

The Bulletin

TRANSPORT ACTION ATLANTIC

SPRING – SUMMER 2021

Halifax eyes green public transit

Electric buses and ferries in city's future



With support from all levels of government, Halifax Transit is set to move forward with major projects to electrify its operations, as well as making waves in the Bedford Basin with a new long-awaited ferry service to downtown. The story begins on p. 26

(PHOTO – Ted Bartlett)



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Advocacy in Action

We were all feeling quite certain it was coming – the 2021 federal election that supposedly hardly anyone believed was necessary. As this is written we are still several weeks from polling day, but by the time you read these words the outcome will be known. Transport Action Atlantic is a strictly non-partisan advocacy organization, but we do not hesitate to get involved in politics when the need or opportunity arises. This election is no exception.

Apart from the highly dubious need for a national vote at this time, it has been an incredibly short campaign. The electorate has had little time to examine and/or challenge the hastily prepared party platforms. There's been wide misuse of the term "snap election" – but it really was not a surprise. It might therefore be argued that TAA could have been better prepared to confront parties and candidates on the issues we believe to be important – matters of convenient, affordable and sustainable public transportation for Atlantic Canadians. Be that as it may, it is certainly disheartening that none of the parties so far have been paying much attention to our agenda.

In the final weeks of the campaign we are attempting to stimulate some critical thinking, focusing particularly on certain closely-contested ridings where transportation issues just might make a difference on polling day. The matters where the federal government has jurisdiction or influence that are of ongoing concern to TAA are well known:

- The sorry state of passenger rail in the Maritimes, and the gross neglect of our one remaining train by both VIA Rail management and their masters – the Government of Canada.
- The excessive cost recovery demands placed on Marine Atlantic's Newfoundland ferry service – demands that Justin Trudeau referred to as "unreasonable" while in opposition.
- The federal government's refusal to honour a written commitment to continuing rail service for Cape Breton made on its behalf three decades ago by the head of then Crown corporation CN.
- Ottawa's reluctance to take leadership in rebuilding an integrated coast-to-coast motorcoach network for passengers and packages.
- The absence of a commitment to the people of Campobello Island who must travel through the US for most of the year to access the Canadian services to which they are entitled.

Regardless of the election outcome, TAA will need to work with new or re-elected members of the House of Commons to advance the above agenda items, and others that may arise during the life of the new Parliament. That will be a priority

throughout the fall and winter. Hopefully the threat of COVID-19 will wane, and the opportunity for more in-person meetings will return.

Perhaps there will even be some public transportation champions among the new crop of parliamentarians, and maybe some new opportunities to persuade MPs who haven't yet "seen the light" about the importance of our cause to Canadians.

At this point it is appropriate to pay tribute to two former Commons members from our region who chose not to seek re-election this time round. We will doubtless miss their advocacy in Ottawa, and TAA wants them to know that their efforts were appreciated.



Pat Finnigan was first elected as MP for the New Brunswick riding of Miramichi-Grand Lake in 2015. Throughout his two parliamentary terms the Rogersville businessman served as the principal cheerleader for passenger rail in the Atlantic Liberal caucus. Although he constantly fought an uphill battle to convince former transport minister Marc Garneau of the importance of the *Ocean* to Atlantic Canada, he did feel that he was making some progress with new Minister Omar Alghabra on the issue.

Miramichi-Grand Lake MP Pat Finnigan was a tireless advocate for passenger rail.

Jack Harris, the long-time NDP member for St. John's East, supported TAA's position that the 1949 Terms of Union intended that Canada should ensure in perpetuity that the ferry service across the Cabot Strait would cost no more than moving people and goods the equivalent distance by land. Although neither the Trudeau Government nor its recent predecessors have respected this principle, Mr. Harris raised the matter of ferry charges in Question Period earlier this year, prompting Minister Alghabra to order cancellation of an ill-timed rate increase just days after it became effective.



St. John's East MP Jack Harris embraced the cause of Marine Atlantic cost recovery

Speaking of elections of dubious necessity, Nova Scotia Liberal Premier Iain Rankin's gamble at the polls backfired on August 17, as the Progressive Conservatives under Tim Houston pulled off an upset victory and won a majority mandate. TAA was active in the campaign, asking parties and candidates to state their positions on various issues of concern.

Unfortunately, the PC party was the only one that did not respond to our pre-election questionnaire, so the views of Premier Houston and his cabinet on such matters as the Cape Breton rail line, public transit, and reducing emissions from transportation remain unclear. We will be seeking to initiate dialogue with the new administration, but there is some uncertainty at this point as to where actual policy responsibility on matters of interest to us resides in the restructured cabinet. Although the reorganization process is incomplete at this writing, it would seem that no ministry includes the word “transportation” in its official title – an apparent omission which we hope will be addressed in coming weeks.

-Ted Bartlett

Opinion

Does Atlantic Canada matter to the Trudeau Government?

By Herb Emery



The recent announcement of the plan to build a new “high frequency rail corridor” connecting Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal and Quebec City to reduce travel times between the cities and make train service more reliable coincided with the announcement of resumption of the Ocean route passenger rail service from Halifax to Montreal with low frequency (weekly) and with physical distancing measures in place... facing backwards to Montreal since there is no way to turn the train around anymore in Halifax.

The Ocean route does not appear in line for the types of investment like the planned High Frequency Corridor to upgrade the speed and quality of passenger rail service in the Maritimes. With the on-going COVID-19 public health requirements for mask wearing and sitting facing backwards, a long, slow trip to Montreal will feel even longer. What is going on with the differing federal priorities for passenger rail service in Central Canada and in Atlantic Canada?

Since 2015 we have had a Federal government under Prime Minister Trudeau that does not see regions, or even provinces that are not Quebec, as important considerations for governing in the national interest. Policies in Ottawa are set to address needs and interests of persons living in Canada, not of provinces or regions. That “spatially blind” persons based approach to governing means that infrastructure investment priorities for the Federal Government will be guided by the interests of residents in the larger Canadian cities. The national interest under the Prime Minister Trudeau appears to be in having strong cities but not strong regions or strong provinces... other than Quebec.

Some of the confusion for many Atlantic Canadians with the current federal government's priorities is that it is a strong break from the past. Prior national governments created programs and made massive revenue transfers to provinces to address regional disparities. In other words, the national interest was served by supporting the attraction of capital to all provinces and regions to create employment opportunities in the place. In the case of transportation, the inherent disadvantages for Atlantic Canada with its smaller populations and distance from central Canada were addressed with transportation subsidies and regulations to ensure levels of service not too different from those available to Canadians in other provinces and regions.

Confederation also promised, even if it did not deliver, a commitment to national transportation systems. In earlier times the development of a high frequency rail corridor would not have stopped in Quebec City. It would have been built out to Halifax to strengthen inter-regional economic ties. Under the current federal government, that investment would not fit their preference for a high return on investment and in offsetting a regional disadvantage, it would discourage out migration of capital and labour to the more populated economic corridor.

To be fair, the Trudeau government's "spatially blind" policy making is not unique among advanced nations. A recent report on regional disparities within nations by the International Monetary Fund highlighted that economic orthodoxy suggests that governments should care about people rather than places. What that means in terms of policies is that government should focus on macroeconomic stability and encouraging smooth economic adjustment to economic shocks through free flows of labor and capital, while ensuring the provision of public goods and affordable access to basic services such as primary health care, education, sanitation, and security. "Spatially blind, people-based policies" can address regional disparities in countries where labor and capital are mobile. These policies "are structured as universal policies applied on a national level, which do not explicitly focus on lagging regions, but which can nevertheless assist them by assisting lagging households". In other words, let the mobile workers and capital go to where demand for them is higher in the big cities and keep the less mobile of the population cared for in the places where they are stuck.

All this is to say, the Prime Minister and his government care about Canadians who live in Atlantic Canada and they are setting policy to help households and persons in Canada. That focus makes provinces and regions unimportant to the national interest. So the prospects for enhanced passenger rail service to Atlantic Canada as we emerge from the COVID-19 seem dim. Probably the best example of the future for the service was the end of Greyhound Bus and integrated national bus service. Our future rail services will depend on the economics of passenger rail in the Maritimes without any help from the Federal Government.

But all hope for improved passenger rail service for Atlantic Canada is not lost. In July in London Ontario, Federal Transport Minister Omar Alghabara announced that Ottawa is committed to exploring opportunities for improving passenger rail

service with a study of the southwestern Ontario rail corridor that links London and Windsor to Toronto... "We started with the busiest corridor and I'm here to tell you that the next step is the second-busiest corridor". An important step for creating passenger rail service in the Atlantic region on par with that in Central Canada would be to have a federal study "exploring the opportunities" for improving passenger rail service between Quebec City and Halifax. If Ottawa won't even study the possibility then all hope is lost.

Dr. Herb Emery is the Vaughan Chair in Regional Economics at the University of New Brunswick in Fredericton.

Opinion

The Big Reset and the People's Recovery

By Tom Beckett



Two important documents, recently released to address the current financial situation in Newfoundland Labrador, make but tangential comments as to the potential use of the transportation sector to allow for decreased public expenditure, increased opportunities for public revenue generation, and detailed plans for use of transportation to support a growing provincial economy.

The following analysis surveys each mode of transportation with a view to provide socially acceptable, detailed, and cost-effective plans.

Marine:

Marine Atlantic Cost Recovery:

The constitutionally required Marine Atlantic service linking Port aux Basques to the Canadian mainland at North Sydney, Nova Scotia, continues to operate at a cost recovery target of 65% established by the Conservative government of Stephen Harper and maintained by the Liberal government of Justin Trudeau. Marine Atlantic management, even during the coronavirus pandemic, has been able in recent years to quite nearly meet or generously exceed this unreasonable target by use of an inflated rate structure, application of full cost recovery on elements of the service which should be included at no cost to the users of the service, and incorporation of the cost of elements of federal policy and politics which should not be borne by ferry users.

Despite a commitment in the 2015 federal election by Justin Trudeau to revise the rates downward, the federal government of his administration failed to meet this promise. Only one Member of Parliament, Jack Harris from St. John's East, has pushed to have the rates reduced.

