



# ***The Bulletin***

TRANSPORT ACTION ATLANTIC

SPRING - SUMMER 2018

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## ***VIA Rail at 40***

***The good, the bad, and the ugly***



(PHOTOS – Tim Hayman, with top right inset from early VIA timetable)

In 2018 Canada's national passenger rail service is marking the 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its creation. Some critics will ask if there's really anything to celebrate after four decades of retrenchment and cutbacks. But optimists think there just might be a headlight at the end of the tunnel. Our coverage begins on page 7.



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Box 268, Dartmouth NS B2Y 3Y3

Editorial Committee: Don MacLeod, Tim Hayman and Ted Bartlett

### **TAA Executive**

Ted Bartlett	President	Moncton NB	386-3615
Ashley Morton	Vice-president	Halifax NS	999-7017
Donald MacLeod	Treasurer	Halifax NS	876-7960
Tim Hayman	Secretary/Webmaster	Halifax NS	818-9948
Christine Mills Garnet	Membership Secretary	Dartmouth NS	461-0301

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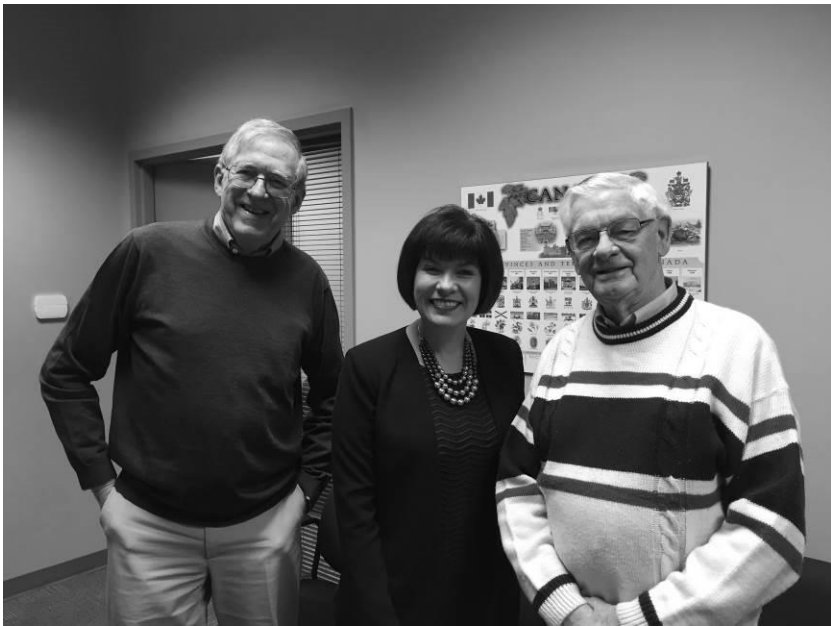


VIA is celebrating its 40<sup>th</sup> birthday, and it's hard not to notice! "40 Years/Ans" branding has showed up all over the system, including on a multitude of locomotives and passenger cars, and on signs like this one above the customer service desk in Montreal's Central Station (PHOTO – Ted Bartlett)

# Advocacy in Action

## **TAA continues dialogue with politicians – and others**

Plenty of issues out there to keep us engaged as public transportation advocates these days! Although the federal government has loosened the purse strings considerably on funding for VIA Rail in its latest budget, there's a complete absence of any commitment to Atlantic Canada. Meanwhile, a court challenge that threatened the constitutional ferry rates to Newfoundland ended favourably for consumers, but the cost of the ferry crossing is still unacceptably high with the Feds continuing to demand higher cost recovery by Marine Atlantic. And, the "car culture" remains firmly entrenched throughout the region, with maximum effort required to extract minimal government funding for transit projects, while millions upon millions of taxpayer dollars seem to be readily available for new highway twinning and interchanges.



**Ted Bartlett and Howard Easton met with Moncton-area MP Health Minister Ginette Petitpas Taylor in January.**

Since our last issue we've been maintaining dialogue with carriers, politicians and municipalities as we strive to heighten awareness of the issues and further our agenda. There's a provincial election in New Brunswick in September, and a federal vote looms on the horizon for next year. With that in mind, we've been seeking to get public transportation recognized as an issue in NB, and talk transport with the 32 Liberal MPs who'll be seeking re-election in 2019. Over the

past six months we've had face-to-face conversation with MPs Andy Fillmore, Darren Fisher, Darrell Samson and Bill Casey from Nova Scotia; Pat Finnigan, Wayne Long, and Health Minister Ginette Petitpas Taylor from New Brunswick; and Ken McDonald from Newfoundland.

In advance of the New Brunswick election we'll be seeking to identify where the parties stand on convenient, affordable and sustainable public transportation. There's already been a meeting with PC leader Blaine Higgs, and one is tentatively set with Green Party leader David Coon. Other encounters are being pursued.

We've also had dialogue on the municipal level in recent months, notably with the towns of Sackville and Channel-Port aux Basques, and the cities of Moncton and Dieppe. And, the Town of Riverview has recently become TAA's newest corporate member.



**Tim Hayman and Ashley Morton, with VIA's Jacques Fauteux and Carole Grenier following a meeting at the Halifax Station on May 1.  
(PHOTO – Ted Bartlett)**

There have also been meetings or telephone discussions with various carriers and transit organizations, including VIA Rail, Marine Atlantic, Halifax Stanfield International Airport, and Metrobus.

*- Ted Bartlett*

# TAA'S AGM held in Moncton



**Well-known New Brunswick entertainer Marshall Button was the featured guest speaker at TAA's 2018 annual general meeting.**

There was something a little different on the agenda this year as Transport Action Atlantic held its annual general meeting in Moncton on May 5. Instead of the panel discussions that have been a principal attraction for the past several years, we were fortunate to have well-known New Brunswick actor, comedian, playwright, and artistic director Marshall Button as our guest speaker. Marshall is also a rail travel enthusiast who was born and raised on New Brunswick's North Shore, so he's acutely aware of how important the trains are to so many communities that have limited travel options. He's also enjoyed riding the rails between major centres in the central Canadian corridor, having shared his experiences in several of his recent newspaper columns. As such, he gave his views on why this country needs passenger trains – a message delivered with his characteristic sense of humour.

The 2018 AGM also included presentation of the John Pearce Award recognizing outstanding contribution to public transportation advocacy. As reported elsewhere in this issue, the recipient was Stan Choptiany of St. Andrews NB, who gave a comprehensive report on the project that earned him the award, as well as sharing his views on rural transit in general.

The election of directors added John Cormier of Charlottetown PEI to the board, while Clark Morris of Bridgetown NS decided to step down after many years of service.

*- Ted Bartlett*

# Transit advocate wins 2018 John Pearce Award



**South West New Brunswick Transit Authority chair Stan Choptiany of St. Andrews NB (at right) receives the 2018 John Pearce Award from Michael Perry, a long-time member of Transport Action Atlantic's board of directors. This year's outstanding public transportation advocacy award recognizes Mr. Choptiany's leadership in returning daily bus service to rural Charlotte County.**

The chair of the South West New Brunswick Transit Authority is the 2018 winner of Transport Action Atlantic's John Pearce Award, recognizing outstanding contribution to public transportation advocacy in the region. Stan Choptiany was honoured at TAA's annual general meeting, held in Moncton on May 5.

The former mayor of St. Andrews was cited as someone who initially saw the need, was instrumental in establishing the transit authority, and then worked diligently as its chair, guiding it through the labyrinth of government funding sources while tirelessly maintaining contact with potential riders.

"Stan has clearly demonstrated his belief in rural public transit as an essential public service," said long-time TAA director Michael Perry, who presented the award. "During his term as mayor, Stan came to the realization that a growing number of his constituents were prevented from full participation in the resources and benefits of both society and the economy because they lacked the freedom to

readily access transportation. These included a broad demographic: seniors no longer wishing to drive, young people, particularly of college student age, people with disabilities, newly-arrived immigrants, and those unable to drive or whose financial situation precluded the purchase of a car. Their growing isolation from a society where mobility is a necessity became an increasing cause of concern, which resulted in many being unable to access timely health care, employment, and post-secondary education.”

