



The Bulletin

TRANSPORT ACTION ATLANTIC

FALL – WINTER 2018

NL ferries recover 67% of costs

Is this what the Terms of Union intended?



Marine Atlantic's MV *Highlanders* awaits loading at the Port aux Basques terminal on a cold January morning. Effective April 1, those trucks will pay 2% more to cross the Cabot Strait. Cost recovery on the constitutional ferry service remains slightly above the 65% target, but political pressure for rate relief is mounting in advance of this fall's federal election. Our coverage begins on p. 30

(PHOTO - Marine Atlantic via Twitter)



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MARK YOUR CALENDAR!

Transport Action Atlantic's **annual general meeting** will be held at the Halifax North Memorial Library auditorium, 2285 Gottingen Street, on Saturday, 11 May 2019, at 1400.

The agenda includes annual reports and financial statements, appointment of an auditor, election of a board of directors, and any other business that may arise.

Current members of Transport Action Atlantic may nominate (with their consent) any other member in good standing for a position on the board. It is the board's responsibility to choose the executive officers. Nominations should be made in advance of the meeting, and may be submitted by mail to the TAA Nominating Committee, P.O.Box 268, Dartmouth NS B2Y 3Y3, or by e-mail to donlinmacleod@ns.sympatico.ca.

Besides the required business, the agenda will include a panel of speakers who will focus on critical public transportation issues in our region, with ample opportunity for discussion. Please watch for further details on our website as this program is finalized.

As always, our AGM is open to the general public and the media.

Advocacy in Action

With an election comes opportunity



Howard Easton and Ted Bartlett met with Miramichi-Grand Lake MP Pat Finnigan and Mayor Pierrette Robichaud in Rogersville NB on January 25, 2019. On the agenda: passenger rail and rural transit.

It almost goes without saying that politicians are naturally more closely attuned to the issues when their date with the electorate is looming. Accordingly, 2019 presents opportunities for us as public transportation advocates to advance our agenda in the federal arena. All 32 MPs from Atlantic Canada are currently part of the governing Liberal caucus, but it stands to reason that the “Trudeaumania 2.0” sweep of 2015 is not likely to be repeated. At least two of the currently-sitting parliamentarians from this region are known to be not seeking re-election in October – but up to 30 men and women wanting another term in Ottawa might at least be prepared to lend us a sympathetic ear. Of course, we want more than mere empty promises; put it in writing, please!

There are two issues of direct federal jurisdiction that currently rank as high priorities with Transport Action Atlantic – the lack of any concrete plan to address passenger rail inadequacies in this region, and the continuing record-high cost recovery levels mandated by Transport Canada on Marine Atlantic’s Newfoundland ferry service (Justin Trudeau made a commitment on this during

the 2015 campaign, but failed to deliver). TAA and its allies are hard at work on both files.

Then there's the matter of the controversial carbon tax. It's a concept that TAA does not have a fundamental issue with – but shouldn't the revenue it raises be green-focused, rather than being returned to taxpayers in a seemingly random fashion? For example, some of it might be invested in renewing some of our badly deteriorated rail infrastructure, and promoting more environmentally-friendly alternatives for moving freight. Support for public passenger transportation to reduce automobile dependency is surely worth considering. And, by the way, shouldn't public transit and intercity motorcoach transportation be exempt from carbon tax anyway – as by their very nature they already mitigate against climate change?

Another matter where the federal government clearly should have a role to play is the isolation of New Brunswick's Campobello Island. Here we have a group of disadvantaged Canadian citizens who have no choice but to travel through increasingly challenging foreign territory in order to gain access to the rest of their country. Even the seasonal ferry that once offered a summer-only link to nearby Deer Island and thence on to the New Brunswick mainland is now history. Is this not a matter of national sovereignty? Surely the Government of Canada isn't willing to cede this historic island to the United States by default? The Liberal MP who represents the island in the current House of Commons recognizes the problem. So does the newly-elected Progressive Conservative MLA. It's another area where the 2019 federal election represents an opportunity for a long-overdue solution!

-Ted Bartlett

Carbon Pricing in Atlantic Canada

Different approaches and their impacts on public transportation

“Carbon tax” is a term that seems to be on everyone's – or at least most politicians' – lips in this year of a federal election. So how does a carbon tax intersect with public transportation, and what is the state of play in each of Canada's Atlantic Provinces?

First, a word about the term “carbon tax” – A carbon tax is not necessarily what the federal government's regulations require. They require a carbon *price* – that someone who generates a tonne of carbon dioxide (or its equivalent in other greenhouse gasses) should have to pay \$20 (in the first year) on top of all their other costs of doing business for the privilege of so contributing to global climate change. How that price is achieved was meant to be up to each province. A tax is a straightforward and understandable way to do it: simply charge everyone \$20 who pollutes. However, there are others, such as cap-and-trade (where the

government hands out a certain amount of “pollution permits”, and then polluters who need more have to find a way to buy them from non-polluters, so the free market determines the specific final price).

Because there are a number of possible different ways to accomplish this, each province was left to its own devices to design its own, with the federal government saying “...but if you don’t, we’ll impose a simple carbon tax in your province, though we’ll return all the take from it back to your province.”

If these systems work, they are not necessarily meant to be a net budgetary gain for the government in question – they are meant to be redistributive. Polluters should pay more, and hence items manufactured in a fashion that generates carbon emissions should cost more, but non-polluters should actually pay *less*, and products – like public transportation – that reduce carbon emissions should actually be less expensive. In the case of a carbon tax, that relies on the government handing over some of its take to support non-polluters. In the case of cap-and-trade, the market itself handles the whole business – polluters pay non-polluters directly to buy their “pollution permits”.

Here’s what each of the provinces in our region have ended up with, and some discussion of what effect this may have on transport in the area.

Newfoundland and Labrador

Newfoundland and Labrador have, to a large degree, simply cried poor to the federal government, saying that they more-or-less can’t handle a full implementation of the carbon pricing. They will implement a \$0.0042 (so, four tenths of a cent) increase on regular gasoline, and \$0.0037 per litre of diesel. ...But you won’t have to pay if your fuel is being used to do agriculture, aquaculture or offshore oil exploration. There will also be no change at all for home heating oil. Bluntly put, this will have no effect on – well, on much of anything. If there is a cost increase or decrease on any mode of transport in Newfoundland and Labrador in the next year, it can be pretty much guaranteed that it has nothing to do with the carbon tax. On the other side of things, there doesn’t appear to be any particular plan to aid lower-carbon methods of transportation, such as urban transit, intercity buses or the famous bay taxis.

Nova Scotia

Nova Scotia has implemented a cap-and-trade system, as well as a small increase in gas and heating-oil taxes. It has not made any solid commitments to spend its take from the fossil fuel taxes on anything in particular. As a result, this will probably have a marginal effect on transport – small increases in pricing for public transport, slightly more onerous for less-efficient modes such as private vehicle travel – but nothing will actually get *cheaper*.

Prince Edward Island

PEI has, like the other provinces, gone with a direct tax on fossil fuels, and then has invited the federal government to step up to regulate the rest of their industries, particularly larger industrial emitters. Their fossil fuel taxes will include a \$0.0442 tax on gasoline, and \$0.0537 tax on diesel. As with both Nova Scotia and Newfoundland and Labrador, this provides a minor push in the direction of more efficient means of transportation, only because it's a minor push *away* from more fuel-consuming modes, but nothing actually gets cheaper.

New Brunswick

New Brunswick proposed a system that the federal government decided was insufficient. As a result, New Brunswick will have the federal “backstop” system implemented. While there are certainly people in New Brunswick who will be frustrated by this apparent loss of autonomy, there is one significant benefit to the federal system – it comes with a clear payments system to offset the costs. First, direct cheques will be written to most households in New Brunswick (\$256 for a family of four), with an extra 10% to anyone who lives outside the Saint John or Moncton metro areas. Finally, the rest will generally be distributed to a laundry-list of deserving beneficiaries: schools, hospitals, small businesses, municipalities, Indigenous groups, and not-for-profits. It is tough to predict how people will react. If the price of gas goes up, the price of the train doesn't, and you've got a little more cash in your pocket, what do you do? Do you take the train, pocket the extra and thank the government for your extra money? Or do you drive anyway, and grumble about the government taking more than they gave you?