Devils hide in the details. A full, transparent discussion must be held to determine the appropriate allocation of costs for the various elements of the Marine Atlantic service. For example, Marine Atlantic charges full cost recovery for the drop trailer aspect of the service. Worldwide, drop trailer service is included in the rate for the trailer aboard the vessel since the exclusion of the tractor allows space for other rate paying vehicles. This specific cost to the trucking industry, which is passed along to users of trucking service, should be reset to zero and the cost recovery target reduced accordingly. The only negative impact is upon the federal treasury. There are no costs to Marine Atlantic users, there are no employment reductions, the reduced cost to truckers will eventually benefit the entire Newfoundland Labrador economy using the marine service across the Gulf, and the improvement in the provincial economy will generate additional taxation revenue for the provincial government without increases in the level of taxation.

The change in fuel used by Marine Atlantic from bunker C to low sulphur marine diesel fuel resulted in a 3% increase in the Marine Atlantic fuel surcharge. This added \$1.07 to the cost of an adult one way ticket out of Port aux Basques, for a total fare of \$45.57. The fare for a vehicle went up by about \$3 to \$119.24. The change in fuel meets a specific requirement of the federal government and should not be placed upon the users of the service. The only negative impact is upon the federal treasury. There are no costs to Marine Atlantic users, there are no employment reductions, the reduced cost to users will eventually benefit the entire Newfoundland Labrador economy using the marine service across the Gulf, and the improvement in the provincial economy will generate additional taxation revenue for the provincial government without increases in the level of taxation.

While the provincial government appears hesitant to engage Transport Canada in a transparent review of the details of cost recovery for Marine Atlantic, Transport Action Atlantic should urge the province to do so. In the absence of a provincial initiative, Transport Action Atlantic should engage Marine Atlantic on this subject with inclusion of other stakeholders such as the Atlantic Provinces Trucking Association, Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador, and Hospitality Newfoundland and Labrador amongst others. The discussion can be undertaken electronically by sharing electronic files and using Zoom or equivalent for face to face talks. There are no employment considerations. Provincial staff are currently being paid to engage in such processes while Transport Action Atlantic participants are volunteers.

Provincial Ferry Services:

The 2020/2021 budget allocated \$76.7 million for terminal and wharf repair and upgrade, ferry operation, vessel refits, and vessel replacement. As communities served by the ferry system relocate or become accessed by highways, services and costs will be reduced. This has been the case on the south coast of Labrador, Harbour Deep, and Little Bay Islands.

Most of the communities served by the provincial ferry system are remote with little opportunity for highway access. While those communities within the Island

of Newfoundland, other than Bell Island, may accept the province's Community Relocation Policy, the communities along the north coast of Labrador are unlikely to do so thus requiring a longer-term marine service. Currently, this service is contractual with limited requirement for provincial government staff oversight. Bell Island consumes a large portion of the ferry service budget due to the volume of traffic being about 60% of the total usage of the provincial ferry system. Creative solutions must be investigated for this service. Stay tuned for a further column on this aspect.

Outsource the Marine Services Division:

With a solution to the Bell Island ferry service and potential elimination of other services on the Island, the requirement for a Marine Services Division essentially disappears. The ferry services on the south coast are contractual, the service between the Island and Labrador is contractual, and the service to the north coast of Labrador is contractual. With a change in government policy, the management of the residual ferry services can also become contractual.

The private sector is well positioned to take on these additional responsibilities. Economies of scale within the private sector will reduce the cost to government. Competition within the private sector will keep government's costs to a minimum. The major impact will be upon the individuals employed in the Marine Division. Government may wish to include the personnel along with the vessels and the terminals as the services are contracted out. Some employees may retire or can be bridged to retirement under a progressive human relations policy. Government may need to establish a 'spare board' policy whereby employees not otherwise accommodated become assigned to short term employment to fill in for maternity leave, short term illness/surgery, education and other long term leave, backfill for employees temporarily reassigned to other work, and similar situations. The 'spare board' employees would be provided an opportunity to interview for positions for which they demonstrate a skill set. This policy will need to be worked out with the unions.

Access to the European Union:

The French enclave of St. Pierre has a new ferry to serve the route between Fortune and St. Pierre. This ferry can accommodate vehicles up to and including transport trucks. St. Pierre itself has a marine service subsidized by France which, similar to Oceanex serving Newfoundland, is fullish on the way to St. Pierre but with plenty of room on the return voyage. This places the EU directly accessible to Newfoundland through Fortune. Live Fortune Bay lobster in Paris, Newfoundland beverage alcohol on the Champs-Élysées, Purity Factories products in European grocery stores, EVAS airplanes flying from European airports, and other products potentially including lumber, paper, peat, and crafts routed to new EU markets. This potential growth of exports will have a stimulating effect on the Newfoundland Labrador economy with associated revenue generation for government without the need for increases in tax rates.

While the private sector has many of the skills to identify and develop this trade channel, some provincial government assistance from current employees may prove helpful. With the involvement of provincial employees, a central knowledge base can be established such that each company is not redoing the same research as others; support for the federal government [when required] can be readily obtained; and trade missions can be undertaken with direct impacts.

The result is more money in the pockets of Newfoundlanders, more money circulating in the Newfoundland economy, and more tax revenues for the consolidated revenue fund without an increase in the taxation levels.

Highway Mode:

Fuel Surtax:

Adding additional taxes in terms of cents per litre is an easy way to generate additional tax revenue. This is hardly out-of-the-box thinking and a regressive tax impacting those who require vehicles to commute to work regardless of income. This is not a bold new approach to government finances and should be disregarded for reasons of social equity. The result will be forgone government revenue and a diminished burden on the lower income groups in Newfoundland Labrador.

Electric Vehicles:

Muskrat Falls power can be used to power an electric vehicle fleet with positive impact upon the climate change goals of the province. These vehicles bring with them a host of government policy requirements. Foremost being a method to replace the fuel tax currently collected by government. Applying a surcharge to electric charging stations has possibility, however, residents installing their own charging stations allows significant escape from taxation unless the home charging stations are required to also collect the surcharge. An annual fee incorporated into the annual licence renewal has promise but would serve as a regressive tax unrelated to actual vehicle use. A road toll system would likely be too costly to operate although satellite technology offers a potential option. A federal requirement to install transponders in electric vehicles capable of providing annual measurements of distance travelled for which a fee could be collected merits investigation but is likely many years in the future given Canada's political structure.

Many more electric charging stations are required to provide province wide access to power. A requirement for commercial property owners with parking areas in excess of 25 vehicle spaces to provide charging station might serve to solve this specific issue.

A third dimension requiring attention is the need for electric vehicle servicing centres scattered about the province. Government could drive the development of such services by requiring all new government fleet vehicles, including those of every agency, board, commission, government regulated private sector entity, and police force, be electric and developing contracts for their maintenance. The

reduced maintenance costs of electric vehicles will benefit government by reducing the maintenance costs for the fleet. However, this will impact the employment of the mechanics with government. Some may retire or can be bridged to retirement under a progressive human relations policy. Some may accept redeployment to other provincial government opportunities such as highway enforcement to take on positions vacated by retirements or long term illness. Government may need to establish a 'spare board' policy whereby employees not otherwise accommodated become assigned to short term employment to fill in for maternity leave, short term illness/surgery, education and other long term leave, backfill for employees temporarily reassigned to other work, and similar situations. The 'spare board' employees would be provided an opportunity to interview for positions for which they demonstrate a skill set. This policy will need to be worked out with the unions.

Highway Toll Application:

The northeast Avalon enjoys a wonderful system of four lane, divided highways which all have nearby alternatives of a lower design standard. Using a tolling concept similar to that of Highway 407 in Toronto, users of the high standard highways could be charged a fee of perhaps \$1.00 per trip [less than the cost of a Tim's coffee]. Many highway users would likely initially divert to using the lower standard, free roadway system based upon the Highway 407 experience. But most will return to using the toll highway after a short time in congestion. Tolls will cause public outrage and will require an appropriate public relations campaign. However, a bold, new approach to government is required. The application of a discretionary toll allows those with lower incomes the opportunity to exchange time in congested traffic conditions for loss of income.

Placing this concept into monetary terms, the Outer Ring Road would generate revenue for government in the vicinity of \$20,000 per day. A tolling mechanism would devour only a slight amount from this revenue stream.

Transfer School Bus Responsibility to Metrobus:

Metrobus has capacity, ability to redesign routes, and ability to add new routes. The province can maintain the special services school transport contracts and school bus contracts for pupils in kindergarten, grade one, and grade two. Children in Grade three and above are significantly mature so as to safely use the Metrobus system.

By providing Metrobus passes to all school children grade three and higher, with appropriate consideration for students of post-secondary institutions, the provincial government can save considerable money currently spent for school bus services. Students will have greater mobility within the northeast Avalon. Some parents will be relieved of their taxi duties. The private sector bus operators will be financially disadvantaged with some companies likely competing for routes outside the northeast Avalon or ceasing operation. In turn this will have a trickling down effect to reduce the cost to the government of these other school bus services.

Economies at Motor Registration Division:

The Fees Policy of the Motor Registration Division requires a school bus to pay an annual fee of \$644. This money begins life within the Consolidated Revenue Fund, is transferred to the Department of Education, then transferred to the School Districts, and paid to school bus contractors as part of their costs although some goes directly to School Board operated school bus fleets. Thus far the money has attracted little cost in the way of management. However, the private school bus contractors and those operating Board owned school bus fleets must manage the annual licensing process which does take some time and hence cost. Motor Registration must provide the clerical staff to process the annual licence renewal, collect the fees, and manage the revenue. Many private sector school bus operators attend Motor Registration offices late in the day just prior to the renewal fee being required. This causes the clerical processing to be carried out on staff overtime increasing the cost. Motor Registration then send the revenue collected back to the consolidated revenue fund.

A Ministerial change to the Fees Policy, easily accomplished, to eliminate the requirement for school buses to pay an annual licensing fee has no impact upon the circular trip of the money and the Consolidated Revenue Fund has no change. However, a not insignificant processing burden is relieved from the clerical staff at Motor Registration Division which in the longer term allows attrition to reduce the number of clerical staff with savings to government. Where Canada Post is used to deliver the annual licence, these costs will be saved by government. Existing IT personnel can change the expiry date on the school bus registration form.

