.

For the time being, there remains plenty of speculation on what the future may hold. One thing is clear: there is a strong base of support in Cape Breton for maintaining the rail line, and the province has remained amenable to ensuring it remains in place while work to expand the Port of Sydney continues. It's far from an ideal solution, but as long as the rails are still in place, there can be a glimmer of hope for preserving the rail link for the future.

-Tim Hayman

Bus shuttle facilitates rail connections from Gaspé for the Holidays

It's been several years since VIA was forced to annul train service to Gaspé due to deteriorating track conditions. Some people have already been making their own way to Matapédia or Campbellton to catch the train – but for many, this isn't an option. For the 2016-17 Christmas holiday period, a new initiative was launched in Gaspé to try to help make this train connection possible for more people from the region as they travelled for the holidays.

From December 20th to January 4th, RÉGÎM (Régie Intermunicipale De Transport Gaspésie – Îles-De-La-Madeleine) offered special bus connections to and from VIA Rail's Ocean service at Campbellton. Buses were scheduled to travel from Gaspé to Campbellton each day that Train 15 was operating, and in reverse each day that Train 14 was operating. Arrival and departure times from Campbellton were timed to align with the Ocean's schedule. The buses made stops at Nouvelle, Carleton-sur-Mer, New Richmond, Caplan, Bonaventure, New Carlisle, Port-Daniel, Chandler, Grande-Rivière, Cap-D'Espoir, Percé, and York; effectively, the route mirrored the route of the suspended Chaleur service.

VIA has been involved in project, allowing the connections to be booked directly through their reservations system. They are reportedly eyeing this trial period with great interest, and if it is successful, would like to see it continue at other busy times of the year. The connection obviously allows VIA to reach more potential riders from the region, and also to help remind people about the possibility of using the train. Passenger rail service could resume within the next few years thanks to investment from the province of Quebec to rehabilitate the line; providing options like this in the interim could help ensure that when service does eventually resume, the train will still be on the minds of more people in region.

Coupled with the additional frequencies of the Ocean, this holiday season has come the closest to replicating the sort of service levels that VIA provided in the region several years ago.

-Tim Hayman

A New Proposal to Rehabilitate the Ocean



Federal Green Party leader Elizabeth May and New Brunswick provincial leader David Coon are among elected officials who have received copies of *Riding the Ocean's Next Wave*. (Photo – Ted Bartlett)

“VIA Rail’s *Ocean* is dying.” So begins the report recently completed by transportation consultant and advocate Greg Gormick for the advocacy group *Save Our Trains in Northern New Brunswick*. The new report is titled “Riding the Ocean’s Next Wave: A proposal for VIA Rail Canada’s Maritime services”, and was released in mid-August with considerable media coverage.

past, and toured Atlantic Canada as part of the “National Dream Renewed” campaign several years ago, aiming to generate support for improvements to VIA’s services across the country at a time when the future was looking particularly bleak.

Gormick is no stranger to VIA’s Maritime services. He has completed reports on rail service in the region in the

His assessment of the current situation boils down, in essence, to three points: VIA is struggling to compete with discount airlines for end-to-end travel; their

equipment is deteriorating; and the inconvenience of a tri-weekly schedule is simply unable to generate adequate ridership or effectively serve any part of the market. These are concerns that are generally shared by TAA.

The issues with the existing equipment are a particular concern. The Renaissance fleet is expensive to operate, has little operational flexibility, and has become increasingly unreliable in recent years. The forced withdrawal of one set of equipment for about a month earlier in 2017 and again now at the beginning of 2018 demonstrated that very clearly.

The tri-weekly schedule imposed in 2012 has been the single biggest impediment to the success and usefulness of VIA's *Ocean* service, and has been something that TAA has continuously opposed. There is no way to build long-term ridership with such an infrequent and difficult to use schedule. TAA has been generally supportive of VIA's proposal to launch daily Campbellton-Moncton and Moncton-Halifax regional trains, as we welcome any improvement to the railway's Maritime service offering. However, we have continued to maintain that a daily *Ocean* would be easier to implement and would be more beneficial in the long-run, particularly if paired with additional inter-city expansions.

Greg Gormick's recommended solution is to order new stainless-steel "Viewliner" cars – a proven design used by Amtrak since the late 1990s – and put them in daily service between Montreal and Halifax. The US carrier is now taking delivery of additional rolling stock in a second generation of this class, including sleepers, diners and baggage cars. He suggests there would be economics of scale if VIA were to piggyback on this order.

There are still some serious questions that need to be answered regarding the details of such a potential order, including issues that Amtrak has encountered with receiving their own order. However, planning to re-equip the *Ocean* in the long-term is essential if VIA intends to continue running the train beyond the time that the Renaissance equipment will expire. TAA supports any move that would supply VIA with new long-distance equipment, and therefore believes this proposal should be further examined.