The answers to these sorts of questions will determine the success of these initiatives over the coming years – particularly as the federal Liberal government has said that, if re-elected, the pricing will increase. Does that mean the rebates will increase? Will the provinces other than New Brunswick get into the rebate game? Whatever happens, we can only hope that it makes public transit, both within communities and between them, more financially viable.

- Ashley Morton

Rail News

No progress on VIA Maritime services It's been a long wait, but virtually nothing has happened

More than three years after the concept was first put forward by VIA Rail's CEO on a radio talk show in Halifax, there's been no visible progress on a plan to restore some long-dormant regional rail passenger services in the Maritimes. On

November 9, 2015, Yves Desjardins-Siciliano told listeners on CBC's *Maritime Noon* that the company was proposing to reintroduce two local train services between Halifax and Moncton and between Moncton and Campbellton. The story was widely reported by other media in the region at the time. The intention, the VIA president said, was to have these routes operational by the late summer or early fall of 2016. But in three years essentially nothing has happened, and it now is evident that the plan has been relegated to the back burner.



A trio of VIA RDCs sits at the Halifax station, after testing in New Brunswick in November 2017. This fleeting visit to the region was the only visible sign of any progress towards fulfilling the promise of improved passenger rail service.

(PHOTO - Tim Hayman)

Transport Action Atlantic chose National Railway Day – the anniversary of the last spike ceremony that marked completion of Canada's continuous rail link from coast to coast on November 7, 1885 – to ask a pertinent question. In a media release, TAA asked why it is taking so long for VIA Rail and the Government of Canada to deliver on that plan. The 2016 target dates came and went, and other possible start times were subsequently suggested. But now VIA management isn't even talking about it.

The release credited the Government of Canada for its recent commitment of a major investment to replace all of VIA's aging rolling stock in the Quebec City-Windsor Corridor, but noted that it has shown little interest in upgrading service

elsewhere. But TAA points out that it would be unfair to blame the current situation entirely on the company's management team.

"If our political leaders considered passenger rail in this region to be important, VIA as a federal Crown corporation would be directed to get on with it," said TAA president Ted Bartlett. Our elected MPs – all of whom belong to the governing party – should be insisting that the needs of this region not be forgotten.

"Our mantra at TAA has become 'Canada doesn't end at Quebec City'" Bartlett continued. "Rail passenger service in the Maritimes remains a national embarrassment. For example, we still have that sorry picture of the oldest named passenger train in North America crawling along a 60-mile stretch of badly deteriorated track in northern New Brunswick at 30 miles per hour or less. Forty years ago the *Ocean* safely ran at 75 miles per hour over most of that route – and it took nearly two hours less to travel from Moncton to Campbellton than it does today. Certainly it's not something we want to celebrate on National Railway Day!"

"VIA's so-called 'regional service' using 60-year-old self-propelled rail diesel cars was not a concept that we wholeheartedly endorsed," says TAA vice-president Ashley Morton. "We extended a lukewarm welcome to that announcement three years ago largely because it promised something better than the existing bare-bones service – a situation that VIA's management now acknowledges isn't meeting local needs. We also considered that regional service to Moncton might be a good fit with the Halifax commuter rail proposal. But our ultimate goal remains to have the *Ocean* restored to its former status as a daily through train between Halifax and Montreal.

"There's no question that the long-overdue modernization of VIA's corridor services was the right thing to do," he said. "But we need to hold the feet of our elected representatives to the fire, and pressure them to insist that Canadians elsewhere in the country have legitimate needs and expectations as well. What we are asking is reasonable, and would not bankrupt the treasury."

At Transport Action Atlantic's semi-annual board meeting in Dartmouth on December 1, the organization confirmed its first priority remains a through service between Halifax and Montreal seven days a week. TAA insists that a well-marketed and appropriately equipped daily train could enhance ridership revenues to the point where they would cover the major portion of incremental costs, resulting in a greatly reduced subsidy requirement per passenger-mile and far better value for Canadian taxpayers. Analysis of figures released by VIA indicate that savings realized by the ill-advised 2012 decision cutting service to tri-weekly were negligible.

Difficult days for VIA in Atlantic Canada

Tragedy, a derailment and cancelled trains in November



The November 23rd derailment of the *Ocean* happened in an ideal location for photographers, just beyond the railfan-popular Young Ave overpass in Halifax's south end. (PHOTO – Darren Stephens)

VIA Rail's operations in Atlantic Canada were rocked by tragedy and challenges toward the end of November 2018. On Friday, November 23rd, as VIA #15 *The Ocean* arrived at Truro, as at many stations along the way, one of the engineers got down from the cab to handle checked baggage during the stop. It's not uncommon for that engineer to step down while the train is still slowing, and this is done time and time again without incident. On this particular day something went wrong, and the engineer ended up pulled underneath the moving train. A police officer was on foot patrol nearby and was able to provide immediate life-saving first aid with a bystander. The 63-year old engineer was rushed to hospital, and while details of his injuries have not been publicly disclosed, it is known that he survived but his injuries were severe. The details of what exactly happened are still under investigation.

After a lengthy wait in Truro, the train was eventually annulled. Buses and taxis were arranged for the 46 passengers on board to either continue their journeys on to their final destinations, or to return to Halifax and wait for the next train. Once police finished their work, a new head-end crew deadheaded the train on toward Montreal.

A cancelled train is a relatively rare occurrence, but November continued to be an unusual month. The following day's #14 arrived without incident, but on Sunday November 25th, reports of a VIA Rail derailment in Halifax quickly started circulating through the media. The equipment for that Sunday's #15 was being turned in the morning to prepare for its 1pm departure. After backing out of the station, the train was proceeding forward through cross-overs to make its way toward the balloon track at Halterm, when some issue with one of the switches caused the train to derail between the first and second coaches. The derailment happened between two easily accessible overpasses across the south-end rail cut, so it made for easy observation by bystanders.

The derailment happened at low speed, so the damage was fairly limited.



PHOTO – Darren Stephens

However, due to the complex coupled setup of the Renaissance cars, separating and righting the equipment was still a time-consuming process. The cleanup occupied much of the afternoon and evening, though the tracks were back in service by the next day. An investigation into what caused the derailment is ongoing.

Unsurprisingly, that day's #15 was cancelled, making it the second cancelled westbound train in a row. Passengers were once again offered either

a refund, bus transportation onwards, or the opportunity to re-book (in some cases for the second time!) on to the following #15. More problematic was the fact that the equipment that would be needed for the next #14 from Montreal was now trapped in Halifax. With insufficient other serviceable Renaissance equipment available, VIA had to quickly scramble together a set of Budd HEP equipment in order to run that next train from Montreal. The damaged Renaissance equipment was mostly returned to Montreal as a hospital train on Nov. 29th, though the two coaches that were most damaged have remained in Halifax, likely to be scrapped due to structural damage to their crash energy management construction.

Due to chronic winter issues with the Renaissance equipment in past years, VIA has kept some HEP equipment in Montreal to protect against this sort of emergency substitution. Clearly a derailment like this is unusual and no specific fault of the Renaissance design (though certainly complicated by it), but this once again highlights the precarious situation with VIA's equipment availability in the east.

-Tim Hayman

No extra trains for the holidays

With no added frequencies, ridership drops

When VIA Rail first ran extra trains over the Christmas holidays in 2014, it marked a recognition that the cut to three trains per week couldn't provide adequate capacity for the holiday passenger demands. VIA was clearly happy with the extra ridership these trains brought in, even if it wasn't up to pre-2012 levels, as they continued to run extra trains in 2015, 2016, and 2017. Earlier last year we reported that VIA's corporate plan now made reference to these extras being a standard part of the *Ocean's* operation, which gave some indication that they were likely here to stay. Unfortunately last fall we discovered that there would be no extras for Christmas 2018.

The rationale given by VIA was two-fold: first, the existing days of operation for the *Ocean* happened to line up well this year, with Christmas Eve and Day and New Year's Eve and Day both falling on a Monday and Tuesday, nicely fitted into the *Ocean's* Sunday/Wednesday/Friday operation. So there was less of a clear need for additional departures. The second issue was a concern about equipment availability, particularly with plenty of equipment heading in for refurbishment at the moment. In any case, VIA claimed on social media that they would still expand capacity to meet historic demands, though it wasn't clear how they planned to do this with fewer trains.