Existing communications staff can readily advise the school boards, the private school bus operators, Motor Registration enforcement staff, and Motor Registration clerical staff of the change in policy.

The school bus operators who contract with school boards will be relieved of an administrative burden which will eventually translate into reduced contract costs. There is no cost to government and potential for long term savings. Employment will be affected in the long run but can be handled by attrition.

Motor Registration Division continues to issue stickers to place on licence plates to indicate the annual licence fee has been paid. Five States in the USA plus Quebec and Saskatchewan have eliminated the use of stickers as the police now have access to the Motor Registration data base by computers they carry in their vehicles. Through their dispatcher they have access to additional information if required.

Eliminating stickers will save the cost of the special paper the stickers are printed upon. The existing IT section can devise an on-line download of the annual licence renewal and receipt of payment. Significant postage costs will be eliminated. Processing requirements will be reduced.

Existing communications staff can readily inform the public, the police, and the Motor Registration processing staff as to the elimination of the use of stickers. Government can immediately start saving which can accumulate up to \$500,000 each year. Employment will be affected in the long run but can be handled by attrition.

Air:

St. Pierre and Air France:

Air France delivers seasonal air service between St. Pierre and Paris. Air St. Pierre is expected to resume service to Halifax and St. John's at the conclusion of the COVID pandemic. This provides a spectacular opportunity to draw tourists into the province. Perhaps a strategic private sector partnership orchestrated by government but funded entirely with private sector capital. Maybe even a partnership between Nova Scotia and Newfoundland Labrador tourism sectors to commence a discussion with Air St. Pierre and if successful a discussion with Air France.

Consolidation of the administrative structures of small airports:

In 1994, Transport Canada, under the direction of Dame Moya Greene, privatized the airports at Stephenville, Deer Lake, St. Anthony, and Wabush. Transport Canada also abandoned the Goose Bay airport to the Canadian military who accepted a municipal partner as a replacement. Each airport is individually operated.

With the exception of St. Anthony and Wabush, these airports join St. John's and Gander, who are still tied to Transport Canada on an annual rental basis, on the Atlantic Canada Airports Association.

The government firefighting fleet and the air ambulance service use these facilities and pay landing fees as required by the individual airports. Consolidation of the administrative structures of these airports can lead to economies of scale and thereby to lower landing fees.

The Government of Newfoundland Labrador must initiate discussions with Transport Canada to eliminate the annual rental fees for Gander and St. John's. If Transport Canada proves difficult, an investigation should be undertaken into potential use of the Board of Commissioners of Public Utilities to control the rents.

At the same time, the Government of Newfoundland Labrador must initiate discussions with each individual airport as to the wisdom of consolidation of the administrative functions. While each airport will require a local board of directors on a volunteer basis and will require a professional administrator, a single individual with responsibility for human relations could perform this function for all the airports; a single individual responsible for maintenance standards and policy could perform this function for all the airports assisted by appropriate ground staff at each airport; a single individual responsible for terminal operation

could perform this function for all the airports assisted by appropriate staff in each terminal. There are other functions which equally could be combined with resultant economies of scale.

Rather than create vacancies by layoffs, the new administrative structure can be developed through attrition. With appropriate planning, each airport community could have one or more of the responsible individuals.

Tom Beckett is a retired public servant who spent most of his career with the Newfoundland and Labrador transportation department. He is a director of Transport Action Atlantic.

Opinion

New transportation solutions for a changing world

By Michael Perry



As we impatiently anticipate the lifting of the COVID restrictions we often hear the wistful declaration, “And then things will get back to normal!” – “Normal” meaning, presumably, the conditions which existed prior to the arrival of this dreadful plague. Within Canada, with double vaccination rates well on their way to 75% of the population, this perhaps might be achievable, but for the rest of the world it appears to be increasingly unlikely.

But there is another impediment to this desire for “normality” which is making itself increasingly obvious, particularly in Canada and Europe this year, and that is climate change. The highest temperature ever recorded in Canada occurred in Lytton, B.C. this summer, and with that its utter destruction by wildfire, one of 300 burning in that region. In Europe, record breaking rainfall resulted in the massive and destructive inundation of communities in the Netherlands, Belgium, and north Germany.

Clearly, we will have to adhere to strict targets to reduce carbon dioxide pollution if we are to slow further deterioration of the atmosphere. Notice that I used “slow” rather than stop or prevent, for that is all the present measures will achieve, and then only if adherence to these is rigid.

What are the implications for public transport in this situation? At present, one can only speculate. There are two possibilities. Evidence of our collective behaviour to combat climate change so far would leave one to be pessimistic, but if we prefer not to dwell on Cassandra-like predictions and concentrate on some of the

measures we can and should be taking we might come to some interesting possibilities.

If we begin with that least essential form of public transport, the cruise ship, we find that it was the worst affected by COVID. These monster vessels proved to be among the worst of the “super spreaders” of infection, and we recall the lurid stories of passengers, refused disembarkation, and confined to their cabins, while the virus raged through every deck. The largest of the cruise lines, Carnival, had a profit of \$3bn. in 2019; by 2020, with all its ships idle in port or anchored offshore, it suffered a loss of \$10bn. Little wonder then, that many of the smaller cruise lines no longer exist, and many of their ships, some of quite recent build, have made their final voyage to the breaker’s yard. Whether the cruise industry will fully recover appears unlikely. There will be an initial rush as impatient cruise enthusiasts throw caution to the wind and embark once again, but it will only take one or two repeat incidents of infection to close popular calling ports to these ships and put many people off cruising altogether. These huge ships are also heavy users of carbon-based fuel, and unless an alternative energy means can be found and implemented within the next decade, the future of this industry seems quite limited.

Heavy users of fossil fuel and spreaders of virus, both internationally and domestically, are passenger aircraft. The principal source of passenger airline revenue is the business traveller. Whether this will continue to be the case remains to be seen, but the growth in popularity of the “virtual” meeting, and the economies for business resulting from this, appears to limit any future airline revenue increase from this source. There have been estimates that face-to-face meetings on location could probably be reduced by 75 %. Although many business travellers fly economy, they are usually using a flexible reservation which commands a premium fare. Business travellers, whether they are flying business or economy class are subsidizing those leisure travellers who are often taking advantage of promotional fares. Any reduction in revenue from business travellers will mean higher fares for leisure or casual travellers. This category of traveller is very “price sensitive” and this will result in a highly competitive market in which only the strongest will survive. Adding to this fare price issue in Canada are a recent 30% increase in NAV Canada fees and an average increase of 52% in airport improvement fees. International travellers will be further impacted by varying rules and regulations regarding quarantine and virus testing, together with the yet unresolved issue of internationally recognized vaccination certificates. Virus “break-outs” in various countries, together with the development and prevalence of virus mutations will also tend to deter tourist travel.

Domestic flights are a major source of carbon pollution. Those flights of under three hours’ duration which expend considerable fuel climbing and descending also add to airport congestion resulting in unnecessary airport expansion. For example, there are return flights almost every hour of the day between Montreal and Toronto, together with frequent flights between those cities and Ottawa which

could be considerably reduced if not abolished if there were a viable alternative such as a fast, frequent electric rail service, downtown to downtown. In Europe, prior to COVID, there had also been a revival of overnight trains between even more distant centres, for example Paris and Porto, Portugal, as environmentally concerned passengers switched modes from air to rail. As COVID begins to retreat in Europe, there are plans to restore these trains. Perhaps we should encourage such an approach in the Maritimes, but it will not come without considerable improvement to track, traction, and rolling stock to make it a more attractive option.

The recent pre-election proposals by the federal Minister of Transport to restore and improve an old CP Railway route north of the double track lakeshore line as a fast, high frequency electrified inter-city passenger line would be more useful if it were built principally as an electrified freight line onto which most of the freight trains presently using the existing double track railway could be diverted, freeing up the double track line for electrification on which a full tranche of frequent fast and stopping passenger trains could run without hindrance from slower moving freights. This double track line serves one of the most heavily populated regions of Canada and a vastly improved passenger service along this route would offer an attractive alternative to the heavily congested highway 401. The only community of any size on the northern route proposed by the minister is Peterborough and there are plans for GO Transit to eventually provide rail service to Toronto from there. The minister should think again!

Electrifying the corridor is a good start but diesel locomotive traction on the rest of the system will also have to end. The most obvious and most efficient energy source is electricity, and although it is frequently argued that there is not sufficient traffic beyond the corridor to justify the capital cost of building electric catenary and supporting electrical sub-stations, but there is presently not much choice given what appears to be currently available. There are presently experiments with hydrogen powered trains in Europe, but these are multiple units, not heavy hauling freight locos. There are presently two methods of producing hydrogen fuel, one using naturel gas which produces 5.5 kg of carbon gas for 1 kg of hydrogen, the other by electrolysis of water which results in a 30% energy loss for hydrogen when compared to using electricity directly. There are additional energy losses from hydrogen compression, cooling, storage, and transport. It is estimated that hydrogen would cost 3-5 times the cost of diesel fuel. Over time the use of electric locomotives running under catenary would justify the initial capital cost of building the catenary over the continuing use of hydrogen fuel. Electric locomotives require less servicing than their diesel counterparts. They are also lighter, reducing track wear.

There are presently experiments in Japan using discontinuous catenary on less heavily trafficked routes. Electric locomotives fitted with batteries re-charge while running under the catenary, using the batteries to power through the gaps. Batteries for locomotives have been developed which will provide two hours of power before needing to be re-charged. Discontinuous catenary would reduce

initial capital costs of catenary and allow powered passage while under bridges or tunnels with low clearance. Freight train shunting on to rail yards or sidings without catenary would also be facilitated. Electrification is clearly the way of the future, but this could only be accomplished with the active co-operation of the railway companies. So far, they appear to have shown little interest in electrification or other large-scale capital-intensive projects, preferring to maintain a reliable dividend return to their shareholders or to use surplus cash to engage in acquisition adventures in the United States. These do nothing to contribute to the effort to mitigate climate change. If the private railways refuse to co-operate, then they must be required to by legislation. Desperate times require desperate measures, even to the extent of forced nationalization, but this should only be attempted if federal ministry has on staff an experienced cadre of railway professionals preferably with some overseas experience. The ministry appears presently to lack sufficient people in this field to effectively lead and administer the railways in the desired direction.