The John Pearce Award was created to honour Transport Action Atlantic’s president emeritus, who stepped down in 2017 from active participation after 40 years of dedicated public transportation advocacy. It is awarded annually to an individual or group to recognize an outstanding contribution, consistent with John’s life-long passion.

“Stan Choptiany’s ‘never-say-die’ leadership ultimately achieved the return of daily bus service linking rural communities in Charlotte County with Saint John,” says TAA president Ted Bartlett. “Without his tireless efforts, last September’s start-up of RuralLynx almost certainly would not have happened. We thank him for his contribution, and will continue to support his efforts to make this service a success, and a model for transit in other rural areas of Canada.”

## ***Rail News***

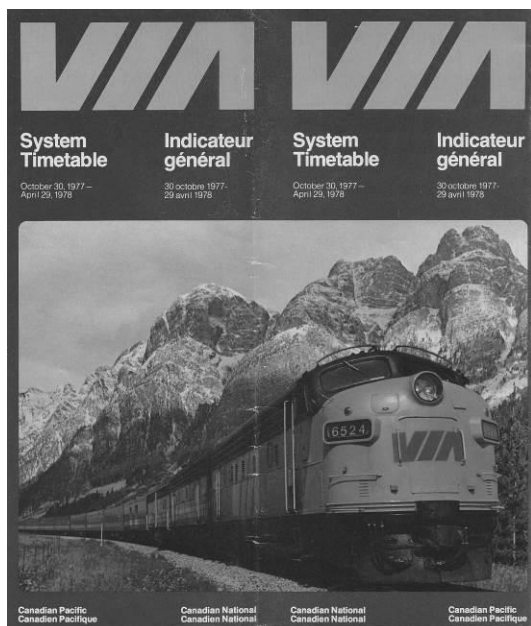
### **VIA celebrating 40<sup>th</sup> birthday ...but it hasn’t been a roadbed of roses**

On April 1, 1978, a Government of Canada order in council created a new Crown corporation. VIA Rail Canada had been established as a subsidiary of Canadian National Railways (then also publicly-owned) the previous year, but now attained new status as a parent corporation under the *Financial Administration Act*. It was the next step in a government initiative to control the cost of supporting passenger rail across Canada, with a primary objective of addressing duplication of services. The intent was for the new corporation to assume full responsibility for the passenger trains operated at that time by CN and CP Rail. It turned out to be a phased-in process, with the first step being consolidation of marketing. Eventually VIA absorbed other managerial responsibilities, first from CN and later from CP. The new corporation took ownership of passenger rolling stock as well, including locomotives, and train crews eventually became VIA employees.

This year, VIA is holding a celebration to mark the anniversary. And there actually *is* a little bit of positive icing to decorate the birthday cake – the first in a long time. This year’s federal budget included a major commitment to replace the entire VIA fleet in the Quebec City-Windsor Corridor, with particular emphasis on the Toronto-Montreal-Ottawa triangle. It’s the first significant investment by

any government in new passenger rail equipment since the earliest days of the corporation's history. For the most part, it's been a long, sad tale of neglect and retrenchment.

While we don't mean to rain on VIA's birthday parade, it is significant to note just how much passenger rail in Canada has deteriorated over the past four decades. This country's struggling network now ranks dead last among the G7 nations – even well behind the United States, which hasn't exactly done a stellar job in keeping up with the rest of the industrialized world either.



**The System Timetable in effect at VIA's inception on April 1, 1978, was a far more robust document than what remains today.**

It's interesting – but rather depressing – to compare the substantial VIA timetable that was in effect on April 1, 1978, with the tiny pocket-sized versions that have been appearing in recent years. (Come to think of it, we haven't seen a printed copy in a while – perhaps paper editions are no longer relevant in the digital age.)

Four decades later, Canada's rail passenger network is but a shadow of its former self, with the long distance services being particularly decimated. In its first year, the new corporation rationalized the transcontinental services, an initiative that appeared to have effected some significant economies with little

detrimental effect on service. Passenger train ridership grew from just under five million in 1977 to peak at nearly eight million in 1981. But then came the first of an ongoing series of budget cuts by successive governments – both Liberal and Conservative. The most dramatic service reductions came in January 1990 under the Mulroney Tories, and the annual passenger count plunged to less than four million.

Forty years on, some fundamental flaws remain in VIA's very existence. There still has been no act of Parliament to give the corporation an explicit mandate or legal framework outlining its governance powers and responsibilities, assure it of stable and predictable annual government funding, or allow it any statutory negotiating power with the freight railways over whose tracks most of its trains must travel. Several governments have made promises, some have even made the



first moves toward a VIA Rail Canada Act, and there have been also a number of private member initiatives – but all have either died on the order paper or been defeated by a partisan government majority.

It would be blatantly unfair to blame the decline of passenger rail in Canada entirely on the management of VIA Rail. Some CEOs were political appointees, not particularly well-suited to the challenge, while others left a more positive legacy than most. But for nearly all of its existence, VIA has been treated like an unwanted child by successive governments. Transport ministers over the past 40 years – with a few notable exceptions – have paid scant attention to passenger rail.

The physical plant and rolling stock have deteriorated, frequencies have been reduced, and schedules have slowed. On April 1, 1978, the fastest train between Canada's two largest cities covered the 335-mile route in 4½ hours, with several others requiring only slightly longer. Today most Toronto-Montreal runs are scheduled for more than five hours, and delays due to freight congestion are endemic. At VIA's inception there were two daily transcontinental trains running daily year-round on two different routes between Montreal/Toronto and Vancouver. Over time that's been reduced to a single tri-weekly train in peak season. For more than half the year it only runs twice a week – and its on-time performance is a national embarrassment. Major population centres like Calgary, Regina, Thunder Bay and Sudbury are no longer served.

CN LINES

LIAISONS CN

8. HALIFAX – SYDNEY – RIVIÈRE-DU-LOUP – (MONTREAL)

		① 601-604	★ SCOTIAN 11-19	★ OCEAN 15		★ OCEAN 14-18	★ SCOTIAN 12	① 603-602
Km	Mi	Daily Quot.	Daily Quot.	Daily Quot.		Daily Quot.	Daily Quot.	Daily Quot.
0	0	19 20	17 15	11 30	Dp Halifax, N.S. (6)	AT/HA Ar	15 55	14 00
6	3	① 19 25			Armdale	①		① 13 53
10	6	② 19 29			Rockingham	②		② 13 49
17	11	③ 19 35			Bedford	③	⑥ 22 17	③ 13 42
25	16	④ 19 42	⑦ 17 40		Windsor Jct.	④		④ 13 35
32	22	⑤ 19 58			Elmsdale	⑤		⑤ 13 24
62	38	⑥ 20 05			Milford	⑥		⑥ 13 08
68	42	⑦ 20 10			Shubenacadie	⑦		⑦ 13 03
75	47	⑧ 20 17			Stewiack	⑧		⑧ 12 57
103	64	20 45	18 40	12 50	Ar Truro (6)		14 35	21 10
0	0	Ar 03 05	11 35	06 30	Dp Sydney, N.S. (6)		21 30	03 05
103	64		19 10	13 00	Dp Truro (6)		14 05	21 00
178	111		① 20 15		Oxford Jct.	①		19 40
199	124		② 20 35	② 14 25	Springhill Jct.	②	② 12 30	19 20
			10 00	10 00	Dp Charlottetown, P.E.I. Bus (15)		15 55	23 10
227	141		21 05	14 55	Aunherst, N.S. (15)		12 05	18 55
243	151		21 20	15 10	Sackville, N.B.		11 45	18 40
304	190		22 25	16 10	Ar Moncton		10 55	17 50
			20 20	13 50	Dp Saint John, N.B. (16)		12 05	19 50
304	190		22 45	16 30	Dp Moncton, N.B. (16) (13)	Ar	10 35	17 30
397	247			17 46	Rogersville			16 15
422	269		00 20	18 20	Newcastle		08 50	15 40
503	313		01 20	19 30	Bathurst		07 50	14 35
549	341			20 08	Jacquet River			③ 13 53
604	376		02 50	21 00	Ar Campbellton, N.B.	AT/HA Dp	06 20	13 05
			03 10	21 25	Dp	Ar	06 00	12 40
625	388		① 02 33	20 45	Ar Matapédia, Qué. (7)	ET/HE Dp		11 10

This page from the 1977-78 VIA timetable shows two full-service trains daily between Halifax and Montreal, and twice-daily service to and from Sydney.

