



The Bulletin

TRANSPORT ACTION ATLANTIC

SPRING – SUMMER 2016

A new ferry (and more) for Halifax Transit



PHOTO BY TIM HAYMAN

Halifax Transit's newest ferry rests against a dock next to the Dartmouth Ferry terminal on July 7, 2016. Named after civil rights pioneer Viola Desmond and built by A.F. Theriault & Son Ltd. in Meteghan River, it is the third new ferry to join the Halifax fleet in the last few years.

Our transit coverage begins on page 12.



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Financial Summary (Audited) – Fiscal Year 2015

Income

Dues	\$ 2,658 (see note 1)
Donations	\$ 1,469 (see note 2)
Total Income	\$ 4,127

Expenses

Total Expenses	\$ 6,004 (see note 3)
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Loss

(\$ 1,877.78)

Notes:

1. One half of dues collected are forwarded to the National office.
2. There were no large donations this year
3. Major expenses: Bulletin \$1,300 / Travel \$1,000 / Promotion material \$2,200 - this material is an asset which will last for many years and a unique expense for this year.

This chapter had no accounts payable or accounts receivable and our bank balance was \$ 4,862.16.

(original signed by)
Donald R MacLeod
Treasurer

13 July 2016

Welcome new corporate members

Corporate memberships are not only an important source of revenue to Transport Action Atlantic, they represent support in principal by companies and municipalities across the region for TAA's advocacy activities. Since our last *Bulletin* was published, we have been pleased to welcome VIA Rail Canada and the City of Charlottetown to a growing list of supporters.

Corporate membership signifies that the sponsoring organization recognizes and generally supports TAA's efforts toward convenient, affordable and sustainable public transportation, and is committed to working or dialoguing with us toward achieving our objectives. It doesn't imply that we will always see eye to eye on the way forward, or that TAA will refrain from commenting on certain issues where the corporate sponsor may be promoting a divergent point of view.

Welcome aboard, Charlottetown and VIA!



Advocacy in Action

Since last fall's federal election, Transport Action Atlantic has been busy building relationships with the new Liberal government, and with members of Parliament from across the region – many of whom are new to public life. A number of our staunchest allies from the previous House of Commons were unsuccessful in their re-election bids, including Megan Leslie and Peter Stoffer in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick's Robert Goguen. In some respects, it was like starting from scratch.

Our key issues are the future of passenger rail in the Maritimes, and rates on the constitutionally-guaranteed Marine Atlantic ferries to Newfoundland. There have been a number of face-to-face meetings, as well as telephone contact. In addition, Transport Minister Marc Garneau arranged a meeting in Ottawa with several of his senior officials, which was attended by TAA president Ted Bartlett and Harry Gow, then president of Transport Action Canada.

Several members of the Atlantic Liberal Caucus are known to have been actively promoting passenger rail, and we continue to work closely with them and encourage their efforts to convince the transport minister and Cabinet of the importance of that service in this part of the country – not just in the Quebec-Windsor Corridor.



Ted Bartlett and Dennis Livingstone met with the new Moncton-Riverview-Dieppe MP Ginette Petitpas Taylor on March 16th.



Dennis Livingstone with Cumberland-Colchester MP Bill Casey.

Policy changes behaviour, minister says



New Brunswick Transportation Minister Roger Melanson was a panel discussion participant at TAA's annual general meeting on April 9.

It's not an admission you hear too often from cabinet ministers, so those in attendance at Transport Action Atlantic's annual general meeting in Moncton on April 9 were perhaps taken a bit by surprise. Roger Melanson, at the time New Brunswick's transportation and infrastructure minister, was exceptionally frank when he suggested that perhaps governments should be subsidizing public passenger services more. The comment came in the course of an animated sustainable transportation policy panel discussion.

"Policy changes behaviour," Minister Melanson told the gathering, asking why, for example, there was so much surface parking in downtown Moncton. It goes against the goal of better public transit, he said.

Fellow panellist Yves Bourgeois, director of the University of New Brunswick's Urban and Community Studies Institute commented that in Moncton only four percent of residents use public transportation to get to work; in Toronto the figure is 24%.

We need to link our built environment to transportation Dr. Bourgeois said, noting that transport costs were completely ignored when the decision was made to locate the new Moncton High School deep in the city's outskirts where more than 99% of the student body would have to be bussed. He offered the opinion that people

will gladly give up ownership of a second motor vehicle if public transport alternatives are attractive enough.

“Where is the strategy?” asked business consultant Chuck Steeves, who said he was hard-pressed to find any evidence of it – for either the movement of goods or people. He cited the example of Bedford to downtown Halifax rail corridor as a resource not used to best advantage because of the policy vacuum. While he allowed that there’s really no place for government in owning rail lines, he suggested the taxpayers should be supporting them in the same way they subsidize highways, bridges and ferries.

“User pay is one way to change behaviour,” commented business writer and consultant Bill Belliveau, which naturally steered the discussion in the direction of highway tolls. Minister Melanson, who has also served as minister of finance, acknowledged there was widespread support for tolls evident in the budgetary consultation process – but equally great difference of opinion as to how it could be implemented. In the end, the government chose to increase HST instead.