Passengers make their way along the platform to board an exceptionally long VIA 15 on December 23rd, 2018. The locomotives and baggage car have been cut off to allow the train to fit in the platform, and to make baggage loading easier. (PHOTO – Tim Hayman)

In the long run VIA ended up replacing one of the two Renaissance consists with a massive stainless steel HEP1 consist, including a virtually unprecedented six coaches, two Skylines (one of which was used as overflow dining car space), and seven sleepers, in addition to the baggage, diner and Park car. The HEP1 cars can accommodate more passengers than the Renaissance equipment, so this made for a significant increase in capacity on those trains. The other Renaissance consist was also expanded to peak lengths.

This adjustment to the equipment did allow VIA to fit more people on some of their busiest trains, including the #14 from Montreal on Dec. 21st, which had previously sold out long in advance; but no matter how much capacity they added to each train, the existing three departures in each direction still fell well below the capacity of previous years with extra trains, and offered fewer travel options.

The final ridership numbers that were released reflect this reality. Based on post-holiday press releases from each of the last four years, VIA carried a total of 8,000 passengers over the holidays in 2015-16, 7,600 in 2016-17, 7,700 in 2017-18, and only 7,100 in 2018-19. It is worth noting that the expanded capacity on those individual trains likely helped maintain ridership numbers that were not as much lower as they could have been if they simply ran standard-length trains three times per week. Yet it still means that ridership was down roughly eight percent compared to the previous year.

TAA was very positive about VIA's addition of extra trains in previous years, and continue to feel that this helped to demonstrate that there is additional potential for ridership with expanded service – something we believe would be true throughout the year and not only over the holidays. We will certainly continue to push for VIA to add extras again in future years.

-Tim Hayman

Deal struck for Amherst Station Pizzeria to take up residence, waiting room to re-open

After three years of negotiations and roughly a year after a tentative deal was first announced, a formal agreement has finally been reached to sell the historic train station in Amherst NS. A three-way pact among VIA, the town, and a local restaurateur will see part of the station turned into a pizzeria, and the waiting room re-opened for passengers.

VIA closed the Amherst station, along with Sackville and a number of others across their system, at the same time that the *Ocean* was cut to thrice weekly operation in 2012. Since then Amherst has remained a stop on the route, but the waiting room has been closed and the building has been unused. Reports surfaced a few years ago that negotiations were underway to sell the building to the town, but until recently it was unclear if the deal would ever be completed.

On January 29th, officials from the town of Amherst, VIA Rail, and Jeff Bembridge signed a series of agreements that will see the town purchase the station from VIA, and then rent the space to Mr. Bembridge under a five-year lease to own agreement. Mr. Bembridge plans to begin renovations as soon as possible to turn part of the station into a pizzeria. The town will pay roughly \$7,000 to install a new furnace, and Bembridge will pay the town a total of \$64,980 (plus HST) in monthly installments over the five years.



VIA #15, the *Ocean*, slows for its stop in Amherst in the fall of 2018. A deal to sell the station to the town will soon see the waiting room re-opened for passengers for the first time since 2012. (PHOTO – Tim Hayman)

The most positive news for passengers taking the train from Amherst is that VIA will rent the waiting room space and will re-open it to passengers, providing a heated space to wait for trains and access to washrooms. There is, however, no indication that VIA plans to re-staff the station.

CN places bid to buy Halterm

Railway plans to make Halifax “Prince Rupert of the East”

There has been much discussion recently about plans to expand Halterm, the south end container terminal in Halifax. After a discussion of ambitious possibilities including relocating the terminal to the Dartmouth side of the Harbour and a failure to secure federal infrastructure funding for port expansion plans, Halterm has moved ahead with an expansion plan that will see the existing site expanded to

allow for the facility to handle two ultra-class container ships at the same time. Halterm also outlined plans that would potentially see more container traffic taken by rail to transload facilities in Moncton and a potential new facility in the New Glasgow area, rather than going directly by truck from the port.

In December a new rail component entered the story, with news that CN and an unidentified partner have placed a bid to purchase a stake in Halterm. CN says that their goal would be to turn Halifax into the “Prince Rupert of the East”, a reference to the enormous success that CN has had with growing container traffic from Prince Rupert BC. They hope that their Halterm purchase could lead to a doubling of the container traffic coming through the Port of Halifax. It would also serve to add an additional rail focus into the operation, prioritizing moving as much traffic as possible from the port by rail as opposed to be truck.

To handle the increase in traffic, CN would also need to expand their track capacity in the city. This could include the expansion of yards to allow them to build two large trains at once, as well as an expansion of track capacity in the south-end rail cut that accesses Halterm.

One question that arises is what implications this would have for passenger rail development around Halifax, particularly the city’s ongoing exploration of commuter rail and VIA’s theoretical plans to add additional trains in the form of regional rail. Both of these plans, especially the commuter rail possibility, would result in more passenger trains travelling through the rail cut to reach the downtown station. In the past, CN has indicated that such plans would require adding additional track capacity and likely signaling the line. So it certainly seems possible that CN’s plans for Halterm could turn out to require some of the same expansions that would be necessary for commuter rail to become a reality. Could a deal between CN and the city, where Halifax contributes to the cost of double-tracking and signaling in exchange for track access, be a possibility under this scenario?

Time will tell. It’s expected that the CN acquisition could be finalized early this year, if the deal is accepted. If it goes through, more details of their plans should soon emerge.

-Tim Hayman

Rail Commentary

Cape Breton Coal by Sea

Rail an attractive option, but does it make sense?

Where available, many companies all over the world ship by water, as it is a viable, practical and economical alternative to both the railroad and trucks. Cape Breton is blessed in that it does have an abundance of deep harbours, open bays and navigable waterways, so this option is available for the mine at Donkin. With the challenges now being faced by using trucks and also rail in getting coal

delivered to the docks in Sydney, this may be the only option left for the company (Kameron Coal) at this time. It also leaves the possibility of coal delivery to NS Power at Point Tupper and Trenton by barge sometime in the future, if local coal is used there.

Production at the mine is expected to triple over the next few years, and getting the coal to Sydney, which is a challenge now, will be a major problem by that time if a solution is not found. Due to heavy loads on congested roads and city streets, transportation by truck has little if any public support. Rail is hailed as the way to go by many, but there are problems over and above set up costs that put rail's availability several years away (if ever) – time the company does not have. If all goes well, barges could be at sea in just a couple of years, and this alternative has already been environmentally reviewed and certified by both the provincial and federal governments.

By rail, I assume it would require a rebuild of the old Devco right of way from Morion Junction to Victoria Junction, a distance of 16 miles. As this is a rebuild, not a reopening of a dormant railroad, in all probability there would be a requirement for a partial or complete provincial and maybe even a federal environmental review before the first spike is driven. This could take months or years if there is a challenge.

There are demands that at some locations the rebuild should detour or divert from the original right of way, which would add extra cost and cause even more delays. To do this may require a separate environmental assessment, surveying, calls for tenders, assessing bids, and maybe even expropriating property. If you think that this is not a problem, call the people building the second cruise ship dock in Sydney, and I am sure they will tell you that it is.

There could be issues with the land owners along the abandoned right of way and strong opposition from the now recreational users. When some railroads are abandoned land owners next to the line are given the option to buy the portion of the line adjacent to their property. Also often the abandoned right of way is purchased by municipalities for recreational purposes and the pleasure of residents. I know that in some municipalities in Nova Scotia this is so. If either applies in the Cape Breton Regional Municipality the prospect of getting access to the right of way again may be just about impossible.

To build a complete new rail line from Morion Junction following a route to the south of Sydney airport to Victoria Junction is also an option. This would be a new routing altogether, to be built at considerable cost and would encounter all the challenges that I have outlined above, and maybe more, and take several years to complete. There are a few other possibilities for rail, but on a preliminary look I see they are remote and again, would face the same drawbacks and problems as I have noted above.

One of the main selling points that attracted the Cline Group here to Cape Breton to develop the Donkin mine, besides the quality and quantity of the coal, the island's mining heritage, and a skilled and available work force, was the mine's nearness to a major port. Other mining operations have to transport coal many hundred miles to reach tidewater, while Sydney is only twenty miles away. Most mining operations have only two transportation options – the railroad or the highway – but Cape Breton offers a third, and the third one available for Donkin in my opinion is the best. I say "yes, if by sea".

