

The Bulletin

TRANSPORT ACTION ATLANTIC

FALL – WINTER 2021-2022

An Island Neglected ***Campobello's struggle for a reliable*** ***year-round ferry***



COVID-19 has upped the ante in the campaign for a permanent year-round ferry for New Brunswick's Campobello Island. Never intended for winter operation, the current vessel is clearly inadequate, but both federal and provincial governments are dragging their feet. The story begins on p. 31.

PHOTO: Justin Tinker



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www.transportactionatlantic.ca

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ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – May 28, 2022

Once again, this year's Transport Action Atlantic's **annual general meeting** will be held virtually using the ZOOM platform on Saturday, 28 May 2022, beginning at 1400 ADT (1430 NDT).

The agenda includes annual reports and financial statements, appointment of an auditor, election of a board of directors, and any other business that may arise.

Current members of Transport Action Atlantic may nominate (with their consent) any other member in good standing for a position on the board. It is the board's responsibility to choose the executive officers. Nominations should be made in advance of the meeting, and may be submitted by mail to the TAA Nominating Committee, P.O.Box 268, Dartmouth NS B2Y 3Y3, or (preferably) by e-mail to TAA secretary Michael Perry at mikeper5@nbnet.nb.ca.

Besides the required business, we plan to include guest speakers focusing on critical public transportation issues in our region, with ample opportunity for questions and discussion. Please watch for further details on our website as this program is finalized. TAA members for whom we have an e-mail address will automatically receive an invitation to the meeting. Others who'd like to participate should request credentials by e-mail to atlantic@transportaction.ca. As always, our AGM is open to the general public and the media.

Advocacy in Action

-by Ted Bartlett

Completion of this *Bulletin* issue coincides with the second anniversary of that “Black Friday” in 2020 when most Canadians suddenly realized that the Novel Coronavirus – soon to be known to all of us as COVID-19 – was a public health threat of epic proportions that was about to have a profound effect on our daily lives. It’s been a tough two years, and the consequences for public transportation have been massive. For us advocates, it’s been a challenging time, but we recognize that it’s doubtless more important than ever to maintain the momentum of our agenda. Most readers will be very familiar with the issues we view to be important – this publication is full of them. And although there’s been little opportunity for face-to-face encounters with influencers and decision-makers, we’ve put technology to work to enable us to hold productive virtual meetings.

Two of those have been with former Green Party MP Jenica Atwin, who jumped the political fence last year to join the Liberals. Despite the change of colours, she successfully held her Fredericton seat, and still appears to be just as firmly committed to public transportation – and passenger rail in particular – as she previously was. Ms. Atwin participated in TAA’s virtual online board meeting in November, and has since joined us in another Zoom conversation. Despite the evident disinterest on the part of the Trudeau government in doing anything to improve passenger rail east of Quebec City, she’s more than willing to champion the cause, and has offered to pursue the matter with New Brunswick’s two representatives at the cabinet table. She’s also a cheerleader for public transit and reliable year-round ferry service for Campobello Island.



Prime Minister Justin Trudeau snaps a selfie with Liberal candidate Jenica Atwin during last year’s federal election campaign on Fredericton’s former railway bridge. The government has still made no commitments to any improvement in passenger rail east of Quebec City. (PHOTO from Twitter)

Ms. Atwin is not alone in Ottawa in advocating on the Campobello file. Former Port Saint John CEO Jim Quinn was appointed to the Senate last summer, and he's onboard with many of the issues TAA deems important. Needless to say,



New Brunswick Senator Jim Quinn is supportive of many of the issues TAA considers to be important. He describes the foot-dragging by both levels of government over the Campobello ferry as “outrageous.” (SUBMITTED PHOTO)

marine transportation is on his radar, and it's not limited to international shipping of intermodal containers and bulk commodities. He's very concerned about the neglect of 800 Canadians who cannot access services in their own country without travelling through the US – a situation he terms “outrageous”. It just wouldn't happen in a part of Canada considered more politically important, he told TAA at a virtual meeting in January.

Although appointed by Prime Minister Trudeau, Senator Quinn is a member of the non-partisan Canadian Senators Group, and it's clear he won't be reticent in speaking out when his views don't align with those of the current government. He's supportive of many of the issues on TAA's sustainable

transportation agenda, and has committed to follow-up action on several of them. The senator knows his way around Ottawa, having been in the senior ranks of the public service before coming home to accept the port position in Saint John.

Meanwhile, TAA has turned up the heat in the campaign over Marine Atlantic ferry rates. As reported elsewhere in this issue, director Tom Beckett has written to Transport Minister Alghabra expressing deep concern over the absence of any mention in his mandate letter of the prime minister's outstanding 2015 commitment. The cat is among the pigeons, so to speak, as the letter was widely copied to the business and political community in Newfoundland. As a result, we have at least one prominent individual who's ready to firmly embrace the cause. We expect to have much more about that included in the agenda of our upcoming AGM. See you there!

A fond farewell...

On a personal note, this will be my final “Advocacy in Action” column. Earlier this year I confirmed to the TAA Board that after eight years in the position I will not be a candidate for re-election as president in 2022. It's been an exciting ride, and I modestly believe we have made some progress on my watch. But there's much more to be done, and some new and fresh ideas and renewed energy will surely benefit our association.

Once an advocate – always an advocate! When our AGM adjourns in May, I won't be simply walking away from the public transportation agenda I have been so passionate about over the years. I'll continue to assist and support the executive and board of TAA whenever I can. But I'm looking forward to a more relaxed lifestyle with fewer deadlines in my so-called "golden years".

You'll still be hearing from me from time to time, I'm sure. One of the things I'd like to do in this new phase of my retirement is to blog (without a deadline!) on some of my favourite topics – and please be assured that transportation is one of them and always will be. Don't expect my blog to appear online by magic any day now, though. I'm somewhat technologically challenged, and will need to call on our children to help me set it up once my duties as president are over. But I've been on Twitter for years, and will likely become increasingly active on that platform (again, *sans* deadlines) – perhaps, indeed, a little more acerbic than I am at present.

Which brings me to this parting suggestion. Those of our readers who are active on social media have a ready-made opportunity to help promote the Transport Action agenda. It's pretty simple: if you are a user of Twitter or Facebook, make sure you are a follower of TAA. Watch for our posts – and share them with your own followers. As an old advertising line used to say, "you tell two friends, and they'll tell two friends, and so on, and so on and so on."

I recently re-tweeted a post about what I believed was very salient public transport quote on both my personal Twitter account and TAA's. While I can't prove it was a direct consequence, the needle jumped abruptly as TAA gained a significant number of new followers – people who evidently identify with our cause and values. If we all did this regularly, our momentum and hopefully our membership numbers could grow exponentially, bringing us closer to achieving our goals of convenient, affordable and sustainable public transportation for all Atlantic Canadians.

And, as the old-time journalists and telegraphers used to say, that's 30!

Yves Bourgeois is 2021 John Pearce Award recipient

A long-time champion of enhanced public transportation systems in our region has been chosen to receive Transport Action Atlantic's annual John Pearce Award for 2021. Yves Bourgeois is the former director of the Urban and Community Studies Institute at UNB Saint John, and is currently dean of studies at the Shippagan campus of the Université de Moncton.

"Dr. Bourgeois' long-time goal has been the promotion of better economic and social outcomes through sustainable transportation access in rural and urban New Brunswick," says TAA director Stan Choptiany. "Most recently he has been the

catalyst and motivator for a new Acadian Peninsula transportation initiative involving both scheduled and on-demand transportation service between Bathurst and Miramichi, scheduled to begin in the summer of 2022.”



Yves Bourgeois is pictured at the historic McAdam railway station, where his landmark report *Surfaces to Services* was released in December 2017.

Four years ago as chair of the Rural Urban Transportation Advisory Committee Yves led the development of a landmark position paper for New Brunswick’s Economic and Social Inclusion Corporation. The document, entitled *From Surfaces to Services: An inclusive and sustainable transportation strategy for the Province of New Brunswick 2017-2037* is an in-depth analysis of transportation needs. While progress has not been as fast as he would have liked, several of the report’s recommendations are being adopted in the new white paper of municipal reform, and there appears to be an increasing commitment to finding transportation solutions for the province.

Born in New Brunswick, Yves received his undergraduate degree from U de M in 1993, and went on to earn a masters in philosophy, politics and economics from the University of Oxford, which he attended as a Rhodes scholar. He furthered his studies in the UK with a masters in science and technology at the University of Edinburgh, and completed his PhD in urban planning at the University of California, Los Angeles, in 2006. He was recently appointed to the Expert Panel on Clean Growth with the Canadian Climate Institute.

“Yves has long been a supporter and active participant in the work of Transportation Action Atlantic,” says Stan Choptiany. “His gentle, intelligent, and collaborative approach makes him an effective transportation champion, and a joy to work with.”

The John Pearce Award is given annually to recognize an outstanding contribution to the public transportation cause. It was created by TAA in 2017 to commemorate the lifetime achievements in transport advocacy by the late Mr. Pearce, a founding father of the association’s predecessor Transport 2000 Atlantic, a past president, and long-time member of the board.

Opinion

Aspiration versus Perspiration: Carbon Emission Targets and the Transport Minister's Mandate Letter

-by Michael Perry



The Minister of Transport has received a list of objectives for his implementation and administration which goes far to explain his apparent policy inconsistency. Regarding the environment the letter urges him to continue to support Canada's transition to "net zero" carbon emissions by advancing measures to accelerate the adoption of zero-emission vehicles by both households and businesses. It asks him to develop a strategy to decarbonize emission intensive on-road freight and to, "Support global efforts

to reduce emissions in the air and marine sectors." But in an earlier paragraph he is encouraged to "continue the restart of a competitive air sector...to rebuild public confidence and the future of the air sector, "...including efficient and affordable travel options that connect regions and communities to each other and to international markets." A fundamental contradiction! Aspiration without perspiration!