Yves Bourgeois, who is also an active member of TAA, said it’s an unfortunate reality that New Brunswickers on average are spending 20 percent of their income on transportation. For low-income families, it’s a massive burden.

That view is shared by Green Party leader and MLA David Coon, who had also planned to participate in the discussion, but was sidelined by the flu.

Meanwhile, TAA has seized the opportunity to maintain momentum in dialogue with government. There was one private meeting with Minister Melanson before he left the transportation portfolio in a subsequent cabinet shuffle. A follow-up session has been tentatively arranged with the new transportation minister, Bill Fraser.

Transport Action Canada chooses new president



Bruce Budd is the new president of Transport Action Canada.

National fund-raising effort launched

Long-time public transportation advocate Bruce Budd of Toronto is the new president of Transport Action Canada. Bruce was elected at the national annual general meeting held on May 14th. He succeeds Harry Gow, who was founding president of Transport 2000 back in 1977, and had agreed to resume an interim leadership role two years ago.

One of the new president’s first initiatives was to

launch a nation-wide fund-raising drive, which is intended to enable the organization to move boldly forward in its advocacy efforts. Key to success is a modern and strengthened communications program, which is already underway.

TAC has engaged the services of a contractor to facilitate this initiative, and to streamline many of the administrative processes at the national office. Justin Prest's services are being cost-shared by TAC and Transport Action Ontario. Justin has recently launched a new and improved website, and a new computer system and software has also been purchased.

All of this, of course, requires money, which is the reason for the fund-raising campaign. The immediate goal is \$15,000, and a long-time supporter of Transport Action generously offered to match donations made up to the end of June to a maximum of \$5000. Members and others quickly rose to the challenge, and contributions passed the \$5000 mark in short order. As of the end of June, the total raised was approaching \$12,000.

Contributions from members and supporters of Transport Action Atlantic would be gratefully welcomed. Donations can be made online at the new TAC website, or by cheque. And they are, of course, tax-deductible.

Rail News

Struggle to save Cape Breton line continues

A veteran Transport Action Atlantic campaigner is feeling more upbeat these days about the future of rail transportation in Cape Breton. Although the line between St. Peter's Junction and Sydney has been effectively shut down for some 18 months, Don MacLeod still believes he'll be hearing the legendary Orangedale whistle blow again – and not just in his dreams. Don represented TAA at a large scale public meeting in February that drew a crowd of nearly 400, and again at the annual general meeting of the Scotia Rail Development Society on March 20.

“I left the February meeting with a very upbeat feeling for the future of the railroad, he says. “It was well organized, well conducted, and well attended. Furthermore, the Province appears on side with its amendments to the *Railways Act*” (the intent of which is to make it much more difficult for the Genesee & Wyoming to simply rip up the tracks in the name of shareholder value).

The legislation – which Don describes as a “delaying tactic” – was subsequently passed by the Legislature. However, there's still been nothing specific about either provincial or federal infrastructure funding for the line.



The station master is long since gone, and the weeds are overgrowing the rusty rails of the Sydney Subdivision in this August 2015 view. But TAA's Don MacLeod is optimistic about hearing the Orangedale whistle once again.

Despite neglect, the structure committee of the SDRS reported that the line is generally in good shape. There is lot of erosion along the Bras d'Or Lakes, and most ties need replacing, but the rail is apparently in good shape. Most important of all, the major bridge at Grand Narrows is surprisingly well-preserved.

A consultant's report commissioned by the Province indicated that an investment of \$30 million over five years would be needed to bring the track back to Class 3 standard, where freight train speeds of 40 miles per hour would be permitted.

Don MacLeod's optimism is echoed by Mayor Cecil Clarke of the Cape Breton Regional Municipality, who was keynote speaker at the February rally in Sydney. The mayor sees a lot of promise in the efforts of the Port of Sydney Development Corporation and Harbor Port Development Partners to promote a container terminal, adding that rail is crucial to this project's success. This view was further reinforced during Sydney Port Days events in May.

Mayor Clarke views the continuing presence of Genesee & Wyoming at the table as a hopeful sign. It's also understood that CN is playing a continuing role in ongoing discussion about the container port proposal. While there's been no indication that the American-owned shortline company is proceeding with an

abandonment petition for the dormant line, neither has there been any public commitment to put their application to remove the tracks on long-term hold.

Most recently, Premier Stephen McNeil accompanied Transportation Minister Geoff MacLellan on a mid-June visit to Cape Breton, and rail was one of the subjects on the agenda with local officials. However, nothing significant emerged beyond a feeling of optimism that the story is far from over.

“Now that the minister has the Yarmouth ferry sailing, he could now swing his office chair around and look through a different window – one that faces east,” Don says.

VIA tweaks timetable – but no developments on service improvements

Passengers travelling to Montreal on VIA’s *Ocean* are now departing an hour later than previously, and the train’s total travel time has been reduced by 15 minutes. Timetable changes effective June 1 now have #15 departing Halifax at 1300 and Moncton at 1732. Arrival in Montreal is at 1003 next morning, and with ongoing connections to Ottawa and Toronto showing some improvement.