Municipal transit, in preference to the car must also be strongly encouraged. The days of the diesel bus are numbered, and even electric long-distance buses have been under trial by Maritime Bus. Municipal bus fares should be reduced to the absolute minimum using heavy parking fees and congestion charges to discourage private car use and to help fund municipal transit. Children and youth should be offered free service as well as seniors. We should follow the example of Scotland which will be offering free service to those under 22 years of age, in addition to seniors over 65. To make transit even more attractive we could follow the example of Luxembourg which offers free municipal transit to all its citizens without exception!

A recent major public transport loss, which so far seems to have escaped the federal minister's consideration is the interprovincial coach service. Since the unfortunate demise of Greyhound, Canadians have been without this essential service which allowed cheap travel across Canada, often serving small and remote communities far from other transportation services. Not only were passengers carried on this service, but it also provided a speedy and reliable transit for parcels and packages across the country.

Mike Cassidy of Maritime Bus has been trying to form a coalition of coach operators across Canada which would provide a coordinated scheduled passenger and parcels service replacing the now defunct Greyhound routes. Such a coordinated effort will require federal co-ordination and financial assistance. The coach owners are willing but lack the means to fully realize such a service. The federal government is responsible for interprovincial travel; the lack of a trans-Canadian coach service seems to have escaped the attention of the minister. The intervention of the Government of Canada to assist in the provision of this important and essential service is imperative. We have gone far too long without it.

To conclude: if the present government is serious about the issue of climate change it needs to get its transportation house in order. Far too much of the transportation budget is being spent on airport improvements and airline subsidies which together support the continuing heavy use of fossil fuel. The emergency expenditures which were made to help Canadians weather the COVID crisis reveals that when the need is there governments can quickly react. The same effort must now be made now to reduce passenger transport's contribution to the climate crisis.

Michael Perry is a long-time public transportation advocate, who currently serves as secretary of Transport Action Atlantic.

Opinion

An affordable alternative to twinning highways

By Lindsay Higgins



Several highway fatalities in New Brunswick in March of this year prompted the predictable calls for hugely expensive highway twinning like this. But there is a more realistic and affordable answer, writes Lindsay Higgins of Stilesville NB. His letter to the editor appeared in the Moncton *Times and Transcript* on March 23. (PHOTO – Ted Bartlett)

I am always sad to hear of collisions on our highways. With the recent incidents along Highway 11, I suspect we'll start hearing from the pro-twinning crowd once again. I don't travel on this highway very often but I usually do several times a year. My observations along this route is that it is one of good visibility and over-all good road conditions. There may be a few areas in need of asphalt repair but generally pretty good.

Incidents along this and other roadways can be caused by many things including weather, mechanical and medical issues. But the biggest problems seem to be the attitudes of some drivers. Speed and distraction are a huge problem here and elsewhere. It seems like everyone is in a hurry or busy with electronics. Some people drive too fast and some too slow (while not pulling over to allow others to pass). I have been passed by logging trucks, transport trucks, courier trucks and many other vehicles all in a hurry to get somewhere. Some of these vehicles passed where not permitted and some while forcing oncoming traffic (often seemingly deliberately) onto the shoulder to avoid a collision. More law enforcement would be useful but police can't be everywhere all the time.

The problem with this and other highways is not the condition or design of the roads but the selfish human nature that we all possess. It seems like the "me" attitude is prevalent. I don't think that spending a quarter of a billion dollars for twinning is economically feasible in these times of fiscal responsibility. This is tax money that you and I will need to repay. While twinning can help, it also encourages even greater speeds which inherently brings an additional set of risks. Really, all we need to do is smarten up. Be respectful and responsible for a change. It seems like we always expect our governments to spend our tax dollars on infrastructure and legislation with the sole purpose of protecting us from ourselves when all we need to do most of the time is change our attitudes.

BE THE CHANGE!

Rail News

VIA's *Ocean* finally returns after 17-month hiatus

Timeline for full service restoration still unclear

VIA Rail service in Atlantic Canada has resumed at long last, nearly 17 months after the COVID-19 pandemic forced an abrupt shutdown. With the *Ocean* back in operation between Halifax and Montreal, albeit on a reduced once-per-week schedule, the last major gap in VIA's network has been restored to at least a basic level of operation. The return of the train has been welcomed by patrons, as there was a solid crowd boarding the first train in Halifax and at several stops along the way. VIA staff in Moncton had even prepared an impromptu celebratory greeting for this first train, and the *Times* and *Transcript* covered the event. Subsequent trips have continued to be well patronized, though full passenger figures are not yet available.

The warm welcome the train received reflects the ongoing interest from citizens along the route in having a train service that is available and that meets their needs for travel both within and beyond the region. While the return is welcome and long

overdue, the initial once per week schedule is hardly adequate. We can certainly hope that VIA is serious about its talk of a gradual reintroduction of service; however, the first planned resumption date for the full schedule has already fallen through, with once a week service now extended beyond October and through to at least the middle of November. The decision was blamed on ongoing COVID concerns, but this excuse just doesn't stand up to close scrutiny, coming just days after VIA restored nearly full pre-pandemic service levels in the Toronto-Ottawa-Montreal-Quebec City Corridor. It seems far more likely that the decision continues to be part of an attempt to keep costs down, with the needs to the travelling public outside of the Corridor left as an afterthought.



VIA's once-weekly *Ocean* departs Halifax under sunny skies, showing off the back-to-back locomotives that allow the train to reverse without being turned, and the mix of stainless steel and Renaissance equipment in tow. (PHOTO – Tim Hayman)

Of course even a return to a thrice weekly service will be far from adequate, and TAA continues to make the case for a daily service – but this will require significant investment, and continues to be an item that requires serious support from the federal government to bring to fruition.

The initial on board service offering remains restricted, due to ongoing COVID-19 concerns, with passengers required to wear masks except when eating, drinking, or in private cabins, and both economy and sleeper passengers initially confined to their respective seats or rooms. While food service remains at-seat for economy passengers and meals for sleeper passengers are pre-packaged cold offerings, the service car lounges and dining car seating have slowly re-opened through September, as VIA slowly works out the service model. With the news that the federal government will soon be requiring vaccinations for all railway employees and passengers, with implementation expected by later in the fall, the on board experience may be able to resume some greater normality before too long.

The new bidirectional consist necessitated by the loss of the turning loop in Halifax has indeed resulted in the loss of the Park car. It remains possible that a Skyline dome/lounge could be added in the future, though with it serving no function at the present time where the lounge and dome would be off limits, it's hardly surprising to see its absence from the initial trains. If no proper replacement for the Park car can be provided, the train will have lost one of its prime attractions for sleeper passengers. The bidirectional train also offers some further complications for operations, with economy and sleeper sections both split and separated between the two ends of the train. To their credit, VIA is turning the seats in the HEP1 coaches to ensure most seats are facing forward, and the Renaissance coaches and Chateau sleepers have been oriented in both directions to allow a good mix of forward facing accommodations for each trip.

On the bright side, the 1950s built stainless steel HEP1 coaches, last refurbished in the late 1990s, have finally received an overhaul, making for a much nicer on board environment for economy passengers. The Renaissance equipment in use has also seen the most notable refresh in years, with exterior paint touch ups, buffing, and waxing, and interior work to repair upholstery, carpets, and other interior components. These improvements are very much welcome; however, they don't change the fact that both the HEP and Renaissance equipment, by VIA's admission, are nearing the end of their serviceable life and a process to replace them needs to start sooner than later. Without adequate replacements, the long term prospects of both the Ocean and Canadian are in serious doubt.

-Tim Hayman



A look inside one of the freshly refurbished HEP1 coaches on the *Ocean*. These cars are a welcome addition for coach passengers, and the ability to turn seats works well in the bidirectional operation. However, even these refurbished cars have a limited remaining lifespan (PHOTO – Ted Bartlett)

We need national passenger rail plan, not cynical election ploys

By Norbert Cunningham



Canada is clearly heading into a federal election soon, despite the smugness of the federal Liberals in not overtly confirming their plan. It's simply a shrewd political calculus by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

Trudeau, though, might be wise to avoid being overly smug. Once underway, election campaigns often take surprising turns. And 'beloved' is not the adjective most Canadians would use for any of today's federal party leaders.

The Liberals have been dispensing obvious pre-election largesse on the pretense of getting our economies moving post-pandemic. Trying to buy the electorate's favour is neither new nor the exclusive realm of Liberals. In New Brunswick it's the norm in federal politics, but shrewd electorates have also been known to court both sides to find the best bid.

Trudeau must know the risk. He need only recall the failure of colleague Dominic LeBlanc with their help in attempting to secure a second term for New Brunswick's former premier Brian Gallant, our third consecutive premier held to one term, unprecedented in New Brunswick history.

Thus it'll be interesting to watch the public reaction to the federal announcement from Transport Canada July 6 that the government is "taking the first steps in preparing for the procurement process to build a new train service in the Toronto to Quebec City Corridor."

The second paragraph of the convoluted announcement merely lists no fewer than six federal government officials of various departments or agencies as all announcing the rather vague 'first steps in preparing for the procurement process,' whatever it really means.

Crown Corporation VIA Rail issued its own release and makes it sound more certain. What's to possibly dislike about an upgrade to passenger rail service in Canada? This nation's rail service has been abysmally bad for decades, sadly lagging as much of the rest of the world has adopted high speed modern passenger service.

Who could complain? Who, that is, other than the Canadians east and west with largely atrocious service outside the Windsor, Ont. to Quebec City corridor?

The Maritime Provinces, for whom the railway was a promise of Confederation, had been without passenger rail service for more than a year during the COVID pandemic, and still had no date for resumption when this election ploy was announced. Moreover, the pre-pandemic VIA service was a pale shadow of its old self, just the *Ocean*, limited to three days a week.

The tracks are so poorly maintained that driving a car while respecting speed limits is often close to twice as fast as the train. I've done Moncton to Flatlands near the Matapedia crossing to Quebec and return in 6.5 hours, about 90 minutes more than it takes VIA's train one way. And the tracks closely parallel the roads. Deteriorated rail beds don't allow faster service. Without political pressure, we'd have lost passenger service years ago.