The document also includes some other key components, including infrastructure improvements, the restoration of the *Chaleur* service to Gaspé, and additional marketing to promote the *Ocean*. VIA has arguably done a good job of improving and marketing their on-board product from a tourism perspective; but tourist traffic at peak times does not guarantee the long-term sustainability of the train, nor does it help to serve the people living in the many communities along the line who rely on the train for basic transportation, or would like to be able to use it. The only way to better serve those people and ultimately grow ridership will be to make improvements to the service from a practical transportation point of view; infrastructure investments to reduce travel times, and frequency increases to make the schedule practical and useable.

-Tim Hayman

Motorcoach and Transit

RuralLynx service comes to SW New Brunswick

The long awaited RuralLynx bus service from Saint John to Charlotte County began on Monday, September 25. The introductory schedule is intended to be temporary for the first few months although buses will be in revenue earning service. The initial schedule will be adjusted as experience is gained both in the actual running time and the calling points on the route.

At present, two buses are assigned to the daily schedule: eastbound leaving St. Stephen at 7.30 am and westbound leaving Saint John at 8.05 am. Except Friday and Sunday, a unique feature of the morning service is that the westbound coach will make a flag stop in time to meet the inbound Grand Manan Ferry at Black's Harbour. The bus will then proceed to Pennfield where it will meet the eastbound service to transfer passengers from Grand Manan intending to proceed to Saint John or other destinations. Passengers from Grand Manan now have a transit service which allows travel either to communities in western Charlotte County or to Saint John where, after calling at the Maritime Bus Terminal, the bus will make on demand stops at the Saint John Regional Hospital, UNB Saint John, Saint Joseph's Hospital, the Provincial Courthouse, and McAllister Mall. On the westbound run, after stopping at St. George and St. Andrews, (with a flag stop for the NB Community College), there is also provision for flag stops at Charlotte County Hospital, Milltown, and downtown St. Stephen. On Fridays and Sundays, the westbound service is extended to Bangor, Maine, with stops at the First Greyhound Terminal and the Concord Coach Terminal for onward transfers to Portland, Boston, (including Logan Airport), and New York. This coach then returns to Canada forming the 4.30 pm service from St. Stephen to Saint John.

In a recent editorial in the local newspaper, the new service was given considerable praise as a hard-won community initiative, but the point was made that journey times could be reduced considerably if the bus did not have to make long meanders off the main highway to serve the coastal communities. This is a problem with the highway system which follows a direct route to Saint John to the north of the coast without calling directly into the coastal communities, as once did the historic highway, which now only exists as a series of unconnected coastal loops. A possible solution under consideration by the South-west New Brunswick Transit Authority, (SWNBTA), which sets the service standard and schedule in co-operation with Maritime Bus, would be the establishment of feeder services, perhaps provided by the existing Dial-A-Ride, from the coast to coach stops adjacent to the nearest highway interchanges, ending the need for the coach to make lengthy detours.

A schedule adjustment to the week day and Saturday return service from St. Stephen to align it with the 4.30 pm return service on Friday and Sunday would also give passengers from Saint John and the other communities a longer day at

the western end of the route in Saint Andrews or St. Stephen allowing for day return excursions to events in St. Andrews or for shopping or hospital visits in St. Stephen. This might also encourage more local use of the existing week day and Saturday service which presently makes its last run to Saint John rather early, leaving St. Stephen at 10.45 am.

Methods to further publicize and market the service are under active consideration. Initially passenger loadings have been somewhat light, but as confidence grows in the community about the reliability of the service and with further schedule adjustments this is expected to rise.

RuralLynx is a pilot project which has received funding from the provincial government as a model for possible future developments in rural regional transit. It is an environmentally and socially responsible way forward which will provide mobility opportunities for people who have difficulty accessing transport, and for those who are seeking an economically viable alternative to the car. The SWNBTA has worked diligently with the communities, their municipal governments and the provincial government to bring the Rural Lynx service on stream. It will take time to change the auto-centric mindset of New Brunswickers where per capita car use and highway expenditure is one of the highest in Canada.

In the words of Stan Choptiany, chair of SWNBTA: “The word on the street is positive. I had one person speak to me this week, (through grateful tears), that having the bus option means she isn’t isolated, and even if she doesn’t use the bus very much, just knowing it is there is a relief and creates possibilities.”

- Michael Perry

How Greater Use of RuralLynx Might be Encouraged

With the new RuralLynx service off the ground, here are some thoughts on how the pilot service could be improved to make it more useful and encourage additional ridership:

- The service was originally designed with seniors as the main target, but it appears that students are the heaviest users, mostly on weekends. Declaring some ‘Seniors Travel Free Days’, where seniors give their contact details in exchange for a free return ticket for themselves and a companion might familiarize seniors with the service and help to establish a contact list for advertising and promotions.
- The offer of a ‘Family Fare’ where up to two young persons under 14 could travel with an adult on a full fare ticket provides a good alternative to situations where a car might have been the preferred transport mode with the resulting loss of a paying passenger.