Passenger air travel is a major contributor to carbon emissions. Domestic flights, particularly those less than two hours in duration, are a major source of carbon pollution. The hourly frequency of the Montreal, Ottawa, and Toronto shuttles are culprits as are the frequent flights between Edmonton and Calgary. Exhaust contrails create an additional greenhouse effect. These short flights also cause airport congestion resulting in further government subsidies to support the expansion of airports. Government support of the aerospace industry is particularly egregious. In 2021 the government pumped more than four hundred million into Quebec aerospace industries alone. Further, the financial assistance paid to Bombardier, for example, goes toward subsidising its primary product line to supply the burgeoning demand for private aviation luxury jets which create the most pollution per passenger-kilometre!

One area of flying which deserves further investigation regarding carbon pollution is the international sector. At present, no country includes carbon pollution from international flights in its greenhouse gas cumulative totals. The figures are largely unknown, but although no country calculates them as part of its contribution to the problem they nevertheless exist!

One suggested solution to the air transport pollution problem is a non-petroleum based jet fuel made from sustainable materials such as corn sugar, used cooking oils, municipal waste, and algae. It is claimed that the use of this so-called Sustainable Aviation Fuel or S.A.F. would reduce carbon emissions by 85% compared to conventional jet fuel. It is estimated that presently only twenty million gallons of S.A.F. is produced annually. The global aviation industry aspires to reduce emissions to net zero by 2050 which would require 230 billion gallons of S.A.F. This fuel is significantly more expensive than conventional jet fuel and would require acres of land presently used for food production. It has been suggested that government subsidies should be used so that passenger tickets would not have to bear the full cost, but S.A.F. still produces greenhouse gases and would further contribute to the desired target becoming unreachable.

The Minister of Transport is also asked to develop a strategy to decarbonize road freight. Now that is a tall order indeed! The green fueling of heavy goods vehicles will be a major problem. Hydrogen is often cited as the solution to this problem, but hydrogen costs 3-4 times that of diesel fuel. In reply, proponents cite “green hydrogen” produced through electrolysis using hydro, wind, or solar sources but even here there is a 30% energy loss compared to using electricity directly and this does not include further loss through hydrogen compression and conversion to a liquid form for transportation and storage. Given the current state of our technology, hydrogen cannot be seriously considered as a viable substitute for diesel fuel for many years beyond the present target date for “net zero.”

The solution, of course, is currently readily available, and would be workable where heavy goods vehicles are used most and that is in the most populous southern regions of the country. Intermodal freight trains including “piggyback,” and a revival of the former “way freight” service would provide, even when using a diesel locomotive, a considerable reduction in the production of greenhouse gas. The conversion to electric trains, a technology presently available, could reduce pollution even further. Transfers of goods to electric vans for regional and local delivery within a range of 200 km., given present battery technology, would be accomplished through regional distribution centres. The new class 93 freight locomotive, presently coming into service in Britain has the flexibility of being tri-mode: electric power while “under the wires,” and when not a smaller but powerful diesel engine supplemented by a battery engine for the extra power boost necessary for a standing start.

So far there seems to have been little interest by the two private freight railways in electrifying their rights of way, and no move to extend their freight services much beyond container, car carrying, and bulk traffic. There is nothing in the minister’s letter about electrification except in relation to “high frequency” passenger rail proposal. The fact that much of the “high frequency” service will take place over tracks owned and operated by the private freight railways and with their agreement, is not mentioned in the letter.

Recently a brightly illustrated brochure has been produced by the ministry regarding the planning, construction, and operation of the proposed high frequency service. The entire project will be contracted out to a yet unknown private corporate entity. It is clear from this document that the ministry staff want extraordinarily little to do with the implementation of the high frequency rail proposal, probably because the ministry staff have little rail expertise and no interest in acquiring it. The result will probably be cost overruns, project completion delays, and in the end the probable bankruptcy of the original contractor.

We have seen it all before. The rebuilding and modernization of the West Coast mainline between London, Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool, which passes through the British industrial heartland, and is the most congested rail route in the country, was contracted to the private corporation, Railtrack for planning, construction, and completion. The result was huge cost overruns, lengthy delays, and long disruptions to the existing rail service. This ended with Railtrack bankrupt and a project still years from completion.

Governments can aspire to do remarkable things, as this letter to the minister reveals, but without the detailed planning and policy work together with consistent and matching aims supported by a knowledgeable ministry staff it will all go nowhere. You cannot have aspiration without perspiration!

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

Opinion

You Can't Get There from Here - Now

-by David Coon



One morning last fall during Question Period, to my great surprise, I received an answer. An actual answer. As I was told when I was first elected in 2014, it's called Question Period not Answer Period, so my expectations are always on the low side during QP.

The answer came from the Premier. My question, which I have often asked over the past 7 years, was whether the government was ever going to take responsibility for improving public transportation services in our province. He said yes. In fact, a committee of public servants was working on it. This was great news. New Brunswick and Canada are outliers in the industrialized world for the provision of public transportation services. For example, Canada is in a dead heat with Albania and Kazakhstan for having the

poorest rail service among the members countries of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe. New Brunswick has city transit systems, intercity buses, a rail system, and a system of river and marine ferries, but you can't get there from here in many cases. Try taking a train to Saint John, a ferry from the mainland to Campobello, a bus from Fredericton to the Miramichi, or even to the Fredericton airport. It can't be done. You have to drive.

There is money available from Ottawa to improve public transportation, money that Premier Higgs has previously spurned. Hopefully, he will soon look at it as an opportunity to seize for New Brunswick.

Given the urgent need for public transportation infrastructure, and the imperative that we shrink the carbon footprint of transportation, we need a bold plan. Here are a few of my thoughts.

Given our size, and the fact that Nova Scotia and PEI have similar public transportation needs, we should pool our efforts with those provinces to create a seamless and affordable public transportation system to serve our entire region. When there is an important public purpose to be served, a Crown corporation is an effective tool. Such regional Crown Corporations exist. Think of Atlantic Lottery. If we can facilitate the delivery of a regional gambling system, I know we can work together to meet the needs of people for getting from here to there, without fueling the climate crisis.

I said we need a bold plan, so I believe it's time to take control of the rails in order to establish a regional rail service. With some upgrades, we could run commuter trains between north and southern New Brunswick, among our largest cities, and from Halifax to both Antigonish and the Valley. Maritime Bus would need to be integrated with the rail service, and our ferry services. In fact, the public transportation network should be seamless so that a single pass, loaded with the correct amount of funds would enable a person to travel by train, motorcoach, city transit, and on any of the many ferries serving our region.

There is an urgent need for improvements in the short-term just so people can travel to medical appointments, to go to work, or to attend school. However, during this decade we need to head a considerable way down the road toward a net zero carbon future if we are to arrive there. That's where a convenient affordable regional rail system interconnected with motorcoaches and city buses will be needed.

As a region we deserve the support of the federal government to assist us with this transportation transition, and a generous portion of the increasing revenue from the carbon tax should play its role as well. All aboard for the net zero carbon future.

David Coon is the Leader of the New Brunswick Green Party and MLA for Fredericton South

VIA exploring market for long-haul equipment replacement



Two of VIA's 35-year-old F-40 locomotives lead a consist of Budd stainless steel cars built in the 1950s through Moncton in September 2021. Out of camera view at the rear of the train are several pieces of British-built Renaissance equipment never designed for life in Canada and well past their best-before date. VIA's entire long-distance fleet is in dire need of replacement, and the corporation has just taken the first tentative steps in that direction. But new equipment may be 10-15 years in the future.

(PHOTO – Steve Boyko)

VIA Rail Canada has confirmed it is preparing a business case for the renewal of its aging long-haul locomotives and cars – some of which are more than 70 years old. The Crown corporation hosted a virtual “Market-Day” event with suppliers on January 20 to discuss the project and seek their input on various elements including schedule, budget, procurement and delivery timeline. Those discussions will inform the submission to the federal government, which will ultimately have to approve the necessary funding. The latest version of VIA's five-year Corporate Plan, which has just been released to the public, is rather pessimistic on how long the process will take, suggesting that delivery of new equipment may well be 10-15 years in the future.

VIA is being somewhat coy about which potential suppliers might be involved. The invitation posted in December on the MERX public tendering website was extended to “all tier 1 original equipment manufacturers of intercity and long-distance rail cars and locomotives”, adding that the day would be dedicated to both informing the market about the fleet renewal opportunity and addressing the context of the Government of Canada’s 2022-2023 Budget.

A spokesperson in the office of CEO Cynthia Garneau did say the participating suppliers at the market day came from “across the world”, but citing issues of confidentiality was not in a position to say how many there actually were. However, it’s a safe bet that Siemens Mobility will be among the contenders to at the very least build new locomotives. Siemens is already supplying 32 bi-directional trainsets to replace VIA’s entire corridor fleet by the end of 2024. The first of has been subjected to testing in real-life winter conditions on the Alexandria Sub between Ottawa and Coteau QC. The testing is reportedly going well, and the first revenue service is expected to take place later this year.

Each of the new VIA trains includes a Siemens Charger locomotive, the current state-of-the-art in low-emission diesel-electric traction. The company also builds a long-distance version of the Charger. As of February 8, Amtrak now has a total of 125 of the so-called ALC-42 units on the way, having just exercised an option to add 50 more to its current production order.

The ALC-42 boasts a 1000-kilowatt head-end power capability for car heating and hotel services, compared to 600 kilowatts on the ones in VIA’s current order, as well as 20% more fuel capacity for longer range. Amtrak has had the first two units for testing over the past six months, and they’ve now been placed in revenue service on the Chicago-Seattle *Empire Builder*.

