



The **Bulletin**

TRANSPORT ACTION ATLANTIC

Summer 2015

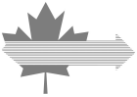
The old meets the new in Digby Gut



PHOTO COURTESY OF BAY FERRIES

The 44-year-old *Princess of Acadia* (foreground) approaches the Digby ferry dock on one of her last crossings, while her sparkling nearly-new replacement, MV *Fundy Rose*, awaits her day in the sun – which finally arrived on July 28.

Story begins on page 15.



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Financial Summary - 2014

Income

Dues	\$ 2,145 (net)
Donations	<u>\$ 9,720</u>
Total Income	\$11,865

Expenses

Promotional material/displays/literature/website	\$ 6,366.00
Travel	\$ 1,470.00
Bulletin (2 issues)	\$ 600.00
Charlotte County NB transit study	\$ 500.00
Postage	\$ 450.00
Other	\$ 1,037.00
Total Expenses	\$10,423.00

Net Income

\$ 1,442.00

Notes:

1. One half of dues collected goes to the National office.
2. This was an exceptional year as we received over \$8,000 in extra donations.

This chapter has no liabilities, our year end bank balance was \$ 5,299.00, and we have approximately \$800 GST rebate outstanding.

(original signed by)
Donald R MacLeod
Treasurer

18 July 2015

TAA welcomes new corporate members

Three New Brunswick cities come on board

The growing public profile of Transport Action Atlantic appears to be paying significant dividends. This spring, three cities in New Brunswick – Moncton, Dieppe and Campbellton – showed their support for TAA activities by becoming corporate members. In addition, two companies – Marine Atlantic Inc. and Polysteel Atlantic – have joined our organization in recent months.

The new memberships are doubly welcome, in that they not only symbolize general support for TAA's goals and objectives, but represent a modest financial contribution that helps to fund our ongoing advocacy activities. Other municipalities and corporations – especially those in the transportation sector – are also being invited to join.

It should be noted that corporate membership is an endorsement in principle for TAA's overall objective of convenient, affordable and sustainable public transportation for all Atlantic Canadians. It must be, however, clearly understood that as an advocacy organization there may be occasions or issues where our association's point of view will be different from that of a corporate member.

Advocacy in Action



John Pearce (l.) and Bob Tennant (along with Ashley Morton, who took the photo) were front and centre at the Halifax station with a TAA booth on Rail Safety Day held on May 2nd. An overflow crowd with long lineups turned out for the highly successful event, where an estimated 2400 people enjoyed short train rides.

Struggle to save Cape Breton line continues



Several hundred concerned citizens turned out for the Scotia Rail Development Society's public meeting in Sydney on May 1. (Photo by Sean Burke)

The celebrated Orangedale whistle has been silent for nearly eight months, and the rails across Cape Breton from St. Peter's Junction to Sydney lie rusty and unused. But optimism remains high that the 100 miles of track may yet be saved for future use.

The Minister's Rail Advisory Committee – a group representing rail users, municipalities and the business community in general – was scheduled to meet on July 30 to hear the outcome of three reports commissioned by provincial Transportation Minister Geoff MacLellan. Consultants were to examine the long-term implications of rail service in Cape Breton, and the economics of rail versus highway transportation. An engineering study on the state of the long-neglected infrastructure was also included.

David Rae – dean of the Shannon School of Business at Cape Breton University and chair of the Scotia Rail Development Society – has been one of the prime movers behind the rail retention campaign. He's leaving CBU at the end of the summer to return to the UK, but promises that he's still going to be very much involved. Finding a successor to maintain the momentum behind the effort was one of the agenda items for a July 28th meeting in Sydney.

Dr. Rae remains optimistic that a solution will be found, and insists that rail is very important to Cape Breton's future. He points to the potential intermodal traffic that could and should be moving by rail – relieving pressure on the already overburdened highway network and enhancing road safety for all users. He notes that the reopening of the Donkin coal mine will create a renewed need for trains, and adds that the port of Sydney really hasn't much of a future without a rail link.

He would certainly appear to have the weight of public opinion behind him. A standing-room-only crowd attended a public meeting in Sydney to discuss the issue on May 1. The *Cape Breton Post* estimated the turnout at 350 people. Paul LaFleche, Nova Scotia's deputy minister of transportation, told the crowd that discontinuance of rail service (which occurred last December) does not mean the loss of potential. Actual abandonment of the line would – but there's still time to do the work needed to save it before Genesee and Wyoming can even apply to remove the rails. The earliest that can happen is February 2016.

It remains to be seen just how far the provincial government is prepared to go in its efforts to preserve the rail infrastructure, or whether the Government of Canada would consider honouring the original written commitment made to the Province when CN – then a federal Crown corporation – sold the line to an American shortline operator.