- Liaison with the Saint John Regional Hospital so that specialist appointments are arranged to fit within the window offered by the bus schedule. At present, this is about four hours.
- Co-operation with Dial-a-Ride so that best use is made of the services offered by both Rural Lynx and Dial-a-Ride. For example, Dial-a-Ride could be used to take bus passengers to and from the nearest bus stop rather than transporting them the entire distance. This would ease the need for Dial-a-Ride to raise extra funds and reduce demands on volunteer drivers. Dial-a-Ride client lists should be examined to determine which clients could be encouraged to include the bus service in meeting their transportation needs.
- Schedule adjustments to allow for passengers from Saint John to enjoy a day return excursion to Saint Andrews. This could be especially attractive during the summer months and during special festive occasions. A package deal which would include bus fare, admission to attractions or boat tours, meals in restaurants, or accommodation in the case of longer stays could also be offered to passengers from Saint John or beyond.
- Wide distribution of the bus schedule both in print, on social media, and the local television station would help to make the service better known.
- Talks to community groups on how to read the bus schedule and how to make best use of the bus might help to educate more of the public on the fundamentals of transit use. Together with schedules, vouchers could be distributed at these events which would be exchanged for free tickets to offer introductory opportunities to enjoy the transit experience.
- The establishment of transit user groups to receive feedback on the service.

- Michael Perry

Integrated Mobility Plan released and approved by Halifax Council

On Friday, December 1, 2017, Halifax Regional Municipality's Integrated Mobility Plan was released to the public as an agenda item for consideration by Committee of the Whole Council. On December 5, 2017, Council unanimously endorsed the plan – a move hailed by active transportation advocates as a culture shift towards improving walking, cycling and public transit in Halifax.

The plan is the culmination of over eighteen months of work, including staff analysis, consultant advice and public consultation. The project was undertaken by an interdisciplinary team of municipal staff led by Rod McPhail, an engineering and planning consultant from Toronto who has a deep appreciation of the interaction between land use, community design and transportation choices.

The team included a representative from Nova Scotia’s Healthy Built Environment Coordinator, as well as municipal engineers, planners and technicians. Now that Council has approved the document, this project structure should help with implementing the recommendations because most of the analysis was done in-house by staff who will continue to be involved with ongoing decisions.

According to the staff cover report, the Halifax Integrated Mobility Plan recognizes that an upward trend of traffic can result because new roads induce new traffic by attracting residents and businesses to outlying areas and enticing transit users to switch to vehicles. It has become clear that no city or region can build its way out of vehicle congestion, unless road improvements are accompanied by pricing signals (such as tolls) or strict land use controls to avoid encouraging dispersed car-dependent land use patterns. The theme of integration permeates the document, and recognizes the need at three levels: Transportation options; Land Use plans, policies, and initiatives; and Municipal departments and orders of government.

Here are some highlights of the Plan’s recommendations:

- A network of Transit Priority Corridors to enable transit vehicles to bypass congestion using methods ranging from traffic signal priority to dedicated bus lanes.
- Design and implementation of dedicated bus lanes along Bayers Road, Young Street, and Robie Street to provide Bus Rapid Transit between Mainland North and Peninsula campuses and hospitals. This method of providing bus service will be the first of many improved bus corridors in Halifax.
- Continued discussions with potential partners with a view to implementing a commuter rail service between Cobequid Road, Bedford, and Halifax as a catalyst for higher-density suburban Transit Oriented Development and downtown employment. There are also long-term recommendations to consider a potential in-street downtown rail extension.
- A commitment to review land use regulations to encourage compact, pedestrian-supportive, mixed use “Complete Communities” clustered around existing and potential transit terminals, including potential commuter rail stations in the Bedford-Halifax corridor.
- A mandate to change municipal design guidelines (the “Red Book”) to enable Complete Streets with increased priority for pedestrians, bicyclists, and public transit, with designs which are sensitive to the needs of all ages and abilities.
- A timeframe to complete major sidewalk connections by 2020, on portions of Herring Cove Road and Dutch Village Road.

- A commitment to complete priority Active Transportation Greenway connections, and an interconnected All Ages and Abilities (“AAA”) Regional Centre Bicycle Network by 2022.
- Increased use of Transportation Demand Management and information technology to reduce the need to travel.
- Potential partnerships to improve suburban and rural mobility, including new carshare locations and approaches for accommodating pedestrians on rural highways in village centres.
- Educational materials for the public and developers explaining the relationship between design, density, transit, and affordability, with interim design guidelines for use by developers and investors. New directions in the IMP must be clearly explained. Inspirational and educational materials can influence decision making long before regulatory changes are adopted.
- A commitment to adopt a curbside priorities approach for the Municipality in order to help guide decisions related to curbside space within the right of way.
- Evaluation of any planned, new additions, or major improvements to the regional road network under a lens that includes using the evaluation scorecard that takes into consideration the four pillars: connected, healthy, affordable, and sustainable.