Meanwhile, the union representing many of VIA’s employees wants Ottawa to pour “significant dollars” into the corporation’s long-haul fleet renewal, and it views the Halifax-Montreal *Ocean* as a priority. Unifor spokesperson Scott Doherty told the Campbellton *Tribune* that upgrading passenger rail transportation is a key factor across the country. He said that the Trudeau Government needs to follow the lead of the Biden White House, which as just committed to the largest public investment in Amtrak’s entire history.

“It can’t just be fast rail service from Toronto to Ottawa or Montreal to Windsor,” he said. “That can’t be the only place where investments get made.” He added that rail travel is “a green, environmentally acknowledged form of transportation, and it’s got to be affordable.”

-Ted Bartlett

***Ocean* crawling back toward “normal” operations**



VIA's *Ocean* winds its way around the Bedford basin departing Halifax in the fall of 2021, the two back-to-back F40s belying the new bidirectional consist necessitated by the loss of the turning loop in Halifax. Though looking quite different, the *Ocean* will be back to 3/week operation in June of 2022 (PHOTO – Tim Hayman)

More than two years after the service abruptly shut down, VIA's *Ocean* will finally return to its pre-pandemic frequency, with the third weekly departures (on Fridays) resuming in the first week of June. For several months now, online bookings had been available for Friday trips from June 3 onward, but VIA would not initially confirm that this would actually take place, citing COVID-19 uncertainty. The return date was finally made official in an April 14th media release, which also announced a return to pre-pandemic frequencies on routes all across the country, as well as a significant expansion of Corridor services, in time for a summer travel season that promises to be the busiest since 2019.

VIA CEO Cynthia Garneau termed it “a celebratory and crucial milestone in our service resumption plan after an incredibly challenging two years. We look forward to welcoming more of our customers back on board our trains and doing our part to encourage Canadians and tourists to get out and explore this beautiful country for the summer travel season.”

VIA's painfully slow service resumption has at times been attributed to ongoing COVID-19 impacts and uncertainty, but there's little doubt that financial considerations stemming from the impacts of low ridership (not helped by the absence of train frequencies) played a major role. The latest press release alluded to this point gently, stating that VIA's decisions were based on various factors including “...employing a balanced approach in order to fulfill VIA Rail's public service mandate and manage financial impacts.”

VIA's onboard service offerings have generally returned to something near the form they took prior to 2020. On the *Canadian*, dome cars, full dining service, and even "Prestige" class have made their return. In the Corridor, both Economy and Business class look much the way they did before, aside from the continued requirement to wear masks (when not eating/drinking or in enclosed spaces) and show proof of vaccination, as required by the federal government. For the *Ocean*, the story is, at present, a little different. Full dining car service is on offer, and is fully up to the standards offered in the Renaissance dining cars in the past, though efforts continue to be made not to seat passengers together who aren't travelling together. The Renaissance service cars offer their lounge space, such as it is, but this space is now shared between both economy and sleeper passengers in both cars due to the presence of coaches at both ends of the train in the bidirectional consist configuration.

The major loss at present is for sleeper passengers; with the Park car gone, a dedicated lounge space is missing, along with the observation dome, and various amenities that used to be offered, such as complimentary tea/coffee, paid bar service, tourism information, and more. While hardly essential, these additional amenities all helped to sell the experience to the tourist market, and generally make the train a more appealing way to travel. VIA could replace these amenities by including a Skyline car in the consist, as they initially planned to do in the bidirectional setup before the pandemic, but so far there has been no commitment to do so. VIA has continued to be coy about any details of what the *Ocean*'s consist may look like as tourist travel resumes, and it's not clear what plan they have to help continue justifying the higher fares that sleeper tickets command.



Lost connection: though already out of service since late 2020, the remaining link to the former Halterm balloon track was formally severed more recently, as CN pulled out the now redundant switch that connected the two ends of the loop. (PHOTO – Tim Hayman)

At the very least, there are recent indications that the consists will expand during the summer months, with Chateau sleepers now showing for sale in the reservations system through until the fall. This was a welcome addition, as many of the upcoming departures had already sold out of sleeper space. How many cars will ultimately be added remains to be seen.

The tri-weekly service continues to be far from adequate to provide a truly viable option for the travelling public in the region; but after a year and a half with no trains, legitimate concerns about the prospects of a return, and a slow 10-month slog of just one and then two trains a week, it's certainly good to at least be getting back to the baseline where we were two years ago.

-Tim Hayman

Opinion

Why is Cape Breton having to wait for rail?

-by Mary C. Senecal-MacPherson



When we hear candidates or elected officials make cliched remarks such as they want assurance of a return for the investment, it's a clue that they are not paying attention. They can't possibly be aware of the federal government's response to the Climate Change accord, with unprecedented funding for infrastructure which includes the short-line funding that supports a green economy and economic development.

Canadians and people all around the world are dealing with floods, fires, drought and early and protracted hurricane seasons, all climate change driven. We are beginning to feel the impact that scientists predicted years ago. Very recently we have been advised by the scientists to accelerate our efforts. This decade, 2020 to 2030, is critical to avoiding the worst consequences of the climate crisis.

Unfortunately, with little time remaining, we as Canadians need to compensate for those countries that are lax in their efforts to meet their obligations.

Green economy

The Railway Association of Canada, states that "Rail is three times more beneficial to the environment than truck and four times more fuel efficient. Rail can move one tonne of freight 215 kilometers on a single liter of fuel and a single freight train is capable of removing over 300 trucks from our congested road and highway networks."

In Canada, transportation is seen as the major contributor to greenhouse gases, 27.4 per cent. Trucks contribute to the bulk of this offence, producing over half of all trade-related emissions.

The Canadian government is strongly moving toward a green economy. If hundreds of trucks daily from the Moncton-North Sydney-Moncton route were reduced and replaced with a commitment to rail it would make an appreciable difference for the environment and would help to bring us in line with an economic policy that rejects regional disparity.

Currently, these trucks are fueled, staffed, maintained and insured in New Brunswick. Heavy trucks add to the highway maintenance costs for Nova Scotia. With only 20 per cent of the traffic going to the Newfoundland ferry being required to have a viable rail system, it wouldn't render the trucking industry inviable. Nova Scotia's 2019 figure for highway and road restoration is \$1.6 billion. The savings to the province against these costs could alone meet the requirements of a sound business case.

Rail restoration for eastern Nova Scotia can be a sustained contributor toward solving the problem of climate change and at the same time enable the province to respond to the dire economic needs of our region and to the alarming safety concerns. The port-rail strategy will yield a thriving economy which in turn will attract and retain badly needed doctors.

New markets

In Barry Sheehy's recent column ('Nova Scotia lagging behind rest of country,' Cape Breton Post, July 27), he points to the abundant natural resources Nova Scotia has that are in global demand and questions why they are not being exported. The revitalization of rail has the potential to benefit not only eastern Nova Scotia but the entire province, the entire region. Rail can facilitate new European market access for a wide range of local products, overall, dramatically increasing multilateral bulk trade.

No surprise that Nova Scotia, with the lowest per capita income, correspondingly, has the lowest trade to GDP ratio in the country. We know that trade drives the economy; trade should never be a concern for a coastal province.

It's not just an end-of-line problem for Sydney. The whole line - Pictou County, Port Hawkesbury, Richmond and other locations – is adversely impacted without rail. It is difficult to attract new businesses and impossible for existing businesses to grow without rail. Rail will benefit all, including Halifax. Rail will ensure uninterrupted service to Newfoundland, a constitutional obligation.

More than regional

The restoration of rail will position Nova Scotia as a gateway to Canada and the United States, not unlike the Vancouver-Prince Rupert, B.C., model. Keep in mind, in the beginning, Vancouver strongly opposed Prince Rupert but today the

arrangement is a remarkable success. Prince Rupert did not draw traffic from Vancouver. Instead, bulk exports were increased to meet the number of imports.

The need for rail is more than a regional thing. It's global.

We acknowledge and thank NDP Leader Gary Burrill for his public expression of support for rail. Burrill recognizes the regional disparity and knows there is no need of it.

The Scotia Rail Development Society urges the public to contact the candidates/elected officials and express your support of rail and help make it part of the discourse. Time for Cape Breton to speak up; everything hangs in the balance.

Mary C. Senecal-MacPherson serves as secretary for the Scotia Rail Development Society. The Sydney resident is a retired teacher and NGO executive assistant.

Motorcoach and Transit

PEI takes the lead in rural transit



Prince Edward Islanders in outlying communities now have a convenient and affordable alternative to dependence on private automobiles under a new provincial government initiative. This 14-passenger vehicle is one of two serving the eastern portion of the province on two separate routes launched in October 2021, each running three round trips daily, Monday through Friday. The service is to be expanded to western PEI by the end of April. (PHOTO – Cassidy Group)

There's been a game-changing development on the rural transit front in Prince Edward Island. Two new routes linking communities on the eastern end of the island with Charlottetown launched on October 12. The so-called "toonie transit"

makes three trips a day Monday through Friday on each route, serving the Montague, Georgetown, Souris, and St. Peter's areas. Riders pay just \$2 each way, and seats can be reserved online.

The service is officially branded Island Transit, and is a division of the Cassidy Group which also operates Maritime Bus, the T3 Transit system in Charlottetown, and a link to Summerside several times a day. The provincially-funded initiative is the first step in what Premier Dennis King says is a commitment by his government to an island-wide public transit system. The planned expansion to include communities west to Alberton and Tignish is expected to be in place by the end of April.