In fact, the most significant good news is that connecting passengers to the National Capital Region no longer have to disembark at 0500 in Sainte-Foy and await a corridor train. Also relegated to history is the bizarre scenario which had the westbound *Ocean* sitting on a siding east of Drummondville for as much as half an hour, waiting to be overtaken by that same corridor train. Ottawa-bound passengers now make the transfer at *Gare Centrale*, and the lack of a workable connection on Saturdays has also been addressed. For Toronto-bound customers total trip time from Halifax has been reduced by 27 minutes.

Eastbound, the departure of #14 from Montreal is at 1900 – five minutes later than previously, but the total run time to Halifax has been lengthened by 11 minutes, further compromising some already-tenuous local bus connections, particularly to Cape Breton.

Clearly there has been no improvement in track speeds. Large stretches of the Newcastle Subdivision in northern New Brunswick are still restricted to 30 mph, and there’s no sign of a fix any time soon. VIA’s eastern general manager Susan Williams says talks are ongoing with the “infrastructure owner” (VIA-speak for CN), but she’s unable to give any specifics as to if or when the stretch between Bathurst and Miramichi in particular might be upgraded. The unfortunate reality is that the travel time from Moncton to Campbellton remains nearly 50% longer than it was 15 years ago.

Meanwhile, Ms. Williams confirms that any hope of re-introducing regional services to the Maritimes in early fall has evaporated, but there's still a chance that something might be in place by Christmas – although 2017 appears more likely. No date has yet been set for test runs of the proposed RDC equipment, nor has CN given permission for the running of any additional passenger trains on its tracks.

-Ted Bartlett



VIA Rail Train 14 "The Ocean" zips through Enfield in early 2016 (PHOTO -Tim Hayman)

VIA Rail and Maritime Bus enter new partnership

maritimebus.com
RIDE it. SHIP it. bus it.



VIA Rail announced on June 21, 2016, that it is entering a new partnership with Maritime Bus that will allow passengers to book Maritime Bus tickets through VIA Rail. Starting July 14, passengers will be able to see bus options and purchase Maritime Bus tickets through VIA's website.

This partnership will also allow passengers to book connections between VIA and Maritime Bus to access destinations not served by VIA, or to book bus tickets on

days and times when VIA's trains are not running. This would, for example, make it easier for people to plan a trip where one direction is on the train, and the other is on a bus due to the days of operation of the Ocean.

At this time, the only designated train-bus connection points are planned to be at Moncton and Halifax, which means that passengers going on to Sydney, for example, would be offered a bus between Moncton and Truro rather than the train. However, given the current arrangement in Truro, where the Maritime Bus terminal is a fair distance across town, setting up such a connection would be challenging. The current bus and train schedules are also not necessarily ideal for booking many connections, and missed connections could become a headache; VIA has indicated that passengers missing connections will be accommodated on the next train or bus, but it is unclear how that would work in cases where the next departure is on the following day (or later).

It is, however, clear that this partnership is intended to be the first step in greater integration between the two carriers. In response to questions on their Facebook page, VIA stated that "Being able to make bookings between our two companies is the first step in our new partnership. Both organizations are committed to enhancing connections for people in the Maritimes. We have more work to do now that the first step is almost complete."

VIA also reiterated that this new partnership is not intended to replace the planned regional trains, nor does it preclude that development. Echoing statements made by VIA's president in their recent annual public meeting, VIA wrote "We still intend to offer intercity travel in the NB & NS. We've been in discussions with our railway partner who owns the infrastructure to certify the equipment to be used as well as the schedule that would be put in place. We're still confident that the service may be made available as early as this fall, and no later than early 2017."

In a press release announcing the new partnership, Maritime Bus president Mike Cassidy said "Having two competing transportation services willing to share train and bus infrastructure for the benefit of their passengers shows total commitment to the marketplace. We are proud of this new Intermodal Partnership which has the Maritime Region at heart."

VIA President and CEO Yves-Desjardins Siciliano echoed the sentiment, saying "Providing a simple and seamless travel experience is what will encourage people to leave their car behind and travel with Maritime Bus and VIA Rail. This agreement is part of our strategy aimed at increasing the mobility of Canadians while reducing their carbon footprint". He continued by saying "By making travel on an integrated network of carriers more convenient and attractive, this initiative will help residents from communities across the Maritimes to travel within the region and beyond by connecting to the Ocean train for a trip to Montréal. It also encourages all Canadians to discover the beauty of the Eastern provinces."

Susan Williams, VIA’s General Manager, Eastern Canada, said “Thanks to the integration of Maritime Bus’ and VIA Rail’s networks, we are glad to offer our passengers the possibility to easily plan a trip to take part in the many attractions Canada’s Maritime Provinces offer.”

