

# ***The Bulletin***

TRANSPORT ACTION ATLANTIC

SPRING – SUMMER 2020

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## ***Pandemic!***

### ***Huge challenges for public transportation***



Masked and physically-distanced passengers aboard a Codiak Transpo bus in early July. COVID-19 has thrown public transportation in Atlantic Canada into a state of chaos. Our detailed coverage begins on p. 5 (PHOTO – Codiak Transpo)



The *Bulletin* is published twice a year by Transport Action Atlantic  
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## ***AGM Rescheduled***

In common with other public gatherings throughout the region, Transport Action Atlantic's **annual general meeting**, scheduled for May 2, had to be postponed because of the coronavirus pandemic. Assuming that the "Atlantic bubble" remains in place, your executive has tentatively decided to reschedule the AGM for the afternoon of Saturday, October 17. It is planned to coincide with the fall board meeting, to be held in Halifax. A final decision will be made in September, and will be confirmed along with the meeting location on the TAA website.

The AGM agenda normally includes annual reports and financial statements, appointment of an auditor, election of a board of directors, and any other business that may arise. However, given the exceptional circumstances this year the executive has asked existing board members to remain in office until the spring of 2021. That said, there are vacancies presently existing which could be filled in the interim.

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

# Advocacy and the Pandemic

*By Ted Bartlett*

You might say we were overtaken by events! The cover story in our last *Bulletin* was an upbeat message on significant public transit advances in our region. Then came the COVID-19 pandemic, and a somewhat delicate house of cards came tumbling down. Transit systems – and indeed public transportation in all its forms – find themselves in a seriously chaotic state these days here in Atlantic Canada, across the country, and around the world.

The challenges of rebuilding what has been lost are enormous. There's an obvious issue with consumer confidence in using public transportation in these difficult times – and an inherent risk that those concerns may result in increased dependence on private automobiles. As advocates, it is incumbent on us to do all we can to ensure that the progress made towards more sustainable transport is not reversed.

Kudos must surely go to Mike Cassidy, owner of Maritime Bus, who kept his coaches running through the darkest days of March and April, and is now looking ahead with optimism toward a recovery in full realization of how vital consumer confidence really is. Unlike the major airlines, he considers that to be much more important than having every seat filled.



**A pair of Maritime Bus coaches prepare to board passengers at Moncton. (PHOTO – Ted Bartlett)**

As for VIA Rail, they appear to have completely abdicated their mandate in this region. They cancelled all service abruptly without notice on March 13 when there was but one confirmed COVID case in all of Atlantic Canada, showing a cavalier

lack of concern for travel disruptions to their customers. And, furthermore, management has no intention of resuming operations down here before November 1, at the earliest.

It is also appropriate that we express appreciation to the various transit systems in the four provinces, that stayed operational and made it possible for essential workers to get to their jobs during the peak of the crisis. In fact, the drivers were themselves frontline essential workers, who performed their duties with distinction when called upon to do so.

TAA has been active throughout the past four months. Of course, like many public gatherings, our annual general meeting scheduled for May had to be postponed. With the Atlantic bubble now in effect we hope to be able to hold it in October, in conjunction with our fall board meeting.

Social distancing has precluded face-to-face meetings, but we've been very much involved through electronic means in maintaining the lines of communication with politicians, officials, civic leaders and the media and ensuring that our key messages are not forgotten. Better days are ahead!

# ***Financial Report***

*The following financial report is provided to update on TAA's financial position at the end of 2019. A full financial report will be provided at the postponed AGM.*

## **Transport Action Atlantic Income Statement December 31 2019 (To Nearest Dollar)**

### **Income**

Dues	\$ 1,411.00 (Net) Note 1
Donations	\$ 3,789.00
Total Income	<u>\$ 5,200.00</u>

### **Expenses**

Total Expenses	<u>\$ 5,736.00</u>
Net Loss	\$ ( 536.00)
Cash In Bank	<u>\$ 1,814.00</u>

Note 1 / One Half dues collected go to National Office

Note 2 \$ 754.00 was outstanding (owed to us) from Canada Helps on Dec 31.

This was received in early 2020 and taken into 2020 income.

*-Donald R MacLeod  
Treasurer*

# Transportation in chaos amid COVID-19

## Four premiers agree on “Atlantic bubble”

It's been one crazy ride throughout our region, across Canada, and around the world. In mid-March, a novel coronavirus and its associated disease known as COVID-19 that appeared as a rather remote and minor concern to most Canadians as the calendar turned to 2020 suddenly mushroomed to crisis proportions. The Atlantic region has fared better under the pandemic than most parts of Canada, and at this writing we're immeasurably better off than our troubled neighbours to the south. Nevertheless, life here is very different than it was just six months ago.

The four premiers and their medical advisors have by all accounts done an outstanding job to date in keeping the case count low. Tight restrictions on travel across provincial boundaries are viewed as being a critical contributor to the success so far – so much so that it was considered safe to create an “Atlantic bubble”, effective July 3. As of that date, residents were permitted to move freely among the four provinces without a requirement to self-isolate. There were, however, more than a few hiccups, as border checkpoints remained in effect. Issues were particularly evident entering New Brunswick from Nova Scotia. Officials were still working to streamline the process some two weeks after the “bubble” was launched.



**Motorists travelling from Nova Scotia to New Brunswick encountered lengthy delays at border checkpoints during the early days of the Atlantic bubble. Commercial traffic was also seriously affected. (PHOTO – Brett Ruskin, CBC News)**

Some consideration was being given to opening up the region to the rest of Canada later in July – primarily to give the struggling tourism industry a boost. But the authorities evidently thought better of it, and the restrictions on visitors from outside Atlantic Canada were showing no sign of loosening as we entered the second half of what is normally the peak travel month. Many tourism establishments, especially in Newfoundland and Labrador, chose not to open at all for the 2020 season.

Travel within the region became largely the domain of the private automobile. Acting with what many viewed at best as an overabundance of caution, VIA Rail abruptly cancelled its *Ocean* service entirely with virtually no notice to its customers on March 13, and subsequently announced that there was no plan to resume operations before November at the earliest. Faced with plunging ridership, Maritime Bus reduced service frequency to tri-weekly, while its Newfoundland counterpart, DRL Coachlines, suspended service entirely for nearly three months. Air Canada has discontinued indefinitely its routes to Halifax from Moncton, Saint John, Fredericton and Charlottetown. Marine Atlantic cancelled its seasonal ferry service between North Sydney and Argentia for all of 2020, while the constitutional service to Port aux Basques maintained its normal schedule but with strict limitations on the number of passengers permitted on each sailing.

This issue of the *Bulletin* contains stories by your co-editors and various contributors on how the pandemic has affected various transportation modes. We have attempted to be as current as possible with this information, but in a rapidly changing environment we run the inevitable risk of being overtaken by developing events.

-Ted Bartlett

## Coronavirus suspends VIA Rail's Ocean for eight months

In our last *Bulletin*, we reported on the March 13<sup>th</sup> cancellation of the *Ocean* as VIA made the abrupt decision to fully cancel both the *Ocean* and *Canadian*, with no accommodations made for maintaining basic service to communities on either line. The cancellation came in light of growing concerns about the spread of the pandemic, but was announced with minimal notice, stranding some passengers who were already on connecting trains or waiting in stations to board. Though initially announced as a cancellation “until further notice”, whatever hope there may have been of passenger rail service in Atlantic Canada resuming any time soon was put to rest on May 6<sup>th</sup>, when VIA announced that the service suspension would be extended until November – a full eight months.

The announcement of the extended suspension was accompanied by the revelation that VIA had discovered issues in the HEP (stainless steel) long-distance fleet

during recent refurbishment work. Structural issues identified in some cars led VIA to initiate a comprehensive inspection program of the entire fleet. Were they to discover significant issues and the need for repairs, they could make use of the extended downtime of the *Ocean* and *Canadian* to proceed with this work. While this may well have limited the ability to run peak-length trains (far from a necessity, with tourist travel shut down and limited interprovincial travel), it should not have limited VIA's ability to restore some basic coach-only service on either train in the interim.