Premier King said it was an “easy decision to make”, and one that will help reduce the province's carbon footprint. And with the sudden escalation in fuel prices resulting from the Russian invasion of Ukraine, he went one step further. Instead of grumbling about carbon taxes, he presented Islanders with a climate-friendly and affordable alternative. Effective March 15, \$20 adult transit passes were available offering unlimited rides on both Island Transit and T3 in the Charlottetown area. Seniors and students pay just \$10 for the pass, while everyone under 18 rides for free. This pass is valid until the end of April, at which time the program will be re-evaluated in light of fuel prices at the time.



In the early morning darkness of October 12, Brady Chaisson boarded the first “toonie transit” bus at the neighbourhood convenience store in Souris, PEI. He’s ridden to and from school in Charlottetown every day since. For this aspiring young hockey player, convenient and affordable rural transit is a game changer. (PHOTO – submitted by Julie Chaisson)

The response to Island Transit has been very encouraging, with the primary users so far being students and commuters. Mike Cassidy, founder and CEO of the transportation company, says feedback has been extremely positive, and ridership has grown steadily. He recognizes, however, that it will take time for the public to become fully aware of the benefits and the full potential the system offers. With the very affordable fares, he anticipates considerable use by seniors and family groups, as well as for school outings. He adds that it's important to note that seats must be booked online, to ensure that sufficient capacity is available on each trip. The normally assigned vehicle accommodates 14 passengers, but a larger bus can be substituted if needed to meet demand.

One Islander who's wildly enthusiastic about the provincial initiative is Julie Chaisson of Souris. Her thirteen-year-old son Brady is an aspiring young hockey player. Some 80 kilometres from his home on the outskirts of Charlottetown there's a recognized Hockey Canada school, the Mount Academy. It represented a golden opportunity for both his academic and sporting future, and his parents were giving serious consideration to enrolling him there. But there was one big catch: more than four hours on the road each day to drive him to and from – a daunting obstacle. For them, the rural transit initiative was quite literally a game changer.

Initially it cost Brady \$20 a week to get to and from the Charlottetown campus – and he's home every evening in time for supper. Now, he doesn't pay anything at all, and the 2022 PEI Budget promises to make free transit a permanent thing for everyone under 18. Understandably, Julie is a cheerleader for toonie transit, and is effusive in her praise for Premier Dennis King and service operator Mike Cassidy. "This is fantastic for PEI," she says. "Where you live doesn't set limitations anymore!"

-Ted Bartlett

More rural transit initiatives around the region



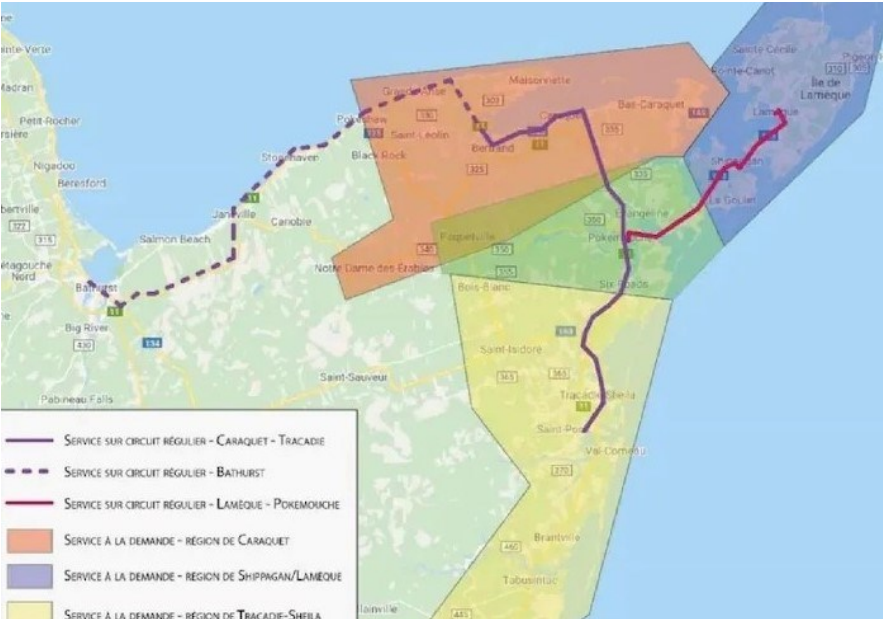
The Eskasoni First Nation in Cape Breton is home to Nova Scotia's newest transit service. Operations manager Kennis Gould is flanked by drivers Ricky Young, left, and Dave Simon as the new service launched on March 14. (PHOTO – CBC News)

The volatile price of gasoline has people from all over Atlantic Canada taking a renewed interest in alternatives to driving and private automobile ownership. Although Prince Edward Island is presently the clear front-runner in initiatives aimed at reducing car dependence, there have been a number of recent good-news

stories on the rural and small-town transit scene from the other three provinces as well.

In Nova Scotia, a Cape Breton Mi'kmaw community has gained a brand-new transportation option. With financial assistance from the provincial government, Eskasoni Transit made its first runs on March 14. The service provides both a way for residents to get around the immediate area and scheduled runs to Sydney for shopping, medical appointments, and other needs.

The service consists of a door-to-door van service, operating by request, and a bus operating a fixed route through the community and to Membertou and Sydney. Van trips cost \$5 anywhere in Eskasoni (\$10 return trip), while the fixed route is \$10 one-way or \$20 for a return trip. The service to Sydney includes stops at the Cape Breton Regional Hospital, the Sydney Shopping Centre, and the Mayflower Mall. The bus makes two round trips daily, once in the morning, and once later in the afternoon. Total cost of the two accessible vehicles was \$170,000, with the Province contributing 65% and the reminder funded by the Band Council.



Acadian Peninsula residents will start enjoying the benefits of public transit in July, with an investment of \$1.4 million by the Regional Service Commission in buses and minivans. It's intended that service will be eventually extended to Neguac and Miramichi. (IMAGE from the Acadian Peninsula Regional Service Commission)

Public transit is also coming to northeastern New Brunswick's Acadian Peninsula this summer. After a delay caused by COVID-related difficulties with equipment delivery, the Regional Service Commission expects to launch a pilot project in July, with buses serving Caraquet, Tracadie-Sheila, Lamèque, Shippagan and

Pokemouche. There will be runs to Bathurst three times daily to enable access to the Chaleur Regional Hospital. For those not living on the main route, an on-demand van service connecting with the nearest bus stop will be available.

Service commission communications manager Cédric Landry told CBC News the pilot project will seek to iron out any initial kinks that may surface. He said they are expecting to spend about \$1.2 million to purchase four 25-passenger buses and at least five minivans, which will be paid for through a combination of federal, provincial and municipal contributions. Operating cost is estimated to be about \$765,000 annually, with one-way fares within the peninsula tentatively expected to be \$5. In addition to the Bathurst runs, the plan is to eventually extend the route to Neguac and Miramichi.

Private vehicles are currently the only transportation option for peninsula residents, says Caraquet Mayor Bernard Thériault. “The lack of alternatives is particularly difficult on the region’s elderly population and newcomers,” he told the CBC. “It’s needed, first, because a lot of people now are getting older and they may not be comfortable with driving a car. Second, we’re in a world right now where immigration of foreign workers will be needed, and we’re already there.”

Yves Bourgeois, dean of studies at the University of Moncton’s Shippagan campus, has been promoting the transit plan for years, and sees it as essential to the economic well-being of the area. “What we notice is that a lot of people – youth, new immigrants – who arrive, don’t stay. So we have a retention problem, and transportation tends to be one of those issues that if you don’t have a steady income and you don’t have the ability to drive, then it’s a losing proposition to stay here. And once municipalities realized that they were going to have a darnedest time in terms of retaining these youth and new Canadians, without these alternative forms of transportation to the private vehicle, then they started warming up in a hurry to the project.”

Meanwhile, far to the north, the stage has been set for the first-ever public transit system in Labrador’s largest population centre. A feasibility study conducted at Dalhousie University is recommending a two-route network for Happy Valley-Goose Bay. While there’s no clear answer yet as to how the estimated \$180,000 start-up cost for each route and the annual \$670,000 annual operating deficit would be funded, there’s growing community enthusiasm for the project.

The study was commissioned by the Town Council, and released in November. The core route recommended by consultants would be 28 kilometres in length, and would provide an hourly service to the town’s 8100 residents. In addition, service would be provided to North West River and the Sheshatshiu Innu First Nation every three hours over a longer 92-kilometre route.

Mayor George Andrews told CBC Radio’s *Labrador Morning* that the proposed system would open up the community to everybody. “Whether it’s a single mom who doesn’t have transportation that needs to go to work, or someone without a

vehicle that needs to go to the airport,” he said, adding that Council would be doing due diligence on the file in the near future.



This graphic from a Dalhousie University feasibility study shows the proposed 28-kilometre core route that would provide hourly transit service in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. A second 92-km route would connect with the Sheshatshiu First Nation and North West River every three hours.

Urban transit tweaks routes on road to recovery

COVID-19 is still with us, but public health authorities and the four provincial governments have seen fit to ease back on many of the restrictions enacted to help control the pandemic. As more and more people transition towards a new normal after nearly two years of working from home, and the masking guidelines on public transit switch from “mandatory” to “recommended”, the bus systems in the region’s major urban centres are adjusting routes and schedules as they ride the challenging road to recovery.

Halifax Transit introduced some large-scale service changes back in November, primarily affecting communities on the Dartmouth side, but also reaching to Halifax, Spryfield and Porters Lake/Seaforth. Most of these changes had been in the works long before the pandemic hit, and were included in plans approved by the Regional Municipal Council last spring. They are not part of the longer-term rapid transit plan unveiled in 2021, but they have the same objective – to make it easier for Haligonians to get to their destinations more quickly and conveniently, and without resorting to cars.