- Don MacLeod

Motorcoach and Transit

Bus service returns to the South Shore Lunenburg County served by bus for first time since 2012



Lunenburg Mayor Rachel Bailey and Mahone Bay Mayor David Devenne getting off the bus in Mahone Bay during the inaugural runs of the new South Shore bus on Sept. 10, 2018 (PHOTO – Town of Lunenburg)

Following the exciting return of bus service to Charlotte County in Southwest New Brunswick, Maritime Bus has launched another pilot project that has brought back bus service to the south shore of Nova Scotia. The south shore transit pilot project is a collaborative effort led by the Nova Scotia Community Transportation Network (NSCTN), in partnership with Maritime Bus, Communities Culture and Heritage Nova Scotia, the towns of Bridgewater, Lunenburg and Mahone Bay, the Municipality of the Districts of Chester, Lunenburg, Citizens for Public Transit and the local non-

profit transit providers: Community Wheels, Seniors Wheels, Queen's and Bridgewater Transit and the VON.

Launched in September of 2018, Maritime Bus set out a schedule that would provide three daily round-trips from Lunenburg County to Halifax, also connecting the towns of Bridgewater, Lunenburg and Mahone Bay. The schedule is oriented to serve commuters heading in to Halifax, as well as those who need to come into the city for appointments, shopping, and other activities. By nature of the relatively frequent service it also works for those heading in the opposite direction. The schedule also incorporates a few well thought out features, like multiple drop-off/pickup options in Halifax (e.g. by the QEII for medical appointments) and well timed connections with the new Bridgewater Transit system.

This pilot marks the first return of bus service to the south shore since Acadian Lines shut down in 2012. When Maritime Bus first launched, they cut back the remnants of the Acadian system to ensure they could manage the new network they were setting up. Now as the company has grown and new partners have emerged to help support these expansions of service, they are willing to embrace opportunities to test new markets that will feed the rest of their system.

Lunenburg County Routes Effective September 10/18

Dep Time		Stops & Times											
Early Am to City	6:00a	Lunenburg Bridgewater To Halifax	Agency Lunenburg	Courtesy Stop Bridgewater Mail	Agency Bridgewater Esso	Flagstop Mahone Bay Lutheran Church Lot	Flagstop Chester Car Pool 9	Flagstop Hubbards Mail	Flagstop Young & Robie Esso / Tims	Flagstop Infirmiry / Summer St	Flagstop Scotia Bk Ctr Duke & Brunswick	Terminal Maritime Bus Weston	
		Arr/Dep Times 6:00a 6:10a 6:20a 6:40a 6:50a 7:00a 7:35a 7:40a 7:45a 7:50a											
		BW Transit Times 06:12 M-F											
AM Connector from City	8:30a	Halifax To Lunenburg Bridgewater	Terminal Maritime Bus Weston	Flagstop Scotia Bk Ctr Duke & Brunswick	Flagstop Infirmiry / Summer St	Flagstop Mahone Bay Lutheran Church Lot	Flagstop Young & Robie Esso / Tims	Flagstop Hubbards Mail	Flagstop Chester Car Pool 9	Flagstop Mahone Bay Lutheran Church Lot	Agency Lunenburg Esso	Courtesy Stop Bridgewater Mail	Agency Bridgewater Esso
		Arr/Dep Times 8:30a 8:35a 8:40a 8:45a 9:00a 9:30a 9:40a 9:55a 10:13a 10:15a											
		BW Transit Times 10:11a 7Days											
AM Connector to City	9:55a	Lunenburg Bridgewater To Halifax	Agency Lunenburg Esso	Courtesy Stop Bridgewater Mail	Agency Bridgewater Esso	Flagstop Mahone Bay Lutheran Church Lot	Flagstop Chester Car Pool 9	Flagstop Hubbards Mail	Flagstop Young & Robie Esso / Tims	Flagstop Infirmiry / Summer St	Flagstop Scotia Bk Ctr Duke & Brunswick	Terminal Maritime Bus Weston	
		Arr/Dep Times 9:55a 10:13a 10:15a 10:35a 10:45a 10:56a 11:11a 11:36a 11:41a 11:45a											
		BW Transit Times 10:12a 7Days											
PM Connector from City	12:40p	Halifax To Bridgewater Lunenburg	Terminal Maritime Bus Weston	Flagstop Scotia Bk Ctr Duke & Brunswick	Flagstop Infirmiry / Summer St	Flagstop Dartmouth Terminal	Flagstop Hubbards Mail	Flagstop Chester Car Pool 9	Flagstop Mahone Bay Lutheran Church Lot	Agency Bridgewater Esso	Courtesy Stop Bridgewater Mail	Agency Lunenburg Esso	
		Arr/Dep Times 12:40p 12:45p 12:50p 1:05p 1:55p 2:05p 2:10p 2:35p 2:37p 2:55p											
		BW Transit Times MB Network Connections											
PM Connector to City	2:35p	Bridgewater Lunenburg To Halifax	Agency Bridgewater Esso	Courtesy Stop Bridgewater Mail	Agency Lunenburg Esso	Flagstop Mahone Bay Lutheran Church Lot	Flagstop Chester Car Pool 9	Flagstop Hubbards Mail	Flagstop Young & Robie Esso / Tims	Flagstop Infirmiry / Summer St	Flagstop Scotia Bk Ctr Duke & Brunswick	Terminal Maritime Bus Weston	
		Arr/Dep Times 2:35p 2:37p 2:55p 3:10p 3:20p 3:30p 4:05p 4:10p 4:15p 4:20p											
		BW Transit Times 3:12p 7Days											
Late PM from City	4:30p	Halifax To Bridgewater Lunenburg	Terminal Maritime Bus Weston	Flagstop Scotia Bk Ctr Duke & Brunswick	Flagstop Infirmiry / Summer St	Flagstop Young & Robie Esso / Tims	Flagstop Hubbards Mail	Flagstop Chester Car Pool 9	Flagstop Mahone Bay Lutheran Church Lot	Agency Bridgewater Esso	Courtesy Stop Bridgewater Mail	Agency Lunenburg Esso	
		Arr/Dep Times 4:30p 4:35p 4:40p 4:45p 5:20p 5:30p 5:40p 6:00p 6:02p 6:20p											
		BW Transit Times 6:12p M-Sat											

Maritime Bus Fares & Types

- Fares & Types:
- Adult One-Way
 - Adult Round Trip
 - Senior/Student One-Way
 - Senior Student Round Trip
 - Same Day Round Trip Adult/Senior/Student
 - Monthly Working Commuter Pass

Maritime Bus Fare Examples All In

From / To Halifax	Adult OW	Adult RT	Adult Same Day Round Trip	Student Senior OW	Student Senior RT	Student Senior Same Day Round Trip	Monthly Pass (Working Commuter All In)
Chester	\$20.54	\$33.98	\$27.93	\$18.02	\$28.46	\$25.54	\$235.00
Mahone Bay	\$27.61	\$46.91	\$38.11	\$24.03	\$40.28	\$34.29	\$375.00
Bridgewater	\$33.80	\$57.85	\$47.02	\$29.28	\$48.74	\$42.21	\$425.00
Lunenburg	\$33.80	\$57.85	\$47.02	\$29.29	\$48.74	\$42.21	\$425.00
Lunenburg - Bridgewater - Mahone Bay	\$13.47	\$21.25	\$17.74	\$12.00	\$18.64	\$16.19	

Benefits

- 3 Departures and 3 Arrivals Daily
- Discounted Monthly Passes
- Discount on Same Day Round Trip Travel
- Convenient Curbside Drop Off and Pick Up locations in Halifax
- WiFi Provided



Inaugural Maritime Bus Lunenburg service schedule. Note that the early morning trip to the city was dropped in January 2019 as Maritime Bus works on refining the schedule. A third later afternoon round trip was added instead.

The schedule has been adjusted slightly since the service launched. The early morning trip was dropped and a later afternoon trip was added instead. Mike Cassidy, president of Maritime Bus, has indicated that the company plans to continue adjusting the service as required to make sure it works for those using it. He also indicated that the company is pleased with ridership growth in the first few months. The service is averaging 20 riders per day, but with the service still new (and bus service absent for the previous 6 years), Cassidy considers this to be a good starting point.