This is the most short-sighted neglect any federal government could perpetrate, especially with climate change and the need for energy-efficient, minimally-polluting modes of transportation. Electric, high speed trains, are part of the answer. But not in New Brunswick or the Maritimes, both lacking any good alternative to cars.

But it got worse. Just days later VIA announced service would resume from Montreal to Halifax on Aug. 11, an overnight ride requiring a sleeper, only returning from Halifax to Montreal four days later on Aug. 15, also overnight. Two of three train runs vanished. Besides retraining crews in Halifax for several weeks, once the runs start, VIA crews themselves will have to find layover accommodations. A neighbour of mine is one. With relaxed COVID rules VIA plans may have evolved, but the service wasn't to include dining room or bar cars, just food carts. And because VIA lost its ability to turn the trains around in Halifax, passengers will be facing backwards during the return trip.

Reports are VIA has done considerable positive renovations to old cars. Yet everything else looks more like moves designed to drive away whatever business VIA has left east of Quebec City. Maritimers are not cheering.

And even in the planned corridor, VIA can't offer 'high speed' trains, just 'high frequency' trains with slightly improved speed and better schedules enabled by building new tracks away from freight trains. Improved rail service is a plus anywhere in Canada, even 'almost high speed.'

But if the Liberal government or any potential successors are serious about improving rail service and national unity, they'd be unveiling an inclusive coast-to-coast rail vision and plan, not this cynical half-baked election ploy with the wrong goal - winning a majority, not the badly needed National Dream, 2.0. Get it right, votes will follow.

This is an issue on which Maritimers can unite and demand fair treatment. Others can't complain about transfers while denying infrastructure to allow the region any chance to prosper.

There is enormous immediate concern because the only track to Halifax is so vulnerable to storm surges it could easily be washed out at any time on the Tantramar marshes heading into Nova Scotia. The busy Port of Halifax depends on it. Only after local politicians created a fuss did Ottawa fund a study, now completed but not to be released until fall. Yet right now, at high tide, the waves come within mere feet of the tracks running along top the dikes. Every day the freights carry an estimated \$50 million in goods to the rest of Canada.

Maritimers must protest vigorously.

Norbert Cunningham is a Brunswick News Incorporated columnist and a retired editorial page editor with the Moncton Times & Transcript. A version of this column appeared in New Brunswick's dailies on July 9, before the federal election was called. Reprinted with permission.

Opinion

Can there be a future for trains in Cape Breton?

By Don MacLeod



Concrete barriers block a section of washed-out track in Cape Breton, but no trains are going to attempt to run here any time soon. (PHOTO – Tom Ayers, CBC)

As we approach the publication deadline for this issue, there aren't any new updates on the status of the railroad across Cape Breton Island. My intent here is to see if there is or can ever be a future for the trains after they cross the Canso causeway.

During the recent Nova Scotia election campaign one of the candidates for the premier's job replied "if a case can be made" when asked about support for the Island's railroad. At present the

future for the railroad is locked on hopes of a container port for Sydney, but that is uncertain and in the last decade there have been few positive signs that this project will go ahead. If I were in Sydney today I would stand on Liberty Pier and look across the harbor as that is where the case for the trains can be made.

Transfers to and from Newfoundland once were a mainstay for the railroad and they could be again. On average over the last five years there were upwards of 100 commercial vehicles in each direction daily crossing on the ferries. Many are drop trailers ideally suited for rail transport and that is where they should be. Even if a third of the road traffic diverted over to the trains plus the local freight now offered that would support at least a break even rail operation that once established would grow.

The rails and infrastructure are still in place but time and neglect will take its toll. At an abandonment hearing in 2014 the owner estimated the cost to rehabilitate the line at 30 million dollars, possibly a little more today. That estimate was based on freight operations at 35 mph which is competitive with trucks crossing over the two lane Trans-Canada Highway into Sydney

The money to rehabilitate the railroad could come from several different departments, both federal and provincial, but ideally the source would be from a guarantee given by Ottawa approximately 30 years ago. At that time Crown-owned Canadian National Railways was selling off selected secondary lines in order to make itself more attractive for potential buyers on the eve of its own privatization.

The government of Nova Scotia under the late John Savage was reluctant to bless the sale of the Truro to Sydney line without some assurances. That reassurance came in June 1993 in the form of a letter from President Paul Tellier assuring that if the buyer ceased operations Canadian National Railways (read as government of Canada) would ensure continued rail service between Truro and Sydney. The mainland section, although operating and profitable, is in need of major upgrades and must be considered also.

The rail crisis became real in 2014 when the owners applied for abandonment of the railroad from the Strait to Sydney. The province has failed to recognize the potential or even the existence or importance of that letter in the efforts to save the trains. In my opinion, support from the province over the last seven years has been weak as the infrastructure will soon reach a point beyond recovery.

Today we have a new administration in Halifax and maybe a new hope for the trains as the candidate who wanted a plan for the railroad is now premier. Maybe a premier who will take another look at that letter, one who understands the importance of the railroad for the Island's future, who agrees that trains can return to Sydney with or without a container port and yes one who believes that there can be a future for the trains after they cross the causeway.

Don MacLeod is a native of Cape Breton, and currently serves as the Treasurer for Transport Action Atlantic.

Halifax Transit to move ahead with major electric projects

Funding from all levels of government initiates fast ferry and electric bus projects

Halifax Transit has received a major boost to one of their rapid transit plans, as all levels of government have stepped in with funding to move ahead with a plan to launch a fast, electrified ferry service from Bedford into downtown Halifax. Halifax Transit had announced the plan as part of their Rapid Transit Strategy, and in June the federal, provincial and municipal governments announced funding support to move the project toward becoming reality.



The first part of Halifax's ambitious Rapid Transit Plan to be set in motion will see new ferry routes from Bedford to downtown, and potentially additional terminals at Larry Uteck and Shannon Park (Image – Halifax Transit)

The full project, which will involve the construction of new ferry terminals, replacement of the downtown Halifax terminal, and the purchase of new vessels for the service, is estimated to cost \$134.5 million. An initial \$3.3 million study to plan and engineer the service will be supported by \$1.1 million from the province of Nova Scotia, \$1.3 million from the federal government, and another \$917,000 from the Halifax Regional Municipality. This phase of the project is expected to be complete in 2022, with hopes that the ferry service will be able to launch in 2024.

In a separate announcement, the HRM announced a tender for design concepts for the rebuild of the downtown terminal and the design of the new Mill Cove terminal. The downtown terminal will need to be expanded significantly to accommodate the new electric vessels planned for the service, and the Mill Cove terminal will need to include bridges across the CN rail line.

A fast ferry service has been proposed a number of times over the years as a solution to traffic congestion on the Bedford Highway, and as a way to provide a more efficient public transit connection into the downtown core. When recent attempts at commuter rail fell through, the ferry service has again risen to the top as a viable option, promising travel times to downtown that can beat driving even at off-peak times, and far exceed anything that is possible by car or bus during peak rush hour. The ferry service would take advantage of existing capacity within the basin and harbour, and would require far less new infrastructure than building dedicated bus lanes on the Bedford highway or adding capacity to the existing rail lines.

With the new addition of exploring an all-electric ferry, the service is even more attractive to multiple levels of government that are prioritizing a shift to clean, sustainable public transportation options. All being well, this will turn out to be the first step in an important expansion of Halifax's transit network.

The news of a proposed electric ferry also fits neatly in line with another major announcement for Halifax Transit this summer, with funding provided for the agency to buy 60 battery-electric buses. The funding announcement, which includes \$45 million from the federal government, \$37 million from the province, and \$30 million from Halifax, also covers a major re-fit of the Ragged Lake Transit Centre, which will house, maintain, and recharge the electric buses.

According to Halifax Mayor Mike Savage, the municipality aims to have a fully electric bus fleet by 2028. With a current diesel bus fleet 340 strong, there will still be quite a way to go after this initial order; but after Halifax faced considerable flak from environmental groups over recent substantial tenders that saw the majority of the bus fleet replaced with new diesel vehicles, this electric shift will no doubt be welcomed, if not seen as somewhat overdue. The first buses should be delivered by 2023, following a tender later this year, with full delivery to be complete by 2024.

-Tim Hayman

The Halifax rail cut revisited

By Clark Morris

Two years have passed since the dream of commuter rail in Atlantic Canada's largest metropolitan area was put to rest. Most observers feel it's highly unlikely that the idea will be resurrected anytime soon. Not so for long-time TAA member and former director Clark Morris, who suggests it's time to revisit and review the situation.

Since the City Council last looked at rail in Halifax much has changed. There is a proposed Halterm - Fairview rail shuttle that would see the reinstatement of the second track through the cut at the south end of the city [*Editor's note: it is not clear at this time that whether the plan will actually involve any new track through the cut itself*]. The proposed shuttle will need to be able to handle a maximum of 200 containers an hour based on 40 containers per hour for each of the five cranes currently at Halterm. For this operation can the containers be double stacked, reducing required train length? Carrying 200 containers means 8000 feet, plus space between the cars, if the container are laid end to end. How long can a train be given the constraints of the site? Would having equipment specially designed for the operation make sense given the sensitivity of South Enders to noise and pollution?

At least two trains an hour each way would be required for anywhere from 12 to 50 hours while a ship is in port. Inbound container shuttles would conflict with outbound trains from Halifax station while outbound shuttles would conflict with inbound trains to Halifax station. In Germany they are investing in quieter freight cars including quieter brakes. Electric or battery electric locomotives are doable. Network Rail in Britain probably has the most experience with tight clearances and mitigating measures. At the very least, no more work on overbridges, especially any work on the Fairview overpass should be done until electrification is reviewed. Electrification and other special work may be eligible for federal climate change funds.

If the number of trains in the shuttle can be kept to only two per hour each way with a running speed of 20 - 30 mph, then with adequate switches and signaling there could be local trains making about the same stops as the local Dayliners did back in 1989 with at least two trains an hour plus one freight or long distance passenger train and possibly more. Both Stadler and Alstom have experience with full electric, diesel-electric, and overhead plus battery operation. Stadler has the advantage of designs approved for mainline operation without temporal separation (signaling alone with mixed use).