Closer to home, the 1977-78 timetable showed two full-service trains daily between Halifax and Montreal, plus a third overnight Saint John-Montreal run. Local services ran twice daily between Sydney and Halifax, and Moncton and Saint John, and there were also daily Halifax-Yarmouth and Moncton-Edmundston RDC routes. Today we have only a sorry remnant – the tri-weekly *Ocean* on a considerably slower schedule mostly due to deteriorated track. Even VIA management acknowledges that it isn't meeting local needs.



**VIA 6436, one of five F40 locomotives decorated for VIA's 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary, trails on Train 15 at Moncton. When these locomotives first arrived with VIA, they operated on both the *Atlantic* and *Ocean*, with both trains running daily. (PHOTO – Tim Hayman)**

The state of affairs in 2018 is really little cause for celebration, but there is renewed hope for better times ahead. The current government appears to recognize that passenger rail has been badly neglected, and is evidently prepared to make some much-needed investment – at least in the corridor. But whether they are willing to extend that vision coast-to-coast in a nationwide rebuilding of the “national dream” remains to be seen.

The present management team at VIA is growth-oriented – in the corridor, at least – with a clear focus on customer service. The CEO would obviously like to be remembered as the guy who rescued passenger rail in Canada from the brink of oblivion. There's no question he's leaving his mark on the corporation, and he actually appears to enjoy interacting with fellow passengers on board the trains – which he rides regularly. It remains to be seen whether his vision of a dedicated passenger line between Ottawa and Toronto, bypassing CN's freight-congested

Kingston Subdivision, has legs. The Trudeau government remains non-committal on that question, but has earmarked money to further study the costly proposal, which would use a long-abandoned CP right-of-way through sparsely-populated territory between Smiths Falls and Peterborough.

So, yes, let's celebrate 40 years of VIA – but do not forget what has disappeared over that time. Some of what's been lost we know will never return – but we must continue to advocate, to encourage, and to criticize those in authority whenever the occasion or the opportunity warrants. The endangered state of passenger rail – after all – is the key reason our predecessor organization Transport 2000 was founded back in the 1970s. And while the pendulum is swinging in a positive direction at the moment, we must not relax our vigilance in the warm glow of 40 birthday candles.

-Ted Bartlett

## **Our Canada includes passenger trains... ...and it doesn't end at Quebec City.**

After four decades of neglect by successive federal governments, there finally seems to be some significant support in Ottawa for passenger rail. In certain parts of Canada – that is. That was the gist of a significant appropriation contained in the Trudeau Government's Budget 2018, tabled on February 27.

The first commitment to new rolling stock in 40 years promises a complete renewal of VIA Rail Canada's aging and tired corridor fleet. No actual cost figures were given because of the pending procurement process, but it's clearly an investment in the billion-plus category. VIA subsequently posted a summary of the fleet renewal program on its website, and on June 18 announced a short-list of four qualified suppliers that will have until October 5 to submit proposals. A contract is expected to be awarded before the end of 2018, with the first of the new rolling stock in service within four years.

In short, the plan calls for 32 new bi-directional trainsets for use in the Quebec City to Windsor corridor. Primarily the new rolling stock will replace the so-called LRC equipment, built in the early 1980s, and now rapidly approaching the end of its useful life. Many LRC cars will need to be retired before the new orders are delivered.

But the oldest equipment on VIA's roster isn't destined for the scrapyard. A total of 75 stainless steel cars originally constructed by the Budd company of Philadelphia – some dating back as far as 1946 – are getting a new lease on life.

Built to last, they are being completely refurbished to modern standards, in the expectation they will continue in service for many years to come, primarily on VIA's flagship train the *Canadian*.



**The troublesome British-built Renaissance cars used in VIA Rail's downsized Atlantic Canada service were never designed for life in Canada, and are in urgent need of replacement. But Budget 2018 makes provision only for fleet renewal in the Quebec City-Windsor corridor.**

It's all very positive news from a government that was quite outspoken on passenger rail while in opposition, but got off to a very slow start following its election in 2015. In fact, VIA wasn't even mentioned in Transport Minister Marc Garneau's mandate letter. And the first two budgets from the Trudeau Liberals allocated only miniscule amounts to study the requirements for fleet renewal and the dedicated tracks/high frequency rail (HFR) proposal. This time, though, there's a solid commitment to proceed with renewal of the corridor fleet, although the government hasn't gone beyond allocating \$8 million for further study of HFR.

But what's not so encouraging about VIA's plan and Budget 2018 is the absence of any reference to replacing the troublesome British-built Renaissance cars that are the tired workhorses of the *Ocean* – the company's only remaining train in Atlantic Canada. Never intended for life in Canada, that equipment has not improved with age. One Renaissance trainset was out of service for some three months this past winter after a major electrical failure at Halifax in early January. The passengers had to be loaded unto buses, and the train deadheaded back to Montreal for repairs.

In response to questions asked during their annual public meeting, VIA has now indicated that the Renaissance equipment in Eastern Canada will be withdrawn from service by 2021, with plans to re-equip the service with stainless steel Budd equipment by the fall of 2020. How exactly that will work, given the limited availability of Budd equipment during the peak season, remains to be seen.

The once-daily *Ocean* now runs only three times a week on a schedule several hours slower than 20 years ago. It simply isn't adequate to sustain and build ridership, or even provide a useful service to Maritimers – a reality that VIA management now readily acknowledges.

Transport Action Atlantic is unequivocal about what this region needs. Nothing less than a daily connection to that new and improved corridor service will be acceptable. Yes – our Canada includes passenger trains – and Canada does not end at Quebec City!

TAA is using every opportunity to advocate with our regional MPs, municipalities, chambers of commerce, and provincial governments in our efforts to get everyone on board. Services to Atlantic Canada need new equipment, upgraded track, and faster schedules – and the time to plan for it is now.

Passenger rail in Canada is on a roll – and we must be part of it!

- Ted Bartlett

## **VIA Rail's 2017-2021 Corporate Plan: what's in it for Atlantic Canada?**

Early in 2018 VIA released their 2017-2021 Corporate Plan. These documents, released each year and looking ahead for the next five, offer a synopsis of the state of the railway and tend to provide insight into what VIA is looking at moving forward. In the last few years these plans have focused heavily on VIA's need for new equipment, and some of the challenges (e.g. deteriorating on time performance on many routes, rising costs) and successes (e.g. ridership growth), as well as a look at their plans across the entire system. This latest corporate plan, which can be found in full online ([http://www.viarail.ca/sites/all/files/media/pdfs/About\\_VIA/our-company/corporate-plan/CorporatePlan\\_2017-2021.pdf](http://www.viarail.ca/sites/all/files/media/pdfs/About_VIA/our-company/corporate-plan/CorporatePlan_2017-2021.pdf)) has some specific items of interest for Atlantic Canada.

There is a blurb describing the operation of the *Ocean*, which has some new phrasing this year. It reads: "During the holiday season, VIA Rail adds extra departures." That is a change from past years, which used past tense phrasing (e.g. last year it said "during the holiday season, VIA Rail *added* six extra departures").

This seems to imply that the holiday frequency expansion is now considered a standard annual practice. This is further confirmed in the following section.

Under "operational issues" for the Ocean, there is a notable recognition that VIA's reduction of frequency on the Ocean has been problematic (*italics added for emphasis*):

"While the Ocean has maintained a respectable OTP, frequencies were reduced from six one-way departures per week to three one-way departures. With this reduction, the Ocean *does not have sufficient frequencies to deliver an adequate travel alternative* in the intercity and regional markets serving between Quebec City and among Rivière-du-Loup, Campbellton, Moncton and Halifax. Additional frequencies however, in response to consumer demand, *are added* during the Holiday season. VIA Rail is currently investigating the possibility of an eastern intercity corridor service from Halifax to Campbellton, as further detailed in Section 3.4.4 of this Plan."