This would seem to be further proof that VIA considers both the *Ocean* and *Canadian* to be primarily tourist trains, non-essential services that just happen to provide some basic transportation as an afterthought. Those in smaller communities along the *Ocean*'s route in particular would strongly disagree, particularly as other intercity transportation services have disappeared. Meanwhile, other VIA services have maintained basic service, and trains are gradually being restored in the Corridor; all with additional cleaning, limited capacity, enforced distancing and mandatory masks, of course.

These train reductions have of course come at a cost to VIA's employee base. On July 8, VIA announced layoffs for roughly 1,000 unionized employees, to take effect July 24<sup>th</sup>. Many of VIA's on board staff had been kept on at partial pay since the shutdown, but evidently VIA has decided not to continue this program for as long as they continue their reduced services.

At the time of writing, the *Ocean* is still tentatively scheduled to resume service on November 4<sup>th</sup>, though what that service will look like remains to be seen (see the coverage in our *Rail News* section). At this time, VIA is blocking Sleeper Plus class bookings through November and December on all overnight trains, as they reportedly try to figure out how they will offer that service in keeping with current safety requirements.

-Tim Hayman

## **Maritime Bus soldiers on through pandemic**

### **Plexiglas barriers should improve customer confidence**

The Coach Atlantic group, owners of the Maritime Bus network, knows it is in for a severe financial hit in 2020 because of COVID-19. Company head Mike Cassidy is anticipating that revenues will be down \$30 million by year-end. The scheduled line-haul service that spans the three Maritime provinces, normally providing connections with Orleans Express into Quebec and the Marine Atlantic ferry to Newfoundland, was hit by a dramatic ridership drop in March, and forced to reduce frequency to tri-weekly. Traffic is only now starting to recover, and by mid-July the buses were running four days a week.

But that's just the tip of the iceberg. With motorcoach tours at a standstill and the cruise ship industry completely shut down, charter demand has almost completely disappeared. But Mr. Cassidy still holds unshakable faith in the future of his business. He's hoping the scheduled service will be back to seven days a week in August, and he's taking firm action to rebuild consumer confidence in bus travel. Unlike the major airlines, Maritime Bus has no plans to resume seating strangers side-by-side. Unless two people are travelling together, the aisle seat will remain vacant for the foreseeable future. And, the company is proceeding full speed ahead with the installation of plexiglass partitions in all its vehicles. By the end of June the work had been completed on four vehicles, which were then assigned to the busiest routes linking Charlottetown and Sydney with Halifax.



**Plexiglass barriers are being installed on all Maritime Bus coaches to enhance passenger safety and confidence. (PHOTO – Maritime Bus)**

Mr. Cassidy says it's important that passengers feel confident and comfortable while travelling, and he believes that these measures combined with enhanced deep cleaning procedures will be very important to the company's recovery. The cancellation of Air Canada's short-haul routes throughout the Maritimes clearly also present an opportunity for the bus company, given that coaches to and from Halifax call regularly at Stanfield International Airport.

"People are seeing us for who we are," Mr. Cassidy says. "I'm seeing tremendous customer confidence in our service, and when COVID goes away, people will remember that we were there when they needed us."

By July 20, system ridership was doing better than the company had anticipated, with an average total of 216 people riding the buses on the four days per week that they operated. The peak day was Friday, July 10, when 320 passengers were carried.

*-Ted Bartlett*



# Transit takes a major pandemic hit

## Ridership begins to slowly recover



**This Halifax Transit bus travelled virtually empty through Dartmouth on the afternoon of July 4. Boarding through the rear doors to isolate the driver from risk of COVID-19 contagion has been typical operating practice throughout the region – making fare collection difficult or impossible. (PHOTO – James Fraser)**

The past four months have been brutal for transit systems throughout Atlantic Canada. During the pandemic lockdown, ridership sank to minimal levels, and revenue even more so as health protection measures made it difficult or impossible to collect fares. But the systems – vital as they were in ensuring that essential workers could get to their jobs – continued to function through the darkest of days.

Although there were some variations among different transit authorities, greatly reduced passenger limits, enhanced deep-cleaning procedures (usually every few hours), and boarding and exiting through rear doors only were typical practice. And each transit system had something else in common – a huge operating deficit.

With a growing realization of how critical the situation had become, a coalition of more than 60 advocacy groups from across Canada declared an online day of action on May 28. The objective was to bring pressure to bear on federal and provincial politicians to obtain emergency funding for transit. Transport Action

Atlantic urged mayors and councils of cities and towns across the region to add their voices to the campaign.

No immediate response was forthcoming from Ottawa. The first indications something favourable might be happening came in the \$19-billion federal-provincial Safe Restart Agreement announced on July 16. Its provisions included “a dedicated stream of funding for public transit”, but no dollar figure was given for the transit component, and no further details were immediately available.

Meanwhile, ridership was slowly recovering around the region, and transit authorities began introducing mandatory mask requirements as a means of allowing more passengers on each bus. Effective on June 29, New Brunswick’s three largest systems introduced the requirement, while recognizing that it would not be possible for drivers to act as enforcers. As of July 24 a similar rule will be in effect in Nova Scotia, but as of this writing Metrobus in St. John’s was still only recommending wearing a mask when physical distancing could not be maintained.



**The new face of public transit. (IMAGE – Codiac Transpo)**

Some transit systems, including Greater Moncton’s Codiac Transpo were installing plexiglass barriers to shield the driver from passengers and allow boarding to resume through front doors. Alex Grncarovski, director of operations, said Codiac has been an industry leader with the procedures introduced to protect both customers and employees during the pandemic. He was pleased at the level of compliance with the masking requirement. As of mid-July, the service was stilling running at only 60% of normal schedule, with no service available on Sundays. All buses were being taken out of service for several hours at mid-day for sanitizing, and fares were still not being collected.

Halifax Transit ratcheted service up another notch on June 22, and is now operating at better than 80% of pre-COVID frequencies. Limitations on occupancy remain in effect with alternate rows of seats being blocked off. Up to five standees are now permitted at any one time. At the time of writing, Halifax Transit has now announced a return to full occupancy and the resumption of front door boarding and fare collection, beginning August 1. In St. John's, Metrobus Transit increased its occupancy limit to 19 passengers effective June 8.

*-Ted Bartlett*

## **Marine Atlantic maintains constitutional service through COVID-19**

### **Other ferries affected to varying degrees**

Marine Atlantic's ferries between North Sydney NS and Port aux Basques NL have continued to maintain twice-daily departures throughout the pandemic emergency, with enhanced measures introduced to protect the health of passengers and crew. The Crown corporation is in a unique position, in that it is constitutionally mandated to provide service between the two ports "in accordance with the traffic offering."

It's therefore imperative, says vice-president Don Barnes, that the company takes every possible measure to protect the continued health and safety of its employees to ensure the essential service is maintained. Normally most crew members share two-berth cabin accommodation in the vessels, but this practice has been discontinued in the face of the pandemic.

Initially maximum passenger limits of 250 per sailing were imposed to facilitate social-distancing, but this was subsequently reduced to 100, including commercial drivers, per departure. This allowed for a smaller crew complement, allowing all employees to have a cabin to themselves. Food service for passengers was also discontinued, with each customer being offered a complimentary boxed lunch. Passengers were required to remain in the area of the vessel to which they were assigned.

Since the introduction of the Atlantic bubble, the company has been carefully monitoring the increased demand, and has been gradually increasing the number of passengers permitted on each sailing. By mid-July the limit had been boosted to 175, in addition to commercial drivers, according to spokesman Darrell Mercer, with plans to increase that number again to 200 in the near future.

"Increasing it incrementally has enabled us to adjust our processes, as necessary, rather than increasing numbers all at once," he said, adding that MV *Leif Ericson* had been placed in service to add more commercial traffic capacity, as required.