There now are two low-floor diesel multiple unit models certified for mixed traffic in the United States, The Stadler GTW 2/6 and Stadler FLIRT, both of which are

in service in the Dallas/Fort Worth Texas area, and the latter of which will soon be in service in Ottawa. The FLIRTs are in hourly service on Texrail between Fort Worth and Dallas Fort Worth airport. The GTW2/6 equipment is used by DCTA north of Dallas. Both are diesel versions of the equipment. Both are running in conjunction with 22-inch high platforms for level boarding and I believe both are one person operation using proof of payment.

If local trains are inaugurated, they should be a part of the local transit system, so far as fares are concerned, and in so far as feasible the buses should be coordinated with them. Local trains should operate from 6 am to at least 11 or 12 pm. The equipment, signaling, switches and crews should not be sitting idle most of the day. While the available route in Halifax would not be my third choice let alone my first, it is especially suitable for generating all day and evening patronage. Negotiations with CN, VIA Rail and the unions would not be easy.

The passenger and freight situation is changing. Can Halifax take advantage of the changes?

Opinion

Better transit options in Newfoundland are badly needed



By David Brake, Head of the Essential Transit Association

The province of Newfoundland and Labrador has done very well in coping with COVID but as that crisis eases, the province continues to look for long term solutions to a gloomy financial outlook. Its biggest short term financial challenge was the disastrously costly Muskrat Falls project - the federal government stepped in to bail them

out of that - but it still appears to be the Atlantic province facing the greatest fiscal challenges. It has huge provincial debt, dwindling oil and gas revenue prospects, high unemployment, and aging, unhealthy citizens spread out across a wide area, making it costly to provide services. The [PERT Report](#) - an independent review of provincial government programs - recommended tax rises and deep spending cuts. But with the financial squeeze on households that seems likely to result, the government must not concentrate merely on managing the decline of services, it should be looking for long-term ways to help people weather the coming storm.

Notably absent from the PERT Report and politicians' rhetoric so far is any mention of the role public transit could play as one of the most cost-effective ways of improving the quality of life of ordinary citizens on a tight budget.

Out of a population of 512,000, only the capital city, St John's, with 108,000 people and Corner Brook with 31,000 have anything more than a skeleton public transit service - the majority of citizens and a substantial minority even of those in urban and suburban areas are not served at all. It's a heavily car-dependent province as a result, but even if households with two or more cars were able to stop running one of them the immediate savings per household would be \$5,000 a year or more. Big improvements could be made for a few million a year and would be supported by federal funding which has so far gone largely un-tapped.

As found elsewhere in Atlantic Canada there is a "chicken and egg" problem. Relatively few people use the transit that is available because the network does not provide an attractive and effective service. Although the capital is notoriously snowy, windy and rainy for much of the year, only 8% of bus stops there have shelters and there's no downtown bus station.

The service is under-resourced because money spent on transit is seen as an expense that serves only the poorest. But it doesn't have to be this way - it's not just major cities that can support decent transit. A [2019 report](#) found Metrobus Transit (mainly serving St John's) provided fewer hours of service per person than ten other comparable Canadian cities including Moncton and Saint John, and users were taking 50% fewer rides per capita than the average.

The plan to improve bus service in that report projected a more attractive service costing \$1.7m more annually would attract an extra 600,000 trips in 2023. But that plan is on hold - the city actually cut the Metrobus budget \$500,000 instead.

Better service would make transit more mainstream. Because there is generally space on the buses we do run (especially with reduced social distancing requirements), costs would go up very little with each additional passenger an improved service attracted once it was set up. Car purchase decisions are long-term ones, however, and changing habits is not easy. The public would have to be confident that there's a long-term commitment to a high quality transit system if it is going to be successful.

That is why provincial involvement is crucial. Remarkably, the province has no transit policy and essentially treats it as something municipalities provide. Other than a recently instituted free bus pass pilot program, the only transit support the province gives is the matching funding required by the federal government to release its funding for transit infrastructure. But cities and towns here are generally too small and ill-funded to make ambitious transit plans or to staff and fuel any additional buses other branches of government might help them buy. Of the three main parties only the NDP mentioned transit in its manifesto during the provincial elections this year. This must change.

The province could help to fund and organize regional planning and oversight of the transit system - particularly in the most populous region - the NE Avalon

peninsula - where the capital is ringed by several other smaller independent cities. It stands to gain many of the side benefits from better transit like increasing public health and helping newcomers to the province and tourists to get around.

Ridership numbers in St John's are down about a third from pre-pandemic times, and will take time to recover. New movement patterns seem likely to emerge if more people are working from home. There is a clear appetite for better transit already building though. Metrobus ridership had been growing 8-10% before the pandemic thanks to a council that said it would make transit a priority. But now is the time to start planning and building the long term foundations for better transit in the future.

Readers with an interest in helping further this goal or seeking more information please visit [The Essential Transit Association](#) on Facebook or follow it on Twitter at [@ETA_NEAvalon](#)

Opinion

Mobility Justice, Rural Transit, and Ferries

By Sharon Roseman



Remedies for transport and other mobility injustices are increasingly being called for by grassroots organizations, researchers, and others. For example, the collective *Untokening* has been fighting against “mobility injustices” experienced in North America by the members of “marginalized groups...Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) communities, people with disabilities, immigrants, trans people, queer people, women, and youth” (www.untokening.org). In her 2018

book *Mobility Justice: The Politics of Movement in an Age of Extremes*, the sociologist Mimi Sheller links “transport justice” to the broad context of a worldwide “triple mobility crisis” comprised of the “climate crisis”, “urbanization crisis”, and “refugee crisis” (pages 3-8). Sheller has outlined 28 “Principles of Mobility Justice” that include the following: “Public transport systems must not arbitrarily deny access nor impose undue burdens, externalities or limitations” and “Public infrastructure for transport, communication, and information sharing shall be publicly funded and made accessible to all people” (page 173).

Despite the crucial attention that has been paid to intra-urban transportation in mobility justice activism and writing, it is equally important to apply it to rural contexts. Rural residents, and especially those in marginalized groups, require accessible, affordable, and sustainable public transit. When public transit doesn't exist or is inadequate, many damaging impacts result from "transport disadvantage" and "transport poverty". The *Transport and Inequality* report prepared for the UK government in 2019, for example, notes that the most detrimental impacts of transport poverty are in rural areas (www.gov.uk/government/publications/transport-and-inequality). In a brief included in their *National Seniors Strategy* document, the National Institute on Ageing highlights that "older Canadians living in rural and remote communities have difficulties in accessing inclusive transportation alternatives" (nationalseniorsstrategy.ca).

To ensure mobility justice and to decarbonize Canadian transportation, fairer consideration must be given to all parts of the country, to both rural and urban spaces, and to the impacts of inadequate transportation options on people from marginalized groups and on the planet. In the European Union, an agreement has been reached for "carbon neutral" "scheduled collective travel" for trips that are less than 500 kilometres by 2030 (europa.eu/transport/themes/mobilitystrategy_en). In Europe, these kinds of measures are being promised in the context of extensive and often inter-linked train, bus, and ferry services, active transportation routes, and delineated commitments to electrification.

Back in Canada, the funding allocated to the new Rural Transit Fund is an important beginning that can make contributions toward reducing regional and rural-urban disparities and lessening the country's carbon footprint linked to transportation. The federal government's recognition of the need for investment in public transport for residents in rural as well as urban locations has been a long time coming. The announcement about the Rural Transit Fund emphasizes "innovative" solutions, including on-demand services and shared electric cars, which will hopefully lead to some excellent new alternatives. However, governments at all levels should be taking additional actions and having more urgent conversations. There is, for example, the Coast-to-Coast Bus Network proposal to the federal government. And then there are the ferries.

In Newfoundland and Labrador, the People's Recovery (peoplesrecoverynl.ca) discussion paper has highlighted how "improving supports to public transit (urban and regional) and active transportation (walking cycling)" can help to "reduce GHG emissions, reduce poverty, build stronger communities, and help improve public health" (page 9). The *Big Reset* report of the Premier's Economic Recovery Team (www.thebigresetnl.ca) contains a smattering of brief references to the question of intra-provincial public transit but without specificity. If the provincial government of Newfoundland and Labrador and the federal government take seriously goals such as ensuring access to employment and education, improving public health and population health, reducing social inequalities, strengthening

rural and remote as well as urban communities, and addressing the climate emergency, specific and ongoing attention should be paid to improving and ensuring rural transit options. I now turn to one example of where additional attention is urgently required to achieve such goals: action that ensures mobility justice for users of intra-provincial ferries should be part of a clear commitment to a better transit future for Newfoundland and Labrador.

The provincial austerity budget of 2016 saw significantly higher fees for many basic services, with intra-provincial ferry rates being one of the hardest hit in percentage terms. Now that things are easing in regard to the COVID-19 pandemic, the most-used intra-provincial ferry service, which links up Bell Island with the island of Newfoundland, has been in terrible shape for months with ferry users often waiting several hours to make the 20-minute crossing due to a severely reduced capacity. Several hundred ferry users from Bell Island commute to work in the St. John's area with others travelling to jobs in the opposite direction. Bell Islanders also rely daily on the ferry to reach medical appointments and many other basic services. In normal years, thousands of tourists as well as relatives and friends of Bell Islanders go to Bell Island. The tourism facilities include the Bell Island Community Museum & #2 Mine Tour – Winner of the 2020 Cultural Tourism Award from Hospitality Newfoundland & Labrador. The lack of capacity on the Bell Island ferry service is a longstanding problem that was meant to have been solved by the introduction of MV *Legionnaire* a few years ago, but users have unfortunately often found this larger ferry being moved to operate in another part of the province. As the Bell Island Ferry Users Committee has consistently outlined, remedies can be found to solve the organizational and other problems that have produced the continuing problems with the ferry servicing Bell Island.

Ferries should not be marginalized as a transportation mode through either insufficient systems or rhetoric. Over the last several years, one could at times see a populist stigmatization of ferry transportation in public culture in Newfoundland and Labrador, such as in the comments sections of some news stories.