VIA was originally reluctant to admit that the 3/week schedule was problematic, and spent the first years after the reduction insisting that they had somehow improved the service by doing so. Despite this recognition, they are not entertaining resuming daily operation, but are instead looking at launching shorter daily intercity services in the region. Section 3.4.4, referenced above, reads as follows:

"i. Eastern Intercity In 2012, the Ocean's frequencies were cut from six to three per week. With this reduction of frequencies, the Ocean does not have sufficient frequencies to deliver an adequate travel alternative...VIA Rail is currently exploring an eastern intercity corridor service from Halifax to Campbellton, which would fill in the frequency gap that was created when the Ocean was reduced from six to three weekly frequencies and benefit local travellers. This initiative is pending infrastructure updates and equipment testing by the host railway. As previously noted, passenger rail service is important to the communities of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, as illustrated by this excerpt from the CTA Review: 'Passenger rail service may be the only viable transportation option for many residents living in communities in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick . . . The need for this passenger service is becoming more acute given the ageing demographic in Atlantic Canada that is highly dependent on public transportation services. We recommend that the CTA include an appropriate provision that would commit the federal government to guarantee the existing level of service as a minimum and provide appropriate resources to VIA Rail as required to continue pursuing and implementing new initiatives to rebuild the service.'" — Atlantic Canada Ministers of Transportation Submission to the CTA Review January 23, 2015."

In the following section:

"Looking at travel patterns on the Ocean, two clear travel market segments can be seen: long-distance travellers between the Maritimes and Central Canada (CBTN-HLFX↔MTRL-QBEC) and regional travellers (CBTN-MCTN↔HLFX) where passengers remain within the Maritimes. For regional travellers who do not use sleeper accommodations, a smaller fleet with coach seating would lower operating costs, enabling greater frequencies. This would enhance the appeal for regional travellers, effectively providing a daily service (when combined with the 'Coast-to-Coast' service) for the Maritimes."

In addition to the details about VIA's intercity plans, page 54 of the plan has details about VIA's part in Halifax's commuter rail plans. The whole section is a bit much to include here, but it is well worth the read. VIA's assessment is basically that they could provide the service at a lower cost than the consultant report that Halifax commissioned had suggested. It appears VIA is proposing a 3-year pilot:

"VIA Rail has met with HRM to assess a possible three year-pilot program for commuter train service between VIA Rail's Halifax station and Windsor Junction. This service would be contingent upon an agreement with CN for the appropriate train frequencies. VIA Rail could provide RDC (Rail Diesel Car; self-propelled diesel multiple units that do not require a locomotive) in a manner similar to that of the Victoria – Courtenay service. "

Further:

"VIA Rail would operate the commuter service on behalf of the Halifax Regional Municipality, who would be the owner and financial backer of the service. VIA Rail is not the promoter of the project but is responding to the HRM request for help in bringing commuter rail to the people of Halifax."

One of the outstanding questions for the future of the Ocean is the state of the Renaissance equipment. VIA has been clear that the Renaissance sets being used in the Corridor are in poor shape and must be retired by 2021, and in a response to a question asked in their annual public meeting, they have now indicated that the Renaissance fleet in Eastern Canada will also be withdrawn by 2021. The Corporate Plan makes no note of this, simply including "Renaissance Ocean Fleet Upgrades, Renaissance State of Good Repair (Ocean Only)" in the section on equipment projects. Yet it now appears that the plan will be to re-equip the train with the very stainless-steel equipment that the Renaissance fleet displaced 15 years ago.



**Rust spots are showing through on this Renaissance sleeper, a common sight on many of these cars in 2018. Corrosion has been the source of many problems with this equipment, and after only 15 years in service on the Ocean, VIA is already planning to retire the fleet in the next few years. (PHOTO – Tim Hayman)**

Finally worth noting is this comment on the Ocean's revenue forecast over the next five years. It is not clear what "on board service enhancements" means, but price increases are not welcome news:

"The Ocean Passenger revenues for the Ocean are forecast to grow by 14.8%, from \$9.9 million in 2016 to \$11.3 million in 2021, mainly due to GDP growth and inflation as well as certain on board service enhancements, which will allow for price increases."

VIA did report positive ridership figures over the holiday season, noting that the Ocean saw an increase again over the same period last year. Trains in the summer have been busy again this year, with long 20-car trains nearly or entirely sold out since late May. These trends are encouraging, but the question always remains about just how much VIA can do with their existing skeletal 3/week service, and whether they are truly providing useful public transportation in the region.

*-Tim Hayman*



# Study launched for vulnerable transportation corridor

Is Tantramar Marsh Atlantic Canada's weakest link?

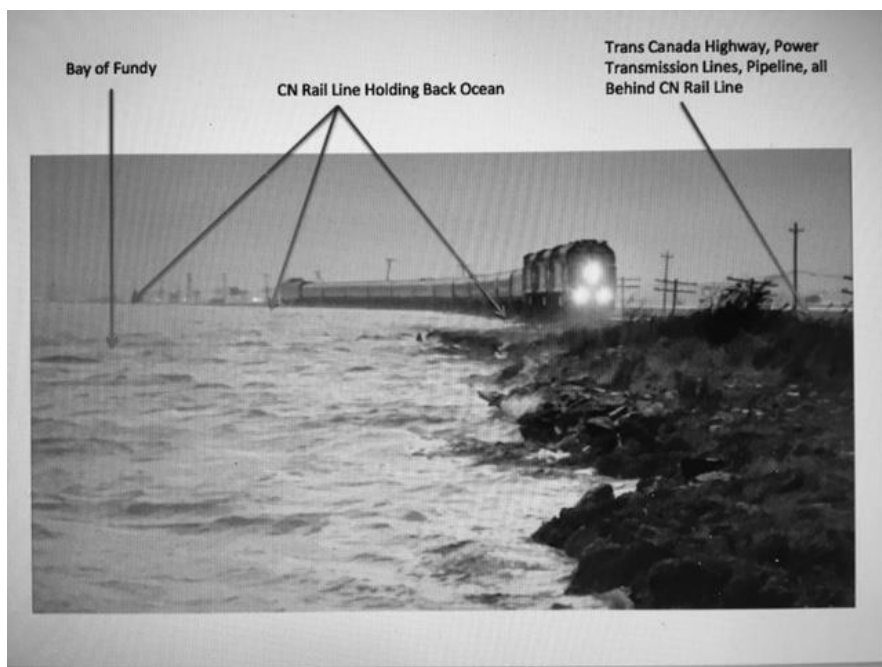


**Cumberland-Colchester MP Bill Casey shows a photo of VIA Rail's Ocean crossing the Tantramar Marsh between Sackville NB and Amherst NS, with an exceptionally high Fundy tide encroaching on the right-of-way. (PHOTO – Ted Bartlett)**

Thousands of people, along with thousands of tonnes of cargo, cross the Isthmus of Chignecto every day. It's a vital transportation corridor linking both Nova Scotia and Newfoundland with the rest of Canada. International trade through the Port of Halifax depends on it. But very few of those who use it realize just how vulnerable it could be to the famous Fundy tides, which are steadily growing higher and higher as a result of climate change.

One person who is very alarmed about the potential consequences is veteran MP Bill Casey. The focus of his concern lies just outside his Cumberland-Colchester riding, where both the Trans-Canada Highway and the CN mainline linking Halifax and Moncton cross the narrow neck of land separating the Bay of Fundy and the Northumberland Strait. When tides are exceptionally high the water comes alarmingly close to the railway roadbed. The rail line is higher than the highway as it crosses the Tantramar Marsh just east of Sackville, and in effect it acts as a

dyke to keep New Brunswick Route 2 from being totally overwhelmed by salt water.



**The salt water of the Bay of Fundy comes alarmingly close to the CN mainline just east of Sackville NB, as VIA train 14 heads towards Halifax during an exceptionally high tide. (PHOTO – courtesy of Bill Casey, MP)**

If it were ever to be breached, the consequences would be dramatic, Mr. Casey says. In his view, the isthmus represents the most vulnerable transportation corridor in all of Canada from an environmental perspective, so he was clearly pleased when a \$700,000 initiative to study the potential problem was announced in May. The federal government is footing half the bill, with the provinces of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick sharing the remainder.