As of July 14, VIA’s online reservations system is indeed showing Maritime Bus connection options, as well as displaying bus options in addition to trains, or in place of them on days when no trains are operating. There are still some issues to be worked out, as some stations (like Sydney) are displayed in the system, but bring up an error message if you try to book a trip involving them. There are also some interesting options; booking a trip from Antigonish to Montreal, for example, will send you on a bus to Halifax and then on the train from there, rather than being able to leave later in the morning and pick up the train in Truro. Clearly there are many issues left to sort out, but one can hope that this will be the beginning of a move towards easier and more seamless travel options for people in the Maritimes.

-Tim Hayman

Motorcoach and Transit

Slow but sure – Transit progress continues in SW New Brunswick



The original fall 2015 starting date for the transit service linking the coastal communities of western Charlotte County with Saint John proved to be a bit too ambitious, but the organizers are still hoping to begin operation sometime this year, provided that the necessary financing and approvals can be secured.

The delay has been used productively, allowing plans to be further refined and providing for the development of a RuralLynx logo, which will be used on publicity materials and to identify the transit vehicles.

Several presentations have been made to provincial cabinet ministers in order to demonstrate the scope and need for the proposed service. These have been favourably received, and further presentations are planned to provincial and municipal officials as well as to the community at large.

The goal is to provide an affordable and accessible transportation service for New Brunswick Southwest. A twice-daily bus service would connect the communities within coastal Charlotte County with each other, and then beyond to the Saint John hub, would meet a number of provincial objectives.

It would support the economic, environmental, social and cultural well-being of rural communities by contributing to an integrated and sustainable multimodal transit plan. It would be affordable, and contribute to economic and community development by facilitating access to employment and to health and social service facilities. Rural isolation would be overcome and environmental protection enhanced.

According to John McGarry, CEO of the Horizon Health Network, “There is a need for improved access to affordable transportation to get to work, appointments or even to the next community. We have no choice but to act now to put the right resources in the right place, so we can adapt to these new health care needs.” There is a clear cost advantage to both the provincial Departments of Health and Social Services by improving access to preventative care which is presently limited by the lack of affordable transportation for a large proportion of the vulnerable population. Where clients have to be transported to Saint John for medical appointments by the Department of Social Development the average cost for a taxi is between \$60 and \$75, and the total annual cost to the department for Charlotte County clients alone is approximately \$108,000. The bus cost would be considerably less.



TAA board members Michael Perry, Vernon Woolsey and Ted Bartlett met with New Brunswick’s then-Social Development Minister Cathy Rogers last October 5 to discuss rural transit in the province.

The RuralLynx proposal would link with Maritime Bus and Saint John Transit, Charlotte Dial-a-Ride (which would feed the main bus route), and existing taxi and private services in the region. There is strong community support for the

service, which is partnered with the Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation, the municipalities, local business and industry, and the Southwest New Brunswick Service Commission.

Government assistance has been sought to fund the proposal as a provincial pilot project, and to assist in the design of an evaluation model to show the project's return on investment and the subsequent government savings.

The lack of transportation is a primary concern in Charlotte County. It has an impact on employment and tourism, it increases health care costs, it increases Social Development costs, and it limits access to post-secondary education and to the provincial court system which is now located in Saint John. RuralLynx would help to solve many of these issues while enhancing the quality of life for many of the residents of this region of New Brunswick.

The initiative appears to have won the support of both New Brunswick Southwest PM Karen Ludwig and provincial cabinet minister Rick Doucet. Ms. Ludwig went so far as to say it could serve as a national pilot project, adding that that funding authorities must give it adequate time to prove itself.

- Michael Perry

Codiac Transpo shows ridership gains

Nearly 2.5 million people rode Greater Moncton's Codiac Transpo in 2015, according to general manager Angela Allain. That represented a two percent increase in ridership from the banner 22 percent jump the previous year. To put things in perspective, however, it should be noted that the 2014 growth was abnormal, as the service was in recovery mode after a protracted labour dispute.

In an interview with the *Times & Transcript*, Ms. Allain attributed the growth to various promotions launched in the wake of the five-month 2012 lockout. These included special pricing or free rides at certain times for students and seniors, and no-charge transportation for all during some special events. The aim was to rebuild rider confidence in the service, as well as persuade non-users to give transit a try.

While the service was shut down, management had developed major changes in routes and schedules, resulting in increased frequency for most users in the city of Moncton proper. Riverview and Dieppe purchase service from Codiac Transpo, subject to budgets set by the respective municipalities. At present, Dieppe is providing more transit for its residents than is Riverview.

Meanwhile, both Fredericton Transit and the Saint John Parking and Transport Commission reported ridership declines for 2015.



Codiac Transpo invested some of the money saved through lower fuel costs in a billboard promotional campaign. (PHOTO – Ted Bartlett)

Update on Halifax Transit **A new ferry, new buses, and new ideas**

HALIFAX TRANSIT

It is an interesting time to be talking and thinking about (and using!) public transportation in Halifax. Several notable developments have taken place in recent months.