Communications that pit roads against ferries, or some communities against others, which can be fed by governments' selective citation of budget figures, are troubling. We don't read a spate of questions about whether there should be tolls on public roads or bridges in the province, let alone what these tolls should be. We don't ask that only the parents of school-age children pay for school buses and schools or patients to pay for hospitals. Moreover, it is particularly hypocritical for anyone to imply that ferries are not basic forms of transportation in a place that relies on Marine Atlantic ferries to bring people and goods back and forth.

So the intra-provincial ferry system does need immediate and enduring remedies for the current problems for Bell Island and elsewhere. And the wider public needs to appreciate that we are always going to require ferries, both large and small. Therefore, in addition to ensuring that the most used ferry routes such as the Bell Island service have sufficient capacity, other changes could be planned as part of the future.

Where possible, future investments in new intra-provincial ferries should follow the lead of other jurisdictions and explore options for greening ferry transportation. While maintaining reduced rates for commuters, seniors, students and children, the provincial government should ensure overall that ferry rates do not prevent individuals from reaching jobs, medical appointments, education, and training nor hinder family caregiving and tourism. There should be a commitment to supporting the development of further, integrated multi-modal and accessible options that would better connect ferries with, for example, buses and cycling routes. Ideally, an eventual integration of travel modes could be linked to the kind of travel cards that are used in locations such as London, UK and some Ontario cities. Such cards provide a seamless system, and easily allow for fare reductions or no fare options for specific travellers.

These kinds of changes are happening elsewhere. Indeed, ferries have become more rather than less central to work and other commuting in other places over the past few decades. In Atlantic Canada, the provincial government of Nova Scotia has now made permanent the removal of ferry user fees. As Tim Hayman reported recently in this newsletter, Halifax has a Rapid Transit Strategy that includes electric ferry travel between Halifax and Bedford. Marine Atlantic has just announced that it is leasing a new ferry that will lower its carbon emissions. In Atlantic Canada, green ferries could well be part of an expanded tourism infrastructure, including in the promotion of car-free tourism.

Hybrid and electric ferries are popping up all over the world, notably in the Nordic countries and in Asia where retrofitting older ships is occurring alongside the introduction of new vessels. Also in the San Francisco Bay Area, where ferry traffic has increased in recent years to reduce clogged traffic on bridges and roads. BC Ferries has been a leader in Canada with its Clean Futures Plan that includes the introduction of electric ferries and charging stations. Brent Dancy, director of Marine Climate Action at Oceans North, argued in a column published in the *Times Colonist* on February 11, 2021 that Canada should develop “a national clean ferries program” to parallel planned efforts for buses (www.timescolonist.com/opinion/op-ed/comment-why-b-c-ferries-should-cross-from-fossil-fuels-to-clean-energy-1.24280618). This kind of initiative could be part of a rural transit plan which acknowledges that, as in much of Atlantic Canada, rural residents commute daily to jobs, health care, education, training, and other services. In many cases, they endure this situation without any or sufficient access to public or active transportation options. Mobility justice for rural residents should be part of efforts to seriously address both rural-urban inequities and the climate crisis.

A vision for a robust, national, longer-term rural transit commitment should be aligned with elements such as the following: forefronting Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples when designing transportation policies and programs; the climate crisis; the need for safe active transportation (e.g. cycling, walking) conditions in rural as well as urban spaces; the urgency of furthering the capacity for seniors to age in place; a recognition that public transit should be designed

with passengers' safety in mind, including for women, girls, and 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals; the requirement of accessible transit for people with disabilities; the design of rural-urban linked transit schedules to improve options for education, training, and employment for rural youth as well as others; the growing unaffordability of a dignified life for many rural as well as urban residents due in part to costs for basic items including housing, food, and transportation; the necessity of ferries as well as land-based and air travel modes in many areas; and the importance of keeping open transportation avenues for new economic paradigms, products, and services that can strengthen and rebuild rural and remote regions.

Sharon Roseman is an anthropologist living in St. John's who specializes in rural studies and mobility studies. She has done ethnographic and historical research on the Bell Island ferry service since 2014.

Marine

Marine Atlantic signs deal for new ferry Controversy swirls over subcontract with Chinese shipyard



This rendering of the planned new vessel for Marine Atlantic appears to indicate a more esthetically pleasing profile than that of the Crown corporation's two current workhorses. (Image courtesy of Marine Atlantic)

Marine Atlantic is expecting to take delivery of a new passenger and vehicle ferry for its Newfoundland-Nova Scotia fleet somewhere in the 2024-2025 fiscal year. The federal Crown corporation announced a five-year charter agreement with Stena North Sea Ltd. on July 21. Following the initial agreement, Marine Atlantic will have an option to purchase the ferry, but it will be under no obligation to do so, and should the new ship not meet expectations it can simply be returned to the owners after the five years have elapsed.

It seemed like a win-win situation, but the devil was hidden in the details and the deal soon encountered some rough waters. Although not mentioned in the media release, it ultimately emerged that the plan was to have this new ferry constructed at a state-owned and highly-subsidized shipyard in China – a nation with which Canada currently has a particularly difficult relationship over the lengthy imprisonment of two Canadian citizens on unsubstantiated espionage charges.

The story broke on the front page of the *Globe and Mail* on August 25, and very quickly became embroiled in political controversy. Canadian ship-building interests were quick to protest that the new ferry could have been built here at home. Whatever the merits of that claim, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau quickly distanced himself from the decision, saying he was troubled by the deal.

“We are concerned with this situation,” he told the newspaper, adding that his goal is for federal government purchasing to “align with our values.” But he also tried to deflect blame to the former Harper Government, suggesting that his predecessor should have made it a requirement of his national shipbuilding strategy in 2010 for Crown corporations to buy Canadian-built vessels.

Meanwhile, Shane McCloskey, policy director in Transport Minister Omar Alghabra’s office denied any responsibility in the matter. “The minister did not approve the contract. ... The minister was informed by the department as the procurement process was completed,” he wrote in an e-mailed statement to the *Globe*.

Likewise, Marine Atlantic denied any direct responsibility for the choice of shipyard. Communications manager Tara Laing said the ferry contract was open to domestic and international bidders and was overseen by an independent fairness monitor. “The ownership of the shipyard selected by Stena was not considered within the procurement process,” she told the newspaper in an e-mailed statement.

For their part, Erin O’Toole’s Conservatives vowed they would cancel the deal immediately if elected, and ensure the contract went to a Canadian shipyard.

Stena is a Swedish-based company, and is a major and widely-respected player in the European ferry industry. Marine Atlantic and its predecessor CN Marine has had a long-standing and largely amicable business relationship with them dating back nearly 50 years. Stena does not build ships, but contracts the construction to builders with established expertise in ferries, generally to Norwegian or German shipyards. That’s where three of the four vessels in Marine Atlantic’s current fleet came from. The Chinese connection in this case is evidently the issue, rather than the awarding of the contract to Stena.

The new vessel offers energy efficient green ship technology, according to Marine Atlantic’s media release. Its design incorporates dual-fuel capability and will include batteries to further reduce its carbon footprint. The ship would be constructed with specific measures to reduce underwater noise, thereby reducing

the impact on marine life. It also offers enhanced power and thruster capability for maximum maneuvering ability during docking and undocking. This would appear to indicate that the challenges presented by the harbour at Port aux Basques are being specifically addressed in the design, as was the case with the purpose-built *Caribou* and *Smallwood* more than three decades ago.

The new ice-classed vessel will be just over 200 metres in length, about the same as the existing MV *Blue Puttees* and MV *Highlanders*, with the ability to carry similar numbers of commercial and passenger vehicles. It will incorporate the latest accessibility standards, carry up to 1000 people, have 146 passenger cabins (including pet friendly cabins), 40 passenger pods (apparently a two-berth basic cabin offering private sleeping accommodation without washrooms), a variety of food service options, seating lounges, a children's play area, and a kennel for pets. The ship was described as being compatible for use on both the Port aux Basques and Argentinia routes, but the company did not specify which existing ferry it would replace.

The Government of Canada provided funding in its 2019 budget for vessel replacement. The corporation launched a request for qualifications (RFQ) in July 2019, with successful bidders moving to an RFP stage in June 2020.

In another recent but unrelated development, Marine Atlantic announced that final approval has been received from Ottawa to proceed with a new administration building in Port aux Basques. The multi-year project will address current space and infrastructure challenges and consolidate administrative functions currently located at several buildings in the town. The new facility will offer improved space and amenities for employees and operations, have a strengthened focus on openness, collaboration, employee wellness and environmental responsibility, the company says. It's expected to be completed in the 2023-2024 fiscal year.

The new building apparently will not, however, be home to Marine Atlantic's corporate headquarters. As the result of an access to information request, CBC News recently obtained a consultant's report commissioned by Marine Atlantic's board of directors. It cautioned against relocating the head office from St. John's, where it has been located since the corporation became exclusively a Newfoundland ferry service more than two decades ago. CEO Murray Hupman confirmed in a CBC interview that there will be no changes to the current structure.

"We see the risk of doing that type of move to be too significant," he said, echoing some of the report's conclusions, including the reluctance of most of the head office staff to move to a smaller community. He added that external specialists in such fields as law, information technology and computer systems, marketing and communications are more readily available in the provincial capital.

The report had warned there is a risk that recruiting challenges might lead to what's known as "credential shrink" where candidates with a lower level of education and experience are hired to fill positions in more remote locations.

"The reality is there is no existing precedent for a federal Crown corporation the size of Marine Atlantic Inc. locating its head office in a community the size of Port aux Basques or North Sydney," the document stated. On the contrary, it was noted that many companies are actually locating in larger centres in order to attract talent, and the report cited problems that had been encountered when other public agencies had moved to smaller communities.

The location of Marine Atlantic's head office has a history of controversy. Community leaders in Port aux Basques have long argued that it should be located in their town, close to the ferry terminal. The report indicated there was a difference of opinion among the corporation's board of directors on the issue.