The study will include an engineering assessment, consultation and options to protect the transportation route through the isthmus. While the outcome won't be known for some time, the MP suggests one solution might be raising and/or reinforcing the rail line, which would have to be done without compromising the estimated \$50 million worth of commerce that crosses the corridor every day.

# Province continues funding to protect Cape Breton rail infrastructure

## With no trains since 2014, rails keep rusting away



**The second-last revenue train to Sydney makes its way around Big Pond in December 2014, with the length of its train demonstrating how effectively the CBNS had driven customers away with exorbitant freight rates (PHOTO – Tim Hayman)**

The railway through Cape Breton is no closer to seeing trains roll over the rails again, but it's staying in place for now, thanks to continued support from the Province. Back in March, the provincial government announced that it would extend the agreement signed last year with the Cape Breton and Central Nova Scotia Railway (CBNS) for another year. This agreement sees the CBNS reimbursed for up to \$60,000 of eligible expenses each month in exchange for not applying to abandon the railway. Eligible expenses include things like security, minor maintenance and staff expenses, but not any major rehabilitation work.

While it does nothing to actually return rail service to Cape Breton, the agreement does ensure that the dormant rail line stays in place and the right of way remains available for future use, should the parties involved decide to make that happen. This is critically important for many of the large scale development plans around the Port of Sydney, including the long proposed container terminal. As unlikely as any of those projects may be, loss of any rail access would effectively reduce the likelihood to zero.

In February of this year, a report on the state of the railway was completed by consulting firm HATCH. This report found that the cost of rehabilitating the railway, including work on major bridges along the line, would be approximately \$103 million, and work could be completed within a 2-year timeframe. While the cost is significant, it is still substantially less than comparable highway projects; take, for example, the recently announced twinning of 38km of highway 104, which will see \$90 million in federal funding in addition to \$195 million from the province.

Business leaders involved with the Sydney port development plans remain supportive of rehabilitating the railway, as does the citizen-led Scotia Rail Development Society. Unfortunately the railway's future has become heavily tied to these major large-scale developments, and smaller local businesses that relied on the railway have suffered, facing higher transportation costs and lower quality service. The highways through Cape Breton continue to be battered by all manner of truck traffic, much of which could conceivably be on trains. Sadly, there seems to be no provincial vision for the good that the railway could provide, outside of the context of mega projects that may never see the light of day.

*-Tim Hayman*

## ***Rail Commentary***

# **Trains or Trucks**

## **The Donkin Saga**

There are several reasons why the Cline Group came to Cape Breton to develop the Donkin coal mine. First it is estimated that there is around one billion tons of coal in reserve in the Sydney coal field that can be accessed at Donkin. Second, the coal has excellent coking and thermal qualities, high BTU value and low ash content. A down side is that the coal has a higher than normal sulfur content (about 2%) but that (and other impurities) can be chemically removed economically (washing) to meet today's environmental guidelines. Third, there is generally a good world-wide demand for coking coal, and there is also the possibility of a local market with Nova Scotia Power for thermal coal; Nova Scotia Power just recently approved Donkin Coal for use at the nearby Lingan generating station. Fourth, the closeness of a major port; while some mining operations have to transport coal hundreds of miles to reach tidewater, Sydney is only 18 miles away.

Here it is the last item that I wish to focus on, getting the product from the mine site to the docks in Sydney. At first glance this would appear to be a natural, with an abandoned rail line passing by within a kilometer from the mine, a line that has direct access to the docks in Sydney and onward connections to the "down but not out" cross island railroad. The Scotia Rail Development Society (SRDS) has undertaken several studies that show that this section of the old Sydney and

Louisburg Railroad could be rebuilt economically, that the undertaking is feasible, the build doable, and for the purpose intended, usable. The rebuild would certainly not have to be at class one standards – all that is needed is a good base that could support a freight train at 25 mph. At full production the mine is expected to produce 3 million tons annually, mostly destined to Sydney for onward distribution, and at that volume it should make any short line railroad profitable.

As logical and sensible as the above appears, the province and some key ministers think otherwise. For the province the best option is large trucks laden with 40 tons of coal or more crossing over secondary roads, through residential areas and sections of Sydney to reach the docks. The cost to maintain and rebuild these roads will be enormous, the aggravation for motorists sharing the roads with oversized trucks will be undeniable, and highway safety overall in the areas involved will decrease noticeably. Yet the province still holds firm that this is the way to go and so far refuses to consider the rail option. However, the province and some key ministers (even from that area) should and must listen to the people, because trucks are not what the people want.

With the volume of coal expected at full production, the great number of truck transits required, and the associated highway congestion and safety concerns, there is just no support at all to transport the coal by truck. At several town hall meetings, efforts by the SRDS and protest directed towards their MLAs this has been made clear to the government. This feeling of anger was summed up at a recent town hall meeting in Port Morien, a community close to the mine and a main through-way for the trucks. People in the community need and want the jobs, but hate the trucks and are not willing to sacrifice their roads, their safety and their quality of life for those jobs – get those trucks off the road. There is a better way to do it, and I agree, there is.

The more I think about what is happening here I consider this to be a classic case for using the railroad, and a missed opportunity for the province to do the right thing if there ever was one.

*-Donald R. MacLeod*

## **Railways? Not in my backyard!**

Many people think about railways only when their car must wait at a level crossing. “When is that train going to get out of my way?” People hear about railways in the news whenever there is a major derailment, the threat of a strike, a major delay, or when someone gets hit by a train. Then there is the lingering horror of the tragic Lac-Mégantic tank car explosion on the long-neglected southern rail link between Quebec and the Maritimes.

Where once Atlantic Canada supported the greatest per-capita use of passenger rail in the country, we now have just one passenger train left, it runs only three

times a week, and the fares are high. Many of the intermediate stations have been locked up, and passengers must wait outside or in their cars, with no checked baggage or wheelchair boarding assistance.

Sleek British railcars, introduced to supposedly provide a modern travel experience 15 years ago, are already showing their age and becoming notoriously unreliable, especially in winter when rail is supposed to be the preferred choice when faced with bad weather. Promises to introduce regional inter-city services between Moncton, Campbellton and Halifax have not come to fruition. To many Canadians our railways, where we can still find them, seem to be at best a nuisance and at worst, a bad news item.

Two recent developments seem to underline the prevailing attitude to railways. Both are understandable, in that they seek to minimize conflicts between railway operations and people who live or work nearby. That is a commendable aim. How it is to be achieved, however, needs to be thought about more carefully. The first example is the federal government announcement of funding to re-route the railway around Lac-Mégantic. There is some justification for this insofar as many residents have been traumatized by the tragic explosion and fire that destroyed their downtown and took so many lives. We should beware, however, lest this set a precedent whereby countless other towns, and even cities, start demanding that their railways also be re-routed. Such a movement harks back to the 1950s, when Ottawa's Gréber Plan recommended relocation of downtown rail tracks and station closure, which robbed that city of its downtown passenger rail station. A federal Railway Relocation Act remains in effect today, intended to facilitate the removal of urban rail lines, and providing for cost sharing.

This kind of approach not only undermines the potential for passenger rail to serve city downtowns; it could also rob small communities of a means of transport that has historically linked them to larger centres, and which still offers advantages compared with motorcoach and air travel. Railways traditionally penetrate the core of rural towns, and if passenger service were made convenient, centrally located stations could form a focal point to such neglected town centres and help stimulate private investment there. While air service flies over these forgotten places and motorcoaches drop off their passengers at freeway interchanges and malls, passenger trains could serve town centres without deviating from their routes.

Ironically, Lac-Mégantic itself once benefited from passenger rail service when the Atlantic train used to operate between Montreal and Halifax through Maine. If Lac-Mégantic's understandable wish for railway relocation is mindlessly mimicked in other rural towns, any opportunity for restoring passenger rail as a catalyst for town centre investment will also be gone. Is that what we really want for places like Amherst, Campbellton, La Pocatière, Drummondville, Alexandria, Brockville or Brandon?

Of course, it is also in such places where railways pose a nuisance to motorists and a hazard to trespassers. And local fitness and conservation groups welcome any chance to convert those rails into trails. In fact, there seems to be a North American mindset that tracks are already informal trails – an attitude that has cost too many people their lives or limbs. Why not just get rid of the railway and replace it with a nice trail? That seems to be the popular mindset.