Halifax Transit is looking ahead to the launch of a number of initiatives in 2022, including a dedicated transitway on Spring Garden Road, a program to make using transit easier for people with special mobility needs, and additional help for newcomers in learning how to navigate the system. (SUBMITTED PHOTO)

Meanwhile, significant improvements to public transit in St. John's were launched in January, after City Council allocated funding for the so-called "Zip Network", aimed at increased frequency on multiple Metrobus routes. The upgrades are part of a commitment originally approved in 2019, but implementation was put on hold due to pandemic restrictions.

The Zip Network offers increased and consistent frequency throughout the day on routes 1, 2, 3 and 10, beginning earlier in the morning and extending later in the day, with 15-minute frequency at peak hours on weekdays and 30 minutes for most other times. Metrobus general manager Judy Powell says user feedback from the changes has been positive, but the COVID factor makes the total impact difficult to measure. For example, Zip was introduced at the same time that most university students returned to campus. She added that ridership continues to gradually improve, and by March had reached 88% of pre-pandemic levels.

Greater Moncton's Codiac Transpo is also tweaking its routes and schedules as it claws its way back to normal, says operations manager Alex Grncarovski. The system is now at 90% of pre-pandemic service hours, and is showing a steady ridership increase. With a new automated fare collection system now fully implemented, there's a wealth of new data available for planning purposes that simply wasn't there before. And, they're hearing a lot from employers who are recognizing how important availability of transit is in recruitment. All this means

more “thinking outside the box” to get the best bang for the buck as routing and expansion changes are contemplated.

Codiac Transpo is especially pleased that the Town of Riverview is showing a stronger commitment to public transit. Council has maintained funding for expanded service that was first introduced last year to help residents cope with the extended closure of one of the Petitecodiac River crossings. Riverview has a history of being very car-centric, and presents a special challenge, Mr. Grncarovski says, because it is very spread out and much more difficult to adequately serve than Moncton and Dieppe. But the coverage area has recently been extended, and residents appear to be reacting positively to more reliable and quicker service.

Meanwhile, Common Council in Saint John is showing positive signs of becoming much more transit-friendly. A recent submission to the five-year review of the Climate Change Action Plan says the Province needs to recognize the important role public transportation can have in achieving greenhouse gas emission targets, recommending incentives to residents who use public transit. The City has also written Premier Blaine Higgs urging him to buy into the federal government’s recently announced \$750-million program to help municipal transit systems rebound from two years of low ridership during the pandemic. Matching provincial funding is a condition for municipalities to get their share, and New Brunswick has shown considerable reluctance in the past toward participation in such initiatives. The premier on one occasion dismissively and infamously remarked that “Fredericton doesn’t need a subway system.”

Maritime Bus owner gets transport minister’s ear

After many months of trying to get his message through to the top about the need for a helping hand to the motorcoach industry, Mike Cassidy finally had his persistence rewarded in early March. The Maritime Bus owner won an opportunity for a face-to-face meeting with federal Transport Minister Omar Alghabra – and on his own turf, at that.

Mr. Cassidy has been working closely with politicians of all stripes while tirelessly campaigning for government support of what he often refers to as “public transit on provincial highways.” Several members of the Atlantic Liberal Caucus helped facilitate bringing Mr. Alghabra for a tour of the bus garage in downtown Halifax, while the minister was on a well-publicized swing through Atlantic Canada.

According to Infrastructure Canada, the Rural Transit Solutions Fund seeks to help Canadians living in rural and remote areas get around their communities more easily day-to-day and connect with nearby communities. The \$250-million

program was unveiled last year, but up to now Ottawa has insisted that only not-for-profit agencies qualify for the capital assistance it offers. That specifically excludes companies like Maritime Bus and DRL Coachlines in Newfoundland – despite the fact that both have been losing money by the busload over the past two years.



Transport Minister Omar Alghabra (second from left) in conversation on March 7 with owner Mike Cassidy (right) in the Maritime Bus garage on Bayne Street in Halifax. Also in the photo are Matthew Cassidy and Kings-Hants MP Kody Blois. (Image from Twitter @OmarAlghabra)

Mr. Cassidy was able to use the meeting opportunity to explain to the transport minister why this policy was unreasonable, and should be changed to allow struggling for-profit operators to acquire new equipment. While there was no ministerial commitment, he's encouraged by Mr. Alghabra's apparent awareness of the intercity bus issue, and believes that progress is being made and the dialogue will continue.

It now appears that the political will is there, he says, at least on the federal level. But because accessing funding is contingent on provincial participation, there's still more work to be done. The program requires a three-way split, with Ottawa, the province, and the applicant each investing an equal share. Therefore it's essential that the provinces come on board. For now, Mr. Cassidy says he's "laser focused" on the three Maritime provinces where he operates, but the model could easily apply in Newfoundland and Labrador, and elsewhere across Canada. There's a demonstrated need, he believes, for an interconnected motorcoach network that can sustainably carry both people and parcels from coast to coast.

-Ted Bartlett

Lessons from a Winter's Tale

-by David Brake



Enroute to Ontario from St. John's in February, David Brake reenergizes his EV courtesy of a roadside charging station at a resort in Baddeck, NS.

I did not get a driver's license until the age of 48 when moving back to Canada and living in the suburbs I was essentially forced into doing so. I have never enjoyed driving... and yet I recently returned from a solo drive - 7455km from St John's to Toronto and back in the dead of winter - seven days each way. Why? To kick off my new venture, *EVs In Real Life*. So why would a transit advocate take an interest in EVs, and why do I believe this is something Transport Action Atlantic and its members should start thinking about too?

There is no question in my mind that the core mission of TAA, fostering public transit, is far more important overall than supporting a transition from one form of car to another. And yet, especially where I live in Newfoundland and Labrador and in the more rural parts of Atlantic Canada, low population densities and long distances do mean that a majority of the public will remain car-dependent for years to come. And in many Atlantic provinces, the emissions from cars and trucks are a leading source of CO₂ emissions and pollution.

There are several good reasons why TAA members should start thinking about EV policy too, and why I find my work on EVs has some similarities with what I have already been doing in my transit advocacy work. Like transit, I find electric vehicles are either ignored here in NL or dismissed as "all right for some, but would never work here". There is also a lack of necessary infrastructure, and just as importantly, a lack of awareness of what would help (often without much extra money needing to be spent). And of course when transit infrastructure and transportation planning is being done, measures to enhance appropriate EV adoption could be included at the same time – park and ride facilities should have charging stations, for example. And there should be a lively debate over how self-driving vehicles (which are likely to be predominantly EVs) will be a help or hindrance to public transit and to city streets in general.

Many of you will have seen Elon Musk's absurd anti-transit pronouncements, or will have noted with frustration the support for EVs alongside the absence of strong measures to improve public transit in the federal 2030 Emissions Reduction Plan. But it's important to recognize that EVs are not themselves "the enemy". They should not be seen as a reason we no longer need public transit - they should instead be a way to reduce the harm caused by the vehicles that will remain once we have done all that is practical to provide good alternatives to their use. The voices of public transit users need to be heard at the table when decisions about the future of electric vehicles are being made.

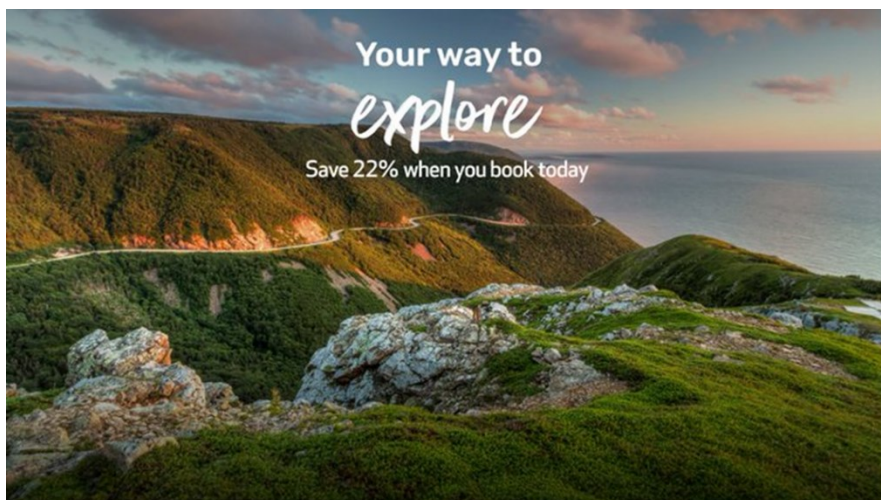
And as I continue my transit advocacy and start building my role as a "critical friend" of the EV I would welcome your thoughts and questions. Follow [EVs In Real Life](#) (and [@EVsIRL](#) on Twitter etc) and let's continue the dialogue. As the weeks go on you will find more of my experiences on my journey as well as thoughts about the practicalities and policy implications of EVs on the East Coast of Canada.

Marine

No rate increase for 2022: Marine Atlantic expects busy summer

It looks like the federal government has made a conscious decision not to rain on Newfoundland and Labrador's Come Home 2022 parade, or to add to the soaring cost of everyday essentials by authorizing a Marine Atlantic ferry rate increase this year. The Crown corporation has confirmed that its rates will remain at 2020 levels – an apparent acknowledgement that an exemption has again been granted regarding Transport Canada's requirement for 65 percent cost recovery on the constitutionally-guaranteed service. Furthermore, Marine Atlantic is even offering a bonus for early-bird travel, with significant savings on both passenger and non-commercial vehicle fares for sailings to and from Port aux Basques and Argentia in the off-peak period up to June 30.