“These numbers are well below our regular capacity but will provide customers with travel options. While not everyone will get the crossing of their choice (some may have to take a day crossing versus night crossing), we feel this is a good balance of meeting the traffic demand while maintaining our principles of meeting the health and safety requirements of employees and customers and maintaining our essential ferry service.”

Passengers are also required to wear a face mask while travelling with Marine Atlantic.

The company’s seasonal Argentia ferry, which is heavily dependent on tourism traffic, has been cancelled for the entire 2020 season. All prepaid tickets for this route were refunded in full.

Elsewhere, the other seasonal federally-funded “constitutional alternative” ferry service, between Nova Scotia and PEI was late starting its season, and initially was only accommodating large commercial trucks and their drivers on a Monday-through-Friday basis. As of July 3, Northumberland Ferries was offering limited passenger service up to 50% of vessel capacity seven days a week. Meanwhile, Bay Ferries Saint John-Digby vessel *Fundy Rose* has been maintaining a single daily round trip, again with limits on maximum passengers permitted. Not surprisingly, the restart of the troubled “Cat” service between Yarmouth NS and Bar Harbor, Maine, is postponed once again. It will not happen at all in 2020, due to the closure of the US-Canada border.

-Ted Bartlett

## **Pandemic brings major cuts to regional air service**

If there’s one thing that transportation observers agree upon in these troubled times, it’s that the commercial aviation industry is facing the greatest challenge of its entire existence. And, most pundits are confident in their prediction that it will be several years before the industry recovers anything like its pre-pandemic passenger volumes.

Unanimity disappears when discussing certain other aspects of the troubled airline industry. With the apparent support of the Government of Canada, air carriers are generally refusing to refund tickets purchased in advance by passengers whose plans were impacted by COVID-19. Furthermore, there are numerous horror stories of Canadians stranded outside the country who had to pay huge penalties to fly home from foreign destinations. Air passenger rights advocates have so far not achieved wide success in helping customers get their money back. (TAA member Woodrow French has been active in this area for many years, and he outlines the passengers’ case in a story which follows.)

There's also considerable debate about the airlines' collective wisdom in seating strangers at close quarters in typically cramped cabins. It would appear that consumers are dubious at best about the carriers' claims that the sophisticated onboard ventilation systems, combined with deep cleaning of seating areas and wearing of masks by all passenger and crew negate any risk of catching the virus from a stranger seated at your elbow. A number of national surveys have produced overwhelmingly negative views on the decision to sell middle seats and to seat unrelated travellers elbow-to-elbow.



**A drastically-downsized arrival/departure board shows the massive impact of COVID-19 at Halifax Stanfield International Airport. (PHOTO – HIAA)**

The *Globe and Mail* reported that in the first nine days of July there were 15 domestic flights and 19 international arrivals in Canada that had at least one confirmed case on board. Furthermore, the newspaper said, there appeared to be no organized mechanism to ensure that passengers who may have been exposed were notified. All this would appear unlikely to boost the confidence level of prospective travellers – no matter how intense and attractive the airline or travel industry promotion might be.

Here in Atlantic Canada, local airport authorities faced the pandemic with a growing sense of alarm, as revenues tumbled amid added costs for health and safety precautions. Faced with the dire prospect of running out of cash amid a slow recovery, management teams are confronting the painful reality that massive cost cutting, layoffs, and postponement of capital projects will be necessary.

Halifax Stanfield International – the region's largest airport – reported that its total passenger traffic in April and May was down compared to last year by 97%, and the number of flights was reduced by 90%. June showed only slight improvement with 95% fewer passengers than the same month in 2019. The July schedule at YHZ offers 55-60% fewer flights than last year. The busiest days in

the first half of the month saw only about 1000 passengers, compared with a daily average of 11,000 passengers in July 2019.

St. John's Airport was down to just a handful of daily arrivals and departures, with some smaller cities showing just a few flights per week. Saint John airport was completely shut down for about two months, with no flights operating at all.

Air Canada announced the indefinite suspension of its regional connector services linking Halifax with Moncton, Fredericton, Saint John, and Charlottetown, as well as flights within the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. Furthermore, the national carrier is pulling out of Bathurst NB and Wabush NL entirely. Provincial Airlines (PAL) will continue to serve NL destinations, including Wabush, but Bathurst is left with no service at all. And passengers wanting to fly to Newfoundland from other Maritime airports must either find their own way to Halifax or fly several hours in the wrong direction on a routing through Montreal or Toronto.

WestJet, meanwhile, has terminated all of its employees in Atlantic Canada. The customer contact centre in Moncton will close permanently, and airport ground services at the various airports where the airline operates will be contracted out. Close to 300 jobs are affected.

## ***OPINION***

# **Airline passengers affected by COVID-19 are entitled to a refund**

*By Woodrow French*

Thirteen years ago, as Mayor of the Town of Conception Bay South NL, I started a movement to secure an "Airline Passengers Bill of Rights". In 2019 I thought I'd achieved my goal when federal Transport Minister Marc Garneau announced that the government would indeed pass legislation to create protection for passengers who use airlines for business and pleasure. My happiness with this announcement was short lived.

Passengers continue to complain about the services they receive while trying to get from point A to point B, and how they are treated by the airline that they use. The airlines are getting into the requirements of the legislation screaming and kicking.

The most recent insult is the practice of the airlines withholding monies that have been paid for future air travel. In this case, if the traveller is unable to, or doesn't want to travel, and demand their money back they can't get it. Instead they are issued a dated voucher, usually two years. The airlines do this with blessing of the federal government, arguing that the airlines can't afford to give the money back.



**A deserted check-in area at Halifax Stanfield International Airport during the height of COVID-19 disruptions. Would-be travellers who paid for their trips in advance are having great difficulty getting refunds. (PHOTO – HIAA)**

What about the people who, because of the pandemic, now find themselves in dire straits financially, and need their money back to pay their bills? In my opinion, the airlines failing to refund people's amounts to theft, and in this case they are aided by the Government of Canada who suspended the requirements of the Airline Passengers Bill of Rights to refund the monies to the people.

In a lot of cases the airlines have suspended routes and are not able to fulfill the requirements of the Bill of Rights to get passengers to their destination in a timely fashion. They are failing to complete their end of the contract, and therefore should refund monies instead of giving vouchers for future travel if that's what the customer wants.

So what do people who are affected by these measures do? My suggestion is to contact the airline and request a refund, also copy your member of Parliament and request his or her assistance in the matter. Next contact the Canadian Transportation Agency and request their intervention, and again copy your member of Parliament. Next let your local media know what's going on, Don't be afraid to vent your frustrations and how you have been treated by the airline. Publicity can be an awesome tool. Social media is also a tool that can be used. Form groups that can lobby the airlines and the federal government to ensure that you get your money back.

It is interesting to note that the European Union still requires airlines to abide by the EU Airline Passengers Bill of Rights. This means that Canadian airlines flying in and out of the EU have to comply. The same requirement should be in effect in Canada. Canadians deserve fair treatment that includes refunding monies paid for airline travel that they can no longer use.

*TAA member Woodrow French is a long-time air passenger rights activist.*

## Is the *Ocean* as we know it gone forever? The train won't look the same when it resumes



VIA train 15, the westbound *Ocean*, pauses at Bathurst on the wintry late evening of March 13, 2020. It would be the last Maritime run after management hastily pulled the plug on all service east of Quebec City. The iconic Park car at the end of the train was likely making its final appearance ever in Atlantic Canada, as the company is apparently planning a less attractive product when service eventually returns to the region. (PHOTO – from Twitter)

On March 13, 2020, VIA Train 15 departed from Halifax station on its journey to Montreal. Unbeknownst to the passengers on board or other observers in the region, this would be the last departure of the *Ocean* before the abrupt beginning of a pandemic-induced service suspension; further, it would almost certainly be the last departure of the *Ocean* that resembles the train that has operated in the region for many years.