The direction contained in the Integrated Mobility Plan is meant to be a framework for amending the existing Regional Plan and developing new planning documents to implement the Integrated Mobility Plan direction. In adopting the plan for this purpose, Council would direct staff to include it in a long-term capital outlook, funding options and priorities. At a later date, Regional Council would then discuss the capital outlook and its implications. Specific project approvals would be achieved through future Council decisions on that Long-Term Capital Outlook and annual capital budgets.

In the meantime, the release of the Integrated Mobility Plan for Council consideration is an important milestone and an inspiration for citizens of Halifax and, hopefully, those of other municipalities in Atlantic Canada.

-Marcus Garnet

Growing transit ridership – a challenge in smaller cities

Superior customer experience is key to success

“Transit isn’t for everyone, but it’s more convenient than you think!” says Marie-Claire Pierce. As senior planner for Moncton’s Codiac Transpo, she’s seen a lot of improvement in the quality of the product over the past five years – but, sadly, not much increase in ridership.

Five years have passed since the end of a protracted labour dispute that halted service in Moncton, Riverview and Dieppe in 2012. But despite improved routing and more frequent schedules, the system is still carrying only about 6000 people a day – around the same number as before the five-month lockout.



Codiac Transpo drivers Laurie Ann Horsman and Jim Sumner – and their passengers – are very pleased with the 20 new vehicles in the fleet serving Moncton, Dieppe and Riverview. (PHOTO – Codiac Transpo)

Transit is a tough sell in a small urban region, where traffic isn't really all that problematic and parking is relatively cheap, she says. That means the car culture is firmly entrenched, and there isn't a strong tradition of transit use – despite photos on her office wall showing streetcars on Moncton's main street a century ago.

Codiac now has 20 shiny new vehicles – all recently acquired with the assistance of federal gas tax money over the past

two years. It has enabled the retirement of an equal number of old clunkers – many of them purchased second-hand from other transit operators – and means that fully half of today's active fleet is less than two years old. That spells improved reliability, greater passenger comfort, and reduced operating costs. The challenge, however, is getting the word out to potential new riders.

Codiac Transpo has a limited marketing budget, but the agency aims to use its resources to best advantage – trying different approaches from time to time.

Recently a new consolidated *Riders Guide*, showing all routes and schedules in detail, has been printed.

Although the information is also available online, the customer feedback on the pocket-sized hard copy has been very positive, Marie-Claire says. There will be a revised edition in early January, incorporating



A shiny new bus – with its Codiac Transpo livery not yet applied – parked in the Moncton transit garage in early December. Federal gasoline tax funding helped the City of Dieppe purchase this vehicle. (PHOTO – Ted Bartlett)

latest schedule updates, to be supplemented by social media, radio and outdoor display advertising.

Customer service is also a very important factor in building transit ridership, Marie-Claire insists. When the agency is hiring new operators, this is the most important qualification in the screening process – it actually outranks the class of drivers licence held by the applicant. Operator training programs are very effective at teaching the necessary skills behind the wheel, she says, but the ability to interact effectively with customers isn't something that's as easily taught. And she views a superior rider experience as essential to Codiac Transpo's overall success.

-Ted Bartlett

Maritime Bus celebrates five years in business



Mike Cassidy and Adam Doiron of Coach Atlantic were honoured with an EY Entrepreneurship Award as they prepared to celebrate the fifth anniversary of their Maritime Bus service.

Travelling 10,000 km a day moving passengers and parcels throughout the Maritimes has been challenging, but Maritime Bus president Mike Cassidy has no regrets.

“Being passionate and naïve allows you the feeling of confidence to never accept something can't be done,” he reflects, remembering the now-defunct Acadian Lines announcing it would be leaving the region November 30, 2012, after reportedly racking up a \$12-million deficit over an eight-year period.

With no real business plan, Cassidy and his

people adopted the abandoned routes the day after the Quebec-based carrier pulled out. The rebranded service launched as a subsidiary of his existing company Coach Atlantic on December 1, 2012, and he had only one thought in mind: “Our region needs a passenger and parcel bus service, and we are the ones to deliver it.

“A loyal customer following and a dedicated and supportive employee team has kept us in business”, he says. “Any company involved in this business will tell you the industry is very fragile with low margins, accompanied by capital intensive debt loads.”