Sean Burke, V-P and general manager of Polysteel Atlantic, whose company has been highly dependent on rail service, believes there is a strong case to be made. He's confident that customers who've been driven away from rail will quickly return if the option again becomes available.

"I'm optimistic we can bring this rail link back," he says. "Very much so. Nobody has changed their mind." He suggests it is sometimes difficult to keep momentum during the summer months, but is looking forward some action in the fall after the consultants' reports become public.

For his part, Dr. Rae says it's very important to get these reports into the public domain as quickly as possible, in order to spark discussion in the community towards exploring all possible solutions. A spokesperson for Minister MacLellan confirmed there are plans to post all three documents on the Department of Transportation and Infrastructure's website once the committee and the minister have had an opportunity to review them.

Transport Action to launch VIA 1-4-10 Plan Passenger rail to be made a federal election issue

Public transportation advocates across Canada are unanimous: Cuts to VIA Rail are limiting the mobility options of Canadians at a time when sustainable transportation is needed more than ever given global warming, rising transportation costs, and ever more people looking for an alternative to driving and flying. Renewing and expanding our national passenger rail system appears daunting.

Transport Action Canada believes that renewing passenger rail requires a realistic plan that sets out just what is required to improve VIA on a rolling basis with deliverables in one, four and 10 years, as well as the estimated costs. This is the thrust of the VIA 1-4-10 Plan, which will be national in scope.

TAC, and its regional affiliates, have engaged transportation analyst and consultant Greg Gormick to prepare the VIA 1-4-10 Plan. It will rely heavily on U.S. precedents to deal with the fleet, infrastructure, service, legislative, financial and managerial needs. The VIA 1-4-10 Plan will be free of any political overtones – apart from highlighting the fact that no Canadian government has ever endorsed such an approach. A draft document is to be completed by the end of July, with the final Plan available by mid-August. It will be distributed in particular to as many federal election candidates as possible, with press releases reaching out to media across Canada.

New VIA executive seeks to maximize revenues, improve performance



Passengers board the *Ocean* in Halifax on May 8, 2015 (PHOTO -Tim Hayman)

VIA is running longer trains in the Maritimes this summer, with an *Ocean* consist that's been boosted to five coaches and eight sleepers for the 2015 peak travel season. When you add the baggage car, diner, service cars, the park dome on the tail end (and of course the necessary transition car), it brings the total count to 19. And it could grow to 20 in the near future. All in an attempt to capture maximum revenue from what will continue to be – in the near term, at least – a tri-weekly train.

Susan Williams, VIA's general manager for eastern Canada, tells Transport Action Atlantic that she's attempting to obtain two more Renaissance sleeping cars to bring the number up to nine on each train. The company is apparently in a severe equipment crunch, with growing demands on its aging fleet. Some of the Renaissance coaches previously used when the *Ocean* ran six days a week have evidently been reassigned elsewhere, but sleepers are not used in the corridor services – hence their potential availability.



VIA Rail's Susan Williams was the featured guest speaker at TAA's annual general meeting in Moncton on April 25. (PHOTO: Christine Mills-Garnet)

Ms. Williams has been extremely busy since her appointment to the new Halifax-based position earlier this year. In addition to her appearance as guest speaker at TAA's annual general meeting in April, she's been maintaining regular contact with interest groups across the region, while trying to address the major challenges that lie ahead in attempting to better meet the needs of Atlantic Canada. She does not pretend it will be an easy assignment.

And although she clearly appreciates what TAA and others have been telling her about the importance of daily service, she's making no commitments at the present time. The company is, however, planning for additional departures again this year over the Christmas-New Year holiday period. At this stage she's not in a position to say with certainty what form this augmented service might take, as much will depend on equipment availability, and is subject to the outcome of ongoing negotiations with CN. But she hopes to be in a position to release the schedule by late summer or early fall – well ahead of last season's almost last-minute promotional effort.

Other priorities on her agenda at the moment include improving interline connections with other carriers, to make VIA services more accessible to customers who live in communities not on the rail line. Improving the schedule is also on the radar – with an eye in particular on the recently upgraded section of track between Miramichi and Bathurst where CN still imposes a 30 mph speed restriction. And, last but not least -- she’s exploring options that might bring increased frequency to the region in future years.

COMMENTARY

VIA’s 2014 Annual Report – a lesson learned?

The passenger rail situation in Atlantic Canada continues its rough ride – despite apparent efforts by VIA Rail management to turn things around. The Crown corporation’s 2014 Annual Report released on May 14 contains some sobering numbers about this region’s last remaining passenger train, reporting both revenues and ridership down and expenses up from the preceding year. The most ominous figure of all is a more than 10 percent increase in the subsidy requirement per passenger mile.