As we've reported before, VIA is set to lose access to the loop track at PSA Halifax (formerly Halterm) as of November 1, 2020. This will leave VIA with no option to turn its tri-weekly train when service resumes, aside from an entirely unrealistic 64 mile (103 kilometre) back-up move to Truro. The wye at Windsor Jct. that once served as an alternate option when the loop was out of service has



long since been dismantled, and would require significant investment (and the removal of an access road to a new subdivision) to reinstall.

TAA has continued to advocate for an alternative infrastructure-based solution, allowing for minimal restructuring of the existing service and an easier opportunity for a return to daily service in the future. Unfortunately it seems at this point that any possible solutions that VIA may have considered, such as reinstalling the wye at Windsor Junction or building some new infrastructure like a turntable on VIA property, have received whatever evaluation they will get and have been deemed unfeasible. So instead, the train will resume with a new operating model.

To date, VIA has been rather vague about its plans for the new operation. What we know for sure is that the train will operate with locomotives back to back (contrary to VIA's typical "elephant style" operation), and after arrival in Halifax, a run-around track near the station will be used to place the locomotives on the opposite end of the consist for the return trip. The consists will be comprised of a mix of HEP (stainless steel) and Renaissance equipment, with HEP1 coaches (whose seats can be turned for the reverse journey) and Chateau sleepers making up most of the accommodations. The remainder will be made up of the last remnants of the Renaissance fleet, with service cars and a dining car providing meal service, and an accessible coach and sleeper providing mandatory accessible service. It's not clear at this time if additional Renaissance sleepers will continue to be used, but it seems that the days of full Renaissance consists have come to an end.

The most significant loss of the new arrangement will be the *Park* car. Based on the details TAA has thus far been able to ascertain, the train will have baggage cars at both ends (HEP at one end, Renaissance at the other) to facilitate baggage service at intermediate stops, which is handled by one of the engineers. While it appears that a *Skyline* dome may feature in the consist to provide some dome and lounge space, the *Park* car with its iconic tail-end lounge, bar, and large bedrooms (always popular and sold at a significant mark-up) will be a thing of memory. It remains to be seen if the loss of this feature car and its higher-yield accommodations will be damaging for the train's appeal and performance in the future.

At the end of the day, the main priority continues to be maintaining what is left of passenger rail service in the region, and advocating for restoration of daily service to better service travelers in the region (an altered consist is still better than an outright cancellation, which we feared could be an option!).

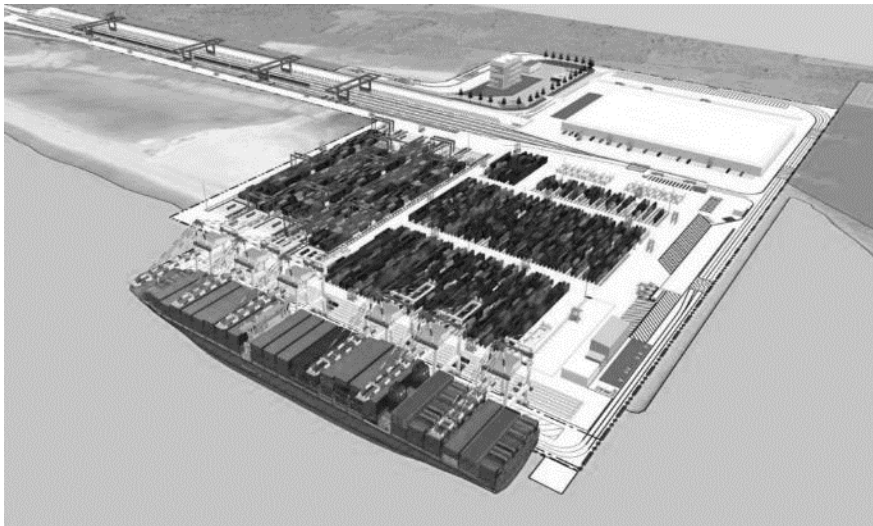
Still, it's hard not to be sad to see the end of the *Ocean* in its more iconic arrangement, and sadder still when the last run happened so unceremoniously and without notice, leaving no chance for a proper farewell.

-Tim Hayman

# Another reprieve for Cape Breton rail line

## Optimism growing for container mega-port

The dormant railway across Cape Breton Island got another reprieve from the scrappers on May 14, when the Nova Scotia government announced a new one-year deal with Genesee and Wyoming Corporation to maintain the defunct rail line between Sydney and the Strait of Canso in its current state of suspended animation. G&W is now owned by Toronto-based Brookfield Asset Management, but it remains to be seen if Canadian ownership of the property will make a real difference in the long term.



**A conceptual drawing of the proposed Novaport container terminal in Cape Breton.**

It's been nearly five years since the last freight moved over the line, but the Province had been paying up to \$60,000 per month to G&W to postpone dismantling of the infrastructure. There had been concerns that G&W was being paid excessively under the old arrangement, and the new contract addresses this by setting the payment at a fixed \$30,000 each month. In making the announcement, Business Minister Geoff MacLellan stated that the rail line was vital to a proposed international container terminal in Cape Breton, and the government now believes that the proponents have convinced potential investors of the project's viability.

The Sydney Harbour Investment Partners, known as SHIP, was formed specifically to assemble the business consortium required to develop the deep-water Novaport™ mega-terminal and associated logistics park. Albert Barbusci, the lead promoter for the project, is optimistic that the Canada Infrastructure Bank could be seriously interested in funding the modest \$130 million investment

required to restore the entire G&W line from Truro to Sydney to class 3 standard. That would enable double-stack container trains to operate at 40 miles per hour.

On the Novaporte project overall, “our momentum is really good,” he said, adding that five federal ministries have an interest in it – including Infrastructure, Transport, Energy, Environment, and Indigenous Affairs. The Membertou First Nation has a partnership stake in the venture, and there’s also a potential green power component, using a new technology to convert waste plastics to energy, so it checks a number of important boxes on the Trudeau Government’s agenda. Mr. Barbusci emphasizes that the Cape Breton project should not be seen in any way as a threat to Halifax – the real competition is the already-congested ports on the US Eastern Seaboard, which have little room for expansion.

*(The following item appeared as an op-ed in the Cape Breton Post on July 13.)*

## **New hope for Cape Breton’s rusting rails**

*By Ted Bartlett*



It’s now been nearly five years since the final whistle sounded at Orangedale, as the Genesee and Wyoming shortline railway company ran its last freight train over the Sydney Subdivision. The rails have continued to rust, ties are deteriorating,

and the roadbed is being compromised by unrepaired washouts – despite monthly maintenance payments by Nova Scotia’s taxpayers.

But wait! There’s a glimmer of optimism on the horizon – perhaps even a bright shining light. While we’ve all been preoccupied by the pandemic, a number of new considerations have arisen – one of them actually a silvery lining amid the dark cloud of COVID-19. The Government of Canada is now keen to give the economy a jump-start with “shovel ready” green-focused infrastructure investments. Rebuilding the Cape Breton rail line would surely meet the criteria – and furthermore present an opportunity for Ottawa to make good on a quarter-century-old commitment signed by the president of then Crown-owned CN. The letter to the premier of Nova Scotia when the Cape Breton line was spun off to the first American shortline operator was an unfulfilled guarantee that rail service to Sydney would remain operational should the arrangement not work out.

For its part, the provincial government now appears satisfied that there is sufficient potential for an international container port on Sydney harbour – a development that everyone agrees can never happen without a fully-functional rail line. There’s good reason for optimism in the recent announcement from Business Minister Geoff MacLellan of a new deal with G&W to keep the railway intact (but not serviceable) at less cost to the taxpayers, and by his expressed belief that the SHIP/Novaport proposal has legs. Also encouraging is the First Nations participation in the project.

