



The Bulletin

TRANSPORT ACTION ATLANTIC

FALL – WINTER 2016

Home for the holidays – by train

***But outlook for passenger rail down east
remains bleak***



PHOTO BY TIM HAYMAN

VIA Rail will again run the *Ocean* for three additional round trips to better accommodate travellers during this year's Christmas-New Year period. Two of these will use an all-stainless steel consist like this holiday extra shown leaving Halifax in December 2015. Transport Action Atlantic remains adamant that a minimum daily frequency year-round is the only way to get more people riding the rails. VIA's own figures reveal that the current tri-weekly service is costing taxpayers more than before the cut imposed in October 2012.

Our rail coverage begins on page 3.



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Province of New Brunswick joins TAA



New Brunswick Transportation Minister Bill Fraser (l.) and TAA president Ted Bartlett held one of their recent meetings aboard VIA Rail's *Ocean* en route from Moncton to Miramichi.

In a move that's believed to be without precedent, a provincial government has become a corporate member of Transport Action Atlantic. On the initiative of its minister, the Honourable Bill Fraser, the New Brunswick Department of Transportation and Infrastructure sent its membership cheque in November.

It's the latest accomplishment in a developing relationship between Minister Fraser's department and TAA. Our organization has had several face-to-face meetings with him in recent months, covering such issues as the Charlotte County transit initiative, VIA rail service passenger service, and freight transportation in the province.

On 19 October the minister met in Halifax with his Nova Scotia counterpart the Honourable Geoff MacLellan, and then boarded VIA Rail's *Ocean* to Montreal where he had meetings scheduled with the CEOs of both VIA and CN. Prior to the trip he had requested advice and input from TAA, and president Ted Bartlett joined him on the train at Moncton for a discussion while en route to Miramichi.

In a debriefing later, the minister advised that the Montreal meetings had been positive, and the two rail executives had separately agreed to work together to address some of the New Brunswick issues – especially the condition of the track between Bathurst and Miramichi, which limits the *Ocean* to a maximum speed of 30 miles per hour.

Extra trains for Christmas



VIA's advertising for the additional departures on the *Ocean*.

Why don't you take the train? – asks VIA's latest advertising campaign. For many in the Maritimes, the answer to this since 2012 has been "because it doesn't run when I need to travel!" With a three-days-per-week schedule, there are normally more days with no train running than there are with one.

Fortunately for those travelling to, from, and within the Maritimes this holiday season, VIA has once again decided to run extra departures of the *Ocean* between Dec. 19 and Jan. 2. There will be three extra trains in each direction, along with rescheduled trains from Christmas day, making the schedule briefly reminiscent of that which existed prior to 2012.

Also good news for railfans and those in the travelling public who prefer the older Budd-built stainless steel "HEP" equipment, a full set of HEP cars will be added in to supplement the normal two Renaissance trainsets, facilitating the additional departures. Unlike last year, where equipment cycling meant that the HEP equipment only operated on two round trips, this year three trips each way will be HEP equipped.

The return of this equipment means that additional accommodation types will be available on those trains, including "Cabin for 1" (traditionally known as roomettes), upper and lower berths, and drawing rooms that can be booked for 3 travellers ("Cabin for 3"). There will also be a full diner with more meal components cooked on board, and a Skyline car to provide take-out food service and a lounge and scenic dome for coach passengers.

This is the third year in a row that VIA has decided to run extra trains over the holidays. VIA was somewhat disappointed in the ridership on the extra Christmas trains over the last two years. Though numbers were up slightly last year, they did not reach the levels that management had hoped for. In any case, the extra departures did allow for more people to travel than would have been possible on the normal 3/week schedule, and VIA has presumably decided that it's worth running these additional trains this year.

TAA has worked to spread the word, and make sure people know these extra options are there when they think about their holiday travel plans. Just as we said last year: if we want to encourage VIA to continue running extra trains during the holidays and consider adding additional frequencies at other times of the year, it would be best if these trains are well used!

The schedule for the *Ocean* from Dec. 19 to Jan 2 is as follows:

VIA 15 (Halifax to Montreal)

Wed, Dec 21 (HEP)

Thu, Dec 22 (Renaissance)

Fri, Dec 23 (Renaissance)

Mon, Dec 26 (HEP)

Tue, Dec 27 (Renaissance)

Wed, Dec 28 (Renaissance)

Fri, Dec 30 (Renaissance)

Sun, Jan 01 (Renaissance)

Mon, Jan 02 (HEP)

VIA 14 (Montreal to Halifax)

Mon, Dec 19 (HEP)

Wed, Dec 21 (Renaissance)

Thu, Dec 22 (HEP)

Fri, Dec 23 (Renaissance)

Mon, Dec 26 (Renaissance)

Tue, Dec 27 (HEP)

Wed, Dec 28 (Renaissance)

Fri, Dec 30 (Renaissance)

Sun, Jan 01 (Renaissance)

Extra trains added into the system are shown in bold. Note that the Dec. 26 departures in both directions are rescheduled from Dec. 25, and as such are not truly “extra” trains, despite running on a Monday.