To Transport Action Atlantic, this really comes as no surprise at all. The figures are a clear indictment of the ill-advised decision in 2012 by the previous CEO to slash train frequency in half. The *Ocean* was showing improvement in both ridership and cost recovery when the axe came out. The level of government support required in 2011 – the last full year before the cut – was down by more than eight percent from 2010, as ridership bounced back after the 2008 recession. TAA warned that reduced service would likely mean revenues would fall more than costs, and our position has been vindicated.

The subsidy per passenger mile in 2014 was a whopping 69% higher than in 2011. And all this while providing a level of service that fails to meet the needs of the people in the region. The tri-weekly frequency is simply not able to build and sustain ridership – and that is ultimately what will drive the bottom line – and produce real value for the taxpayer’s dollar.

In all fairness, VIA new management team faces a monumental challenge. A lot of damage was inflicted on the *Ocean* in the years leading up to 2014’s dismal results. Under the previous leadership, the company might well have used last year’s numbers as an excuse to cancel the service entirely. But that doesn’t appear to be the mindset that prevails today.

VIA is now at least showing a willingness to listen to what its customers, community leaders, and TAA have to say. And the message is being given to them loud and clear. More service – not less – is the route to success. We're not saying it's going to be easy; it's a long climb back from the bottom of a deep, dark pit. But it's the only way forward.

But notwithstanding the best efforts and intentions of VIA management, the fix cannot come without political support. There will have to be an initial cash infusion to undo the damage inflicted by the 2012 setback. And that money can only come from the Government of Canada.

There's to be a federal election this fall. Let's hear what the candidates have to say about it!

- Ted Bartlett

Motorcoach and Transit

Maritime Bus to Fredericton **New Brunswick's Best Kept Travel Secret?**

- by Dennis Livingstone



A Maritime Bus intercity coach leaves Moncton for points west. Parcels may be the bread and butter, but TAA's Dennis Livingstone believes the passenger service may be New Brunswick's best-kept travel secret.

For the last three years I have been the anthem singer for all the St. Thomas University hockey games for both the men's and women's teams. There was no problem getting to Fredericton from Moncton; I drove. I love driving and it was a great stress buster, especially after a busy week at school.

This past academic year, I added something new to my Fredericton routine. I engaged the services of a personal trainer to work with me in the area of strength and conditioning. I felt I needed to look great when I stepped on the ice in front of those young kids who spent their spare time getting into shape both on and off ice. With the academic year over and arrival of summer, I still wanted my gym time. What to do? The drive to Fredericton is really a lost four hours of unproductive time. Texting while driving absolutely is a no-no!

I checked Maritime Bus schedules, and was delighted to discover that they now offer same day return service from Moncton to Fredericton. And the cost is actually less than I'd pay for gas in my SUV. Wow! (The adult return fare is \$67.08 – \$57.35 for seniors like me.) I leave each Monday and Thursday at 8:30 a.m. from Moncton's Via Station. This bus stops enroute in Salisbury, Oromocto and the Fredericton Airport with a scheduled arrival time of 10:50. Because you must book your trip in advance, the enroute stops are sometimes eliminated, and on several occasions there were early arrivals in Fredericton. Incidentally, this bus continues on to Edmundston, with onward connections at Rivière du Loup.

Depending on my Fredericton schedule, I can return home at 3:15, or work or shop for longer and leave at 6:00 p.m. The later departure is the bus coming in from points west of New Brunswick, and has been known to be late because of highway traffic. This evening route travels to Moncton via Sussex, so one gets to see different scenery on the homeward journey.

I find the service excellent – comfortable, fast, efficient, and there is free wi-fi and lap-top plug-ins on most buses. There are not many passengers on the 8:30 departure; the most I've seen was 12. The average appears to be six out of Moncton with two or three boarding at Salisbury. Eastbound to Moncton passenger counts can vary. On July 23, the 6:00 p.m. departure had six passengers out of Fredericton and three of those got off at Sussex. Indeed that is a small passenger count.

In conversation with Mike Cassidy, owner of Maritime Bus, I learned that the passenger count on this daylight run has seen no growth between this year and last. The term used was "stagnant growth". Although the "new" daylight runs aren't generating large passenger numbers, the volume of parcels picked up or dropped off at Fredericton is substantial. The real bread and butter appears to be the express service that is offered.

- Dennis Livingstone is a newly-retired educator, and long-time Transport Action member.

New Buses for Kings Transit Authority

-by Bill Linley



A 24-seat Kings Transit Vicinity bus rolls east through Bridgetown NS on July 9. The new vehicles cost 40% less than a standard transit bus. (PHOTO: Bill Linley)

On August 19, 2014, the Municipality of the County of Annapolis formally accepted one of three new Vicinity buses that the Kings Transit Authority will operate from its base in New Minas, Nova Scotia. The federal government's Gax Tax Fund provided \$281,080 from an allocation of \$53.2 million to Nova Scotia in fiscal 2014-15. One of the buses regularly serves the Bridgetown to Weymouth route through parts of Annapolis and Digby Counties.