The pilot has been funded for 18 months, after which decisions will have to be made about whether it continues. Those involved are optimistic, and hope that this will be a first step in the goal to ultimately reconnect the entirety of the south shore (all the way to Yarmouth) by public transportation.

- Tim Hayman

“Wait and see” approach on Greyhound issue a failure



One of the last Greyhound buses at Nelson, B.C., just before service ceased at the end of October 2018 (PHOTO – Bob Keating, CBC News)

The owner of Maritime Bus and charter operator Coach Atlantic says the federal government had the opportunity to have a reasonable and workable alternative in place when Greyhound West shut down operations at the end of October. Instead, it chose to take a “wait and see” approach – and as a result there’s no longer a national motorcoach network in Canada.

Mike Cassidy says this country needs a coast-to-coast bus corridor for both passengers and parcels, with full interlining capability and compatible ticketing platforms. As of November 1, 2018, it doesn’t have one.

It’s misleading at best, he says, to claim that 83 percent of the routes abandoned by Greyhound have a replacement service. Perhaps indeed there’s some sort of bus operation on 83 percent of the route mileage, but there’s no connectivity for passengers or interlining of parcels. “And what about frequency and equipment?” he asks.

This lack of connectivity has had a substantial detrimental domino effect on other motorcoach operators. Maritime Bus experienced a significant revenue drop, particularly from its parcels business, in the month following the end of Greyhound service out west.

Mr. Cassidy participated by telephone at TAA’s fall board meeting held in Halifax on December 1. During a discussion that lasted well over an hour, he described in detail the challenges of providing line-haul bus service in Canada – especially in

the more sparsely populated areas. Using the example of Maritime Bus, he pointed out that the economies of scale that his company derives from charter operations, school bussing, and contracted public transit in Prince Edward Island are essential to the survival of his business.

He remains hopeful that a solution will eventually be found by the task force created by Transport Canada when the Greyhound shutdown was first announced. He was disappointed that the group didn't move in a more timely fashion from the outset, but notes that they are now undertaking a "deep dive" on the issue that may result in some policy shifts by government.

- Ted Bartlett

Charlotte County Transportation Forum

October event focused on advancing public transit progress in the region



Stan Choptiany, president of the Southwest New Brunswick Transit Authority, addresses the Charlotte County Transportation Forum on October 30
(PHOTO – Ted Bartlett)

Charlotte County (pop: 25,428) lies in southwestern New Brunswick and has a landmass 60.5% that of PEI and a population density of 7.4/km² vs 25.1/km² for PEI. The scattered rural population has declined 4.2% in the last 5 years and 38.6% of people are over 55. Two of the three major islands have ferry service, but Campobello Island is an orphan with only an irregular seasonal link to the mainland. It does have year-round connections to Canada through the USA. The

four major towns have large seasonal employers with a complement of temporary foreign workers. Fifty per cent of the population lives rurally. Key medical, social and judicial services have relocated to Saint John, 100 km away.

In 2017, a daily return Maritime Bus service from Charlotte County to Saint John was re-established with the initiative of Rural Lynx, (The Southwest New Brunswick Transit Authority Inc. (SWNBTAI)), a not-for-profit group representing all areas of the County. The rationale is to provide available, accessible and affordable transit. To date the service has provided over 2700 rides with ~50% of the riders continuing onto the Maritime Bus network. While successful, not all needs are being met. SWNBTAI invited over 40 groups and individuals to work towards creative solutions by revisiting how residents travel within the County, restating the transportation needs and brainstorming the next steps.

Charlotte County is diverse and resident travel includes boats and ferries, snow mobiles, ATV's, relying on friends and family, Dial-a-Ride, and personal vehicles. The travel needs include specialist appointments, student after school programs, intra and inter-county access to services, seniors' programs, inclement weather travel, poverty issues, socialization, wellness, amelioration of isolation and issues connected to rural living in an era of declining access to and centralization of local services.

The Forum provided a platform for discussion and networking of social, governmental, business and health providers. The participants developed 6 key "creative solutions":

1. Centralize Client Focused Government Transportation Budgets and Assets to maximize Efficiencies: creating economies of scale, maximizing budget efficiencies and increasing availability of underutilized assets.
2. Regional Rideshare: 1st and last mile connections to bus. Intra-regional transportation (within Charlotte County)
3. Consistent, scheduled bus/van/school bus that travels into each individual community to a more central location: Reliable access to community and further transportation options. Independence and freedom of movement.
4. Subsidized Community Cab (including subsidized insurance), with car share: Affordable, accessible, reliable, safe, respectful transportation. Creates employment. Could shorten the bus route time by transporting clients to some of the rural stops along the highway
5. Expand Dial-a-Ride to include weekends, more hours, adding drivers, expanding advertising to get the word out. Expand the possibility for transportation that is more affordable and flexible. Greater government support to pay drivers more for their time as well as mileage.
6. Create an integrated communications platform with a key facilitator/convenor. Includes: a) Information Sharing throughout the County. (b) Develop website (carpooling). (c) Utilize cable TV CHCO. (d) Develop updated phone-in centre. (e) Transportation Case Worker

The Rural Lynx/SWNBTAI Board subsequently met to review and identify where to focus our efforts. Next steps include combining solutions 2, 3, 4 & 6 to develop an integrated multimodal, on demand, responsive, coordinated public transportation business model for a social enterprise entrepreneur that addresses the transportation needs of residents in rural and municipal Charlotte County. The model will utilize the full spectrum of integrated communications technology.

-Stan Choptiany

Fredericton on the Move

Strategic plan released at end of November

The long-awaited Fredericton Transit strategic plan entitled “Fredericton on the Move” was finally released to the public on November 30. It was prepared by Stantec Consulting Ltd. which has had considerable experience in the transit advisory field. The study was over a year in the making and included passenger surveys and stakeholder meetings.

The 217-page study is not unlike most consultant reports in its introductory remarks, opening with some general statements about the virtues of transit. Improving transit will make possible: “compact growth and intensification”, “mixed use developments”, and the encouragement of “density and equitable development” will “foster sustainable growth through transit”. How these optimistic zeniths will be achieved by the modest proposals outlined in the study is not revealed.

The document sets out the following aims: “The improvement of service quality”, “Growth in transit ridership”, “New ways of providing transit” and, “Overcoming stagnant ridership”.

These opening remarks go on to reveal that Fredericton Transit (FT) provides 1.37 million passenger trips per year. In comparing other transit operations deemed as “peers”, (Kingston, Brandon, Red Deer, North Bay and Moncton), FT carries the most at 22 passengers per hour.

The study will seek to identify key routes for increased frequency, seek solutions to low performing routes, and suggest ways to ensure that bus stops are accessible. Many stops have no sidewalk and others are frequently blocked with snow in winter.

The stakeholder consultation dealt with fare affordability, and correspondents pointed out that higher fares would be resisted unless there was a corresponding improvement in service quality. This is especially true of the study’s proposal to abandon the concessionary bus pass for seniors over 65, which presently costs \$50

annually. The authors of the study claim this price is “unsustainable” and propose that it be replaced with a “low income monthly pass” open to all adults who qualify at \$42 per month. Those not meeting the “low income” qualification would pay the regular monthly pass rate of \$84 monthly. At the time of writing the resulting inevitable controversy has eclipsed discussion on all the other study proposals which are of a more operational nature.



A pair of Fredericton Transit buses wait at their stops on a chilly winter day (PHOTO – Michael Perry)

Further to the fare issue, there is a reluctance by students at UNB to enter into a transit pass agreement which would be incorporated into the Student Union fee. The reason most frequently given is that the service is not frequent enough to be convenient. But the study fails to mention that this student reluctance has a history. Saint Thomas University Student Union, which shares the same campus as UNB, entered into such an agreement some years ago. UNB Student Union also petitioned FT for a similar arrangement. It was refused, on the grounds that such an arrangement would overburden the transit system because UNB had a much larger student population! Now that student tuition fees have increased considerably, UNB students are reluctant to enter into any agreement which will increase their overall costs. The result has been a net loss of potential passengers to FT as a result of its previous short-sightedness. Any change in student attitude will require the transit offer to be very attractive.