Going forward, his thoughts are very clear: “Our commitment is to provide service to the region and honour the 80-year history of bus transportation...remaining passionate and dedicated in meeting the needs of our customers. Five years from now, on our tenth anniversary, we will still be saying that we have no regrets in doing what we do for our Maritime communities.”

Meanwhile, on October 5, Mr. Cassidy and Coach Atlantic CEO Adam Doiron were honoured as Atlantic winners in the business-to-business category at the Ernst&Young Entrepreneur Awards in Moncton. The judges cited their management and strategic direction in leading the company to success as a regional bus transportation provider.

The EY Entrepreneur of the Year program recognizes entrepreneurs for their financial performance, vision, leadership, personal integrity, and entrepreneurial spirit. It is known as the world’s most prestigious business awards program, with regional, national and global awards programs in more than 145 cities in more than 60 countries.

-Ted Bartlett

Marine

A week in Federal Court

Oceanex challenges constitutional ferry rates

A legal challenge to the freight rates charged by the taxpayer-funded constitutional ferry service between the island of Newfoundland and the mainland has had its day in court, but it’s expected to be some time yet before a ruling is issued. Oceanex Inc, a private shipping company headed by Newfoundland businessman Sid Hynes, had filed an application in February 2016, asking the Federal Court of Canada to review the Minister of Transport’s approval of commercial vehicle fares charged by Crown corporation Marine Atlantic.

The arguments before Madam Justice Cecily Strickland occupied a full week in a St. John’s courtroom, beginning on October 23. Given the potential implications, there was surprisingly little media coverage of the proceedings.

Oceanex alleged the subsidies inherent in the Marine Atlantic freight rates create an unfair advantage in the cargo shipping business, allowing the ferry operator to undercut it on shipping rates. Guy Pratte of Borden Ladner Gervais (BLG), representing Oceanex, argued why judicial review, a legal process usually

reserved for decisions by government bodies, is appropriate to address Marine Atlantic's subsidies and shipping rates. Oceanex is not asking the court to set the appropriate freight rates; however, the court is being asked to direct the federal government to exercise its responsibility to examine shipping rates offered by Marine Atlantic in light of the subsidies. The Government of Canada cannot hide behind the delegation of its duty to a third party, the plaintiff maintains.

Transport Canada commissioned a study from the consulting firm CPCS which appears to indicate the impact on the Newfoundland economy from elimination of the subsidies would be less than the current cost of living increases. Oceanex wants Transport Canada to take these findings into account in the setting of Marine Atlantic rates, but the judge was not prepared to accept this report as evidence.

The federal government, the Government of Newfoundland Labrador, and Marine Atlantic all maintained that Oceanex did not have legal standing to make the application for judicial review; that the ferry service is not a government body subject to judicial review; and that the 1949 Terms of Union, in imposing a constitutional burden to subsidize the ferry service, take precedence over legislation and policy. The Marine Atlantic service was represented as being substantially different from that of Oceanex, and those opposing the plaintiff's application all insist that lower subsidies would mean price hikes for goods and services.

In 2015-2016 the Marine Atlantic subsidy was \$115 million for operations and \$236 for capital while in 2016-2017 the subsidy had fallen to \$61 million for operations and \$38 million for capital.

Nadia Effendi, with BLG, claimed the subsidies to Marine Atlantic limit the ability of Oceanex to capture more freight volume, to increase freight rates, and to obtain financing to replace the *Sanderling*, which provides service to St. John's out of Halifax and Montreal. Oceanex apparently believes they have about one-third of the freight market, and cannot increase this because of the subsidies to Marine Atlantic. The Government of Newfoundland Labrador, however, said Oceanex increased its market share from 31.7% in 1999 to 36.5% in 2014.

Transport Action Atlantic has long held the position that a progressive interpretation of the Terms of Union (specifically Term 32) would mean that the cost of moving a commercial trailer of merchandise by Marine Atlantic between North Sydney NS and Port aux Basques NL should be no more than that of road-hauling that same trailer a distance of 180 kilometres – the equivalent of the ferry route between the two ports. Current Marine Atlantic commercial rates are already well in excess of that amount.

- with files from Tom Beckett

Gander Chamber defends Term 32

The Gander and Area Chamber of Commerce is taking a lead role in expressing the concerns of the Newfoundland and Labrador business community over the potential impact of a decrease in federal subsidies to Marine Atlantic.

“Businesses and consumers on the island portion of our province are already paying a much too high price for products shipped to the province,” says chamber chair Debby Yannakidis. “On behalf of the Gander and Area Chamber of Commerce and its 320 business members, we are asking the Federal Court of Canada to stay faithful to our Terms of Union and not grant the request to have the subsidy to Marine Atlantic decreased per Oceanex’s request.”