The 27.5-foot, low-floor accessible bus is a product of Grande West Transportation. The company was formed in 2008 to design a community shuttle bus for BC Transit and others seeking an affordable, accessible low-floor vehicle. Grande West's headquarters is in Aldergrove, BC.

In February 2010, a prototype bus was delivered and tested at the Winter Olympics and Paralympic Games. Following a further 21-month trial at communities across British Columbia, BC Transit placed an order for 15 units for delivery in 2013. In April 2015, the company indicated that it had sold 15 buses to BC Transit, three to Kings Transit and 13 to Transdev in Montreal, Quebec. At the same time, it announced a sale to the City of Selkirk, Manitoba and a repeat

order for one bus to Transdev. Three vehicles, including a new 30-foot two-door model, were demonstrating in Ontario. Transit Cape Breton received one 30-foot vehicle in the spring of 2015. Grande West's Eastern Canadian dealer, City View Bus Sales, ordered a further eight units in June. A total of 51 units had been built and ordered by June 2015.

The Vicinity has a projected lifespan of 10 to 12 years, and at \$290,000 costs 40% less than a standard 40-foot transit bus. The vehicle is competitive with truck-based cut-away units that often have a shorter lifespan. The 27.5-foot Vicinity typically carries 24 seated passengers with a capacity for 16 standees. A 220-hp Cummins ISB diesel equipped with a 6-speed ZF transmission powers the 10-ton vehicle. It has four-wheel disc brakes and has a 26-foot turning radius. Passenger convenience features include a Braun Transit Ramp Vapor Door and Axion signage. Vicinitys are imported from China with final assembly in Aldergrove, BC.

Transit plan progresses in SW New Brunswick

- by Michael Perry

St. Andrew's Mayor Stan Choptiany finally sees light at the end of the tunnel, and is confident that there will be public transportation linking communities in Charlotte County with Saint John by late this fall.

"It's happening," he commented, following the July 22 inaugural meeting of the newly constituted not-for profit Southwest New Brunswick Transportation Authority Inc. It's the result of two years of deliberations by the members of the Charlotte-York Transportation Committee, which initially met to find solutions to the lack of adequate public transit in this region of rural New Brunswick – especially to the regional centre, Saint John. The authority's first act was to hire a project development co-ordinator on full-time contract. The successful applicant was Sue Farquharson of Due South Strategies.

The co-ordinator's first task is to establish the by-laws, policies, and financial procedures of the newly incorporated authority in order to facilitate the establishment of a board of directors. Initially the proposed board will include the membership of seven municipal representatives, (mayors or their appointees), within the service area of the authority, as well as representatives of unincorporated areas, non-governmental organizations, and representatives of the existing dial-a-ride services in the region.

Given the geographical peculiarities of the region, with rural settlement scattered along a peripheral ridge while population concentrations are in the coastal towns and villages off the main highway, dial-a-ride connections to and from the central

route between St. Stephen and Saint John will be essential to feed the bus. Ms. Farquharson is presently developing plans to gather information from such groups as low-income earners, community college students, seniors groups, those on social assistance and the unemployed. The initial operational model originally envisioned by the committee will also be validated by the co-ordinator as to timing and routes, connections, and ticketing options.

The authority will not own or operate the buses, but will tender this to a private provider who will employ the drivers and maintain the vehicles. The project co-ordinator will devise the contract guidelines and the service delivery template in order to facilitate the tender request. Liaison with the provincial departments of Social Services and Health, local employers, and the Energy and Utilities Board is also included in the project co-ordinator's remit. Finally she will also develop the criteria for a communication plan which will include news releases, advertising and the social media.

There's still much work to be done, says Mayor Choptiany, and funding remains an issue. He estimates the service will cost about \$400,000 annually to operate, with somewhere between 25 and 40 percent coming from farebox revenue. The remainder will have to come from government sources, but he believes there's a strong case to be made – and that public transit is a solution that will actually save taxpayer dollars in the long run. This initiative could provide a model for other areas of the province to follow.

Moncton getting 11 new buses

Codiac Transpo is looking forward to the delivery of 11 brand-new fully accessible buses in 2016. The \$5 million purchase, funded jointly by the federal, provincial and municipal governments was announced on May 21.

The acquisition won't mean an actual increase in the fleet, as the new buses are intended to replace older vehicles – many of them purchased second-hand – that have exceeded their useful lifespan. Average age of the current fleet is about 15 years, making it the oldest in New Brunswick.

The new 40-foot buses will have larger ramp platforms for wheelchairs. They be of heavy-duty construction, and include up-to-date safety features, such as impact plates to protect against accidents and single windshields with no blind spots.