The “Moving Forward Together” plan to redesign the public transit map was adopted by Regional Council at its meeting on April 12th. However, Council passed a large number of amendments to the basic implementation requesting reports on numerous variations to the core plan (generally addressing service to

areas that the plan would not provide.) The plan is to be implemented over 5 years. TAA members who have been interested in this work have generally been supportive of the principles the new plan endorses, such as more frequent service on core “spine” roadways (such as Robie Street, Portland Avenue and the Bedford Highway) rather than circuitous routes that take longer, are slower and are generally less frequent, but provide at least “thin” service to a greater area. Implementation is to begin in the fall of 2016.

Commuter rail has had an “on again, off again” history over the past few months. The initial report (which many TAA members found lacking on several fronts) from the consultancy hired to assess the possibility of implementing a commuter rail system suggested the project was financially unviable. The Halifax Regional Council took the interesting step of not exactly stopping the investigation at that point, though. Rather, a proposal has been agreed to design an “Integrated Mobility Plan” for the Regional Municipality. This idea is meant to address the possibility of commuter rail, but in the context of evaluating all public transit, private vehicle travel, cycling, walking and any other mode of getting around. Not only that, but how mobility impacts, and is impacted by, land use.

One of the first actions that the Council’s working group on this issue took was discussions with groups active in this area, including TAA. While we expressed support for improved efficiencies in public transportation, including such things as transit priority on city streets, and a general (if qualified) support for commuter rail, we also brought to the fore the idea that the HRM’s mobility needed to be thought of in terms of regional integration. It should be simple, efficient and cost-effective to get from Halifax to Bridgewater, Kentville, Truro, Sydney and Moncton (let alone to Sheet Harbour) – not just to Dartmouth and Bedford.

It is informative to read the terms of reference of this Integrated Mobility Plan work. Here are the core set of questions that they are meant to answer: 1) How do mobility investments, personal access, goods movement and land development affect each other? 2) What are the social, environmental and economic effects of these inter-relationships? 3) How can these factors be optimized to create a strategic mobility investment plan based on the objectives of the Regional Plan?

Obviously, it’s quite high-level stuff – any one of those questions would likely be a reasonable Ph.D. thesis for a student of city planning or civil engineering. However, it’s clearly a positive step to see land development included in these thoughts – where we put our people and their jobs as Halifax grows clearly has a strong relationship with our ability to provide decent public transportation.

In mid-May, Council awarded a contract to Nova Bus Ltd. to supply up to 100 new buses to Halifax Transit over the next five years. The contract marks a shift back to Nova Bus as a supplier, after receiving several batches of New Flyer buses over the last few years. Halifax will pay \$16.9 million for Nova Bus to deliver 60 12-metre low-floor LFS buses over the next three years, with an option for an

additional 40 vehicles in the following two years. The first 30 buses will arrive over the next year, allowing Halifax Transit to retire the last of its aging fleet of Nova/GM Classics, some of which are nearing 20 years of active service.



The end of the road is fast approaching for the remaining Nova/GM Classics in the Halifax Transit fleet. New buses arriving next year will allow the last of these venerable work horses to be retired. (PHOTO – Tim Hayman)



In July, Halifax Transit took delivery of another new passenger ferry, the *Viola Desmond* (pictured on the cover), named in honour of the African Nova Scotian businesswoman jailed in 1946 for refusing to observe racial segregation policies, and recognized as a pioneering civil rights campaigner. The vessel is now in service between Halifax and Dartmouth, following its official unveiling on July 7. It was built at A.F. Theriault & Sons shipyard in Meteghan River, Nova Scotia. It joins the *Christopher Stannix* and *Craig Blake* as the last of three new ferries that Halifax Transit has received in the past three years. Every Halifax Transit ferry since 1934 has been built in Nova Scotia.

Halifax Transit has also unveiled a pilot program to provide discounted transit passes to low-income residents, at 50% off the regular monthly rate. The plan was approved by Council on June 21, and will run from September 2016 to February 2017. Residents are eligible if they are earning a gross annual household income of \$33,000 or less, and are not currently receiving any other form of social assistance to help with transit costs. As this is a pilot program, it is currently capped at a maximum of 500 applicants. If successful, the initiative may be extended further in the future.

Finally, and perhaps most interestingly, a coalition of groups in Halifax have decided to advocate for Halifax making itself one of the best quality-of-life cities in the country, particularly for younger people. A pillar of this strategy is a quantum leap in the quality of public transportation. The well-publicized launch of their platform attracted hundreds of people to the top floor of the Halifax Public Library in June. Their public transportation proposal includes commuter rail, five bus-rapid-transit (BRT) lines, and a host of transit priority measures meant to make public transportation a preferred alternative. You can check out their proposals at thelittleeasy.ca/easy-to-get-around.

-Ashley Morton

Marine

The Cat came back

There is ferry service once again between Yarmouth and Portland, Maine, this summer – and it marks the return of a concept not entirely unfamiliar to the area, provided by an experienced Canadian operator. Nova Scotia Transportation Minister Geoff MacLellan announced on March 24 that the Province had reached an agreement with Bay Ferries Limited to manage and operate a high-speed vessel between the two ports.