She pointed out that Marine Atlantic transports the majority of produce and meat, building supplies, and dangerous goods to the island. Carriers choose Marine Atlantic because it offers two commercial trips daily on the short-sea route to Port aux Basques, as opposed to Oceanex’s three trips weekly directly to St. John’s. Any decrease in federal support to Marine Atlantic will inevitably have a detrimental impact on the cost of living, she concluded, because it would mean an increase of two to three times the current commercial rates on the ferry – which will doubtless be passed along to the consumer.

Matt Coleman, director of wholesale and distribution with the province-wide grocery chain Colemans says “Colemans is opposed to any action against the Marine Atlantic subsidy that could possibly have a negative impact on our customers in form of higher costs or reduced services. A reduction in the federal subsidy would result in a breach of the 1948 Terms of Union agreement which was put in place to ensure Newfoundland was put on a level transportation playing field. Term 32 was intended to treat the Cabot Strait as an extension of the national railway network. In current day, the rates on Marine Atlantic are much higher than those set out as a guide in the Terms of Union. If anything these rates should be decreased – not increased as requested by Oceanex.”

The Gander and Area Chamber of Commerce, representing more than 300 members, views itself as an advocacy voice for businesses in rural Newfoundland and Labrador. The chamber promotes and improves the economic climate of the area, while supporting the needs and concerns of the business community.

-Ted Bartlett

Oceanex launches war of words against Marine Atlantic

Oceanex clearly isn’t waiting for Judge Cecily Strickland to rule on its application for review of Marine Atlantic’s commercial rates. The private freight carrier has already moved to the next phase in its war against federally-supported rates for

commercial truckers. Using a combination of social media, newspaper insertions and outdoor display advertising, the campaign is evidently aimed at winning support for its objectives among the general public in Newfoundland and Labrador, and discrediting both the management of Marine Atlantic and the federal government.

“Think your ferry ride is expensive? Well you’re right, and you have Marine Atlantic to thank,” reads one post on Twitter, linking to a webpage that proclaims Oceanex creates “an ocean of opportunity” and operates on “an ocean of accountability”. Other tweets pose rhetorical questions about who really benefits from the subsidies supporting Marine Atlantic, suggesting that the taxpayer dollars are “going to the bottom lines of large private businesses.” And, an advertisement published in the St. John’s *Telegram* in early December makes the dramatic but dubious claim that if Marine Atlantic charged “proper rates” for commercial traffic, “tourists and you could travel for free.”

Ironically, Oceanex itself is a large private business, controlled by one of the province’s wealthiest entrepreneurs. And, in reality the most costly slice of the Marine Atlantic subsidy pie goes to acquiring, maintaining, operating and crewing a fleet that meets the stringent requirements of passenger service – not to mention the extensive terminal infrastructure and other onshore support services that a ferry service demands. For its part, Oceanex doesn’t even carry truck drivers.

Marine Atlantic has so far remained silent, and has not risen to its own defence. Perhaps it’s because they’d rather refrain from public debate on a matter that is before the courts, or simply are taking the position that being a Crown corporation makes it inappropriate for them to engage in verbal warfare with the private sector.

-Ted Bartlett

Marine Atlantic cost recovery hits 70% Corporation holds annual public meeting

Marine Atlantic’s customer satisfaction rates increased to 77 per cent during the 12-month period ending March 31, 2017, and on-time performance rates improved to 91 per cent. The vessel reliability rate stood at 99 per cent, and the Newfoundland ferry service recorded its second consecutive year of growth, the first back-to-back passenger increases in almost two decades.

There was quite a bit of good news to report as the Crown corporation held its annual public meeting in St. John’s on November 6. However, there was one very sobering statistic presented by board chair Kris Parsons and CEO Paul Griffin. During the last fiscal year, Marine Atlantic achieved a record 70 per cent cost recovery, “falling within the targeted range as directed by the Government of Canada.” It generated \$111.7 million in revenue, while the service cost \$209.4 million to operate. The federal subsidy for the year was \$94 million.

The cost recovery ratio has risen steadily over the past two decades, climbing from approximately 45 per cent in the late 1990s. During that period, user rates have soared at triple the national inflation rate – in sharp contrast to tolls on PEI’s Confederation Bridge, which are tied to the cost-of-living index.



Marine Atlantic’s customer satisfaction levels and on-time performance continue to improve – but the cost recovery targets demanded by Transport Canada continue to soar.

During the last federal election campaign, Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau publicly lambasted the Harper Tories for their fixation on cost recovery for the ferry service, and promised that a Liberal government would address the issue. They haven’t: Since the election there have been two rate increases at Marine Atlantic – both well in excess of the cost-of-living index. A third is anticipated for 2018, although it had not been announced as of this writing.

- Ted Bartlett

New ferries arrive for St-Pierre-Miquelon

It’s a whole new era in transportation for residents of the overseas French territories of St. Pierre and Miquelon. The islands, located just a few miles off Newfoundland’s south coast, have a total population of about 6000. But now they are about to have a modern passenger and vehicle ferry service running to Fortune NL.