The second example of Canada's attitude to railways is the recent report of the Railway Safety Act Review Task Force, which among many worthwhile recommendations, expresses support for the Railway Association of Canada/Federation of Canadian Municipalities Railway Proximity Guidelines to prevent inappropriate development near railway lines. The general principle of requiring setbacks and design elements to minimize noise, vibration and safety risk has merit, but reading the guidelines in detail, one can get the impression that they shift the burden of safety unduly onto abutting landowners.

For residential development within 30 metres (100 feet) of railway property for main lines, private landowners are expected to construct a berm or crash wall to protect against derailed trains. While it is true that these barriers also provide noise reduction benefits, one wonders what could be achieved if all those extra costs were invested in the railway itself, to prevent derailments from happening in the first place.

The cost of erecting and maintaining these barriers, together with the loss of private developable land within nearly 100 feet of the railway property line, imposes a heavy burden on landowners to minimize the risk associated with derailments for which they are not responsible, and which might happen anywhere along a rail line. In Britain, where land is scarce and must be used efficiently, one wonders how such a proposal would be received.

Even here in North America, more compact development oriented to high-quality transit service is becoming popular, and often that transit service depends on a rail line. Such "Transit Oriented Development" can help reduce the need to drive, by placing a wide range of shops, services and housing choices within a convenient walking distance of a railway station. This, in turn, helps reduce the risk of car accidents and the long-term health impacts of car dependency.

Ironically, if the federal government were to impose a ribbon of land use restrictions extending along either side of all Canada's mainline railways, there is a risk that the ongoing health and safety benefits of Transit Oriented Development may be sacrificed to avoid any risk from a hypothetical derailment that may never happen. Some trade-offs will have to be made, drawing from what has been learned about risk management, the relationship between community design and community health, and the sharing of responsibility for safety between railways and abutting communities.

Both examples above remind us to be careful what we wish for. Before we invest taxpayer dollars to expel our railways from more cities and towns, we must ask whether, and how, those railways might serve as a positive asset to those same communities. Is there potential for passenger rail service? How might a rail service help attract investment to long-neglected town centres? Could we draw from Britain's experience with Community Rail Partnerships to enhance and promote the few train services that we already have?

And before sterilizing wide swaths of private land that could support compact, walkable development served by transit, we must see if a more nuanced set of requirements might be appropriate. For example, does a Nova Scotia mainline serving a handful of trains per day call for the same setbacks and barriers, as does a southern Ontario or Quebec mainline serving several trains per hour at higher speeds? Could we finetune Transit Oriented Development so that the more vulnerable land uses are not too close to railway operations, yet sufficiently close to the station to be convenient?

Most important of all, these examples suggest that the federal government should not be satisfied with merely imposing regulations or paying to remove railways. Just as the public sector willingly invests in highway safety, so it should also invest in making Canada's railways at least as safe as those in other developed countries. After all, the best approach of all is to keep the trains on the tracks in the first place, and to keep people and cars off those same tracks. That would indeed be a worthy investment of public funds.

*-Marcus Garnet, MCIP*

## ***Motorcoach and Transit***

# **Dieppe invests in more bus frequencies**

## **Mayor suggests transit should be free**

Exciting things are happening on the transit front in Atlantic Canada's fastest growing city. Dieppe, New Brunswick – served by Codiac Transpo, owned by the neighbouring City of Moncton – is boosting frequency on two routes this summer. And Mayor Yvon Lapierre is stepping boldly into territory where no one in this region has gone before.

Effective July 15, a \$200,000 increase in Dieppe's transit budget will allow for an additional 2000 operating hours. On the recommendation of Codiac Transpo, City Council voted to approve bumping up the off-peak weekday daytime schedule to a 30-minute headway on routes 93 and 95. In essence, this means that all three Dieppe bus routes will now run on a half-hourly basis from 0630 to 1800, Monday through Friday.





**Dieppe residents are seeing an increase in transit frequency this summer, thanks to a \$200,000 budget boost.**



**Dieppe Mayor Yvon Lapierre wants to “move the needle” on public transit by eliminating fares.**

But Mayor Lapierre wants to go farther than that. In what he terms an initiative to “move the needle” on public transit, he’s urging elimination of transit fares in Dieppe as early as the next municipal budget.

“The issue of making our public transit free has nothing to do with the cost, but all about reducing our carbon footprint,” he told Transport Action Atlantic. “As a City we have put in place a number of initiatives to reduce our CF, and this would be one more effort to continue to educate our population about these efforts.”

# Metrobus celebrates 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary with new buses

The St. John's Transportation Commission came into being on April 30, 1958, with the passing of a special resolution by City Council. The new public transit system replaced the old Capital Coach Lines, successor to the venerable trolley cars that had disappeared from city streets in a decade before.

The service itself was rebranded as Metrobus in 1971, but the commission that manages it remains in place. In observance of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary, free rides were offered on all routes for the day. But there was another reason to celebrate as well. The transit agency had just taken delivery of three new compact, fuel-efficient Vicinity buses.

Fully wheelchair accessible and with seating for 24 passengers, the Vicinity is one of the quietest transit vehicles on the market, both inside and out. The "close and seal" door design reduces noise on board and reduces air draft, preserving heat within the bus during the colder months and helping keep the cool air in during the summer.



**The 30-foot Vicinity model introduced this spring by Metrobus costs 25% less than full-sized vehicles, and uses 30% less fuel.**

Metrobus general manager Judy Powell says the new buses are intended for use on feeder routes. "The Vicinity buses are an excellent fit for allowing us to efficiently service some of our less busy routes and realize significant savings in fuel costs," she says.

The Vicinity is something completely new to the marketplace, Ms. Powell added. "If you'd asked me a few years ago if we should be considering smaller vehicles for some of our routes, the answer would have been a definite 'no', because there wasn't a suitable product on the market. The price difference between a 40-foot

and 30-foot bus wasn't significant, and there was negligible difference in fuel efficiency."

But all that has changed. The Metrobus Vicinity models, sold and supplied by Grande West Transportation in Aldergrove, BC, are ruggedly built to withstand the challenging Newfoundland operating environment, and have a stainless steel body to minimize corrosion. Their capital cost is 25% less than a new 40-foot bus, and they are 30% more fuel efficient – making public transit an even more environmentally-friendly option for residents of St. John's and area..

They aren't a universal solution, the general manager notes. Because of their smaller carrying capacity, they wouldn't be able to meet the demand at peak times on heavily travelled routes. That said, Metrobus will likely be acquiring several more vehicles of this type if those now in service live up to expectations.

## **Maritime Bus Plans to return bus service to Nova Scotia's South Shore**

After the success of the Rural Lynx bus project in Southwest New Brunswick, a project made possible through cooperation with Maritime Bus, the PEI-based intercity bus operator is poised to launch a similar project in another part of the region that has had no bus service for years. The south shore of Nova Scotia lost its bus service in the later years of Acadian Lines operation, as they curtailed less profitable routes and scaled back their network. Now service could be resumed as far as Lunenburg County beginning this September.

The first news of this potential service broke in early June, when Suzanne Lohnes-Croft, Liberal MLA for Lunenburg, announced that she was calling for the province to provide \$300,000 in funding over two years to provide service to Mahone Bay, Lunenburg and Bridgewater. Then later in the month, Maritime Bus made a formal application to the Nova Scotia Utility and Review Board to launch a pilot service beginning September 1, 2018. Their application requests approval of an eighteen-month pilot project to provide service between Lunenburg, Bridgewater, Mahone Bay and Halifax. The preliminary route schedule and frequency would provide three return trips daily between Lunenburg County and Halifax, with fare pricing falling under their current Board approved zone pricing model. The application also proposes a new fare option for Monthly Passes, intended for those commuting into the city. They are also asking to add two 15 passenger mini buses (Fob Transit type or similar), which may be used for this service.

If successful, this would help start to fill in one of the most glaring holes in the public transportation network in Nova Scotia. It could potentially help integrate with local transit, such as Bridgewater's recently launched system, and Lohnes-

Croft stated that the goal is to eventually extend the system all the way to Yarmouth. If that moves ahead, it would finally provide a proper scheduled public transportation link to the southwest, and would notably provide a connection with the ferry service to Maine – a publicly supported link that is currently orphaned from the rest of the region’s public transportation network.