Meanwhile, the City of Moncton has politely declined a request from the Province to extend Codiac Transpo service to the new Moncton High School – located far from the city centre about 1.5 kilometres beyond the existing service area.

Assistant City Manager Don McLellan says the City can't afford the estimated \$100,000 additional cost.

"We don't think the revenues would cover the cost of doing it, so we're not in a position to offer it," he told CBC News. "So we're saying to them, if they think this is a crucial service that they want for their students out there, they should come to the table with some funding."

He added that if the government had chosen to keep the school at its old location, students would have had access to multiple existing transit routes. City Hall had earlier expressed opposition to the plan to build the new school in a remote area off the Irishtown Road in the extreme outskirts of the city.

Three water taxis now plying Halifax Harbour

- by Marcus Garnet



A different way to cross Halifax harbour. TAA board members Marcus Garnet and Christine Mills-Garnet enjoy a water taxi ride, accompanied by their friend's dog Cloe.

This summer Halifax boasts three small-craft ferry/water taxi services, two of which have just started up. One is based at Kings Wharf, a major upscale multi-unit residential development on the site of the old Marine Slips in downtown Dartmouth. The other new operation is based on the Northwest Arm. The third, Harbour TaxSea, has been around for a long time and offers excellent charter service. Both the newcomer services also offer on-demand trips as well as shuttles.

The new Kings Wharf small-boat ferries are authorized to carry up to six people per trip, are open to the general public, offer fully enclosed cabins, and accept dogs. There's a 40-minute frequency fast shuttle for \$5 one-way from Dartmouth's Kings Wharf over to Sackville Landing in Halifax. The boats also offer on-request trips anywhere within harbour limits where a suitable dock is available. For example, the fare from Dartmouth to the Northwest Arm is \$15 one-way. More information is available online at <http://www.harbourtaxi.ca/halifax-dartmouth-full-schedule-1/>.

My wife Christine and I tried it for a short tour skirting Georges Island with our friend's dog, Cloe, who was very reluctant to board but seemed to enjoy poking her snout through the window after we got going. The captain was friendly and helpful, and the boat's speed was very impressive.

The other new operation, the Chebucto Water Taxi, is based on the Northwest Arm though they also offer on-demand trips to or from Alderney Landing in downtown Dartmouth. Their six-seater fast boat is open-topped but includes "dry bags" for people's belongings. The service has already attracted some commuters who use it to cross from Halifax's Mainland South to Bishop's Landing in downtown Halifax. More information on this service is available at <http://www.cwtaxi.ca/>.

Last but not least – in fact, they were first – is the Harbour Taxsea, a small cabin cruiser. Their website says it costs \$60 an hour, including up to 6 people (no...not \$60 per person, \$60 for 1-6 people). So if you can get six people to sign up, each pays just \$10. They're based at Cable Wharf in downtown Halifax. See <http://taxsea.tripod.com/>

Marine

***Fundy Rose* makes her maiden voyage**

The venerable Bay of Fundy ferry *Princess of Acadia* was sailing her final miles as the last days of July slipped away. Her much-anticipated replacement – the newly rechristened *Fundy Rose* – was undergoing a final and thorough round of sea trials to make sure everything was in readiness for her first revenue trip, which at long last took place on the morning of July 28.

The *Fundy Rose* – while not a brand-new ship – is some 30 years younger than the aging *Princess*. Purchased last year by the federal government for \$44.6 million, the 124-metre ferry spent the winter in Halifax undergoing a main engine overhaul, extensive interior refurbishment, and upgrades to hydraulic and control systems before being turned over to operator Bay Ferries Limited in early July.

Bay Ferries vice-president Danny Bartlett noted that it had originally been hoped that the new vessel would have entered service in the spring. But with her delayed debut taking place in the peak tourism season, the company considered it prudent to take extra time to do everything possible to ensure a smooth and seamless transition – free from mechanical or other issues that could rain on the inaugural parade.

The *Fundy Rose* was formally introduced to communities on both sides of the bay before she began transporting passengers and vehicles. Transport Minister Lisa Raitt was on hand for ceremonies and open house events in Saint John and Digby on July 15.

Mr. Bartlett says the new ship offers considerably more in the way of amenities than her predecessor – and visitors taking the tour during the preview events appeared to be suitably impressed. Equipped with bow thruster and stabilizer fins, she'll be also better equipped to deal with adverse weather.

The one shortcoming is a smaller capacity for tractor-trailers than the *Princess* – 16 units versus 22. But Bay Ferries plans to offset this by taking advantage of the new vessel's faster cruising speed to schedule additional crossings in periods of high demand.

Marine Atlantic purchases two vessels



MV *Highlanders*, docked at Port aux Basques.