CBC News reported that two new vessels – the *Nordet* and *Suroit* – arrived on November 28 from Turkey. Each can transport about 200 passengers, 15 cars and three tractor-trailers. The new ferries replace an existing boat that could not accommodate vehicles, and operated only from April to December.

Having two vessels on the run will also mean improved access to Miquelon without travelling through St. Pierre.

The mayor of Fortune, Charles Penwell, is anticipating a large increase in both tourism and freight traffic through his community. The newly-inked trade agreement between Canada and the EU is a significant factor here, as this service will mean access to the European community will be literally only an hour away.

Both vessels will undergo two weeks of sea trials before beginning their service to Fortune, but it was unclear as to when service might actually commence. Terminal facilities were reportedly not quite ready for start-up.

-Ted Bartlett

The Cat – Season 2 ends on a high note, despite challenges

Earlier last year, we reported on the beginning of the newly revived Cat ferry service between Yarmouth NS and Portland Maine. Bay Ferries was highly optimistic about the passenger numbers for the upcoming season, given the number of bookings by that time. At the end of June 2017, bookings were trending to double the 2016 passenger volume. Unfortunately, on June 28th one of the four main engines on the vessel failed, for which the engine manufacturer (MTU) accepted full responsibility.

This forced a restructuring of the sailing schedule while repairs were carried out on the vessel. By the end of the season, the ferry had sailed only 83 of the 112 days originally scheduled – a 25% decrease. However, despite the reduced number of sailings, the passenger numbers ended at 41,500, a 17% increase from the 2016 season. The service averaged 500 passengers per crossing in 2017, which was an increase from the 344 passengers per crossing averaged in 2016. So the season closed with positive results and plenty of optimism, even in spite of the unforeseen hurdles. Bay Ferries vice-president and general manager Jim Wilson credited all those within the company who worked hard to overcome those challenges, saying “we could not have achieved these results without the herculean efforts from our entire Bay Ferries team.”

-Tim Hayman

Air

Air Travellers bill grounded by Senate

Marc Garneau’s hopes for passage before Christmas of his proposed air passenger rights legislation failed to take off during a Senate hearing in early December. The Canadian Press reported that the session was marked by strong rebukes and a

fiery exchange between the transport minister and a former Liberal party operative.

The Liberals had been pushing the upper chamber to pass a transportation bill that would set the stage for a new air passenger bill of rights, make changes to rail safety rules, and affect grain shipments. Transport committee members, however, killed any hope the minister had of convincing them to fast-track the legislation, putting off until next year any changes that would affect air travellers caught up in delays or bounced from flights.

There's also growing public concern that the legislation won't achieve what many advocates have been asking for – give travellers some clearly defined rights when they feel they have been wronged by an airline. For his part, Minister Garneau told the senators that was never his intention. The bill as proposed is merely designed to give the Canadian Transportation Agency a framework on which to base regulations.

The travelling public in Canada is becoming increasingly agitated by horror stories ranging from denied boarding to being trapped for hours on board an airplane sitting on the tarmac going nowhere. While much of the anger has been directed against the country's "dominant carrier" (one particularly nasty episode was reported in our last *Bulletin*), Air Canada is not alone in the customer outrage department. Both WestJet and Air Transat have been on the receiving end of strong criticism in recent months.

Air Passenger Rights is an advocacy group founded by Gabor Lukacs of Halifax, specifically to address airline travel issues. Among their many website items at <http://airpassengerrights.ca/> is a recent post entitled "5 Reasons not to Trust the Canadian Transportation Agency". It alleges that the watchdog serves the interests of air carriers more than those of air travellers.

One prominent Atlantic Canada journalist who might endorse that suspicion is Russell Wangersky. Writing in the St. John's *Telegram* on December 5, he described his outrage as he peeled back the covers on Air Canada's overbooking practices when he was stranded at Halifax airport for a day due to mechanical issues.

"I understand it's a business. I understand it's about profits," he wrote. "But passengers need some protection. In Europe, there are cash penalties for airlines that don't provide prompt services to the customers they inconvenience. It's clearly time for that here. Cash is apparently the only language airlines like Air Canada speak."

-Ted Bartlett

St. John's Airport celebrates 75 years

Major expansion program underway



Air travel hadn't become the dominant mode it is today when this photo of the tiny YYT terminal building – then known as Torbay – was taken back in 1954. Note the TCA logo over the vintage Chevy at right, and the unpaved parking lot. (PHOTO – Old St. John's via Twitter)

It was originally constructed as a military airfield during World War II, but it wasn't long before commercial aviation made its presence felt at what is now St. John's International Airport. Less than a year after the first military aircraft touched down on a still-incomplete runway, a Trans

Canada Airlines Lockheed Lodestar inaugurated the first passenger service on May 1, 1942. In 2017 the rapidly growing airport observed its 75th anniversary.