Bay Ferries had operated the Yarmouth to Maine marine link for more than a decade until a previous government cancelled the annual operating subsidy in 2009. For several years there was no ferry at all, causing great concern throughout the Nova Scotia tourism sector, and especially in the southwest corner of the province. Service resumed in 2014 under an agreement with Nova Star cruises, using a conventional cruise-style ship. But in the two seasons it ran, MV *Nova Star* devoured a substantial serving of public funding while attracting disappointingly low passenger numbers.

Bay Ferries has reached a two-year charter agreement with the US Military Sealift Command to provide a 106-metre catamaran-hulled craft, originally built in 2007 for service in Hawaii. It's quite similar in design to an earlier high-speed ferry known as *The Cat*, which was deployed on the Yarmouth route for several years

until 2009. While the newcomer still bears its original registered name *Alakai*, it being marketed as The Cat with the distinctive logo and identity prominently displayed on the hull. Bay Ferries says the unique name has retained exceptional brand recognition – even after being out of the market for six years.

Service for the 2016 season commenced as scheduled on June 15, and will continue daily until the end of September. Departures from Yarmouth are at 0800 ADT, and from Portland at 1430 EDT. With a service speed of 35 knots, typical crossing time for the 185 nautical miles will be under six hours. A reservation system was launched in early April. The regular one-way fare for a car and two adults is \$413 US, all taxes and fees included. There are various promotional offers available, including a \$100 US discount on the automobile rate for Nova Scotia residents, valid five days a week throughout the season.



***Alakai*, the new “Cat”, approaches the Yarmouth ferry terminal during test runs on June 7, shortly before the new service would begin. (PHOTO – Tim Hayman)**

The vessel is certified for up to 700 passengers. Onboard amenities include food service, movie lounges, a gift shop, a children’s play area and a visitor services desk. There is space on board for approximately 200 autos, but no commercial vehicles are being carried because the City of Portland no longer permits trucks in the area where the ferry docks.

This is an issue for seafood producers, because live lobsters and other perishables will still have to be transported by the Digby ferry rather than the more direct marine route to New England. However, community leaders in Yarmouth and tourism industry people in general were elated at the announcement. Because of the time required to locate a suitable vessel and arrive at a charter agreement, concern had been growing that another summer without ferry service might be looming.

Describing the ferry as a “vital link in Nova Scotia’s transportation system”, Minister MacLellan predicted the new contract would mean more visitors to the province, and more jobs in the tourism sector. Government will provide annual funding for operations and marketing, at \$10.2 million for the first season and \$9.4 million for the second. There will also be \$4.1 million for start-up costs that will include terminal upgrades, and \$9 million towards the ferry's retrofit, in lieu of two years of charter fees. Although the deal between the Province and Bay Ferries is for ten years, no financial arrangements beyond the initial two seasons were revealed.

"This long-term support for a solid ferry operator provides stability and predictability for Nova Scotia businesses and tourism operators from all across the province," the minister said. He acknowledged that because the vessel is US-owned it must be operated by an American crew, but noted that it will be based and maintained in Yarmouth and will purchase fuel and most other supplies in Nova Scotia.

"We're ready to aggressively market the ferry service to Americans and beyond, and help boost tourism to Nova Scotia." said Bay Ferries CEO Mark MacDonald. "We are pleased to once again provide this important service between Nova Scotia and Portland."

-Ted Bartlett

TAA concerned about NL ferry rates

The cost of moving passengers, autos and freight between Newfoundland and the mainland has been one of those perennial issues that seems to rear its head on a regular basis. But now the tale has taken a bizarre turn, with a private shipping company launching an action in the Federal Court of Canada alleging that Marine Atlantic’s rates for transporting commercial trailers between North Sydney and Port aux Basques are too low.

Oceanex – an intermodal transportation company operating three large vessels linking St. John’s with Halifax and Montreal – is alleging that the Minister of Transport has exceeded his jurisdiction in approving the current level of ferry charges. The company claims its rail and trucking competitors have an unfair

advantage because of subsidized Marine Atlantic rates, and that those rates are gradually eroding its market share.

Marine Atlantic's tariff is approved by the Crown corporation's board of directors, based on a cost recovery formula set by Transport Canada. The subsidy history dates back to the Terms of Union negotiated in 1948 as the British colony prepared to enter the Canadian Confederation. The intent was to equalize transportation costs for the new province.



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

Using the circumstances of the time, Term 32 stipulated that the Cabot Strait crossing between North Sydney and Port aux Basques was to be rated as an “all-rail” movement. In other words, the cost of moving freight was to be equivalent to rail transportation over the same distance – effectively treating the ferry as a land bridge. Today's Trans-Canada Highway has replaced the railway in Newfoundland, but modernizing the intent of Term 32 should mean that the cost of transporting an intermodal trailer between the two ports by ferry should be no higher than that of hauling it over 185 kilometres of highway.

Transport Action Atlantic suspects that the current Marine Atlantic rate is already considerably greater than that figure, and that the current cost recovery ratio of 65% is higher than it would be if the spirit of the Terms of Union was being fully respected.