The good news is no doubt due in part to continued pressure – both in public and behind the scenes – from those who believe the cost recovery requirement is contrary to the Terms of Union under which Newfoundland and Labrador joined Canada in 1949. Transport Action Atlantic has long been a leading advocate in this regard, and recently ramped up its campaign to have ferry rates reduced to the cost of travelling the equivalent distance by highway. TAA continues to insist that this was the intent of the latter-day Fathers of Confederation, in order to offer residents of the province a measure of protection against the added transportation costs of the Cabot Strait crossing.



**Marine Atlantic is onboard with Newfoundland and Labrador's Come Home 2022 promotion. The Crown corporation has apparently been given an exemption once again from Transport Canada's 65% cost recovery requirement, and there will be no rate increase this year. And as an extra bonus, off-peak vehicle and passenger fares are being offered for sailings to and from Port aux Basques and Argentia up to June 30th.
(Image from Twitter @MAferries)**

In a recent letter to Transport Minister Omar Alghabra, TAA director Tom Beckett expressed deep disappointment that the minister's recent mandate letter from Prime Minister Trudeau made no mention of the ferry rate issue or the unfulfilled commitment made by the now-PM when he was opposition leader in October 2015.

"We are deeply disappointed to note that the list of specific tasks assigned to you did not include initiating a process jointly with the Government of Newfoundland Labrador to ensure the constitutional Marine Atlantic ferry remains affordable for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians," he wrote. He reminded the minister that Mr. Trudeau had denounced the Conservative-imposed 65% cost recovery requirement as "unreasonable", and had committed to then-premier Paul Davis that a government under his leadership would address the issue.

"The establishment of a reasonable rate structure for Marine Atlantic will go a long way to meeting the objective set for you that 'we must continue building a strong middle class and work toward a better future where everyone has a real and fair chance at success and no one is left behind' as set out in your mandate letter," he added. TAA has shared its letter – including copies of Mr. Trudeau's written 2015 commitment – with the Prime Minister's Office, all MPs from Newfoundland and Labrador, Premier Andrew Furey and several of his ministers, as well as selected community, business and political leaders.

TAA cautions against complacency, just because there was no rate increase in 2022 for the second year in a row. In 2021 planned increases were rescinded just

days after their April 1 effective date when Ottawa relented on the 65% requirement, for reasons attributed to the pandemic. But there's no reason to believe that the federal government has had a permanent change of heart on cost recovery demands, and it's important that public pressure be maintained on politicians, who ultimately have control. Marine Atlantic's CEO reports to Parliament through Minister Alghabra.

Meanwhile, Marine Atlantic is anticipating a busy summer, and is optimistic that it will be able to once again offer its customers the full package of onboard amenities that were available pre-pandemic. The effects of pent-up demand from NL residents who are more than ready for a getaway and from homesick ex-pats who haven't seen family and friends in two years are clearly being felt – despite some lingering uncertainty as to where COVID-19 will trend in the months ahead. By early March, advance ferry bookings to date were more than double those for the same period in pre-pandemic 2019. Marine Atlantic spokesman Darrell Mercer told VOCM News that about 8000 reservations were made for the summer period between January 1 and March 7, compared with just 3300 up to the same point three years ago. Cabin accommodations on most overnight sailings between North Sydney and Port aux Basques in July are already sold out.



After two years of greatly restricted onboard amenities, Marine Atlantic is optimistic about offering a full range of dining options for its passengers this summer. (PHOTO – Marine Atlantic)

In both 2020 and 2021 there were strict limitations on the number of passengers permitted on each ferry crossing, in order to maintain social distancing. Food and beverage service was also severely restricted. But this year, the level of amenities should return to near-normal. There may be some changes in how the food

actually gets to your plate, says chief information officer Colin Tibbo, who also holds overall responsibility for the customer experience portfolio. However, he's looking forward to restoring the standard of service that has earned the company greatly improved satisfaction ratings from travellers in recent years. He does anticipate that some additional health and safety precautions will still be necessary, and some changes may be needed in the operation of the popular buffet dining room aboard *MV Atlantic Vision*. At this point, it isn't clear what masking requirements might be in effect during the peak travel period.

And while motorists taking the ferries to NL this year may have plenty of reason to grumble about how much they are paying at the gas pumps, there's one thing they don't need to worry about. The rapid escalation of petroleum prices arising from the Russian invasion of Ukraine won't have any immediate effect on Marine Atlantic's fuel surcharge. The company purchases and stores large volumes of fuel in bulk using its own tank farm at Port aux Basques, and there's a lot on hand now that was purchased last year at much lower prices. What Mr. Tibbo refers to as the fuel hedging program protects customers against unpredictable price swings and consequent frequent fuel surcharge adjustments.

-Ted Bartlett, with files from Tom Beckett

The CAT's coming back – again!

After yet another year out of service due to ongoing pandemic related travel restrictions, Bay Ferries is finally anticipating a return to service for the much maligned CAT ferry between Yarmouth and its new terminus of Bar Harbor, Maine. The company has announced a service resumption date of May 19, beginning with four crossings a week – Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Monday. The service will expand to daily crossings from June 23 to September 11, dropping to six days a week until October 10, when sailings will end for the season.

The ferry will depart from Yarmouth at 9:30am, and depart for its return trip from Bar Harbor at 3:00pm. The shorter schedule facilitated by the new US terminus, at 3 ½ hours, makes this tighter turnaround possible, and facilitates better scheduled times in each direction. Tickets for the season can be booked via the Bay Ferries website. Adult fares are \$115 one-way for walk-on passengers, or \$210 for a round trip ticket, with discounted rates for seniors and youths; children under 6 years of age are free. Vehicle fares begin at \$199 for a standard car, with increasing rates for larger vehicles and trailers, added to the initial passenger fare. Fares for smaller vehicles are lower, beginning at \$20 for a bicycle. A special "Atlantic Adventure" package is also available, which offers discounted rates for walk-on round-trip travel where both crossings are completed within 72 hours. Canadian passengers may be disappointed to realize that all fares are presented in US funds, which means that the ferry pricing will be much steeper for Canadians depending on the exchange rates.

As with any travel in this time, scheduling and the actual return to service remain contingent on the public health situation, and any cross-border travel restrictions that may exist or evolve as the year unfolds. Full refunds are available on any trips cancelled at least 24 hours before departure.

An island neglected

Campobello struggles for the basics that other Canadians enjoy

-by Justin Tinker



Canadian residents of Campobello Island have for generations accepted a level of nuance to their daily life. Being a geographical anomaly whose nearest mainland connection is the United States of America, residents have freely and daily taken the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Memorial Bridge since 1962 to reach essential goods and services in Lubec, Maine, as have the nearly 200,000 yearly visitors to the Campobello International Park bearing FDR's name.

Since the events of September 11, 2001, an era of border controls never imagined in 1962 has resulted in the increased isolation of Campobello, with numerous services that Canadians take for granted being either unavailable or greatly restricted. There is no longer a bank to support local business. The provincial government garage has been replaced with subcontracted equipment and labour due to the difficulty of servicing the island through the winter. Fishing vessels have relocated to mainland harbours to simplify operations, as even reliably receiving fuel on Campobello is not assured.

Island residents have come to accept some of these restrictions as their new way of life. They know that from time to time their mail can and will be opened by foreign authorities. Residents know that appliance repair doesn't serve Campobello, meaning their warranty is only valid if they haul their appliances to the mainland for diagnosis and repair. While many who remain begrudgingly accept these restrictions, families have been moving off Campobello at an alarming rate, leaving the island starved of the younger generation needed to build and diversify the economy in the long-term.

Believing that the 800 permanent residents deserve better than to be wholly subject to the shifting entry requirements of the United States, the Campobello Island Ferry Committee, a group of islanders past and present, have dedicated time, effort, and dollars to building the case for a year-round ferry connection between the island and mainland New Brunswick. A 2018 study by Vaughn McIntyre Consulting, commissioned by the committee, concluded that there is justification for a year-round ferry to operate on business case alone, as \$3 million annually in economic activity would be recovered from islanders shopping in Canada as opposed to the US. Further spinoff benefits to the island and region were identified in addition to the \$3-million initial calculation.

Armed with this business case data, the Council of the Rural Community of Campobello has pleaded with both the provincial and federal governments to provide the permanent year-round ferry connection to Canada that they believe they deserve. Both governments acknowledge the need, but that's as far as it goes. The solution remains elusive. Green Party Leader and Fredericton South MLA David Coon, a strong supporter of the project, says "Campobello is a valuable part of New Brunswick and needs to be treated as such." He has visited the island several times in support of the project, experiencing first-hand the difficulty that residents face in transiting to and from the mainland.

Local MLA Kathy Bockus and MP John Williamson have both affirmed their support, recognizing that Campobello requires this year-round link to make growth possible and life on the island viable in the face of 21st century border realities. MP Williamson presented a petition in the House of Commons requesting federal government support for this international quagmire that islanders face daily. Senator Jim Quinn, discussing the situation with Transport Action Atlantic, voiced his frustration with governments' inaction in one word: "Outrageous."

Campobello residents continue to push governments at all levels, while a temporary barge operation for 32 hours per week between Campobello and Deer Island – made all the more imperative by COVID border closures – proves that the need is there. This stopgap service by a vessel never intended for winter use falls far short of the reliability and frequency needed to realize the economic and long-term benefits outlined by McIntyre's study. Governments at the provincial and federal levels will have to work together to implement a solution that ends this systemic neglect of Campobello's most basic needs: the rights to freedom of movement and reliable access to goods and services other Canadians take for granted. So far they have not.

Opinion

Campobello residents stranded by government inaction

-by Mary Helen Robichaud



Roads are essential. Governments dedicate tax dollars to plan, build and maintain them while managing the bridges and ferries needed to sew together the transportation network that we all rely on. If a community is left stranded from its province and country by a washed-out road, or other obstacle, we naturally expect government action to fix it.