-Ted Bartlett

Air

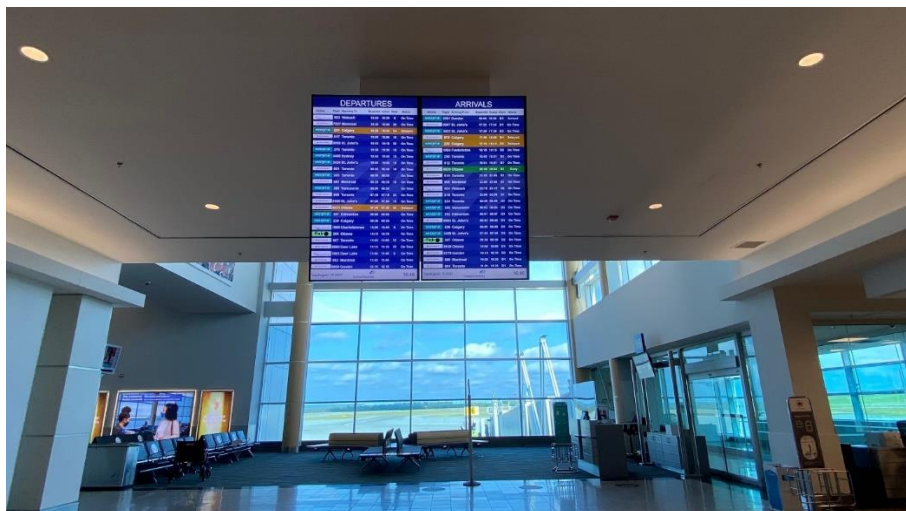
Airports get federal aid as traffic slowly recovers

While the second summer of the COVID-19 pandemic brought some signs of recovery, the long-term future of commercial air travel to, from and within Atlantic Canada is still far from clear. Carriers were gradually increasing their service levels in the region in what would normally have been their peak season, but for local airport authorities costs continued to far outpace revenues. Some locations had gone for months with no scheduled flights whatsoever, but by early summer Fredericton, Saint John and Sydney had at least recovered some semblance of passenger service.

The Government of Canada offered a significant measure of relief through its Regional Air Transportation Initiative, and by the time the election campaign got underway nearly \$40 million had been dispensed in total. The largest single contribution went to St. John's International Airport (YYT), where CEO Peter Avery said the \$11.8 million would help in the recovery effort, and allow the facility to remain competitive. Next in line was \$4.8 million for Greater Moncton's Roméo LeBlanc International Airport (YQM), which had earlier also received over \$5 million in federal funding for capital improvements.

Earlier contributions under the initiative included \$3.8 million each for Saint John (YSJ) and Fredericton (YFC), \$3.1 million each for Charlottetown (YYG) and Deer Lake (YDF), \$2.7 million for Sydney (YQY), and \$2.4 million for Gander

(YQX). The region's largest airport, Halifax Stanfield International (YHZ), doesn't qualify for assistance under this program, but has been benefitting from ground lease rent relief since March of 2020. Additionally YHZ, along with 22 other airports across the country including six in Atlantic Canada, received a one-time payment under another federal program – the Airport Relief Fund.



The arrivals/departures board at Halifax Stanfield International Airport on August 10 showed increased activity, but remained far below its pre-pandemic level. For context, it should be noted that the flights shown here cover a period of nearly 24 hours. (PHOTO courtesy of HIAA)

The number of flights in the region operated by Air Canada and WestJet is gradually increasing, but it is still nowhere near pre-pandemic levels. Meanwhile, Porter Airlines – in full hibernation since March of 2020 – was set to return to Atlantic skies in the first half of September. Porter aficionados who appreciated the more luxurious upholstery previously found in the airline's Q-400s may be disappointed to learn that their entire fleet has now been re-equipped with lighter weight seating. In the process an extra row has been added to the cabin, eliminating the more generous seat pitch which once set Porter apart from its competition.

Air Canada has so far not indicated any plans to resume the majority of its short-haul services in the region. Newfoundland-based PAL Airlines is filling some of the void, but on a much lower frequency. PAL has also commenced its promised service to Ottawa from St. John's and Deer Lake, stopping at Moncton or Fredericton on alternate days.

Halifax Stanfield was set to welcome its first international passenger flights in September, a shortened seasonal service to Frankfurt operated by discount carrier Condor Airlines, which has announced its intention to return in the summer of 2022. As of August 9, YHZ was permitted to once again accommodate US and

overseas departures, but there are no other firm commitments from other carriers. Spokesperson Tiffany Chase said Air Canada had not announced resumption of any non-stop European routes to or from YHZ, and their winter seasonal schedules, which would include sun destinations such as Florida, were yet to be published. WestJet has indicated that they plan to resume non-stop seasonal service between Halifax and Glasgow in spring 2022, but has made no mention of their routes to London Gatwick and Dublin.



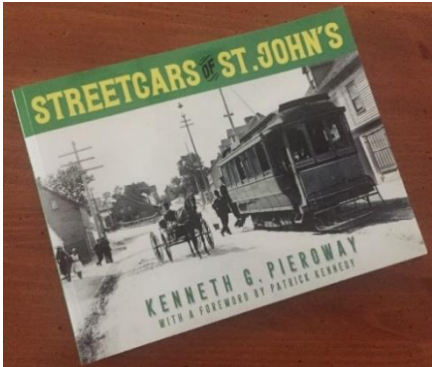
Fredericton Airport welcomed the first arrival of a PAL Airlines Dash-8 from Newfoundland on June 28 with a water cannon salute. The tri-weekly flight from St. John's and Deer Lake now continues on to Ottawa. (PHOTO - PAL Airlines)

By the end of August, Stanfield was handling an average of 60-65 arrivals and departures carrying between 5000 and 7000 passengers daily, compared with pre-pandemic levels of 200 daily flights accommodating 11-12 thousand people. Flights to and from YHZ were serving only 16 destinations, compared to 46 pre-COVID.

-Ted Bartlett

Recommended reading

Streetcars of St. John's – a transit history photo study



Almost 40 years to the day before the Newfoundland Railway carried its last revenue traffic, a little red Birney streetcar finished its final run through downtown St. John's and tied up for the last time at the Newfoundland Light and Power Company's car barn on Water Street west. It marked the end of an era, not unlike similar scenarios played out across North America during the 1940s.

Author/photographer Kenneth Pieroway is far too young to remember the days of the trolley cars in St. John's; the last remnants of the service disappeared long before he was born. But he's done a commendable job of bringing history to life with *Streetcars of St. John's*, by collecting a variety of vintage photos from multiple sources and presenting them side-by-side with his own photography of the same locations today.



A passenger boards Birney car #14 of the St. John's street railway on Water Street west in the 1940s. Note the British colonial practice of driving on the left was still in effect; the rule didn't change until 1947 – less than two years prior to Confederation with Canada.
(Photo from the collection of Dr. Neil Harvey)



Author and photographer Ken Pieroway has experienced passenger trains and public transit around the world. Streetcars of St. John's is his third book, and a fourth is in the works. He's pictured here beside a PCC streetcar in San Francisco.

Readers familiar with Ken's two previous books – both outstanding collections of images from the last four decades of railroading on “The Rock” combined with his own photos of the same settings after the rails were lifted – may be forgiven for thinking he had a tough act to follow. Surely there wouldn't be much original material to work from! But Ken is a diligent and persistent researcher, and the results are a most pleasant surprise.

Once he set out to photograph the contemporary settings of the old pictures he'd collected, Ken was surprised to find that many of the streetscapes hadn't changed all that much. Many of the buildings shown in the vintage images are still standing today, and readers familiar with St. John's should enjoy attempting to identify them.

Ken says he's met a lot of wonderful people during his research for all three books, and is very appreciative of the co-operation he received from so many noted photographers, including Robert Sandusky, the late Ronald Ritchie, and long-time Transport Action member Bill Linley. Permission to publish many vintage images was freely granted.

The good news is there's a fourth book in the works, this time again focused on the Newfoundland Railway as it existed in the 1940s and 50s. The full-colour publication from Flanker Press will be available in both hard and soft cover versions, and is slated for release in the second half of 2022.

-Ted Bartlett

Meet a Member

Justin Tinker advocates on behalf of his Fundy Isles home



Justin Tinker with his new Tesla electric vehicle

Born and raised on Campobello Island, New Brunswick, off the coast of Maine, Justin enjoyed an upbringing relying on the transportation networks of two nations, but outside the service range of public transport in either Canada or the United States. The family convenience store and garage kept him busy pumping gasoline and meddling with vehicles in ways he probably shouldn't from a young age.

Being forced to drive nearly three hours round trip through four international border crossings to access essential services was commonplace to Justin

growing up on Campobello, making him comfortable in the driver's seat as road trips were made throughout North America. After meeting his future wife in Saint John in 2011, he made the two-nation trip to the DMV again, this time to change his address.

After earning a degree in Civil Engineering at the University of New Brunswick, Justin's entry into the professional engineering realm led him to a consulting engineering firm, where he worked as a geotechnical engineer. In recent years, he has moved into project management full-time, bringing his expertise to large-scale projects throughout the Maritimes and New England.

Noticing Campobello Island's struggle to maintain population, economy and even viability as a rural community, Justin has taken the lead in the fight for year-round access to and from mainland Canada without relying on the uncertain US borders, chairing a committee and working toward results in partnership with elected leaders (and in spite of a few others). Continuing to be active in the region, Justin serves on boards and committees dedicated to education, renewable energy, transportation and trade.

In what little downtime remains, Justin enjoys electric transportation in different forms; taking to the virtual skies studying for a pilot's license, competitive sim racing, the driver's seat of a golf cart for a quick nine holes, or in a Tesla EV between destinations.

Justin and his wife Stephanie have set down roots in Saint John to raise their daughters Anna and Ella. Anna has carried on Justin's trait of meddling with vehicles, learning at a young age how to chase her father with a golf cart.

Vanishing stations



Two unstaffed and long-shuttered VIA stations in northern New Brunswick will soon be no more. The Crown corporation confirms that the deserted buildings at Jacquet River and Charlo are now in a badly deteriorated condition, and even if the affected communities stepped up to take responsibility for them (as has happened at other unstaffed conditional stops) the cost of restoration would likely exceed that of building an entirely new structure. Tenders for demolition were expected to be called this summer. These photos from the collection of Steve Boyko show the stations in happier times about 15 years ago, when they were still staffed, there were six arrivals and departures per week, and the Canadian flag was proudly displayed.