Fewer trains, higher cost – VIA’s Tri-weekly Ocean continues to cost more than 6 day/week service

When VIA Rail cut service on the Montreal-Halifax *Ocean* in half back near the end of 2012, they claimed that the move was made to reduce the cost of running the service. The *Ocean*, like all of VIA’s services (and indeed, nearly all public transportation systems worldwide), operates at a net “loss”, with subsidies required to offset the operating costs of the service. Trains like the *Ocean* require a somewhat higher subsidy per passenger than VIA’s Corridor services, and VIA management was supposedly looking for ways to reduce spending across the system. So the *Ocean* was reduced from six day per week operation to only three.

Passenger rail advocates, including Transport Action Atlantic, raised their voices at the time to warn of the implications of slashing the service. Examples from Canada and elsewhere in the world continue to show that frequency reductions are not an effective means of reducing costs – while they may result in some

immediate cost savings, any cost reductions are offset almost without fail by greater reductions in ridership as a result of the less convenient service.

The problem with reduced frequency is that costs don't come down enough, while revenues plummet. Reducing a service like the *Ocean* to a lower frequency does reduce some costs, but not all of them, as many fixed costs remain (e.g. maintenance of stations and other infrastructure, equipment costs, some personnel costs, marketing). In other words, a 50% reduction in train frequency does not result in a 50% reduction in costs. VIA's numbers since 2012 back this up: in 2011, the *Ocean* cost \$48,832,000 to operate six days per week. In 2013, that cost was reduced to \$43,930,000 for three trains per week – a reduction of barely 10%. By contrast, the passenger revenues for the service dropped much more dramatically. Passenger revenues for 2011 were at \$13,983,000 with six trains per week, and dropped to \$10,563,000 in 2013 following the cuts (and even lower in 2014 and 2015), a roughly 25% reduction.



Two Ocean train sets sit in Halifax on a sunny day about a year before the 2012 service cut. This is now a rare sight, only occurring when VIA runs extra trains over the holiday season. (PHOTO – Tim Hayman)

As a result, a service that had a shortfall of \$34,849,000 running six trains per week became one with a shortfall of \$33,367,000 running three times a week.

What's even more shocking is what happened in the following two years. Costs actually *increased* further in 2014 and 2015, while revenues continued to drop. So the *Ocean* managed to actually have a *higher* net shortfall in 2014 and 2015 than it had in 2010 or 2011, despite running only half the trains! The 2015 numbers show this trend expanding even further from where it was the last few years. The shortfall is now up to \$36,743,000.

The other consequence of this change is the subsidy per passenger mile, a useful metric for the efficiency of running the service. In 2011, that figure was as low as \$0.55 subsidy per passenger mile; in 2015, it was \$0.89, more than a 60% increase.

Comparisons 2010-2015 annual reports of the VIA Rail Ocean							
Year	Revenues (in thousands)	Cost	Shortfall	Subsidy (per passenger mile)	Passenger Miles	Passengers (per year)	Notes
2010	12,973	46,309	33,336	\$0.60	60,611	127,000	6 days a week
2011	13,983	48,832	34,849	\$0.55	63,361	134,000	6 days a week
2012	13,349	48,611	35,262	\$0.59	59,766	131,000	6/week Jan-Oct., 3/week Oct-Dec
2013	10,563	43,930	33,367	\$0.84	39,600	76,337	3 days a week
2014	9,804	45,420	35,617	\$0.93	-	74,175	3 days a week
2015	10,288	47,031	36,743	\$0.89	-	79,785	3 days a week
Cost	2010 vs. 2015	2%	Cost 2% more to run the train 3 days a week compared to 6 days a week.				
Revenues	2010 vs. 2015	-21%	Revenues have dropped 21%				
Shortfall	2010 vs. 2015	10%	The train is costing tax payers 20% MORE to run a train 3/week vs. 6/week				

Figure 1: This table shows a comparison of the revenues, costs, shortfalls, and subsidy per passenger mile from 2010 to 2015, noting where the reduction in frequency took place*. Numbers were extracted from VIA’s public annual reports.

So what’s the takeaway message from these numbers? Basically, VIA’s argument that cutting frequency to three trains a week was necessary to save costs was simply wrong. Reducing the frequency has, as many predicted, caused a decline in ridership that offset any savings from running fewer trains, and has resulted in a service that costs VIA more both in absolute terms, and on a per-passenger basis.

With numbers like these, how can VIA possibly justify continuing to operate a tri-weekly service? It clearly isn’t working. Examples from around the world, including Amtrak to the south, have shown time and time again that increased frequency will drive increases in ridership. Without doing that, none of VIA’s best efforts to improve the service are likely to matter, and they will continue to spend more money while serving fewer people.

The *Ocean* may be a comfortable, enjoyable way for people to travel, but when you can’t book a train on the majority of days in the week, more and more people are going to continue to look at other options to get where they need to go, when they need to.

-Tim Hayman

VIA 3rd Quarter Update

VIA's 3rd quarter report for 2016 showed positive trends across the network in general, but continues to show less than exceptional figures for the Ocean. Passenger totals and passenger miles were down compared with 2015, but revenues actually increased slightly. This may be due to changes in fare discounting (fewer sales).

Year	Passengers	Passenger Miles	Revenue
2015	28,811	16,101,000	\$3,691,000
2016	28,300	15,738,000	\$3,944,000

This quarter's figures are still above the exceptionally poor performance in 2013 and 2014 (immediately following the frequency reduction), but remain a fraction of what they were prior to 2012.