Marine Atlantic now owns outright the two sister ships *Blue Puttees* and *Highlanders*. It was announced on May 26 that the company had exercised a purchase option in the 10-year charter agreement with Stena Line. The two modern vessels – extensively retrofitted for the North Sydney-Port aux Basques run – have been a mainstay of the fleet since 2011. The actual purchase price was not disclosed, but the official announcement said it was part of the approximately \$375 million funding package for Marine Atlantic contained in Budget 2015.

Don Barnes, the company's vice-president of customer experience, explains that the decision to purchase was a prudent economic move that will reduce overall fleet costs in coming years. Furthermore, experience with the two ships has now clearly demonstrated that they meet the needs of the service very well, he says, adding that the overwhelming majority of Marine Atlantic's customers agree. The 200-metre identical twins have improved fleet reliability, added significantly more vehicle capacity, increased the number of cabins and seating spaces available to customers, and introduced many new passenger amenities.

Earlier, the company announced an extension of the charter agreement for MV *Atlantic Vision*, assuring that the 203-metre European-style cruise ferry will remain part of the fleet at least until the fall of 2017. The *Vision* provides a 16-hour overnight seasonal tri-weekly service between North Sydney and Argentia mid-June through mid-September, and also serves the Port aux Basques route as required.

This spring Marine Atlantic embarked on its first-ever experiment with promotional pricing, offering discounted advance bookings for a limited time on the Argentia route. Mr. Barnes says the results are still being evaluated, and it will likely be fall before the final verdict is reached regarding success of the program. Nevertheless, he says traffic on the Argentia service year-to-date is showing an increase over 2014 – and he expects there will be other promotional initiatives in future.

A crucial year for Yarmouth to Maine ferry

- by Donald R MacLeod

It is far too early to make an accurate assessment on the *Nova Star* ferry's performance this year as passenger numbers are only available for the month of June. However this much is certain: this is a crucial year for the ferry, the operators, and the Nova Scotia government who support the service.

Traffic must improve this year over last year – the target this year is for eighty thousand passengers, up twenty thousand from 2014. In the month of June the *Nova Star* carried eight thousand passengers, but to meet the target loadings must be much higher in the July, August and September period. This does not mean that at that volume the service will be at break even; only that it should operate within the present provincial government subsidy.

There will be no more subsidy money from the Province over and above the \$13 million committed for this year. This point has been made loud and clear by Transportation Minister Geoff MacLellan, the cabinet minister responsible for the ferry. In its initial year the service received a subsidy of over twenty eight million dollars – money that was intended to run it for seven years. Another source of financial help that failed to materialize was the State of Maine refusal to guarantee a \$5 million line of credit. It would appear that Maine was saying that we like you, and the benefits you bring are welcome, but we really don't like you all that much, and the benefits for us are not that great.

On a positive note, Minister MacLellan is optimistic about the future of the service, at least for next year. If the present operators of the *Nova Star* cannot

operate in an efficient manner and within the limits of the provincial subsidy, the government will search for another operator, and the minister confirms that there are three interested to date. This could be an indication that the Province is willing to commit to long-term funding for the service as long as the subsidy is reasonable and the benefits are positive and acceptable for the taxpayers of Nova Scotia.

Air

New Cat III ILS for St. John’s airport Bad weather causes chaos during construction



Reconstruction at the intersection of the primary and secondary runways at YYT got underway in early July, imposing significant operational restrictions. When bad weather struck, chaos resulted. But the project means better days are ahead. (PHOTO: St. John’s International Airport Authority)

The best laid plans of mice and men – according to poet Robert Burns – often go awry. That was certainly true in mid-July, while the principal runway at St. John’s International Airport is shut down to allow for installation of a \$37-million Category III instrument landing system. The project also required the closure for several weeks of a portion of the secondary runway at the point where the two intersect, reducing the usable surface for landing and takeoff to just 6000 feet.

The planners did their research very carefully, and chose a time window beginning on July 7 when historical data indicated that weather issues would be

least likely to arise. Problem was, Mother Nature declined to co-operate. The weather turned out to be atrocious, with ceiling and visibility reduced to well below operational limits on various occasions. For one 30-hour period beginning on July 10, more than 40 incoming flights were cancelled. The airlines had barely recovered from this peak-season setback when the notorious North Atlantic fog swept in again, scrubbing another 35 landings over 24 hours.

Fortunately, construction progress was not affected by the weather, and Runway 16-34 was returned to its full 7000-foot length with its Cat I ILS fully functional on the morning of July 22. But while flight operations at YYT returned to near-normal, Newfoundlanders were still searching for the elusive summer of 2015. As this story was written, Environment Canada had posted a frost advisory for the St. John's area.

Long term, the improvements to Runway 11-29 will place St. John's among the top four airports in Canada – and the only one with fewer than 10 million passengers annually to have a Cat III ILS. The principal runway will be partially reopened in September, and its full 8500-foot length should be available by the end of November. The new ILS is expected to be operational by the spring of 2016.