There’s now a clear indication that international shipping patterns are changing, and that substantial growth lies ahead in trans-Atlantic container traffic. Atlantic Canada is ideally positioned to take advantage of this opportunity, and Cape Breton can be a major beneficiary. Ports on the US eastern seaboard are already heavily congested, with very limited space to expand. Halifax can certainly handle some of the future growth, but again, both ocean terminals there are surrounded by dense urban development. Sydney harbour, on the other hand, has abundant undeveloped land available for logistics and distribution facilities. In reality the Novaport proposal does not represent competition for Halifax, or even Saint John. It is actually a hugely attractive alternative to the American ports – and one that has apparently grabbed the attention of major international shipping lines.

It may be some years yet before we see super-sized container vessels appearing in Sydney harbour, but there’s a growing level of confidence that it will indeed happen in the foreseeable future. In the meantime, a rehabilitated rail line could be put to use as soon as it is completed, and begin some immediate payback on the taxpayers’ investment. Diverting domestic traffic for Cape Breton and Newfoundland from an overburdened highway system to environmentally-friendly rail transportation would mean significantly reduced road maintenance costs for the Province of Nova Scotia, not to mention the safety benefits.

The cost of rehabilitating the complete rail infrastructure from Truro to Sydney to what’s known as class 3 track is pegged at \$130 million. This includes upgrading

the portion that's still operational. That investment would permit double-stack container trains to operate at 40 miles (65 kilometres) per hour over the entire line. That kind of money would likely buy less than 20 kilometres of twinned highway (assuming there weren't too many bridges or interchanges) – which would also come with the substantially higher public expense for maintaining it.

Minister MacLellan seems convinced that SHIP has a business plan that international financiers are willing to invest in. Now is the time for Cape Breton's Liberal MPs to get firmly behind the rail rehabilitation project. They would seem to have a potential ally in Infrastructure Minister Catherine McKenna – well known for her strong environmental views. This modest, green-focused, low-risk investment has huge economic implications for a region that has suffered far too long. Let's get on with it – now!

## **CN announces new Halifax-Moncton intermodal service**



**CN's Moncton intermodal facility is expected to become a busier place with more international container traffic being handled. (PHOTO – Ted Bartlett)**

CN is launching a new intermodal service between the Port of Halifax and Moncton's Gordon Yard. A media release on May 22 said the railway, in collaboration with the Halifax Port Authority, stakeholders, ocean carriers and customers, would offer "integrated solutions" through the Moncton facility.



The initiative is viewed as a positive development in getting more freight traffic off rubber and onto rail, but the full implications are not immediately clear. At minimum, however, it should mean a significant reduction in heavy truck traffic on the congested streets of downtown Halifax, and should also reduce wear-and-tear on highway infrastructure between Halifax and Moncton while lowering the carbon footprint of freight transportation.

CN spokesman Jonathan Abecassis said “The ongoing collaboration with ocean carriers and partners such as CMA CGM, Zim, and Tropical will reduce short-haul trucking throughout the Atlantic region by offering quick and sustainable options for goods, as rail is a safer and a more GHG efficient mode of transport.” He added that no additional infrastructure investments are planned at this time for the Gordon Yard.

The company is planning to spend a total of \$30 million this year on maintaining and upgrading its infrastructure in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Media releases announcing the expenditure again emphasize

potential reductions in greenhouse gases, along with increased capacity, by encouraging the use of rail for long haul needs. According to CN this will also reduce traffic congestion, accidents and burdens on public transportation infrastructure, as one freight train can replace over 300 trucks on the highway. Moving freight by rail instead of truck reduces GHG emissions by 75%, the railway claims.

## Canadian Pacific Buys back Eastern Line

Canadian Pacific Railway (CP) has returned to Atlantic Canada. Well...sort of. Late last year, CP announced that it had agreed to purchase the Central Maine and Quebec Railway (CMQ), a shortline operating in Maine and Vermont. The CMQ was the latest incarnation of what had been the Montreal, Maine and Atlantic, which folded after the Lac Megantic tragedy in 2013. The sale to CP was officially finalized in June of 2020.

This line was CP territory in decades past, before it was ultimately spun off to shortline operators like many former Class 1 owned lines, as CP determined it wasn't profitable enough to operate as part of their system. Clearly, times have changed. As CP eyes opportunities to compete with CN and other Class 1 railways south of the border, the acquisition of the CMQ gives them access to something that they were lacking prior to this point: ports on the Atlantic coast.



**CP's so-called "Atlantic Gateway", showing how the acquisition of the CMQ has expanded its reach into the east coast.**

The newly acquired line provides a direct connection between CP's system south of Montreal and the Irving owned New Brunswick and Maine railways, which ultimately provides access to the Port of Saint John via the New Brunswick Southern. With trackage/haulage rights to Saint John, this presents the opportunity for CP to generate a presence in the region. The railway has plans for significant infrastructure upgrades, which it hopes will make it competitive for intermodal and automotive business to move from Saint John across their system, rather than going via Moncton on CN. The full extent of this work and the potential business it could attract remain to be seen. The railway also hopes to develop the port of Searsport, ME, as another opportunity to expand its business on the east coast.

*-Tim Hayman*

## ***Motorcoach and Transit***

# **Halifax council endorses \$780-million transit investment**

**Projects include rapid bus lines, new ferry routes, electric buses**

A bright light appeared amid the pandemic darkness on May 26, when the Halifax Regional Municipality approved a progressive initiative that together represents the largest single investment the city has ever made in public transit. The

unanimous endorsement by Council envisages \$780 million in projects that would see four rapid bus routes, three new ferry routes, and 210 electric buses in service by 2028.

The city plans to contribute up to \$210 million over eight years, and is submitting proposals to the provincial and federal governments to fund the remaining portion of the projects. This investment would be a substantial move toward reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, electrification of the transportation system, and advancement of the city's climate action plan. The projects would reduce air and noise pollution, orient land use toward transit through increased development around transit stations, and contribute to creating a community that is less car-orientated and more affordable.



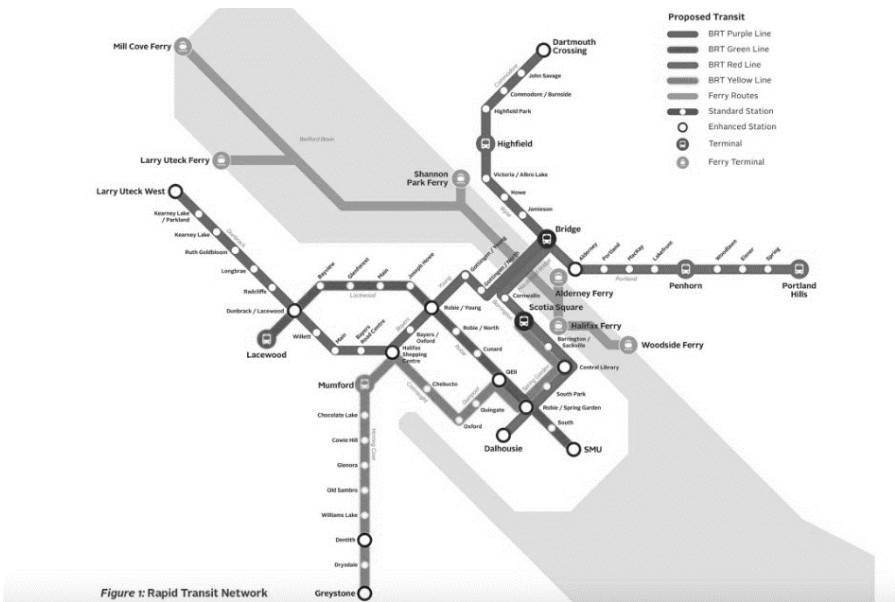
**A ferry arrives at the downtown Halifax terminal from Alderney Landing, as another departs for Woodside. HRM Council has endorsed investments that would include three new direct ferry routes by 2028. (PHOTO – James Fraser)**

The network of four bus lines would offer service every 10 minutes, seven days a week, with fast, comfortable service. There would be less stops, and transit priority measures in place such as priority lanes covering 60 percent of the total length of the routes. There would be stations within 800 metres of 120,000 people and 100,000 jobs. The aim will be to compete with private vehicles through offering improved travel times and a high degree of reliability. Once receiving funding, the first bus line could be in place within three to four years, and the complete network within seven to eight years.