Cut off from New Brunswick and Canada by the sovereignty of the United States and its border, Campobello Island has been experiencing decades of rapid decline as our provincial and federal governments cling to their official excuses for doing nothing to help.

It's been easy to spot the signs a collapsing community here even before COVID-19. Our demographic freefall, which began with the hardening of the U.S. border in September 2001, has driven a steady exodus of tradespeople, teachers, nurses, professionals and young families. It has led to the closure of the island's Department of Transportation garage, the loss of our local bank branch, tourism information centre and other services.

The situation is as distressing as it is exceptional compared to the sustained growth that is occurring in the other Fundy Isles that are served by provincial ferry service. Nearby St. Andrews was New Brunswick's fastest growing community between 2016 and 2021 with a 14.7 per cent surge in population.

Anyone who sets foot on a vessel from the growing town's signature whale watching industry will get a close-up tour of our island's coastline, famous Head Harbour light station and Roosevelt Cottage. Located just 22 kilometres away by sea, the 117 km path to St. Andrews by land through two international borders is significantly farther.

But the federal government doesn't take those borders into consideration in its official position that Campobello isn't officially isolated. In a November 2020 response to a petition, former Transport Canada Minister Marc Garneau stated that according to the National Marine Policy "Campobello Island is not classified as a remote community or a constitutional obligation, as access to the island is

available year-round by land through the state of Maine using the bridge crossing in Lubec, Maine, USA.” ([Petition e-2652 - Petitions \(ourcommons.ca\)](#))

When Senator David Adams Richards pleaded for help for Campobello from Transport Canada in a committee meeting last May 2021, he was told by an Assistant Deputy Minister that ferry service to Campobello "falls within provincial jurisdiction" and that Canada's responsibility is solely for ferry service between provinces like those connecting Saint John and Digby or PEI and the Magdeleine Islands.

New Brunswick's Transportation Minister Jill Green's official position is that the province can't afford to provide ferry service. Last November she told the St. Croix Courier that "I have to take care of the entire province and the transportation network." She added "sometimes I have to make difficult decisions."

Her comment begs the question of whether Canadian politician has ever so callously weighed her duty to remedy a small community's isolation against the financial future of an entire province?

Green frequently points out that a dependable year-round ferry isn't needed because Campobello has a bridge to the United States, but according told the St. Croix Courier that on her first trip to Campobello last summer she opted for the two ferry crossings that a one-way trip requires from the Canadian mainland via Deer Island.

Still, islanders are continuing to pursue solutions while we wait for political leadership. The recent and well publicized sale of surplus island properties by the provincial government is more proof that the Campobello is a rare asset to New Brunswick. Setting aside the logistical nightmares that are subject to world events and U.S. sovereignty, there is no doubt people are drawn to this island.

The dream of owning a home or cottage here is quickly complicated by the absence of a dependable link to the mainland which makes even a weekend visit a gamble. Year-round residence on the island equates to a hardship post for anyone who wishes to pursue a career or start a business here that requires predictable access to the mainland.

Despite all the negative indicators, the fact that Campobello residents don't even need binoculars to see the provincial ferries that route near their shores on a daily basis is an enduring symbol of hope. The ferry activity that surrounds Campobello proves there are no marine or technical reasons that prevent the island from accessing a provincial ferry service. Though imposing, political obstacles are all that stand in the way of a better future for the island.

Campobello's strategic position and its bridge to the United States could present an opportunity for the entire region. If provincial ferry services, and the current surplus of existing vessels that serve our neighbours, were adjusted to include

Campobello it would open up a seamless travel corridor that connecting American tourists with the entire Fundy region, including Grand Manan, Deer Island, Saint Andrews, Saint John and the Fundy Trail Parkway, all via Campobello. It could grant the people of these communities with a new avenue into the United States and endless opportunities to connect with each other as the neighbours we have always been.

The opportunities are there, and the people of Campobello want to build a better future here and across our region. We are inviting our governments to accept our invitation to capitalize on what we have to offer.

Mary Helen Robichaud grew up on Campobello in a fishing home where community advocacy was always foremost concern. She studied at UNB in Saint John and Fredericton, and raised her family in Eastern New Brunswick and on the North Shore of Prince Edward Island. She now lives in her childhood home in Welshpool.

Air

Airlines and airports look ahead with cautious optimism



MAX is back. The once-controversial Boeing 737 MAX 8 will be the workhorse of overseas flights from Halifax Stanfield International this summer.

PHOTO-courtesy of HIAA

“Travel is getting easier again,” proclaims a recent e-mail blast from WestJet to its customers. And, the Calgary-based airline appears to be as good as its word for overseas travel this summer from Halifax Stanfield International Airport. It’s forging ahead with the restoration of seasonal direct service to four destinations across the pond, beginning on May 1. This summer there will be a daily flight

from YHZ to London Gatwick, and tri-weekly service to Glasgow and Dublin, plus four times a week to Paris.

Air Canada is also resuming its non-stop, year-round service to London Heathrow, starting with a five-times weekly operation effective April 30, increasing to daily for the peak travel period. And starting June 24 the national flag carrier will resume daily Halifax- Boston service. American Airlines, meanwhile, will start daily service to Philadelphia on June 3, and also offer once-a-week direct flights to Boston and Washington. And, two carriers will offer seasonal service to Frankfurt beginning this spring. Condor Airlines and Lufthansa subsidiary Eurowings Discover will both fly to and from YHZ three times a week.

“We are very pleased that many of the non-stop overseas and U.S. flights that were offered at Halifax Stanfield pre-pandemic will return for summer 2022,” says airport spokesperson Tiffany Chase, although she acknowledged that some routes will be offered at lesser frequencies until more travel demand returns. “We will continue working with our airline partners to bring back more routes and increase flight frequencies in the coming months and years for the benefit of our communities.”



St. John's Airport appears destined to remain “international” in name only for the foreseeable future. And, to add insult to injury, Newfoundland travellers heading overseas will have to pay extra to fly for several hours in the wrong direction before boarding their trans-Atlantic flight.

PHOTO-CBC News

Even though it's some 470 nautical miles closer to Europe than Halifax Stanfield, the picture at St. John's International Airport is not quite so rosy. Apart from flights to and from the French territory of St. Pierre and Miquelon, YYT will remain devoid of direct service on any international route. Three years ago WestJet decided to permanently centralize all its Atlantic Canada overseas flights at Halifax. Air Canada cancelled its on-again, off-again service to London

Heathrow in 2019, when the controversial Boeing MAX 8 airplanes were grounded worldwide over safety concerns. And then came the pandemic.

Air Canada told CBC News by an e-mailed statement in mid-March that there were currently no plans to add any international flying out of St. Johns, blaming the continued suspension on pandemic effects. Interestingly, all the overseas flights resuming from Halifax by both Air Canada and WestJet will use the MAX 8 aircraft, with all safety issues apparently now resolved to the satisfaction of the regulatory authorities.

Although WestJet had earlier frequently boasted that its St. John's to Dublin seasonal flight represented the most successful new route introduction in the airline's history, the operation was relocated to Halifax in 2018. So was a seasonal offering to London Gatwick that ran for two years. PR manager Morgan Bell told CBC that the decision to end those flights came down to the numbers. "That route simply wasn't performing to expectations," she said. "Frankly, there wasn't enough guests on that plane to continue to operate it, so unfortunately it was cancelled."

Ms. Bell said the decision to make Halifax the centre for European flights goes beyond the specific demands of the St. John's market, and has more to do with large scale scheduling for a complicated "hub and spoke" network of interprovincial and international flights.



All Atlantic Canada airports that were permitted to host international flights pre-pandemic are now once again allowed to do so. But like most in the region, Moncton Airport missed out on the 2022 sun destination season. PHOTO-Ted Bartlett

Pre-pandemic, Dublin-bound passengers originating at YYT weren't charged extra for the dubious privilege of flying for two hours in the wrong direction on a

small commuter aircraft before boarding their overseas flight. Now that's no longer the case. Passengers from St. John's will have to pay significantly more than those originating at YHZ to fly to both Dublin and Gatwick. A snapshot on WestJet's website for Friday, May 20, revealed a fare difference of \$118 to Dublin and \$148 to Gatwick – even though YYT is 467 nautical miles closer to Dublin than YHZ. Online research showed it is also more expensive to fly Air Canada to Heathrow from St. John's than from Halifax on the same date, but the difference in fare was just \$43.

For the second year in a row, passenger activity at Atlantic Canada's busiest airport was down roughly 75 per cent in 2021, compared to pre-pandemic levels. In a February news release, the Halifax International Airport Authority reported that 1.1 million passengers travelled through the airport in 2021, compared to 4.2 million passengers in 2019. Domestic travel reached roughly a third of 2019 levels in 2021, but US and international travel was nearly non-existent due to ongoing international travel restrictions, resulted in significant financial losses for the HIAA.

"The past two years have been the most challenging years in Halifax Stanfield's history," said airport CEO Joyce Carter. "We anticipate that it will take several more years for the airport to fully recover from the effects of COVID-19, and the recovery path will have many ups and downs along the way."

After a slow start to the year, travel began to pick up through the late summer, as travel restrictions eased, and increasing vaccination rates helped raise traveller confidence. The return of air service created a sense of optimism, and more passengers were served during the month of August than the months of January to July combined. However, much of this progress was blunted by the pre-Christmas spike in COVID-19 cases due to the Omicron variant and restored caution against non-essential travel.

The overall decrease in passenger traffic during the pandemic has had a significant financial impact on not only the airlines and airport authorities, but on other related businesses as well, including food, beverage, and retail concessions. As of early February, approximately 45 per cent of concessions in the Halifax air terminal building remained closed because of the low passenger volumes, while others had reopened on limited hours due to less frequent flight activity and ongoing labour shortages.