Unused and unwanted – 33 Renaissance shells scrapped

The end of the line finally came this fall for the unused remnant of the 139 British-built railcars purchased by VIA Rail in 2000. They'd originally been ordered for a planned service through the Channel Tunnel to be branded "Nightstar" – that would link London with several major cities on the continent. But changing market forces – including cut-rate competing air fares and faster day trains on the same routes – caused the project's cancellation, and the rolling stock sat unused for several years before VIA showed some interest. After testing three units in Canada, the decision was made to buy all 139 cars – many of which were incomplete shells.

VIA dubbed them "Renaissance" cars, as they represented the first new rolling stock acquired in two decades. After extensive modifications, 47 coaches, 27 sleepers and 17 service cars joined VIA's active roster, while 12 sleeper shells were converted to baggage cars and three to diners. The purchase price was less than half the going rate for new passenger cars, but necessary modifications to make them usable under Canadian operating standards and conditions added substantially to the final cost. In service they ultimately proved to be high-maintenance and not particularly well suited for winter use, but by 2006 they had nonetheless become the backbone of the Atlantic Canada *Ocean* route – for better or for worse. Some of the coaches, baggage cars, and service cars have also seen limited service in the corridor. An attempt to reintroduce overnight sleeper service between Toronto and Montreal was unsuccessful.

By 2008 VIA had evidently reached the conclusion that these cars had a limited future, and began salvaging the trucks and other running gear from the incomplete

sleepers and service car shells for use as spare parts. The carbodies remained stored at Bombardier's Thunder Bay plant, at significant ongoing cost.

A spokesperson for VIA confirmed that the decision was taken recently to put an end to this unnecessary expense, while the company was able to realize some scrap value from the 33 shells – none of which had ever turned a wheel in revenue service in two decades of existence. Photographer Roger Litwiller noticed the scrapping operation underway in October, and observed that at least some of the cars still wore the original Nightstar logo applied when they were built in the mid 1990s. As for the colour scheme, VIA obviously adopted it as its own when the corporation purchased the equipment, and the dominant green was subsequently applied to VIA's F40 locomotives and refurbished LRC cars.

See the rear cover for a photo of the scrapping underway.

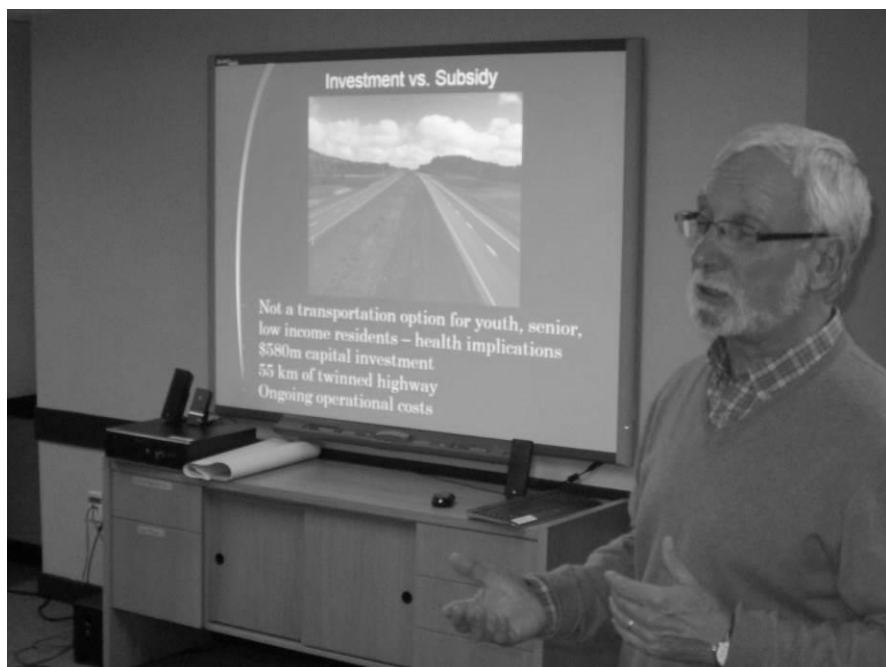
Motorcoach and Transit

Rural Lynx- Update on progress toward a transit service for New Brunswick South-West



There have been some further developments in the planning for this transit service which will initially link the communities of coastal Charlotte County from the border town of St. Stephen to Saint John. South-West New Brunswick Transit Authority Inc. (SWNBTA), which oversees the planning and management of the proposed service, has employed the Orchard Group Consultants to assist in validating

the existing plan as to route and scheduling, feeder connections to and from adjacent regions to the main-line route, and customer estimates. They will also advise as to the nature of vehicle best suited for each type of route and initiate negotiations with possible service providers. Rural Lynx does not envisage owning or maintaining any vehicles, nor will it employ any drivers. It will establish the service standards, such as the routes to be served and the frequency of service, together with the fares and publicity. Choice of service provider will be made by a competitive request for proposal process. Both Maritime Bus and Saint John Transit are envisaged as possible interested parties. The Orchard Group and SWNBTA have had some preliminary discussions with Maritime Bus. Maritime has a fleet of varied vehicle types, experienced drivers, maintenance facilities and an established parcel service. It also has ticketing and data collection software which could be easily adapted to the needs of Rural Lynx. Online ticket access, phone access to a ticketing agent, and ticket printing are also available, as well as the facility to provide ticketing for integrated rides where several providers are used. An association with Maritime Bus might also expedite approval by the New Brunswick Energy and Utilities Board.