The three new ferry routes would provide fast, reliable, direct connections to downtown Halifax from terminals at Mill Cove, Larry Uteck Boulevard, and Shannon Park. The first ferry route could be operational within three to four years, with the Mill Cove route recommended to receive first priority due to having the highest potential demand. Land would need to be acquired for the new terminals, and Halifax ferry terminal would require a rebuild.



The electric bus proposal is a plan to transform Halifax's conventional fleet into an electric-powered low carbon fleet. The aim is to convert half of Halifax Transit's 400 buses to battery power by 2028. In phase one, Ragged Lake Transit Centre's current expansion project would be modified to account for electrification, completing construction in 2021-22 to enable storage of 54 forty-foot equivalent buses. In phase two, a total rebuild of Burnside Transit Centre to accommodate electrification would enable storage of 300 forty-foot equivalent buses by 2027-28. A third phase would consider a Ragged Lake Transit Centre transformation to achieve a 100% sustainable fuel Halifax Transit fleet. Each electric bus is expected to save \$24,000 per year in decreased energy and maintenance costs, and reduce equivalent CO2 emissions by 59% by eliminating tailpipe emissions but sustaining upstream emissions from power generation.



Success of the rapid bus, ferry, and electric bus projects is largely contingent on receiving funding from federal and provincial governments. Proposals are being submitted to the federal government's Public Transit Infrastructure Fund and Green Infrastructure Fund, among other funding opportunities. The total remaining potential funding through the Green Infrastructure Fund is expected to be several hundred million dollars. If funding is received from the federal and provincial governments, the city will still be required to contribute the remaining 26.7 percent, or up to \$210 million. A portion of that money is already accounted for in the city's budgets, including funding for transit priority lanes. The cost of replacing and expanding conventional buses over the same time period is estimated at \$153 million.

It remains uncertain how the COVID-19 pandemic will impact Halifax's plan to transform the city's transportation system. Prolonged impacts from the pandemic could constrain municipal finances and depress transit ridership. However, these transit projects are medium to long-term plans, and Halifax Transit representatives are optimistic that ridership will recover by the time core components of the project begin to become operational in three to four years. Although the above-mentioned funding streams appear to be well-defined, it's possible the pandemic may result in alterations intended to advance projects that will stimulate the economy.

*-James Fraser*

## Maritime Bus Electric Bus Demo

*By Alex Glista*

*In a follow-up to our coverage in the Fall-Winter 2019-20 edition, Alex Glista shares his experience riding the electric bus demonstrator.*



**Alex Glista stands in front of the MCI electric bus demonstrator, just after stepping off a historic ride from Truro to Halifax.**

On March 17<sup>th</sup>, 2020 transportation history was made in Nova Scotia, as the first electric coach bus to operate in the province travelled between Truro and Halifax. The historic trip was organized by Maritime Bus/Coach Atlantic in partnership with Motor Coach Industries (MCI) to demonstrate the feasibility of green technology in the transportation sector. Earlier in March, the same electric coach bus operated demonstration trips in both Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick. I was on board during the historic Nova Scotia trip on behalf of

Transport Action Atlantic, and got to experience first-hand how electric busses could change the inter-city transportation sector.

Motor Coach Industries is a subsidiary of New Flyer, a Winnipeg-based bus manufacturer. With an increasing number of transit agencies investing in electric busses, MCI developed the D45 CRTe LE coach bus as a solution for longer-range regional commuting and transportation. According to MCI, the ideal route typology for this model is a 200-kilometre round trip, where the bus has an opportunity to charge upon return. With a capacity of 56 passengers, the D45 CRTe LE features amenities for longer travels, such as USB charging ports and 12-volt outlets.

At 11:45 AM, the electric coach bus departed the Truro bus station. During the demonstration, some key differences from its diesel counterparts were easily noticed. In particular, the usual roar of a diesel engine was notably absent, replaced by a calming silence. While the driver switched lanes on Highway 102, Maritime Bus CEO Mike Cassidy remarked “listen to the annoyance of this turning blinker” – a sound which would usually be drowned out by engine noises. Though Cassidy emphasized that the environmental benefits are the most important part of the electric coach bus, noise reduction and user comfort are also a key aspect of convincing both riders and transportation agencies of the merits of this technology.

Besides being a comfortable drive, electric coach busses offer many advantages for the companies which operate them. MCI estimates that operators will experience a 50% reduction in fuel costs, and a 30% reduction in maintenance costs. Additionally, the D45 CRTe LE has real-time diagnostic tools which monitor energy consumption, can alert the garage of needed maintenance, and can predict failures in bus components. The bus can also receive software updates over Wi-Fi, similar to a smartphone.

At 1:00 PM, the bus rolled over the Angus L. Macdonald Bridge. This was the first time that an electric bus had crossed this bridge since 1969 when Halifax Transit phased out trolley busses, and likely the first time that a battery-electric bus has ever crossed this Halifax landmark. While driving through downtown Halifax, the bus visibly turned the heads of pedestrians, who seemed curious about the words “100% BATTERY ELECTRIC” affixed to the exterior.

Around 1:15 PM, the D45 CRTe LE bus arrived at the Halifax VIA Rail station and bus terminal, concluding the historic journey. There, Mike Cassidy shared his vision for the future of electric busses in Atlantic Canada, and for his company Maritime Bus. “This bus isn’t transportation, it’s hope” he proclaimed. As Atlantic Canada is uniquely positioned to bear the brunt of the negative impact of climate change, such as sea level rise, Cassidy sees technology such as electric busses as a chance for the region to demonstrate leadership in developing solutions to this issue.



**Forward view from aboard the electric bus, rolling across the MacDonald Bridge into Halifax. (PHOTO – Alex Glista)**

He hopes that Maritime Bus can order a unit by December 2020 so that it can be deployed for the 2021 cruise ship season. Eventually, Maritime Bus/Coach Atlantic Hopes to have between two and four electric busses, but to do so will require the financial help from the provincial and federal governments. As this demonstration occurred in early March of 2020, it is unclear how COVID-19 will impact the company's plans to roll out these busses.

With the cost of electric vehicle technology declining, and the range of batteries increasing, it is only a matter of time before electric coach busses become the norm. However, it is exciting to see this revolutionary technology being tested across Atlantic Canada and Nova Scotia. The prospect of it being implemented here in the near future represents a chance for the region to be a national leader in green inter-city transportation.

## **Rural Lynx dissolves – but the need lives on**

*By Stan Choptiany*

The Southwest New Brunswick Transit Authority Inc., better known as Rural Lynx, voted to dissolve the Corporation after the July 7<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting. During the time in operation, we were fortunate to work with a great many community minded individuals from both Charlotte County and southern York County bringing expertise to the table at many levels in hopes of securing permanent transportation solutions. We collaborated in a pilot project partnership with the province of New Brunswick and Maritime Bus for twenty months offering daily return bus transportation between St. Stephen and Saint John. Even

with over 3500 rides taken and significant use by residents, especially from Grand Manan, it was found that there was not the constant uptake to allow for Maritime Bus to continue without the grants provided from the Province. Analysis of the pilot project and a detailed study funded by the NB Environment Trust Grant identified that the most advantageous transportation option would be small wheel-chair equipped vehicles that operated in an on-demand, door to door structure. The Rural Lynx board has just helped fund such a model. It will be centred in Saint Andrews, but there will be a community fund which will support contracted service to other regions of Charlotte County. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 situation has delayed the inauguration of the service.

Over the eight years of work by the transportation committee/Southwest New Brunswick Transit Authority Inc. board, we learned a great deal about the transportation needs in the community and the challenges of a scattered population. We commissioned seven major studies and established partnerships with Municipalities in Charlotte and southern York County. We had funding and or organization support from the municipalities, the Regional Service Commission, Transport Action Atlantic, the United Way, the NB Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation (ESIC) and the Provincial Regional Development Agency. We participated in the Provincial ESIC rural/urban transportation study, a national conference and convened a major transportation forum.