A similar sentiment was expressed by Canada's new Prime Minister during last fall's election campaign, in a response to then-premier Paul Davis. In his letter dated October 15, Justin Trudeau wrote:

“Liberals fully appreciate the importance of the Marine Atlantic ferry to Newfoundland and Labrador. It is not only a vital part of Newfoundland and Labrador's economy, but also serves as an extension of the Trans-Canada Highway, connecting the province to the rest of the country. With the Conservative government fixated on cutting expenditures at all costs and demanding an unreasonable percentage of cost recovery from Marine Atlantic, the

crown corporation that runs the ferry was forced to increase its fares by a total of 11 percent over the past three years.”

TAA has discussed that commitment to reasonable ferry rates with a number of Liberal MPs since the election, noting that charges have more than doubled in less than 20 years – outpacing by far the cost of living index. Meanwhile, tolls on the Confederation Bridge to Prince Edward Island – which also represents a constitutional commitment of the Government of Canada – have increased by less than 32 percent.

The MPs have been asked to remind the Prime Minister of his campaign commitment, and to at the very least set aside the latest announced Marine Atlantic rate increase pending a full review of the issue.

The challenge mounted by Oceanex, however, represents an even more ominous threat, because the company is in effect asking the court to overrule the Terms of Union. If they win their case, the inevitable result would be a dramatic rise in the cost of living in Newfoundland and Labrador.

-Ted Bartlett

Ageing ferry sidelined at start of summer season

The 2016 summer schedule on the seasonal Northumberland Ferries route between Caribou NS and Wood Islands PEI was just about to launch when bad news broke. The venerable MV *Holiday Island* failed to pass inspection, and will be out of service until repairs are completed. This reduces the route to a single vessel, MV *Confederation*, operating on an accelerated schedule but with the total capacity and number of crossings considerably reduced.

Media reports in early July indicated that engineering assessments and remedial work being undertaken at a Quebec shipyard would likely take longer than originally anticipated. Northumberland Ferries vice-president Don Cormier told the Charlottetown *Guardian* that the 45-year-old vessel would likely be out of service for most of the summer.

The company has lengthened the operating day for the remaining ship and is making greater use of mezzanine decks to provide additional capacity on the 14 nautical mile crossing. But deploying the mezzanines means space for high vehicles, including trucks and RVs, is limited.



It now appears the ailing 45-year-old MV *Holiday Island* will miss most of the 2016 summer season while it undergoes major repairs at a Quebec shipyard. (PHOTO – Northumberland Ferries)

Concerns have been raised about the potential impact of the service disruption – not only on tourism but on the agricultural and seafood industries as well. Federal agriculture minister and local MP Lawrence MacAulay has been a long-time advocate of the seasonal ferry service, which was guaranteed to continue under the agreement to build the Confederation Bridge. While he assured that everything possible is being done to address the situation, he acknowledged that there was no backup ferry available. The minister also expressed disappointment that the problems with the vessel remained undetected until the summer season was about to start.

The *Holiday Island* was built in 1971 for the Borden-Cape Tormentine route, then operated by Canadian National Railways. She was inherited by the new Crown corporation Marine Atlantic in 1986, and reassigned to Northumberland Ferries after the Confederation Bridge opened in 1997. The ship has capacity for 155 automobiles.

Details about the exact nature of the problem are scanty, but it's understood that attention is being focused on the steelwork in the vehicle deck area. In an earlier statement Mr. Cormier told the CBC that the company was exploring several options for a short-term fix or more involved solutions that would extend the vessel's working life for up to seven years. No cost estimates for either option were disclosed.

WestJet continues to grow in Atlantic Canada

Canada’s second-largest airline seems to have its sights squarely set on the Atlantic Canada market. WestJet continues to add services to the region, with several new major offerings this spring and summer.

“Ninety percent of the capacity growth from Halifax Stanfield International Airport over the past several years has been with WestJet,” says airline spokesperson Lauren Stewart, adding that the airline now serves a total of 24 destinations from this region. There are 23 daily departures from YHZ alone this summer.



WestJet celebrates the launch of its St. Johns-Gatwick service. Pictured from left to right are: Christopher Mitchelmore, Minister of Business, Tourism, Culture and Rural Development, Government of Newfoundland and Labrador; WestJet employee Mckayle Anthony; Mark Porter, WestJet Executive Vice President, People and Culture; Gail Carroll, St. John’s Airport Authority Board Member; and Darren Martin, St. John’s Airport Authority Board Member. (PHOTO – WestJet)

Perhaps the most significant introduction this year was the April 15 launch of a Halifax to Boston run. But the company also launched its third seasonal overseas

offering from the region – a daily flight from St. John’s to London Gatwick that made its first departure on May 7. Like the new services from YYT to Dublin and YHZ to Edinburgh introduced in 2014 and 2015 respectively, this flight uses the Boeing 737 aircraft that has been the airline’s stalwart since day one.

All three overseas flights are being well patronized, and Ms. Stewart says there’s hope the St. John’s-Gatwick routing might eventually be offered year-round. This flight offers convenient connections to and from Halifax as well. She added that the Canadian dollar has improved relative to the British pound in the aftermath of the Brexit vote, making the UK a more attractive destination for discretionary travel.