Originally known as Torbay Airport, it was named after the small fishing village nearby. The military controlled the facility until the war ended, but both the US and Canadian air forces continued to maintain a significant presence during the early years of the Cold War. The small wooden terminal building built during the war was eventually replaced by a more modern brick structure in 1958, and the TCA Lodestars gave way to larger propeller-driven aircraft such as Viscounts and Vikings. The airline rebranded itself as Air Canada, but the number of passengers using YYT remained relatively small.

Not so today. The St. John's International Airport now handles approximately 70 per cent of non-resident arrivals to the island, with nearly 90 flight arrivals and departures most days. And despite several major expansions, the facilities have been hard pressed to deal with the crowds, especially at peak periods.

As the 75th anniversary was celebrated, the airport authority was eagerly looking forward to 2018, when the latest expansion to the still relatively new terminal building becomes operational. It will feature a much larger security clearance and departure area, with an eventual total of 13 food, beverage, and retail concessions – including for the first time a full-service restaurant inside the security zone.

It's a sign of the times, reflecting a preference by today's air travellers to arrive early at the airport, clear security, and then relax in the departure area. But relaxing has often become a bit challenging of late. During peak travel times, even

finding a seat becomes difficult. Airport management expects the “Expansion YYT” project will change all that.

The current phase – on schedule for completion in the spring of 2018 – will add 145,000 square feet of space in an extension to the east of the existing terminal building. It’s part of a 10-year, \$200-million investment, which will eventually double the size of the terminal. The principal source of funds is the airport improvement fee, which increased from \$30 to \$35 per boarding passenger effective July 1.

By the time Expansion YYT is complete, the airport authority projects it will be handling two million passengers annually.

-Ted Bartlett

Meet a Member **Yves Bourgeois**



The newest addition to Transport Action Atlantic’s board of directors is a distinguished New Brunswick academic, with widely recognized expertise in the area of sustainable and inclusive transportation policy. Recently appointed dean of studies at the Shippagan Campus of Université de Moncton, Yves Bourgeois was previously director of the Urban and Community Studies Institute and professor of economics at the University of New Brunswick. He remains an adjunct professor at UNB.

His main areas of research revolve around innovation and economic development, and how regions create value and jobs from technological change. He also studies nudges that shift people’s choices of transportation mode, as well as smart cities and how municipalities leverage digital technologies to improve services.

Yves chaired New Brunswick’s Rural and Urban Transportation Advisory Committee, mandated by the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation (ESIC) to develop an inclusive and sustainable transportation strategy for the province, which has just been released.

A Rhodes Scholar, Yves holds a PhD in urban planning (regional and international development) from UCLA, and masters degrees from Edinburgh and Oxford universities. He also has ten years experience outside academia in both the private and public sectors, including work with Microsoft and the Parliament of Canada.

In Memoriam

Atlantic region loses long-time rail advocate



**Iain Dunlop
1945-2017**

Transport Action Atlantic is mourning the untimely passing of a long-time board member and rail advocate. Iain Dunlop of Bristol NB had faithfully served as TAA's secretary for over a decade. He died at the Upper Valley Hospital in Waterville on October 24, at the age of 72. While he had confronted a variety of health issues for several years, the loss came as a shock to his colleagues. He had participated in the TAA executive teleconference in August, and was looking forward to attending the fall board meeting in Halifax.

Born in Aberdeen, Scotland, Iain came to Canada at a very young age, and spent his formative years in a number of New Brunswick communities. He graduated from Grand Falls Regional High School, and went on to pursue studies at teachers' college where he met his wife Marlene. They settled first in Bath, and later in Bristol, where they both started their careers.

As a high school teacher for 32 years, Iain was a well-recognized community leader in New Brunswick's Carleton County, where he coached both baseball and basketball in addition to his transportation interests. He joined the board of TAA in 2005, and was elected secretary a year later – a role that continued until his passing. He was a true supporter and promoter of the cause of better transportation in his province, the Atlantic region, and for all of Canada. He will be dearly missed within TAA.

Iain was also very active with the Shogomoc Railway Society and the McAdam Historical Restoration Commission.

Besides his wife Marlene, he is survived by his son Scott, daughters Tanya and Nicole, and five grandchildren.

A New Award for Transportation Advocacy



The John Pearce Award – TAA has launched a new award in honour of John Pearce, recognizes his outstanding contribution to TAA since its inception. The award will be given annually to an individual who has made an outstanding contribution to public transportation advocacy in the Atlantic provinces. Appropriately, the first ever award was presented to its namesake. This plaque will be on display at the VIA Rail station in Halifax. [See story on pg. 3]
(PHOTO – Tim Hayman)