The Rural Lynx goal was to advocate for affordable, available and accessible transportation options. The ESIC “Surfaces to Services” and the newly released “Overcoming Poverty Together 3; The New Brunswick Economic and Social Inclusion Plan”, both call for regional transportation planning coordinated by the Community Inclusion Networks (CIN) and the Regional Service Commission (RSC). The CINs and the RSCs have been included in our partnership from our beginning. It is clear to our Rural Lynx board that transportation planning should now be under their guidance. Our board members have developed considerable expertise and we will be sharing our research, experience and studies with them. It is a natural progression to evolve from a grassroots board to groups with provincial jurisdiction. Our board sees this evolution as a most positive development, and we are looking forward to more effective, personalized, and responsive transportation solutions for our region.

*Stan Choptiany served as long-time chair of the Southwest New Brunswick Transit Authority. He is a former mayor of Saint Andrews, and a past recipient of TAA's John Pearce Award*

## **Acadian Peninsula transportation initiative moves forward**

Momentum continues to build around another community transportation proposal in New Brunswick – this time on the Acadian peninsula. The lack of alternatives to private vehicles is becoming increasingly sensitive in northeastern area of the

province, as authorities continue to raise the spectre of centralizing more public services. At the same time, numerous stakeholders – from municipalities and community organizations to senior care facilities and educational institutions – are taking stock of underutilized vehicles and assets that could enhance mobility options for the broader population. How these pieces connect together to increase mobility options is the work currently underway.

The COVID pandemic has delayed the public consultation process, but committee chair Yves Bourgeois, dean of studies at Université de Moncton's Shippagan campus, expects hired experts to propose three different models to the broad group of local decision makers as early as September.

'There's no interest in white elephants and large empty buses zig zagging the peninsula. It's 2020. We have ready technology to connect existing assets onto a reliable and agile system. We need a framework to integrate our existing assets and to start shifting behaviours,' he says, adding that in light of the pandemic a pilot may be expected out of the corral next winter or spring.

## *Marine*

# **Supreme Court denies Oceanex appeal**

The media preoccupation with COVID-19 almost allowed a highly-significant Supreme Court of Canada ruling to pass unnoticed. On March 26 the commercial shipping company Oceanex was denied leave to appeal two lower court decisions on constitutional ferry rates. The earlier rulings by the Federal Court of Canada essentially upheld the 1949 Terms of Union provisions that mandate federal support of the Marine Atlantic ferry between Newfoundland and Nova Scotia.

Having now run out of litigation options, it would appear that Oceanex decided to change tactics. Oceanex executive chairman Sid Hynes launched a campaign in April to persuade the federal government to give his operation a \$2 million/week subsidy to his operation to offset alleged COVID-related losses. During the court proceedings he had consistently maintained that Oceanex was not seeking a subsidy, but wanted Marine Atlantic to be required to charge higher truck rates. An attempt to mobilize public opinion in his favour by raising the spectre of looming food shortages failed when the provincial government said it had assurances that Marine Atlantic and the trucking industry had plenty of available capacity and the supply chain was in no danger. After apparently giving the matter some consideration, Ottawa denied the subsidy request.

Meanwhile, Transport Action Atlantic maintains that ferry rates are still inconsistent with the intent of Term 32, and are significantly higher than they

should be. The transportation provisions drafted upon Newfoundland's joining Confederation envisaged that the cost of moving goods and people across the Cabot Strait would be equal to travelling the equivalent distance by land. Clearly this is not currently the case, and TAA will continue to maintain political pressure for a rollback to more reasonable levels.

-Ted Bartlett

## Two suppliers shortlisted for replacement NL ferry



**Marine Atlantic's *Leif Ericson* is slated for replacement in 3-4 years' time. (PHOTO – Marine Atlantic)**

Marine Atlantic announced on June 9 that two companies, Stena North Sea Ltd. and Rederi AB Gotland, have been shortlisted to move to the RFP stage for the procurement of a new vessel for the Crown corporation's fleet. Funding for the procurement had been announced in the last federal budget, and a request for qualifications was issued in July 2019.

The new ship is expected to enter service in fiscal year 2023-2024, replacing the aging MV *Leif Ericson*, built in 1990 and acquired by the Crown corporation nearly 20 years ago. More

details about the new vessel's particulars, such as size, design features and technical specifications, will be presented once a contract has been entered into with the successful proponent. The *Ericson* has been primarily used as a commercial vehicle carrier.

Meanwhile, Marine Atlantic has confirmed a further two-year extension on its lease of MV *Atlantic Vision*, which will now remain as part of the fleet until at least November 2022. However, with the Argentia service cancelled for the entire 2020 season, the *Vision* will remain idle for the immediate future, unless needed as back-up.

# **Yarmouth ferry won't sail in 2020**

## **Pandemic pushes off service restart by another year**

The delays to the return of the CAT ferry service between Yarmouth and Maine continue, but this time due to forces beyond the control of Bay Ferries or the province of Nova Scotia. On February 21, the ferry operator had announced that service to Bar Harbor was planned to launch on June 26, believing that any remaining work to be done with United States Customs and Border Protection on the new Bar Harbor terminal could be completed in time for the scheduled launch. Our coverage of this news in the last issue of the *Bulletin* noted that “it remains to be seen if everything will go as planned.”

As well planned as the logistics for the launch may have been, the spread of COVID-19 proved to be an insurmountable obstacle for an international, tourist-oriented seasonal ferry service. By mid-May, Bay Ferries had postponed the launch date to July 15, but still remained optimistic that they would be able to sail in spite of the challenges posed by the pandemic; however, this remained heavily dependent on travel restrictions, and particularly the status of the international border between Canada and the US.

On June 26, the date initially planned for the beginning of the sailing season, the Nova Scotia government and Bay Ferries announced that the 2020 season would be cancelled altogether, citing the abundance of COVID-19 cases in the United States and major concerns from Nova Scotians about non-essential travel to and from the US at this time. The Chairman and CEO of Bay Ferries Limited, Mark MacDonald, said in a news release on the cancellation that “International non-essential travel worldwide has essentially come to a standstill. It is not clear when U.S. operations would be permitted to occur, what opportunity would exist for proper marketing of the service, and what short term customer demand would be.”

*-Tim Hayman*

## **Why Campobello deserves a year-round ferry**

*By Justin Tinker*

Campobello Island is a community of 800 year-round residents located in the Bay of Fundy off the southern coast of New Brunswick. It is indirectly connected to Canada using an international bridge to the United States of America. Campobello's place in history is largely tied to US President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who referred to Campobello as his “beloved island” and spent summers there as a child.



There is no provincially-owned or subsidized ferry vessel serving Campobello Island. East Coast Ferries Ltd. operates a seasonal vessel tied to the summer tourism season, but the reliability of the service has been the subject of scrutiny in recent years as the 2018 ferry season was abandoned completely due to vessel issues.

Residents of Campobello face numerous unique challenges unlike those faced by any other Canadian. Islanders are the only Canadians forced to cross international borders to fuel up their cars, to obtain banking, reach governmental services, attend specialist appointments, and any number of practical services not available on the island. Domestic Canada Post mail is routinely inspected and scrutinized at the border on route to Campobello by US CBP, arbitrarily opened, and sometimes seized if contents are questionable in the eyes of the agent.



**Justin Tinker (left) is pictured with NB Green Party Leader David Coon at the ferry landing on Campobello Island.**

Campobello has difficulty obtaining goods and services, threatening existing island establishments and the food security of the island itself. Service technicians from many fields elect not to serve Campobello, citing difficulties in accessing it reliably. In a recent survey, 86% of island residents felt a year-round ferry is “needed” or “very needed.” Campobello Island continues to be disproportionately hindered by policies at the border both during normal times, and especially now during the COVID-19 emergency.

Since the 9/11 attacks and the corresponding increases in border restrictions, Campobello has watched its population decline by 35%, and a once-healthy economy now lags behind the provincial average by over \$6,000 per person.