Other airports throughout the region reported similar bleak news, although spokespersons all seemed to agree that the worst seemed to be behind them and were looking ahead with some cautious optimism. St. John's International, Atlantic Canada's second largest in terms of passenger numbers, did not release statistics for 2021, but Greater Moncton's Roméo LeBlanc Airport – number three in the region – confirmed that its passenger arrivals and departures showed only slight improvement from the previous year.

In a media release on February 7, the airport authority acknowledged the uncertainty hanging over YQM in 2021. Even though it was the only New Brunswick airport handling passengers during the first half of the year, the facility saw only 10% of normal activity during that period. A stronger recovery over the summer months meant that YQM was able to close the year at 177,040 passengers – a slight improvement over the prior year’s total of 173,404. Still, this remains down 74% compared to pre-COVID 2019 activity levels of 674,406 passengers.

- files from Tim Hayman and Ted Bartlett

“The Little Airline that Could”

Remembering Harry Steele and EPA

Widely described as a “business titan”, legendary Newfoundland entrepreneur Harry Steele died in St. John’s at age 92 on January 28, leaving behind a wealth of memories among all who knew him. Lieutenant Commander Steele was a career navy man, whose final military posting placed him in command of CFS Gander, not far from his birthplace in the remote Newfoundland outport of Musgrave



Harry Steele acquired control of struggling Eastern Provincial Airways in 1978, turned it around in just four years, and sold it to Canadian Pacific at a handsome profit. Before exiting the transportation business completely in the late 1990s, his interests also included stakes in Halterm, Oceanex, and Clarke Transport.

PHOTO – Langan Business Report

Harbour. While in Gander, he and his business-savvy wife Catherine acquired a bankrupt hotel named, perhaps somewhat inappropriately, the Albatross. He left the Canadian Forces in 1974, at least in part because he was unhappy with the unification program which had dispensed with much long-standing naval tradition, including his uniform. By that time, the hotel was doing well, and he accepted an offer as a vice-president with Eastern Provincial Airways, then part of the Crosbie group of companies. He lasted less than a year in that job – but long enough to recognize the struggling airline as an opportunity.

The Steeles mortgaged their home and the hotel to augment the money they'd earned in some astute stock market trades, and by 1978 had acquired control of EPA. He turned it into a money maker, built a reputation for customer service and satisfaction, played politics without being openly partisan, overcame the Transport Canada bureaucracy to defeat the much-larger CP Air in a struggle to win the lucrative Halifax-Toronto route, and took on striking pilots in a bitter and very public dispute. (During the labour troubles, Harry Steele was widely quoted as referring to the strikers as "overdressed, overpaid, oversexed bus drivers" – something he always maintained he never said, but the legend persists to this day.)



Gander was home base for EPA's growing fleet of first-generation Boeing 737 jets in the 1970s. But although he maintained his residence in the Newfoundland airport town, Harry Steele recognized that Halifax made more sense as the airline's hub, once he had won the right to fly to Toronto. (PHOTO – courtesy of Gander Airport Historical Society)

He also lost some friends in Newfoundland, and Gander in particular, by moving the airline's operational hub to Halifax. It was, however, a sound economic decision in light of the new Toronto routes, and no doubt facilitated the eventual sale of EPA to CP Air at a substantial profit in 1984.

In most of his business endeavours, according to biographer Fred Langan, he did not adopt a hands-on management style, leaving the day-to-day operations to others. But EPA was an exception, right down to some pretty small details. He'd always taken a dim view of smoking, and his airline became one of the first to ban the habit entirely. But his deep dislike of tobacco was only part of the story. EPA saved a lot of money by no longer having to clean ashtrays.

The little airline that could.

What's an Eastern Provincial?

It wouldn't surprise us to discover that a few Torontonians still haven't heard about us. For them, an explanation. For everyone else, a reminder.

The airline of Atlantic Canada

We started as a mail service linking northern Labrador to Newfoundland. We developed into the "regional carrier" of Atlantic Canada and expanded into Montreal in 1968. Today, our routes stretch from St. John's, Newfoundland all the way to Toronto.

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We've built our reputation on service. Our pilots know their planes and airports inside out. Our flight attendants are attentive and courteous. Our food is superlative too! We're probably the only carrier still serving full meals on flights of less than an hour. And our dinners, between major centres, feature complimentary wine.

Fly our way

We fly non-stop from Toronto to Halifax daily at 9:20am and 7:00pm and our morning flight continues non-stop to St. John's, Newfoundland after a short stop in Halifax. We return from Halifax to Toronto daily at 7:20am and 4:55pm. If you're returning from St. John's, we depart at 3:25pm.

Your travel agent knows us. Call them and book now or call us, Eastern Provincial, at 363-4951. Outside Metro Toronto 1-800-361-0245. Recorded flight information 676-4036.



EASTERN PROVINCIAL

Fly to Atlantic Canada with the airline of Atlantic Canada

After EPA was sold, Mr. Steele was soon named to the board of CP Air, and eventually became non-executive chairman of successor company Canadian Airlines International. But his aspirations to build the new carrier into an enduring national and world-wide presence came to naught. Battered by the turbulent skies of the 1990s, Canadian ceased to exist with the arrival of the new millennium, and was acquired by and merged into Air Canada. In later years, Harry Steele's business focus was in broadcasting, but it was said he always refused on principle to fly Air Canada.

Fellow Newfoundlander and well-known commentator Rex Murphy counted Harry Steele as a "fine and full friend", who was widely admired and respected from coast to coast. He possessed an "instinctive responsiveness" to quietly helping those in need – somewhat out of character, perhaps, with the hard-nosed

businessman that some others knew. His friends included such luminaries as Paul Martin, Peter Lougheed, John Crosbie, and former US President George H. W. Bush. An especially close relationship developed with Craig Dobbin, another Newfoundland entrepreneur. The two were long-time fishing buddies, despite being poles apart in personality. And apparently there was even very little residual bitterness among the pilots in the aftermath of the EPA strike.

Catherine (Thornhill) Steele, married to "the Commander" for 68 years, survived her husband by less than six weeks. She passed away on March 6. The Albatross Hotel remains in the family.

-Ted Bartlett

Meet a Member

David Brake advocates for better transit in NE Avalon



David Brake is a big fan of both two- and four-wheeled electric vehicles. He regularly uses his e-bike to get around St. John's, which isn't exactly a cycle-friendly city.

David lived for 48 years in Toronto and in London, England, not needing or wanting a car. But circumstances drew him to Burlington, Ontario, where the difficulty he encountered living without a driver's license shocked him into action. He quickly became involved with Burlington for Accessible Sustainable Transit, and later contributed to the discussion forum UrbanToronto before moving to St John's. He's now of necessity a car driver because of the unsatisfactory state of transit in the Newfoundland capital, having two children to shuttle to far-flung parts of the city. But as head of the [Essential Transit Association](#), which advocates for better alternatives to the car

culture in the NE Avalon area, he remains hopeful that he can bring transit back into the mainstream in his adopted car-dependent province.

David is a member of the [Challenge Car Culture](#) task force of Social Justice Co-operative NL, and has served on the board of Happy City St. John's. He has also written a guide for getting around St. John's without a car. Despite the city not being exactly friendly for cycling, he regularly uses his e-bike for personal transportation. As for that car he requires to chauffeur the kids – it's fully electric for minimal carbon footprint, which gives him something else to advocate for. He's written an online [guide for the EV-curious in Newfoundland](#), and recently launched another new initiative, [EVs In Real Life](#). And to put money where his mouth is, he recently embarked on the challenge of driving an EV all the way from St. John's to Oakville ON – in dead of winter. The story of that adventure is summarized elsewhere in this issue.

Oh yes – living on The Rock, David very much misses trains!

In memoriam

Clark F. Morris

1939-2022



**Clark Morris, attending a Transport Action Atlantic board meeting in November 2015.
PHOTO – Christine Mills Garnet**

Transport Action Atlantic regrets to report the passing of a long-time public transportation advocate and TAA director. Clark Morris of Bridgetown NS died on March 10 at the Valley Regional Hospital in Kentville. He was active in our organization for nearly three decades, and served for many years as an often outspoken member of our board. He was passionate about public transportation, particularly trains.

Although health issues prompted his retirement from the board several years ago, he

remained opinionated to the end. His final published commentary appeared in the last issue of the *Bulletin*.

Clark was born on May 9, 1939, in Evanston, Illinois. He was a graduate of Rutgers (the State University of New Jersey), and worked as a computer programmer at several companies, including Westinghouse Electric and Philips Lighting, before moving to Canada in 1992. While working for Irving Oil Limited, he took part in the fix for Y2K.

He was very pleased with the welcome he found in Bridgetown, where he was a long-time member of Baptist Church. He recently received his 30-year pin for service with the Bridgetown Lions Club, where he will be remembered as the one who collected the money at the pancake breakfasts.

TAA extends sincere condolences to Clark's wife Marian Ward, and surviving members of his family. Cremation has taken place, and he will be interred at Bloomfield, New Jersey, at a later date.

The future of long-haul passenger rail?



VIA Rail is testing the waters, seeking replacements for its antiquated non-corridor fleet. (See story on page 11) Some proven designs for North American conditions already exist, and are now running on Amtrak long-haul routes. Here a Siemens Charger ALC-42 is on the point of the *Empire Builder*. “America’s Railroad” has ordered 125 of these modern low-emission diesels.



Amtrak has taken delivery of 25 of these redesigned Viewliner II sleeping cars, built by CAF USA in Elmira, New York. The order also included 25 dining cars with full galley capability, baggage cars and baggage-dorm combinations. The photo below shows the diner interior. As Amtrak owns the designs, these cars presumably could be built under licence by any qualified manufacturer. **PHOTOS – CAF USA**