Former St. Andrews mayor and current chair of SWNBTA Stan Choptiany presents at TAA's fall board meeting in Halifax. (PHOTO – Ted Bartlett)

Transport Action Atlantic, through Ted Bartlett and Michael Perry, has made representations to provincial ministers regarding the need for Rural Lynx, and has suggested funding the project as a pilot model for other regions of rural New Brunswick, all of which have a substantial need for public transit connections to the varied facilities available in the three regional centres of Moncton, Saint John and Fredericton. Resulting from these efforts, an invitation to make a presentation to the provincial Minister of Transportation Bill Fraser, together with some of his senior officials, was extended through Transport Action Atlantic to the board of the SWNBTA. Stan Choptiany, the former mayor of Saint Andrews and current chair of the SWNBTA, made the presentation, which was favourably received. He subsequently made the same presentation to the fall meeting of TAA in Halifax. The SWNBTA has also approached the Member of Parliament for New Brunswick South-west, Karen Ludwig, who has expressed strong support for the transit service. Application for funding has also been made to ACOA and the regional development branch of the provincial government.

Funding remains a problem, as each branch of government appears to be waiting on the other to make the first move. Assurances have been given that funding for new transit initiatives like Rural Lynx will be announced as part of Phase 2 of the federal infrastructure project, but this provision awaits the April budget. Meanwhile the frustration on the board of SWNBTA grows as funding promises by other agencies such as the United Way have been lost because these were

dependent on evidence of government funding. It may become difficult to maintain the momentum and enthusiasm of the committee membership if words of support are not soon translated into substantive action.

-Michael Perry

Bus rides in St. John's and Moncton will cost more in 2017

Users on two Atlantic Canada transit systems will be ringing in the new year with higher fares. Both Metrobus in St. John's and Moncton's Codiac Transpo will increase the single adult cash fare from \$2.25 to \$2.50, effective at the beginning of January. The hike will place both cities on par with Halifax, but still 25 cents lower than Saint John and Fredericton.



The announcement from the City of St. John's notes that Metrobus fares haven't changed since 2008, despite increasing costs, while for Codiac Transpo it's the first increase in five years.

Moncton fares will rise again to \$2.75 in 2019, and reach \$3.00 in 2021, under a five-year rate structure announced this fall. The plan also involves a \$1.00 increase each year in the price of monthly passes and 10 and 20-ride punch passes. Seniors and students receive a significant discount on monthly passes, and people age 65 and over will continue to get free rides every Wednesday.

On Metrobus, seniors and children age 5 to 17 get a discount on 10-ride and monthly passes, and post-secondary students are eligible for a semester pass. But anti-poverty advocates in St. John's are urging City Hall to consider a reduced pass rate for all low income residents, citing the example of a current pilot program in Halifax, and a new initiative in Toronto expected to be phased in beginning in 2018.



TAA participates in ad-hoc committee on Halifax's Integrated Mobility Plan

Halifax is undertaking a thorough review of how people and goods get around the Halifax Regional Municipality. This review, to be titled the "Integrated Mobility Plan", had its genesis in a review of possibilities for commuter rail on the existing CN right-of-way from Windsor Junction to the VIA station in the south end of Downtown Halifax. That review (which had a number of critics, including some within TAA) clearly stated that commuter rail would be far too costly to be realistic. The Halifax Regional Council, however, took the interesting step of rolling the consideration of that report into a much larger review of mobility across the region, rather than narrowly focussing on a binary yes/no question regarding a specific commuter rail option.

The Council has hired an experienced outside expert, Rod McPhail of Toronto to lead this work. It is proceeding apace, and is currently in a public consultation

phase. However, TAA was invited to participate in an ad-hoc committee of concerned groups ranging from the Heart & Stroke Foundation to Bicycle Nova Scotia. After some good collaborative work, here are the major points the committee's submission addressed. If you're interested in seeing the entire document (only two pages), we'll be sure to provide a story about it on www.TransportActionAtlantic.ca in the near future.

- Principles:
 - Seriously work towards zero traffic deaths
 - Prioritize pedestrian, cycling and transit over single-occupant vehicles
 - Adopt a "complete street" policy to make streets more useable by cyclists, pedestrians and transit
 - Limit single-user car trips to the current amount - Grow the population and economy without accommodating more single-user car trips.
- Investments:
 - Fund a minimum connected grid of bicycle lanes
 - Complete the "Blue Route", a trail of connected bicycle paths from Porters Lake to Lunenburg by filling in the gap through the core of Halifax.
 - Plan to include Bus Rapid Transit in the next request for federal transit funding.
 - Provide a network of high-frequency (15 minutes or better) bus routes across the city.
 - Plan for commuter rail, and start planning for transit oriented developments around the (future) stations.
 - Facilitate car share usage through dedicated parking spots.
 - Invest in the ability to measure transportation better.
 - Allow minor residential streets to have lower speed limits.
 - Buy electric buses
 - Allow developers to provide funding to transportation infrastructure instead of providing parking in new buildings.