Stakeholders also expressed a strong desire for Sunday services where presently none exists. A Sunday service on some routes, or a combination of routes should be piloted to gauge passenger response, provided funding was made available. It was felt that if mobility was valued by the city, then the additional costs could be justified. Increased service frequency was another popular request, the present regular service interval of one bus per hour was viewed as inconvenient and a disincentive to use transit. Stakeholders also expressed the opinion that parking fees in the downtown core were too low to constitute an incentive to use the transit alternative. There was a shortage of locations available to purchase passes and bus fares as only tickets, passes and exact cash fares were accepted by bus drivers. A transfer hub north of the river was suggested to reduce the present need to travel over the river and back to travel from one end of the north side to the other. A “trans north side” route, which would also end the need to cross the river was proposed by some correspondents.

On the technology side increased use of passenger counting and tracking was recommended. This would provide customer information to improve route and service planning. The provision of CCTV in each bus could improve passenger and driver safety. Innovative solutions to services later in the evening could lead to “on demand” services using “pop-up” routing. This is presently used by Belleville Transit to cover both late evening and Sunday services. The use of ‘touch’ technology in fare collection using open source payment such as credit and debit cards would make tickets and transfers obsolete. Fares should be fixed such that the cost of transit is competitive with the cost of driving and parking. The importance of forming “partnerships” was also emphasized. It was noted that New Brunswick was the only provincial jurisdiction in Canada which does not fund urban transit. Partnerships with community organizations, other municipal departments (especially where snow clearance around bus stops is required), and key trip destinations such as shopping centres, and companies which could provide potential technical solutions to transit issues should also be sought. Free employee parking, especially for government employees, should be curtailed, and employees offered some form of concessionary transit pass instead. Marketing should be given careful consideration, especially in the establishment of a “Transit is Cool” culture in Fredericton.

There is a need for fleet modernization and improved accessibility with buses deploying curbside ramps for ease of access. Purchases of buses should be combined with those of other municipalities in order to get the best price. Fredericton is very much a “car-centric” city. The first question asked of the planners by city council when a new development is proposed is, “Where will they all park?” One of the largest budget items is that of road and roundabout provision to facilitate the flow of traffic downtown. This, despite the morning and evening rush causing heavy congestion on the routes leading to both bridges. Use of transit could be encouraged by more frequent buses and routes heading directly to final destinations and by eliminating the present the lengthy wait at the King’s Place hub interchange thus reducing journey times. Instead it is suggested that the driver’s “break” come at the turnaround points of routes. This would enable some

journeys presently taking forty-five minutes end to end to be accomplished in 20 - 25 minutes. The interchange is also the source of considerable fare evasion. It may be observed that while the driver is on a 'break', some passengers enter buses without paying a fare or showing a transfer. The report suggests drivers keep doors closed if they are not present in the bus.

The report suggests that tickets and cash fares continue supplemented by electronic fare collection using debit cards. Surprisingly, it dismisses the use of electronic fare cards like Presto or Oyster. But fare cards are favoured by that element of the public who do not wish to use a debit card or who do not qualify for one. Ride limited fare cards could also be given to welfare recipients, refugees and others receiving aid from social services. They can also incorporate concessionary fares for students, tourists, and seniors. Fares can also be varied to reflect off peak and peak times. They also serve as a transfer if used within a pre-specified time limit. Cash fares should be eliminated. Purchase on an electronic fare system could be made in conjunction with other municipal transit systems to lower cost and to begin to make fare collection interchangeable and universal. A convenient cashless fare collection system is an incentive to transit use. Recently Toronto Transit restricted the use of debit and credit cards, finding that it interfered with the Presto system. These cards can now only be used to 'load' Presto cards.

The report also dismisses the use of low emission hybrid or electric buses and advocates the continued use of diesel-powered buses. This at a time when every effort needs to be made to reduce our carbon "footprint". At the time of writing, the time limit for reducing carbon pollution to stop climate change was announced to be about ten years. Most jurisdictions in Europe will have made considerable progress in eliminating carbon, and in fact, have legislation in place enforcing this. Transport for London has an increasing number of hybrid and battery powered buses. Why does Stantec continue to advocate for the continuing use of diesel buses for Fredericton Transit?

The study concludes with a summary of recommendations for periods of two, five, and ten years.

Short term (0-2 years):

- Recast some bus routes so that they proceed on a more direct path toward their final destinations resulting in a time saving for passengers and serve areas en route of high population density.
- Develop "park and rides" along existing routes utilizing, where possible, existing parking lots.
- Eliminate low ridership routes and replace with an "on demand" shared ride contracted taxi service to the nearest existing bus interchange point.
- Consider in co-operation with city planners, a re-arrangement of the King's Place hub.
- Discuss with the province financial assistance for the provision of passes for those with low incomes.

- Develop non-fare sources of revenue. (Advertising, provincial contribution from gas tax, etc.)
- Harmonize price and extend agreement for the U-Pass to UNB, NBCC, and NB College of Art and Design.
- Investigate E-Pass agreements with employers. Begin negotiations with government and regional hospital initially before extending to other major employers.
- Commence or continue conversations with prospective partners, such as community organizations, technology companies, key trip destinations such as shopping centres, neighbouring municipalities and municipal departments.
- Use a marketing agency to update logo and provide clear direction for the Fredericton Transit brand.
- Begin transition to a 15- year lifecycle for buses. (presently 18 years).
- Develop criteria for monitoring progress toward performance improvement and goals.

Medium term (3-5 years)

- Extend southern suburban bus route to include Fredericton Airport.
- Pilot a Sunday service on selected routes.
- Consider the potential for an interchange hub on the north side to reduce cross-river travel for passengers wishing to reach north side destinations only.
- Invest in ``on-demand`` scheduling software.
- Continue data collection and analysis.
- Revise the fare collection system.
- Implement new bus stop signs using new Fredericton Transit brand.
- Evaluate results of changing to a 15-year life cycle for buses.
- Modify objectives etc. as new information becomes available.

Long-Term (5 years and more)

- Further develop park-and-rides.
- Further improvement to collection and analysis of data.
- Continue cultivating and extending partnerships.
- Further implementation of new bus stop signage
- Replace present communication system in buses.
- End paper- based fares.
- Continue and improve data collection, adoption of new technology, and public feedback.

This report was released with minimum publicity. Apart from the recent senior fare controversy little further has caught the public's notice. The present political and fiscal climate in New Brunswick is such that the city can probably expect little provincial government encouragement to make Fredericton's public transit

system a more viable option to car use. Unless what has been up to now a very `car-centric` city council decides to whole-heartedly support some of these proposals substantive change appears unlikely.

-Michael Perry

Commentary

Autonomous Vehicles: Dystopia or Utopia?

Autonomous cars and trucks have been much in the news recently. They promise unmatched safety, convenience and accessibility, and these benefits will probably be realized sooner or later. Some people have suggested that self-driving cars will replace public transit and autonomous trucks could all but decimate freight railways. As public transit and rail advocates, we must think carefully about this emerging technology, and explore how it could affect other modes, for better or for worse. Here are a few thoughts to get a discussion started, and we encourage our members to go online or write to us with their own insights and suggestions for this important topic.

Imagine a world where everyone owns their own fully autonomous motor vehicle, fitted out so they can eat, sleep, work and socialize on the move. People could live far beyond metro areas, especially if fuel remains cheap or, as is more likely, batteries become more affordable and efficient for electric propulsion. Congestion on approach roads to downtowns and business parks would entice people to work from home or in their cars, and businesses would want to locate even further away from cities. Although this would revitalize rural areas, it could also encourage car-dependent development to sprawl further and further into rural areas while undermining the viability of walkable, transit-supportive city and town centres.

Unable to compete with the carefree comfort of autonomous private vehicles on freeways, public transit would lose ridership, leading to route abandonments and encouraging a further shift to private vehicles. On the positive side, transit agencies could substitute low-ridership suburban routes with self-driving shared shuttles, enabling operators to focus their resources on trunk routes. These might still be viable, because buses would require no drivers, eliminating a large cost factor, while deadheading and crew shift logistics would be reduced. In at least some cases, passengers would still want a staff person on board an autonomous bus, but that employee could focus on passengers' needs rather than driving - more like the old bus conductors. Even passenger rail could benefit if riders could use their I-phones to arrange to have an autonomous car waiting for them as soon as they disembark, finally solving the "last-mile" problem so often associated with public transit.