These is never a convenient time to close a runway, says Marie Manning, the airport's director of marketing. But she points out that when all the work is completed the usability of YYT will be at 99 percent – putting it on par with all major airports in Canada. The new technology will allow aircraft to land and take off in conditions of very low visibility; a weather challenge that has had an impact on the airport's operations and the region's reputation for much of its history. She adds that the substantial improvements and rehabilitation of the runway during 2015 means that no extensive work will be required on this runway for at least fifteen years.

“We appreciate the impact that this has on families travelling, on visitors to the province, and on the entire community,” she commented. “The work that is being completed this year, however, is necessary to improve the level of service for our airline partners and passengers, and the substantial benefits that will result will be enjoyed for many years to come.”

Rain, drizzle & 

In 2016, our **NEW RUNWAY SYSTEM** will allow 700 more flights to operate on schedule, regardless of fog.

EXPANSION **YYT**

Westjet introduces new services; expects others

July 15 marked a major milestone for WestJet services in Atlantic Canada. With the debut of the airline's short-haul brand Encore and its fleet of Bombardier Q400 turboprop planes in this region, new daily services involving five Atlantic airports made their first flights. In addition, the Q400s brought additional runs to two existing routes. The occasion represented WestJet's single largest increase in service at Halifax Stanfield Airport since the airline's first arrival there in 2003.

The new destinations from Halifax were Sydney, Deer Lake and Gander, with an additional frequency to both St. John's and Ottawa. A new daily service was also added between Moncton and the national capital.

"This is a prime example of why we started Encore as a regional airline," said WestJet spokesman Robert Palmer. "The advantage with Encore is to be able to serve smaller cities and communities that have a need for additional air service, and a need for more competition, but aren't large enough to support a jet. This is an example of being able to put the right-sized aircraft on the right routes at the right time of day."

It's evidently working. The new Halifax-Deer Lake route had been operating less than a week when the word came that a second daily frequency would be launched in April of 2016. The airline spokesman indicated there could be additional Encore services coming to the region, as more Q400s become available. The airline had originally planned to acquire a total of 45 of the "Next Generation" aircraft. It currently has 23 in operation, with purchase options being converted to firm orders on a continuing basis.

Meanwhile, sporting a custom-designed tartan tail incorporating the WestJet corporate colours (see photo on back cover), the inaugural seasonal flight between Halifax and Glasgow, Scotland, took to the air on May 29. It had a tough act to follow, Mr. Palmer pointed out, coming on the heels of last year's new service between St. John's and Dublin, which still holds the title as WestJet's most successful launch ever. But he said it's "doing extremely well", and both overseas offerings are expected to return in 2016.

Questions remain about Air Canada Flight 624 TSB delivers preliminary investigation report

– by Tim Hayman

On March 29, 2015, what should have been a routine flight from Toronto to Halifax became a harrowing ordeal for the 133 passengers and five crew members on board, as AC 624 made a "hard landing" at Halifax Stanfield International Airport (YHZ) in the midst of a severe winter storm. Despite significant damage to the aircraft, all passengers and crew survived the crash, though 25 people were

treated for injuries and no doubt many of the passengers suffered psychological trauma from the event. Now four months after the incident, many questions remain about just what exactly happened on that evening.

The Transportation Safety Board (TSB) is investigating the incident, and on June 16, 2015, released a report on the preliminary findings of their investigation. This preliminary report does not yet identify the exact cause of the incident, nor does it assign blame to the crew, the plane, or any other specific combination of factors. It does, however, offer the first details about the final moments of that flight.

As it prepared to land, the aircraft (C-FTJP, an Airbus A320-200) was using a localizer approach to land on runway 5 at YHZ. A localizer approach only provides a pilot with lateral guidance to align the aircraft with the runway; this is less sophisticated than an Instrument Landing System (ILS), which provides precision lateral and vertical guidance to an approaching aircraft. Two of the runways at the Halifax airport have these more advanced systems, but runway 5 does not. As such, the pilots of AC624 were reliant on on-board systems for their vertical position as they prepared for landing. A number of people have called for upgrades to the landing systems at YHZ in the wake of this incident, including former pilots and other aviation experts, who have emphasized that ILS should be standard on all runways at an airport with the type of fog and snow conditions that YHZ receives.

The preliminary investigation of the aircraft suggests that the airspeed during the approach was consistent with a normal landing approach, and the aircraft was configured appropriately for landing. No mechanical deficiencies were found in the aircraft's systems, nor were any discrepancies noted in the maintenance records. Yet despite this, the plane approached the runway too low. The engines of the aircraft severed power lines, cutting power to much of the airport, before the landing gear and rear fuselage contacted the ground about 225 metres short of the runway threshold. The aircraft then continued, ironically enough, through the localizer antenna array, before pitching nose down into the ground 70 metres before the threshold. It then bounced and slid along the runway, coming to a stop 570 metres past the threshold.