TAA is also in the process of developing our own response and submission. Please feel free to contact Ashley Morton (ashley.morton@utoronto.ca, 902-999-7017) if you would be interested in participating in these discussions.

- Ashley Morton

Halifax to allocate funding for commuter rail?

In an interesting development, Halifax is potentially earmarking \$48 million for commuter rail in 2020 and 2021. The proposed funding appears in the municipality's not-yet-adopted 10-year capital plan. Presented to council on Dec. 14, the plan includes \$24 million in each of those two years for commuter rail. Nothing is certain at this point, but seeing a funding figure on paper is an exciting, if preliminary, step forward. We expect to have more to say on this in the near future, so stay tuned!

NL ferry users face higher rates – again!

For two decades, rates on the Marine Atlantic ferries linking Newfoundland with the mainland of Canada have steadily outpaced the rate of inflation. That's because cost recovery targets set by the Government of Canada have been continuously escalating. In the last fiscal year, the corporation generated nearly \$110 million through customer revenue, achieving a cost recovery of 65.8 percent. The figures were included in information presented by CEO Paul Griffin at the annual public meeting held in St. John's on November 3.



CEO Paul Griffin (l.) with Sharon Duggan, acting chair of Marine Atlantic's Board of Directors, at the corporation's annual public meeting. (PHOTO – Marine Atlantic)

And, it would appear that ferry users will soon be hit with a substantial increase in the fuel surcharge – the result of a mandated change to more expensive but cleaner burning marine diesel. The net result will apparently be yet another hike in ferry rates that far exceeds the inflation rate. The federal subsidy for the constitutionally-guaranteed ferry service has been in steep decline over the past 20 years. In the mid 1990's cost recovery was in the neighbourhood of 45 percent, but the proportion of costs recovered from the farebox has been climbing ever since. It's a fact that wasn't lost on the Trudeau Liberals during last year's election campaign, when they clearly implied they were going to address the issue. A year later, they've evidently had a change of heart and decided to stay the course. There's been no indication that any reduction in the targets Marine Atlantic is required to meet is in the offing.

Transport Action Atlantic has been reminding members of Parliament of the written commitment on ferry rates made by the Liberal Party leader – now Prime Minister – during the election campaign. So far it's been to no avail. Furthermore, TAA believes the switch to cleaner fuels should not be the full responsibility of ferry users. As part of Canada's commitment to the environment, the money should be found elsewhere in the federal budget.

- Ted Bartlett

Change of venue for ferry rate court challenge

The legal challenge to constitutionally-guaranteed Newfoundland ferry rates is going to be heard in St. John's. Transport Action Atlantic has learned that the Federal Court of Canada has responded favourably to a petition by the Province of Newfoundland and Labrador seeking a change of venue. The case was originally slated to be heard in Toronto – an obvious inconvenience and potential hardship to interveners from the province that would be most affected by the outcome.

The private sector shipping company Oceanex, which operates container and drop-trailer services to St. John's from Halifax and Montreal, claims the federally-subsidized rates provided for in the Terms of Union under which Newfoundland joined Confederation in 1949 represent unfair competition. The provincial government is among those who maintain that the intent of Term 32 was to ensure insofar as possible that the cost of living was not unduly affected by the added expense of moving consumer goods across the Cabot Strait.

Transport Action Atlantic takes the position that this provision is just as valid today as it was nearly 70 years ago when the Terms of Union were negotiated. Applying the spirit of the agreement to today's transportation realities, the cost of moving a trailer between North Sydney and Port aux Basques should not exceed that of hauling it over 180 km of highway.

It is anticipated that the case will be heard in the spring of 2017. The St. John's venue not only facilitates participation by interested parties in the province, but will no doubt result in extensive media coverage and greater public awareness – which would not have happened had the case been held in Toronto.

Ups and downs for Port Saint John: port signs new lease agreement with DP World and makes investments, but loses Tropical business

It's been an interesting few months for Port Saint John, with a mix of good and bad news. On July 28, 2016, Port Saint John officials announced the signing of a 30 year lease agreement with global trade enabler DP World for the operation of its container terminal, the largest private sector investment in the port in decades.

DP World is one of the largest marine terminal operators in the world, handling more than 170,000 TEUs per day, and serving approximately 70,000 vessels a year. They own or operate 77 marine and inland terminals in 40 countries around the world and employ 37,000 people worldwide. In Canada, DP World has three operations at Port Authorities in British Columbia: DP World Vancouver (Canada's largest container terminal), DP World Prince Rupert and DP World Nanaimo.

Now in charge of port operations, DP World bought two new post-panamax sized gantry cranes for Port Saint John, which will enhance the port's container handling capacity. These cranes arrived on October 29 on heavy lift ship Zhen Hua 14 for placement at the Rodney Container terminal, and will be in service by January 2017.



Two new post-panamax sized cranes arrive at the Port of Saint John on Oct. 29, 2016. (PHOTO – Port Saint John)

Speculation about how additional containers will move has been rampant since the inception of the agreement. Pan Am railway has completed track upgrades from Northern Maine Jct. to Mattawamkeag, Maine; on November 13, Pan Am started running Waterville to Mattawamkeag trains five days a week interchanging with The Eastern Maine Railroad. Previously, the track was used sporadically. Conversations continue about the potential for intermodal service through Maine. Saint John Port Authority President Jim Quinn said, “You're going to see more regular rail service with respect to containers but a rail service that goes across Maine to Montreal”. CP is always anxious to secure traffic that travels south to New England and New York State.