This is certainly exciting news, and we will be following these developments closely and supporting them as they move along.

*-Tim Hayman*

## **Long-haul motorcoach needs new business model says Maritime Bus head**

Western Canada is a long bus ride away from the Maritimes, but the announced October 31 shutdown of Greyhound’s operations everywhere west of Sudbury could have serious implications for this region’s leading line-haul carrier. Charlottetown-based Maritime Bus interchanges both passengers and packages on a daily basis to and from far-flung destinations, and company president Mike Cassidy is deeply concerned that the imminent collapse of this seamless coast-to-coast network could have a significant impact on his bottom line. He doesn’t go so far as to predict it would ultimately prove fatal blow to his operation, but it’s certainly an ominous sign.

“The motorcoach industry in Canada needs a new business model,” he says. “Ridership is down, and costs are up. This is a national issue, and there has to be a national solution.”

It would appear that Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is at least in partial agreement. He told reporters during a scrum on July 17 that the Greyhound news was “difficult” for people who are already struggling economically, but rely on the service to visit family, travel for work, and get across the country.

“I have asked our minister of transport to work with the provinces, to work with communities, to work with the company to try and see what paths forward there are,” he said. But neither the PM nor Transport Minister Marc Garneau appear ready to make any federal financial commitment on the issue.

What is known is that a federal-provincial working group has been established to seek possible solutions, but there have been few details revealed as of this writing about what progress, if any, has been achieved.

Mike Cassidy, for his part, insists that something has to be in place when Greyhound shuts down on October 31. Perhaps, he suggests, a transitional strategy would be an interim answer, noting that “studies take forever.”

For him, the situation brings back memories of 2012, when Orléans Express shut down its Acadian Lines subsidiary. Maritime Bus began operations immediately, connecting with the Quebec carrier at Rivière-du-Loup. It’s been a rough ride at times, but Mr. Cassidy is justly proud of his record. However, he has no delusions of grandeur. His organization simply isn’t big enough to repeat its earlier performance on a much larger scale.

“We can’t become Greyhound on October 31<sup>st</sup>,” he says, tempering the comment with a note of optimism. “But we have a history, passion and desire, and I’m prepared to work with others toward finding a solution.

*- Ted Bartlett*

## ***Marine***

# **Federal Court dismisses Oceanex petition Judge upholds “Terms of Union” rates**

An application by private freight carrier Oceanex to force a judicial review of the constitutional ferry rates charged by Marine Atlantic between North Sydney NS and Port aux Basques NL has been denied. In a detailed ruling that ran more than 200 pages handed down on March 7, Judge Cecily Strickland of the Federal Court of Canada upheld the subsidized tariff – which Oceanex had argued was detrimental to its business.

The case occupied a full week in a St. John’s courtroom during October 2017, but given the enormous potential consequences had Oceanex been successful, it attracted remarkably little public or media attention. Marine Atlantic ferries are supposedly supported by the Government of Canada in an effort to equalize the cost of living between the island and the mainland, as part of the Terms of Union that brought Newfoundland and Labrador into Confederation in 1949. The obligation is contained in Term 32, and Judge Strickland ruled it was apparent from the evidence “that it could not be breached and required Canada to ensure a ferry service that is readily accessible for passengers and freight shippers who wish to use the Constitutional Route.”

The Oceanex application was in effect a challenge to the Terms of Union. But despite the setback for its case, the company isn’t prepared to give up just yet. Just before the deadline, an appeal was filed, which will result in Judge

Strickland's ruling being scrutinized by a panel of three other Federal Court judges. No time-frame has yet been set for this process.

Meanwhile, Transport Action Atlantic maintains that the ferry rates are already considerably higher than they should be for consistency with the spirit of Term 32. Cost recovery on the service has now passed the 70% mark – up from less than 50% two decades ago. During the 2015 federal election campaign the Trudeau Liberals denounced the cost recovery demands of the Harper Tories as “unreasonable” – but since gaining office they have done nothing to address them. Over the past two decades, rates have risen by three times the cost of living index, and TAA is actively campaigning for action on the Liberal commitment.

*- Ted Bartlett*

## **New CEO named for Marine Atlantic**

### **Don Barnes led new focus on customer service**



**Don Barnes has been named interim president and CEO at Marine Atlantic.**

Marine Atlantic is entering its 2018 peak season with a new leader at the helm. Transport Minister Marc Garneau announced on June 1 the appointment of Donald Barnes as interim president and CEO. He replaces Paul Griffin, who had led the Crown corporation since the retirement of Wayne Follett late in 2011. Mr. Griffin resigned to accept the presidency of C-CORE, a St. John's based R&D company.

Both Mr. Griffin and Mr. Barnes were part of a new executive team recruited in 2009 by Mr. Follett – a career public servant charged with rebuilding Marine Atlantic following a scathing report on its struggling operations from the auditor general of Canada. Mr. Barnes had served as vice-president of customer experience

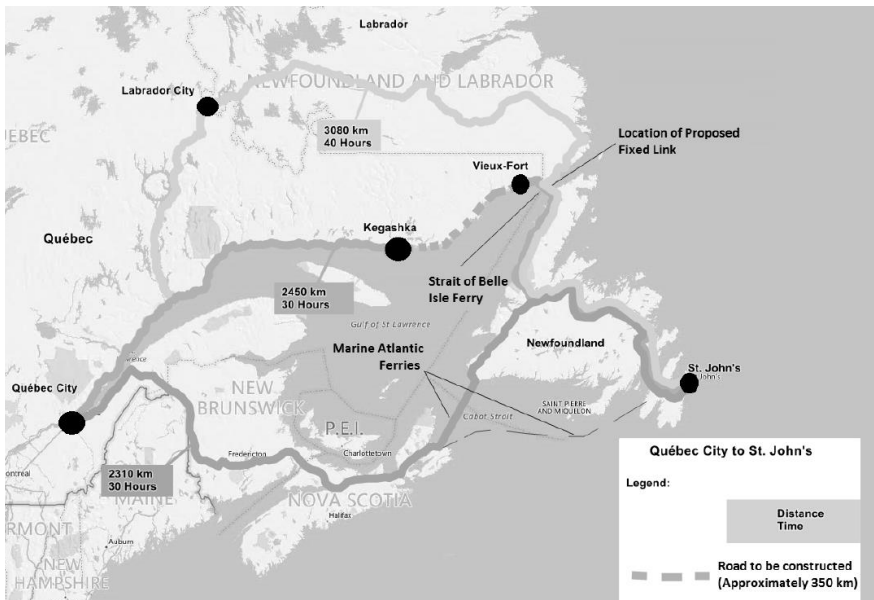
for the past nine years, during which the corporation's satisfaction ratings have improved substantially. Before joining the ferry service he had served in a number of senior roles with the Bristol Group, a marketing and communications organization. He holds degrees in psychology and business from Memorial University.

Mr. Barnes' appointment is for one year, or “until such time as the open, transparent and merit-based selection process seeking a president and chief executive officer is completed,” according to a media release from Minister Garneau's office.

## **A Newfoundland-Labrador fixed link Tunnel vision or pipe dream?**

A tunnel capable of carrying road traffic on a dedicated train under the Strait of Belle Isle is technically feasible with an estimated price tag of \$1.65 billion. The Premier of Newfoundland Labrador, Dwight Ball, and the MP for Labrador, Yvonne Jones, believe this to be a “nation building” project, and argue for federal government financial participation.

Yes, a tunnel under the Strait of Belle Isle between Point Amour in Labrador and Yankee Point on the Island of Newfoundland is technically feasible. Such tunnels are a way of moving traffic in Norway, Japan, and Switzerland – and have been for many years with the technology consistently improving.



**This map from the consultant’s report shows the location of the proposed tunnel, and compares travel times to the existing routes. Note the lengthy section of new road that would be required.**

And yes, a 2018 ballpark price of \$1.65 billion seems accurate enough to make financial decisions in the absence of an environmental study and a traffic forecast. However, to be a nation building project, traffic will need to access the tunnel at one end and enjoy an acceptable egress at the other. And that traffic will need to be comprised of Trans Canada Highway vehicles for the project to function as nation building.