Meanwhile, back on the domestic front, WestJet has also introduced 4-times weekly direct service between Halifax and Vancouver and Halifax and Winnipeg for the summer season. Depending on ridership, the company is optimistic about extending these services into the fall and beyond.

With one exception, the WestJet Encore flights introduced in 2015 using the Bombardier Q-400 aircraft have been successful. The Fredericton-Toronto and Deer Lake-Halifax runs have been especially well-patronized. However, the airline withdrew from the Moncton-Ottawa market earlier this year, after finding the field a little too crowded.

New budget airline coming to region

Billing itself as Canada’s new ultra-low-cost air travel company, NewLeaf Travel is set to launch service from two Maritime locations later this summer. The Winnipeg-based operation doesn’t own any planes, but instead will use Boeing 737-400 aircraft supplied and crewed by Flair Airlines of Kelowna BC.

Having secured regulatory approval, the company has announced that service from Halifax and Moncton is set to begin on July 28 and 29. The service will operate on a seasonal basis twice weekly from both YHZ and YQM, flying non-stop to Hamilton, Ontario, with a connection on to Edmonton offered from the Moncton flight. This option doesn’t appear to be available from Halifax.

In early July the company’s website showed a one-way promotional fare of \$100.75 on the inaugural July 29th flight from Moncton to Hamilton. The fare from Halifax to Hamilton on the 28th was \$169.19.

There is a catch, however. Any carry-on luggage larger than a briefcase involves a charge of \$30 – which is actually more than the fee for a 50-pound checked bag. The company is encouraging checked baggage, as opposed to the bulky carry-ons

that have been problematic on other airlines. As is the case with many other carriers, paying for luggage at the time of booking results in a discount. Travel with NewLeaf can only be booked on their website at www.GoNewLeaf.ca.

New TAA website is live

Transport Action Atlantic’s all new website was launched late last year, and has been continuing to be tweaked to optimize its appearance and performance over the months since. As reported in last summer’s bulletin, the new site is a sleeker, more modern, and most importantly, more functional platform for TAA to interact with the public.

The new site features an accessible design that is easy to navigate, with a bright, attractive contemporary appearance. Built on the popular and widely-used WordPress platform, the new site can be updated more easily and frequently than before, making it worthwhile to check back often to see the latest news. These up to date stories are presented in a blog style format, with the opportunity for people to comment on stories and be engaged in the discussion. The website also still features static pages that provide key information about TAA, which is now available in French as well.

TAA’s social media accounts (Facebook and Twitter) are connected with the new site, and are also an excellent way to stay connected and up to date with the work of TAA. If you haven’t done so already, you can “like” our page on Facebook, or “follow” us on Twitter. If you aren’t a member of either platform, you can still see the updates and interesting links that are shared via the sidebar on the front page of the TAA website.

The new website also features a secure online donation form that allows people to contribute directly to TAA’s advocacy work, in addition to signing up or renewing memberships online. We are also working on developing an e-mail mailing list, so we can be in touch with members and supporters in a timely fashion, particularly when we are engaged in time sensitive campaigns.

We’re always happy to hear feedback on the site. If you notice any bugs or broken links, have suggestions on ways to improve the site, or would like to contribute a story, please contact the webmaster at tim.hayman@transportaction.ca.

You can visit the new site at www.transportactionatlantic.ca.

Our national counterpart, Transport Action Canada, has also recently launched a new and improved website, which you can visit at www.transportaction.ca.

- *Tim Hayman*



VIA Rail partners with Maritime Bus

Posted on June 22, 2016



VIA Rail announced on June 21, 2016, that it is entering a new partnership with Maritime Bus that will allow passengers to book Maritime Bus tickets through VIA Rail. Starting July 14, passengers will be able to see bus options and purchase Maritime Bus tickets through VIA's website.

This partnership will allow passengers to book connections between VIA and Maritime Buses to access destinations not served by VIA, such as



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New Report Reveals Key Factors for Growing Urban Transit Ridership

Transport Action Atlantic shared a link.

A screenshot of the new TAA Website. Note the various transportation categories, the social media sidebar on the right hand side, and the easy “donate” link. You can also sign up for or renew your membership online, or join our e-mail mailing list to be kept in the loop on events and opportunities to get involved. The website is optimized to work on both desktop and mobile devices.



Embracing modern communications – TAA is active on Twitter and Facebook. Both sites allow for more active engagement with our web-involved users, and more opportunities for members and others to contribute to the discussion.

Advocacy in Action



TAA's Ashley Morton and Ted Bartlett in discussion with Halifax MP Andy Fillmore (left). Mr. Fillmore rode the train to Ottawa, with his family, for his swearing-in ceremony.



TAA president Ted Bartlett and Transport Action Canada's founding president Harry Gow met with several members of the Atlantic Liberal Caucus in Ottawa on February 25th. In attendance were caucus chair Bernadette Jordan from NS, Gudie Hutchings from NL, and Pat Finnigan from NB.