In addition to the new arrangement with DP World, the port and governments of Canada and New Brunswick have also embarked on an infrastructure modernization program valued at \$205 million. This project will see the modernization of the West Side Terminal, and a tripling of its container handling capacity.

Despite these positive developments, it hasn't been all good news for Saint John. In November, Tropical Shipping announced that it would be moving its business to the Port of Halifax at the end of the year. Tropical currently accounts for about

half of the total container business at Port Saint John, so the loss may have serious implications for the port. Were it not for the new investments and the lease with DP World, who hopes to bring in new business, the implications could have been devastating. In any case, it will still mean a significant change to operations in the short term. Tropical is expected to make the move to Halifax in late December.

- Iain Dunlop

Air

Privatization and rental costs a concern for smaller airports

Some two decades after local authorities took over operation of smaller federally-owned airports in Atlantic Canada, 2016 marks the first year that rent must be paid to the landlord under the 1997 agreements. But there's a problem, according to Moncton airport authority chair Christopher Bacich. In a recent interview with the *Times & Transcript*, he expressed concern that the money will be going into general revenues – not to Transport Canada for reinvestment in the air transportation system. The inevitable result is tighter budgets, Mr. Bacich suggests, adding that smaller airports are going to have to charge higher fees to finance infrastructure upgrades.



The partial privatization of smaller airports like Moncton has produced success stories through Atlantic Canada, but there's concern about the recommendation to take the process a step further. (PHOTO – Greater Moncton International Airport Authority)

Moncton's Roméo LeBlanc International Airport is the third largest in Atlantic Canada in terms of passenger volume, and for 2016 will be paying somewhere between 400,000 and 500,000 dollars in rent to Ottawa. The country's biggest airports – like Pearson in Toronto – are required to pay 12% of revenues to Ottawa. Meanwhile, at the other end of the spectrum, the smallest ones like Saint John pay just 2%.

Another concern is the looming possibility of full privatization of all federally-owned airports, as recommended by the *Canada Transportation Act* review (commonly referred to as the Emerson Report) tabled in Parliament earlier this year. Mr. Bacich maintains that this initiative should only be considered for the country's largest airports – those that handle more than five million passengers a year. He said the Moncton facility, because of its size, simply does not have the attraction to investors that Toronto or Montreal would have.

The partial privatization of Moncton airport has clearly been a success, he added, because it has more than tripled its passenger traffic since 1997, and has self-financed major facility upgrades over that period.

Porter stopping service to St. John's for winter season; some WestJet routes under review

Domestic travellers to and from St. John's International Airport will have one less option this winter. Porter Airlines announced in October that they will be suspending their scheduled service from January 4 through April 11, 2017. Citing the economic downturn affecting Newfoundland and Labrador, the airline said it has chosen to concentrate on the busier nine months of the year.

Marie Manning, the airport's marketing director, told CBC News that they aren't particularly worried about the setback, saying the situation was unique to Porter and was apparently related to the cost of servicing a single daily flight at the eastern extremity of their system.

Meanwhile, the airport, which celebrated its 75th anniversary this fall, reported a 9.4% growth in passenger traffic in summer 2016, as compared to the previous year. August was its busiest month ever, with nearly 200,000 travellers arriving or departing.

WestJet doesn't have any concerns about its traffic volumes at YYT, according to spokesperson Lauren Stewart. However, she did acknowledge that their Encore services linking Deer Lake and Sydney to Halifax were "struggling", and are subject to ongoing evaluation. Meanwhile, the Q400 service between Fredericton and Toronto has been extremely successful, operating three times a day.

And WestJet's seasonal overseas offerings from St. John's and Halifax continue to perform well. The flights to Glasgow and Dublin showed a slight ridership decline in 2016, but this was likely due to the addition of a new routing from St. John's to London Gatwick, with a connection to and from Halifax. All three overseas flights will return in the spring of 2017.

Tales of tolls and twinned highways



The Barney's River Fire Department has had to deal with more than its fair share of highway carnage over the years – so the slogan on the fire hall beside busy two-lane Highway 104 is quite understandable. But are there less costly ways to reduce traffic congestion and improve safety?

Nova Scotia's Highway 104 through Antigonish County is without doubt one of the most dangerous stretches of road in all of Atlantic Canada. And now that the rail line to Sydney is effectively shut down – though not yet abandoned – virtually all of the cargo bound for Cape Breton and the Newfoundland ferry is fiercely competing with cars for space on the increasingly congested two-lane artery. Twinning it has become a rallying cry, and in an ideal world it would probably be the logical answer; problem is, the Government of Nova Scotia simply can't afford it.

And, furthermore, there doesn't seem to be a lot of appetite for the obvious way to pay for an upgraded road network among either the truckers who haul the goods or the motorists who uneasily co-exist with the eighteen wheelers – often attempting to overtake the slower-moving vehicles when it really isn't safe to do so. Yes, it's very easy to point fingers at truck drivers, but most of them rank among the safest people behind the wheel. But impatience often leads to chances being taken, with all-to-frequent disastrous consequences.