Assuming downtowns and town centres somehow survive, traffic lights could be replaced by traffic-dodging synchronized turning which would make streets almost impossible for pedestrians to cross. Streets could become so thick and fast with autonomous vehicles that people would be discouraged from walking and cycling. Where parking is scarce, vehicles would drive away empty after dropping off their occupants, further adding to traffic as they circulate through the streets looking for free parking elsewhere. Whatever appeal city and town centres had as pedestrian-oriented gathering places could disappear.

Meanwhile, autonomous trucks would operate in long platoons of closely spaced, self-propelled units while paying a fraction of the cost imposed by their weight and congestion. Factories and distributors might replace costly warehousing with large, self-driving trucks constantly circulating around suburban ring roads, effectively using the freeway system as publicly subsidized real estate. Railways with privately funded rights-of-way would be unable to compete, leading to abandonments which would shift additional freight onto public roads.

Roads, especially freeways, could become filled with ultra-long trucks with multiple, self-steering trailers, especially if there are no road tolls or weight-distance charges. Road vehicles could be spaced only inches apart even at speed, increasing lane capacity without necessitating road expansion. But freeway geometry and people's stomachs will only tolerate design speeds. As a result fast passenger rail might still have a role, and of course rail could also reap some benefits from self-driving technology if the unions were to allow it.

When the automobile and semi-trailer revolutionized transportation, they reshaped North American economies, lifestyles and settlement patterns. Autonomous driving could reshape North America yet again, and unless governments take early steps in anticipation, many of the results could have serious impacts on the natural and built environment, in spite of the benefits to safety and convenience. Now is the time to shape autonomous vehicles, before they shape us.

There are several opportunities to do so, and in some cases the technology used in autonomous vehicles could facilitate such early action. Here are some concepts to consider:

- **Encourage sharing:** Car-sharing and ride sharing are gaining popularity in urban areas, through such agencies as Carshare Atlantic, Uber and Lyft. To the extent that people can be persuaded to forego costly car ownership and shift their thinking toward cars being a service rather than a product or status symbol, many benefits could arise. If people can simply subscribe to a fleet of autonomous cars which could be summoned by a simple cellphone call, parking demand could be substantially reduced. This would open up large suburban tracts for redevelopment as compact, mixed-use, pedestrian supportive town centres.

- **Zone for Transit Oriented Development:** Increasing density and allowing a mix of shops, services and jobs within a short walk of a station makes public transit more efficient and attractive at the same time. There is a growing demand for walkable development resembling traditional towns, even in suburban locations. Large surface parking lots near railways or bus corridors are ideal opportunities for creating such places. New approaches to zoning can reduce the uncertainties and costs that have discouraged developers from innovative investments and site plans.
- **Invest in strong transit corridors:** If we think of Transit Oriented Development as a series of beads, we can think of high-quality transit service as the string that links them together. Now is the time to decide where the strategic corridors are, that could link existing and potential city and town centres where people can access transit on foot or by bicycle. As we have already seen, low density development could best be served by small, shared autonomous shuttles, freeing transit agencies to focus their investment and operations on strategic corridors. These should form a spine and demonstrate a strong commitment so developers have confidence to invest their own funds in creating town centres and strengthening downtowns as places to live, work, study and play. Whatever mode is chosen, these spines should be developed early, before autonomous cars become so commonplace that they drive development away from cities and towns, to consume valuable farmland and disrupt important ecosystems.
- **Apply variable tolls:** Road space is a limited asset, so users should pay more for travelling in congested, pedestrian-oriented areas and at busy times, than for less heavily used roads or at times when few others are travelling. This would optimize road usage by adding a meaningful market pricing signal, and would encourage people to use public transit in, and between cities and town centres while maximizing the availability of road space for those who need it most.
- **Include the capital, maintenance and insurance costs of cars in the cost of each car trip.** Together with car sharing and ride sharing, this would free lower-income households from the high cost barrier of car ownership, while increasing the cost of using a car for any given trip. This, in turn, would reduce the tendency to use cars for every trip every time, making transit a more attractive option for certain types of trips or times of day.

If we take early steps like those outlined above, autonomous cars can serve us instead of shaping us. The time to act is now. Do you agree? Please share your thoughts with us!

-Marcus Garnet

Big changes for Labrador marine services

Two modern vessels entering service in 2019



MV *Qajaq W* (formerly the *Grete*) was expected to begin service on the Strait of Belle Isle in late January or early February – somewhat earlier than originally planned. The seven-year-old Norwegian-built ship replaces the 49-year-old *Apollo*. A sister ship will begin serving the north coast of Labrador when the 2019 navigation season opens.

(Submitted photo - CBC website)

The Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has awarded two new long-term contracts for a modernized marine service that will see two nearly-new ships replacing three older vessels – two of which were almost 50 years old.

A government announcement said the new contract for the Strait of Belle Isle is valued at approximately \$11.9 million per year for a 12-year term and has been awarded to Labrador Marine Inc. The contract for the north coast of Labrador is valued at approximately \$14.6 million per year for a 15-year term, also awarded to Labrador Marine Inc. to be delivered in partnership with Nunatsiavut Marine Inc.

The Norwegian-built vessels, MV *Grete* and MV *Hiimuaa*, are ice-class 1A ships built for northern climates, increasing capacities along the Labrador coast. Both vessels, which were to be renamed before entering service, are both fully accessible for passengers with disabilities.

The former *Grete* arrived in St. John's in mid-January, already wearing her new name – *Qajaq W*. It's pronounced "Kayak W", reflecting a historic means of transport in coastal Labrador. She can transport as many as 300 passengers, 120 passenger vehicles and eight tractor trailers, and was to enter service in late January or early February. She's a smaller vessel than the 49-year-old *Apollo* that she replaces, and will use half the fuel. Yet she actually has a greater capacity for both passengers and vehicles, and is equipped with an ice-breaking bow at both ends.

Her sister ship – as yet not renamed – will operate out of Happy Valley-Goose Bay when the 2019 navigation season opens, serving isolated ports along the northern Labrador coast. She'll replace both the 32-year-old passenger-freighter *Northern Ranger* and the 47-year old cargo vessel *Astron*. This will complete the transition of the Labrador marine service to a completely roll-on, roll-off operation, handling both highway vehicles and wheeled containers.

Commissioned in 1986, the *Ranger* was the last of the traditional coastal boats. She completed her final run in November, and her future remains uncertain.

- Ted Bartlett, with files from Tom Beckett

Marine Atlantic cost recovery remains above 65%

Ferry rates draw fire at annual public meeting

Marine Atlantic has successfully delivered once again on Transport Canada's cost recovery directives, collecting 67 percent of its operating costs from Newfoundland ferry service users during the fiscal year ended March 31, 2018. The figure was among those revealed at the Crown corporation's annual public meeting held in St. John's on December 14 – and it's beginning to raise some serious questions across the province.

This time round the attendees included civic representatives from the two "bookends" of the island portion of the province – St. John's and Port aux Basques. And they weren't just there out of idle interest. They came looking for answers, in the wake of a resolution passed with 99% support by the province's federation of municipalities at its annual convention two months earlier.

TAA has been advocating on this issue for some time, arguing that the Terms of Union which brought the province into the Canadian Confederation in 1949 were designed to ensure that the cost of crossing the Cabot Strait would not exceed that of moving people and goods the equivalent distance by rail or road. That hasn't

really been the case for many years, and ferry rates – including the inevitable fuel surcharges – are now increasing at a pace far in excess of the cost of living index.

Responses given by Marine Atlantic executives indicated that the non-constitutional seasonal *Argentia* service, and all onboard hospitality services, are required to have full cost recovery, although there were no clear answers as to how such expenses as corporate overhead and feeding and accommodation of crew are apportioned.



Marine Atlantic's MV *Blue Puttees* approaching the dock in North Sydney, NS.

There's growing indignation across the province about the cost recovery target on what is clearly supposed to be a constitutional obligation of the Government of Canada. In fact, no less a personage than Justin Trudeau described the Transport Canada demand as “unreasonable” back in October of 2015. Of course, he wasn't prime minister then – but there's been no change in policy since the Liberals took over the reins of power.