Throughout Canada, the Trans Canada Highway, as it is on the Island of Newfoundland, is a high speed, controlled access roadway with assured passing opportunity and low gradients to allow trucks to maintain speeds of 100 km/hr. There is no such facility on the north shore of Québec east of Québec City – and no such facility in Labrador. Equally, Route 430 up the Northern Peninsula from the Trans Canada highway at Deer Lake is far from being to the standard of the Trans Canada, particularly through Gros Morne National Park where the Long Range Mountains provide steep slopes conducive to slowing heavy trucks to crawl speed.

Hence, not only is the tunnel required but the reconstruction and new construction of a Trans Canada standard highway is required from Québec City to Point Amour and from Yankee Point to Deer Lake. The standard is known, the construction costs can be reasonably estimated on a per kilometre basis and added to the cost of the tunnel to provide an order of magnitude of the entire project cost.

Now, who will use this new Trans Canada Highway which parallels the existing Trans Canada Highway south of Rivière-du-Loup in Québec, through New Brunswick, tying into the Confederation Bridge to Prince Edward Island, through Nova Scotia including Cape Breton, across the Cabot Strait on Marine Atlantic between North Sydney and Port aux Basques, and through Newfoundland to Deer Lake?

An overview examination of origins and destinations of traffic would quickly eliminate most traffic to/from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Prince Edward Island and most likely traffic from Maine. The exception might well be tourist traffic from these locations wishing to do a “great circle” route rather than travel over the same roadway twice.

Traffic from Ontario, westward in Canada, and central and western United States will evaluate the new route on the basis of how much shorter the trip will be and how much less it will cost. Reasonable estimates of the time and travel cost can readily be determined to provide an answer to the potential traffic diversion. Traffic from the remainder of New England and the east coast of the United States will require more detailed analysis, including the portion of the overall traffic stream these vehicles currently comprise.

Before spending the estimated \$23 million on a further stage of a feasibility study, the origins and destinations of the current traffic stream should be determined and an educated analysis conducted as to the potential amount to divert to the new facility. New techniques in origin- destination analysis could well make this step relatively inexpensive. And also answer the question as to whether a 400 vehicle per hour capacity in the proposed tunnel is sufficient.

When traffic diverts from a major highway such as the Trans Canada Highway, there is often a loss of business for such establishments as fuel stations, restaurants, accommodation providers, tourist attractions, and the like. Merchants



and communities along the existing Trans Canada Highway can be expected to complain vociferously about the project. The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador will be expected to provide a program to support Port aux Basques. Possible negatives aside, the Newfoundland-Labrador fixed link deserves additional study in an open and transparent manner. Particularly the traffic analysis.

- Tom Beckett

## *Air*

# **WestJet launches new overseas flights from Halifax**

## **St. John's loses Gatwick route**

Some new trans-Atlantic options are available from Atlantic Canada this year, with the launch of two new WestJet routes to Europe from Stanfield International Airport. The May 31 inauguration of the seasonal daily flight to Paris was a particularly exciting occasion, as it marked the first-ever non-stop service to the French capital from Halifax.

In addition, YHZ now has daily seasonal service to London Gatwick, which began on April 30. This flight replaces one that operated for two seasons between St. John's and LGW, but WestJet announced earlier this year that the YYT departure hadn't met their ridership expectations and would not return in 2018.

"We appreciate and recognize that this might be unfortunate and disappointing news for the community of St. John's," the airline said in a statement released on January 29. It went on to note that any service offered by WestJet is based on supply and demand, schedules are reviewed on a regular basis, and the market demand indicated that this one was not sustainable. However, the airline's YYT to Dublin service – the company's very first overseas offering that began in 2014 – is back for its fifth season.

WestJet is also once again flying seasonally between Halifax and Glasgow. That run has been operating since 2015. All three overseas flights from YHZ will make their last departures for 2018 on October 26, but airport spokesperson Nicole Scaplen expressed optimism about a longer operating season next year, and the hope that some would evolve to become year-round services.

The aircraft on the new run is the latest incarnation of the familiar Boeing 737 to join the WestJet roster. The airline took delivery of the first 737-MAX 8 last fall. They expect to add up to 50 more over the next decade. The new plane has a longer range than the existing 737s in the WestJet fleet, and is quieter and more fuel-efficient. It has a total of 174 seats in plus and economy class, including 11

rows of economy seats with a more roomy 34-inch pitch offering a range of options for passengers.



**Take-off for the City of Light! Passengers on WestJet's inaugural flight from Halifax to Paris wave French tri-colours and Canadian flags for the camera just prior to departure on May 31.**

WestJet now flies four times daily between YHZ and YYT, under its Encore brand using Bombardier Q400 aircraft. The airline now has 42 of these short-haul planes in service.

Convenience of connections from St. John's to and from the Halifax overseas flights varies, with the outbound being generally better than the return. But for the most part, to get the best connections YYT-originating passengers will have to dig deeper in their pockets for the dubious privilege of flying for two hours in the wrong direction before starting their overseas journey. A scan of the WestJet website indicates there are some bargain fares available if one is willing to put up with a long layover, but it appears that in most cases the lowest price means an overnight stop in Halifax.

Speaking of bargains, the ultra low cost carrier Swoop was set to start service between Halifax and Hamilton on June 20. Swoop is a WestJet subsidiary, and offers one-way fares between these two points for as little as \$79. At that price point its bare-bones service, of course, and even a carry-on bag will cost you extra, as will booking through a call centre or pre-selecting a seat. But Swoop promises to maintain one important policy that sets its parent company apart from most other airlines – it will not intentionally overbook a flight.

Swoop service between Halifax and Hamilton is available most days until mid-December. At press time there was no information available on longer-term plans.

## *Meet a Member*

### **John Cormier**



The newest member of TAA's board of directors brings a substantial background in marine transportation to our organization, and has a long history of community involvement in Prince Edward Island. John Cormier was employed for 34 years at Northumberland Ferries, where he held the positions of general manager and vice-president of human resources and operations. Prior to that he worked as a transportation officer with the provincial Department of Industry and Commerce, and served as a purser and terminal manager with the Magdalen Islands Transportation Company.

John is a past president and life member of the Canadian Ferry Operators Association, a director of the Charlottetown Harbour Authority, and a member of the PEI Labour Relations Board. He's also been involved with the Charlottetown Chamber of Commerce, served on the Atlantic Press Council, and is a member of the Canadian Maritime Law Association.

He is an avid tennis player and reader, enjoys an active semi-retirement that includes hockey, skating and biking. He's ridden the full length of the Confederation Trail several times. John and his wife, Gayle, have two grown sons. They live in Charlottetown.

## *In Memoriam*

### **Bill Naftal**



**Bill Naftal**  
1940-2018

TAA's *president emeritus* John Pearce advises with regret of the recent passing of one of Transport 2000 Atlantic's founding members. Bill Naftel died in Halifax on April 29.

Bill hosted the initial meeting which led to the founding of our predecessor organization at his Brunswick Street apartment in 1977. A long time senior historian with Parks

Canada, he was an early board member of Transport 2000 Atlantic and had a strong interest in railway history. We extend our condolences to his family.

# Fleming's Monument



More than a century after his death, the substantial CN bridge spanning the Southwest Miramichi stands as a monument to the vision and professional skill of Sir Sandford Fleming. The legendary chief engineer of the Intercolonial Railway had faced much opposition in the 1870s for his insistence on iron and masonry construction for major bridges. Time, however, has proven him right.

This 380-metre structure has been safely carrying both freight and passenger trains for more than 140 years, but recent underwater inspections revealed some deterioration of the piers. This looming liability was no doubt a key reason why CN sought in 2012 to abandon a large portion of its Newcastle Subdivision – a move which would have severed the VIA Rail link between Halifax and Montreal.

Now this iconic bridge is receiving a new lease on life. The piers are being upgraded in a two-year project being funded through VIA by the Government of Canada. The work, slated for completion this fall, should ensure the spans remain serviceable for another several decades.

Next time you are crossing the Miramichi on VIA's *Ocean*, if you'd like to see a suitable monument to this distinguished Scottish-Canadian engineer – just look around you!

-Ted Bartlett