Many Nova Scotians, and New Brunswickers too, will say they are not opposed to highway tolls on principle – they just don't want the toll booth in their backyard. Let somebody else pay!

Tolls are political dynamite. It's widely believed that at least one provincial government in the region was defeated on the issue not too long ago. And in the latest teacup tempest, the opposition Conservatives in Nova Scotia are accusing the McNeil Liberals of reneging on a commitment to eliminate tolls on the Cobequid Pass. But why should they be removed? Hasn't the public become accustomed to paying – and don't they realize that they have the use of a faster, safer and well-maintained highway because a smiling commissionaire or an automated transponder takes a little of their money every time they pass?

Please folks, get with the program! If there's a real desire for more four-lane highways, isn't it reasonable that those who use them should pay? It's a widely accepted practice in other jurisdictions, and Atlantic Canada should be no different. Don't blame your elected representatives if they read the writing on the wall and choose to accept that reality.

But back to that dormant, neglected railway line in Cape Breton. A recent study for the Nova Scotia government pegged the cost of upgrading it to the standard that existed 25 years ago, when it carried most of the cargo to Cape Breton and Newfoundland, at \$30 million. For that money, you might buy a whole five kilometres of twinned highway, if there weren't too many bridges or overpasses required. Hardly enough to make a difference!

On the other hand, a modest public investment in rail infrastructure, and some accompanying intermodal facilities, would go a long way toward safer highways in our region. There's really no logical reason why a container of merchandise bound for Canadian Tire in Sydney or Walmart in Corner Brook should be lifted off a railcar in Moncton and road-hauled 500 kilometres to Cape Breton. It happens simply because public policy has driven it in that direction.

Former New Brunswick transportation minister Roger Melanson, speaking at Transport Action Atlantic's annual general meeting last spring, put it very succinctly. "Policy drives behaviour," he told us. He hit the nail right on the head.

- Ted Bartlett

A muted celebration of National Railway Day



On CN's Newcastle Sub just north of Rogersville NB, a speed restriction slows VIA Rail's *Ocean* to an agonizing 30 miles per hour over more than 60 miles of deteriorated track. Not something to be proud of on National Railway Day!

Transport Action Atlantic's observance of National Railway Day was somewhat less than celebratory this year. Our optimism that the Trudeau Government would act decisively to address some of Canada's critical rail issues is beginning to fade, amid growing concern about the state of the network in the Maritimes and across Canada.

November 7 marked the anniversary of the last spike ceremony that marked completion of a continuous rail link from coast to coast in 1885.

More than 130 years after that historic event, what's often referred to as the National Dream remains an essential part of the Canadian economy. But despite the vital importance of rail in moving goods and people from coast to coast, TAA insists there are some very serious issues that need to be addressed. So far they appear to be getting short shrift from a government that took office just over a year ago on a promise of "real change."

The federal government appears to have a renewed focus on the subject of rail safety – and rightly so. But there's also a critical infrastructure shortfall that is still not getting the attention it so badly needs. A recent major policy speech in Montreal by Transport Minister Marc Garneau hardly mentioned it.

Clearly there's a growing crisis in the key central Canada corridor between the country's two largest cities, where freight congestion is seriously compromising on-time performance of VIA Rail passenger service, and overloaded highways are becoming ever more crowded and dangerous.

In the Maritimes there are dormant and underutilized lines that could be making a much greater contribution to the overall transportation picture by relieving pressure on the road network. Meanwhile, the sorry remnant of what was once a vibrant passenger operation in our region is totally inadequate to meet the needs of the communities it is supposed to serve.

In our view, rail passenger service in the Maritimes is really an embarrassment to Canada. Without a doubt we lag far behind all other G7 nations – and many third-world countries as well. It's almost beyond belief that the longest-running named passenger train in North America is crawling along a 60-mile stretch of badly deteriorated track in northern New Brunswick at 30 miles per hour or less. Forty years ago the *Ocean* routinely ran at 75 miles per hour over most of that route – and it took two hours less to travel from Moncton to Campbellton than it does today. Although the condition of the CN mainline through Nova Scotia is significantly better, the passenger train is frequently subject to lengthy delays because most of the passing tracks between Moncton and Halifax have been decommissioned.

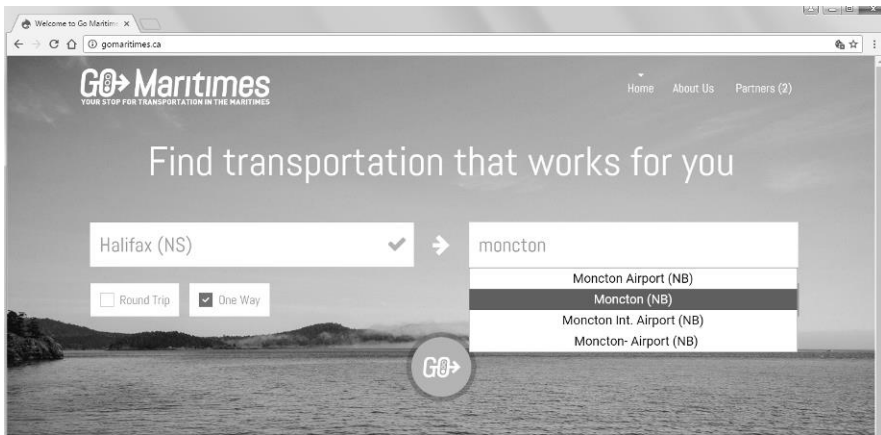
Transport Action Atlantic strongly supports recent initiatives by the provincial ministers in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick to have the issues addressed, and we acknowledge the efforts of several MPs from the region to convince the federal minister that Canada does not end at Quebec City.