Now with another federal election looming this year, there's an opportunity to ask some pointed questions that some politicians might find a little awkward. If 65% percent was an unreasonable cost recovery demand under the Harper Tories back in 2015, has it now become acceptable under the Trudeau Liberals? Perhaps some sparks will fly as the campaign heats up – and there may at last be some action on a long-standing issue that affects everything on the island from the price of produce at the supermarket to access for potential tourists intrigued by those colourful TV ads.

- Ted Bartlett, with files from Tom Beckett

Bay Ferries to move to Bar Harbor

Nova Scotia to foot the bill



The high-speed CAT ferry will soon be serving Bar Harbor instead of Portland Maine (PHOTO – Tim Hayman)

Late last year Bay Ferries, the operator of the recently revived CAT ferry service between Maine and Nova Scotia, announced that it was looking to move the American terminus of its service from Portland to Bar Harbor. Making the move to Bar Harbor would reduce the duration of the crossing from Yarmouth, allowing for a reduction in fuel costs, and would also avoid some of the uncertainties about the future of the terminal in Portland. It also wouldn't be the first time the

Yarmouth ferry service served Bar Harbor, as the previous iteration of the ferry service sailed there between 1997 and 2009, as did the earlier operation on CN Marine and Marine Atlantic.

In October, the town council of Bar Harbor voted unanimously to support a 5-year lease agreement with Bay Ferries starting in 2019, but then ran up against a number of obstacles related to questions about required upgrades to the terminal and who would cover the costs. Despite these issues Bay Ferries allowed their lease with Portland to expire on December 31st, confident that the arrangements with Bar Harbor would be sorted out in time for the 2019 season.

On February 19, 2019, Bay Ferries announced that it has signed a lease with Bar Harbor to use the ferry terminal for the next 5 years, at a cost of \$1.3 million. It was also revealed that the province of Nova Scotia will be responsible to pay to upgrade the facility, repair the dock, and build a new loading ramp. Nova Scotia will also be expected to contribute to some component of the cost of board control services at the terminal. It is not yet known what these costs will be, as Bay Ferries has requested the numbers not be released to avoid any influence on the final pricing of contracts that have not yet been finalized.

Despite the additional upfront costs, Bay Ferries expects that the move will ultimately reduce costs in the long run thanks to ~40% fuel savings. The shorter crossing and the potential tourist market out of Bar Harbor may also help bring more riders to the ferry. In any case, we'll be keeping a close eye on how the move plays out.

Bookings for 2019 crossings should be available at the beginning of March.

-Tim Hayman

WestJet pulls sudden switch on Dublin flight

Strong community reaction in St. John's

A seasonal route that WestJet consistently trumpeted as the most successful new service introduction in its entire history suddenly fell from favour at the airline's Calgary headquarters last fall. The announcement on November 22 that the daily transatlantic flight from St. John's to Dublin that had operated May through October since 2013 was switching to Halifax came as a bolt from the blue and not-so-friendly skies.

It was an abrupt about-face for the airline, which as recently as last January was insisting that, despite the rerouting of their London Gatwick flight to Halifax in 2018, the YYT-DUB flight was continuing to do well and there were no plans to change it. Not so, said a WestJet spokesperson in November, suggesting that the flight had been failing to meet expectations ever since its launch as the airline's very first transatlantic endeavour.



St. John's Deputy Mayor Sheilagh O'Leary isn't buying WestJet's story about why they've switched their seasonal Dublin flight to Halifax.

"We were blindsided," says St. John's Deputy Mayor Sheilagh O'Leary, who's been a leader in the widespread community push-back against WestJet's decision. She's not buying the airline's story, pointing out that anecdotal evidence from people who used the service over the past six years indicates the flight was full or nearly so on almost every departure.

She suspects that other factors were in play, suggesting that St. John's may have been outfoxed by a behind-the-scenes campaign to establish the Halifax Stanfield International Airport as a transatlantic hub. This summer there will be four daily overseas WestJet flights originating from YHZ, in addition to the year-round service to London Heathrow offered by Air Canada.

Also unconvinced is Irish academic Kieran Cronin, who has started a social media effort that now has nearly 3000 Facebook followers. Quoting figures from Ireland's Central Statistics Office, he said the number of passengers on the DUB-YYT flight grew from 14,433 in 2014 to 22,045 in 2017 – an increase of more than 52%.

A concerted effort is underway in St. John's to attract another carrier that might be interested in direct service to Ireland. Ms. O'Leary notes that the direct flying time from Dublin to St. John's is just over four hours (slightly less in the eastbound direction due to prevailing winds). Now passengers bound for the Emerald Isle from St. John's will have to begin their journey by flying for nearly two hours in the wrong direction on a commuter-style aircraft.

There seems to be little hope that WestJet will change its corporate mind. Right now the only good news seems to be that the airline's St. John's-originating "guests" won't have to pay extra for the dubious privilege of the roundabout routing – at least for the time being.

– Ted Bartlett

In Memoriam

Jim Munves



Jim Munves (1922-2018)

Long time supporter, member, board member and mentor Jim Munves passed away on August 31, 2018, in Charlottetown at the age of 96. Jim joined Transport 2000 (Atlantic), (our society's name up until 2010) in the early 1980's and served on our board of directors until shortly before his passing. Jim was our reprehensive spokesperson and voice on Prince Edward Island for most all of that time. He had a deep passion for the Island's transportation needs, particularly in and around the larger centres but also the rural areas, and how they connected both on-Island and to and from the mainland.

He was a noted author, and a native of New York State. For many years Jim divided his time between New York and his beloved Prince Edward Island, but in his later years he adopted "The Island" as his permanent residence.

We will all miss Jim not only for his devotion to our group, its goals and objectives, but also for his dedication to the transportation needs of Prince Edward Island, his guidance and direction to our board, and his many contributions to this bulletin where he was for many years co-editor. Our deepest sympathy to Jim's family on the loss of a great husband, father and friend.

Meet a Member

Tim Hayman



Tim Hayman has been an active member of Transport Action Atlantic for seven years, and currently serves on the TAA board as secretary and webmaster. He is also co-editor and the layout guy for *The Bulletin*.

Born in Ottawa, he spent most of his formative years in the small eastern Ontario hamlet of Johnstown, right by the St. Lawrence River and within sight of CN's busy Kingston Subdivision. He credits living next to the tracks at a young age for sparking his life-long interest in everything rail-related,

especially the VIA trains that sped by his childhood home on their frequent trips between Montreal and Toronto.

Tim headed east in the fall of 2007 to attend St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, where he completed a BSc. in Biology and Interdisciplinary Studies in Aquatic Resources. He moved to Halifax in the fall of 2011 to complete a Masters of Marine Management at Dalhousie University. He currently works for Fisheries and Oceans Canada in Dartmouth.

One of the perks of moving to the east coast was the opportunity to regularly take the train to and from Ontario to visit family, and Tim soon became a frequent traveller on the *Ocean* and other VIA trains. Wherever possible he prefers to work the train into his travel plans, and in 2017 made his first full coast-to-coast trip by rail from Halifax to Vancouver.

Tim first became involved with TAA when VIA announced the cut to the *Ocean* frequency in 2012, followed soon after by the threat of abandonment to the Newcastle Subdivision. He had always been vocal about rail issues, going back to his teenage years when he often wrote letters to the editor of local newspapers. Wanting to become involved in this particular cause, our group grabbed his attention as the clear voice for passenger rail advocacy in the region.

In addition to being a frequent train traveller, he is also an avid railfan and model railroader, and a frequent concert-goer.

Tim and his partner Ashley live in central Halifax. They don't own a car, and are regular users of public transit.

People in the News



Maritime Bus owner Mike Cassidy says economies of scale derived from charter, transit, and school bus operations are vital to the survival of his line-haul business. But he insists the federal government could be doing more to help the industry – and its wait-and-see attitude isn't working. See our story beginning on page 18.
(PHOTO – CBC News)



Norm Haslett, long time advocate for public transit, excitedly prepares to board the bus in Lunenburg as Maritime Bus' new south shore service launched on Sept. 10, 2018. See story on page 16.
(PHOTO – Town of Lunenburg)