Deer Island to the north and Grand Manan to the south share similar economies based on fishing and tourism, and have been treading water in both demographics while they have enjoyed year-round ferry connections to the mainland.

The only unique variable impacting Campobello Island compared to the other Fundy Isles is a total reliance on the International Border. The fact that Campobello is completely dependent on the goodwill of a U.S. border patrol officer for access to Canada hurts the island, with each additional measure prompting more families to leave.

In a June 17th New Brunswick Legislature address announcing the return of a Gagetown Ferry, MLA Bruce Northrup proudly insisted that “having reliable access to transportation infrastructure is critical for any community's long-term viability and success”. The residents of Campobello Island couldn't agree more. Without reliable transportation infrastructure, Campobello has indeed suffered greatly, and currently has no elected voice in the Legislature.

The Accessible Campobello movement seeks to reverse two decades of decline. Beginning in 2017 as the Campobello Year Round Ferry Committee and reorganized as Accessible Campobello in the face of COVID-19 restrictions at the border, we continue to work at holding government accountable to protecting the constitutional rights of Canadian citizens on Campobello Island. Previous studies estimated direct Canadian economic benefit to be \$2.5million per year, taking into account only the economic activity currently lost to the United States by residents' necessity of travelling through the border. Actual economic benefit, including months added to the summer tourist season and increased access to mainland buyers for island fisheries, would likely be much higher, though detailed studies have not been completed.

Working together with MLA David Coon, Accessible Campobello is dedicated to creating a year-round ferry connection to the island, opening pathways to building affordable housing, a robust, sustainable economy, improved connectivity and extended tourism opportunities – all of which can be unlocked when reliable transportation infrastructure is extended to islanders and mainlanders alike.

This year marks a pivotal moment in the rich history of Campobello, with representatives from municipal, provincial and federal governments all recognizing the dire need for improved transportation on the island. What is yet to be written is whether this is the turning point where governments work together to make Campobello sustainable, viable, and ready for a return to success, or whether the island is abandoned by the governments tasked with preserving access and mobility rights for all Canadian citizens.

*Justin Tinker leads the Accessible Campobello group. He grew up on Campobello Island, but now resides in Saint John.*

## *Meet a Member*

### **Kathy Bouska**



**Kathy Bouska and canine companion Gripen on the platform of the shuttered VIA station in Sackville. (PHOTO – Rick Bouska)**

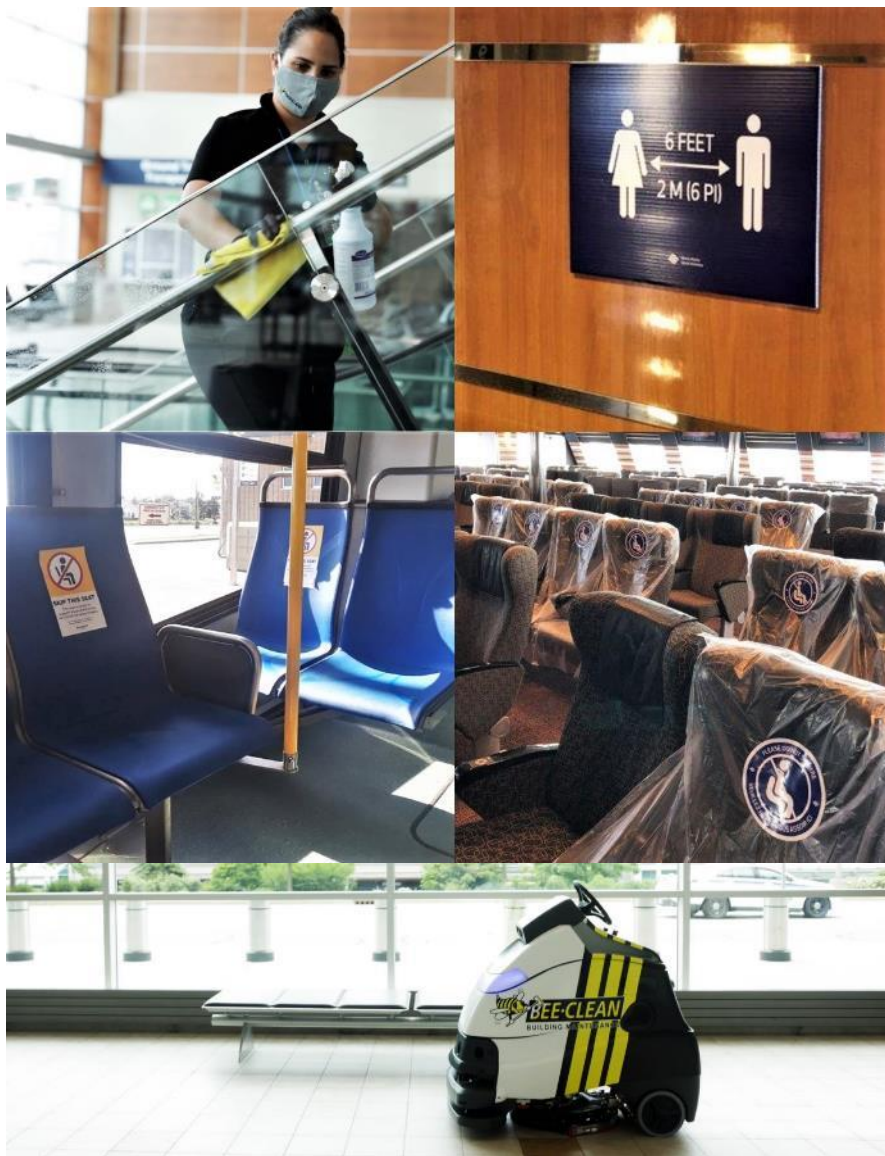
From her hometown of North Bay, Ontario, to the many places she has lived, Kathy Bouska has used many public transportation systems. She routinely took the train to Toronto and later to Waterloo when she attended university. After graduating she returned to North Bay, where she met her husband and adventure partner Rick, a US Air Force Officer serving in North Bay's NORAD sector.

Rick's Air Force career took them to Astoria, Oregon; Rome, New York; Anchorage, Alaska; and Stuttgart, Germany, where Kathy used local transit including for commuting to the museums and archives where she worked as a curator and archivist. Their transit travels together began when they lived in Upstate New York, taking Amtrak, VIA, and the Northlander to North Bay, and made multiple trips to Europe flying space available in military cargo planes.

Lucking out with their assignment to Stuttgart, Germany (where they lived for nine years), they experienced public transportation at its finest – sometimes even beyond conventional modes when they rode cogwheel and steam trains, or even gondolas. These systems welcoming well-behaved dogs enabled them to use them extensively throughout Europe and the UK because their boy, Gripen the English Labrador, could accompany them. He had his own ticket (child's price) and a mat to lie on, which always elicited smiles.

In choosing their forever home, they made a list that included being on the VIA Rail network. Sackville, New Brunswick, fit their criteria with the bonus of being serviced by Maritime Bus. A Tantramar Heritage Trust Board Member, Kathy just completed a Railway Employee Oral History project and led the team to create a railway exhibit. She, Rick, and Gripen love living in Sackville, and enjoy engaging in all the many outdoor activities, especially hiking, camping, and canoeing. Kathy hopes to help TAA bring back daily VIA service, and to encourage public transit systems to include well-behaved bigger dogs in their dog-friendly policies.

# *Transit in the time of COVID*



New sights that have quickly become common place in 2020 – top-left, a masked employee at the Halifax airport carries out additional cleaning of handrails; top-right, a sign onboard Marine Atlantic reminds passengers to maintain distance; middle-left, signs on a Halifax Transit bus encourage distancing by blocking off seats (Photo – James Fraser); middle-right, similar signage and coverings on seats keep passengers apart on a Marine Atlantic ferry; bottom, an autonomous cleaning machine carries out its duties at Halifax airport. (Additional photos courtesy of Marine Atlantic and Halifax Stanfield Airport)