-Ted Bartlett

Other News

“Go Maritimes” provides useful tool for multi-modal transportation planning in Atlantic Canada

Have you ever been trying to figure out how to use public transportation to travel between two places in the Maritimes, and had a hard time knowing if you'd found all of the options? If so, you'd do well to check out the valuable online transportation planning resource that is now available in the form of “Go Maritimes”. Founded by Wayne Groszko and developed in partnership with a number of individuals and local organizations (including the Ecology Action Centre, Dalhousie University, and the Province of Nova Scotia) Go Maritimes aims to make it easier for people to find the schedules for buses, shuttles, trains and other transport services to plan their travel in Canada's Maritime provinces.



A look at the Go Maritimes website. This tool makes it easy to see all of your various public transportation options for trips within the Maritimes.

Trying to plan travel using public transportation in many parts of the Maritimes can be a challenge, and that often begins with simply being unaware of what options exist. With Go Maritimes, users can enter any two end-point locations (where public transportation options exist) in the Maritime Provinces and their desired travel date, and the site will then present them with the various options available, including specific schedules and estimated costs.

For example, if one wished to travel from Halifax to Moncton on Dec. 18, Go Maritimes shows three different Maritime Bus departures and the one VIA Rail departure, along with the ticket prices and links to the respective websites to buy a ticket. For a different type of example, say you were interested in a trip between Baddeck and New Glasgow – Go Martimes shows two different shuttle companies along with Maritime Bus.

The site is constantly being added to and improved, and the team working on it is always looking for feedback from anyone who has suggestions on how to improve the site, or notices any errors in the information provided.

A handy feedback button is included near the bottom of the main page of the website.



You can visit the site and try out the travel planning features at

<http://gomaritimes.ca/>

Meet a Member



Katherine ("Kat") Kitching is an active transportation and urban planning advocate in Halifax, Nova Scotia. She enjoys working on a variety of projects, and recently wrapped up a contract as a research assistant looking at the positive impacts of co-operative businesses on Canadian society. She runs a small social enterprise offering outdoor fitness programs for people of all ages, with a focus on making exercise accessible and enjoyable for women aged 50+. Both her career, and the fact that she gets wherever she needs within the city on foot, or on her bike or inline skates (wearing enough lights to bear the occasional gibe for being a "rolling Christmas tree"), have led her to be a strong advocate for active transportation. She has recently become involved in Walk n' Roll

Halifax, an organization that advocates for every walking route in the City to be "safe, comfortable, and interesting".

However, even the strongest active transportation activist needs motorized transportation to access the many wonderful places in our region and beyond. Though Kat and her partner are part of a private car-sharing arrangement, she feels that the kind of Atlantic Canada she wants to live in will have great, accessible inter-city public transportation - particularly on rails. Kat is a huge fan of the train, preferring it to any other mode of inter-city transportation, and has been using VIA's short- and long-haul services regularly since she was a teenager. She recalls how agonized she felt in late 2013, when CN was threatening to abandon a stretch of Northern New Brunswick rail, potentially severing the VIA Rail link to anywhere west of Bathurst. "I read about the risk of losing our only train service (and my main mode of transportation) from Halifax to the rest of the country, and I thought 'There must be someone out there advocating on this issue!'" However, when she first went searching on the Internet for such an organization, she came up empty - until a Halifax newspaper quoted TAA then-Vice-President Ted Bartlett in defence of the line, and Kat was able to search for TAA by name. She quickly signed up, and has been a member since.

Luckily, both those problems have been solved - or at least significantly improved. TAA now has an active, effective website (for which Kat provided valuable feedback during the development stages), and the Newcastle Subdivision will not be closed in the immediate future. All the same, she is continuing to help TAA push for our agenda in areas such as Halifax's Integrated Mobility Plan consultations and advocating for a restoration of the *Ocean* to daily service. We're very happy to have Kat's skills, abilities and energy within our organization!

End of the Line



Even wonder where the inspiration for VIA's green-themed livery came from? The answer is clear in this photograph taken in Thunder Bay on 29 October 2016. Still sporting the logo of the still-born UK-based Nightstar service, 30 never-completed sleeping car shells, along with three service cars, were being cut up for scrap – without ever having carried a paying passenger. The 106 Renaissance cars that VIA did place in service retained their original British colour scheme, which was subsequently applied to other Canadian rolling stock as well. (PHOTO – Roger Litwiller)



On a similar note, the RDCs that were stored at the former IRSI site in Moncton for many years were finally scrapped earlier this year. Only a few survived the scrapper's torch, including ex-VIA 6133, which has been purchased by Rapido Trains Inc., who will be restoring it to operating condition (visit <http://rapidotrains.com/saving-6133-update/> for more info) (PHOTO – Jason Shron)