Passengers evacuated the plane through the forward and mid-plane emergency exits, and then had to wait in the dark on a cold, snowy runway until emergency crews from the airport could arrive. According to some passengers, it was as much as 40 minutes before buses were brought to transport passengers to the terminal, though others have acknowledged that emergency crews provided immediate shelter and care to injured and particularly vulnerable passengers.

The weather at the time of the crash may well prove to be a factor. The TSB notes that the final weather update the crew received before landing was of a windspeed

of 20 knots gusting to 26 knots from the north-northwest, with forward visibility of ½ statute mile in snow and blowing snow. Vertical visibility was 300 feet

above the ground, and the temperature was at -6°C. Whether these conditions caused the pilots to misjudge their vertical approach is a question that the TSB will no doubt continue to examine.

The challenge for the TSB now remains to identify the exact cause of the incident. Their investigation will involve thorough recreations and simulations of the events, evaluation of pilot and flight attendant training and other safety practices, further evaluation of the aircraft and the airport landing systems, and additional interviews. The TSB release acknowledges that approach-and-landing is inherently a dangerous part of flight, and that these types of incidents continue to pose one of the greatest threats to aviation safety in Canada.

New TAA website nearing completion

- by *Tim Hayman*

A complete redesign of the Transport Action Atlantic website has been progressing behind the scenes over the last several months, and the new site is almost ready to launch. Working with a Halifax web designer, a new site has been developed that will present 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 will be easy to navigate, with a bright, attractive contemporary appearance. Built on the popular and widely-used Wordpress platform, the new site will make it easier than ever for TAA administrators to edit and add content, allowing the website to present up-to-date news that will encourage people to check in often. The website will feature static pages that provide key information about TAA, along with frequently updated blog-style posts featuring the latest transportation-related news from Atlantic Canada. These posts will allow for TAA to offer a perspective on transportation issues as they happen, while also allowing for people to participate in the discussion through comment fields that will be available on these posts.

TAA's social media accounts (Facebook and Twitter) will be connected with the new site, making it easy for people to navigate between them and see updates from each platform. The site has also been designed to be fully functional on tablets (e.g. iPad, Playbook) and mobile phones. Perhaps one of the most exciting aspects of the new website will be the introduction of a secure online donation form that will allow people to contribute directly to TAA's advocacy work.

The site is anticipated to go "live" before summer ends. Look for it soon at www.transportactionatlantic.ca.

Meet a Member



Ashley Morton, shown here introducing his daughter Gwen to the pleasures of train travel, is an extremely active TAA volunteer – despite his busy career. He acted as our chief spokesman at last December’s UARB hearings in Sydney, is involved with urban transit in Halifax, and has also been spearheading the new website design project.

Ashley Morton hails originally from Bella Coola, British Columbia, but now lives in Halifax, where he works as an electrical engineer, designing electrical systems for ships. Here’s how he describes his interest in public transportation:

"I have always found urban public transit systems cool, keeping maps of them on my wall when I was younger, and so on. In fact, I think that interest in urban transit systems is riding fairly high right now, with general public interest in "urbanism" helping to drive it. However, being from a small town, it has always bothered me that those kinds of discussions often had nothing to say to rural or small-city people. Of course, the gap is filled by a group like TAA, who talk about inter-city public transportation.

“My interest these days is driven by my environmental concerns and my interest in social justice. Every time we, as a society, can provide alternatives to private car travel, we do so many good things: We limit our carbon and smog pollution, we provide access to the world to people who are poor, disabled or unable to drive for some other reason... I don’t think it’s going too far to say that the work of public transportation is the work of civilization – the better our transportation links are, the richer and healthier our society is.

“Some of the work that I’m particularly proud of is when TAA steps up to support projects like the search for proper public transportation in southwestern New Brunswick – those are people who are unlikely to ever have a local transit advocacy group like "It’s More than Buses" in Halifax, for example, but who desperately need some way to get around that doesn’t require a car."

Ashley is 35 years old, and lives in the North End of Halifax with his wife and 3-year-old daughter, who first rode the bus when she was just two days old. In addition to his extensive TAA activities, he is involved with It’s More Than Buses, a public transit advocacy group in Halifax, as well as the Nova Scotia Rugby Union.

Colourful Transportation News



WestJet commissioned a custom-designed corporate tartan to commemorate the start of its new Halifax to Glasgow service. Designed by the renowned Scottish firm D. C. Dalgliesh, the fabric was used in items for sale in the airline's online store. But only a single kilt was made. CEO Gregg Saretsky wore it for the May 29 inaugural flight, while the 737 aircraft sported the design on its tail.



An interior view of Marine Atlantic's new bright and spacious terminal building in North Sydney. The \$20-million facility officially opened on June 2.