



TRANSPORT ACTION ATLANTIC

MEMBERS' UPDATE SPRING-SUMMER 2026

Seasons overlap...

These Members' Updates are meant to look back on each season to give folks a sense of what we have been doing as well as various transportation issues that have come up. But, of course, things keep happening even as the next season begins! So, while retaining our quarterly publication, we're going to refer to two seasons at a time to recognize that reality overlaps calendar dates.

Because we are mostly looking back at the previous season, we sometimes joke that this is an "Oldsletter" rather than a "Newsletter"! Nevertheless, we hope it is interesting and helpful to those of you who are less "in the loop" for public transport issues than are those of us on the Board.

Of course, we are still looking for anyone interested in resuming the Transport Action Atlantic Bulletin or some other kind of newsletter for us, and if you would like to take that on, please contact Marcus Garnet at marcusgarnet3@gmail.com or call him at 902-580-0508. In the meantime, we hope these seasonal updates are helpful, and we wish you the best as we come into the summer!

National Annual General Meeting and 50-Year Anniversary

This spring, Tim Hayman, Ben Hammer and Marcus attended the national Annual General Meeting (AGM) in Ottawa as well as a subsequent public meeting and the 50th Anniversary Dinner for Transport Action Canada (formerly Transport 2000 Canada). The events



The TAC public meeting, which was followed by an RSVP anniversary dinner.

were well attended, indicating continued interest in surface public transportation, whether local, regional or national. One of the guest speakers was former federal Transport Minister David Collenette.

New National President

At the Transport Action Canada AGM, the National Board thanked outgoing National President Terry Johnson for his years of leadership and sharing expertise in railway related topics. Our new National President is Tariq Khan, who brings a wealth of experience in organizational management. He offered to serve in a coordinative role, delegating functions and issue responses to board members who have the appropriate skills and expertise. His leadership in chairing meetings and responding to board members' initiatives is already much appreciated. At Transport Action Atlantic, we are already enjoying working with him along with others on the National Board.

Atlantic Regional Board and Annual General Meeting

Our own Atlantic President, Tim Hayman, chaired our biannual board meeting and Regional AGM online this past June. The Atlantic Board welcomed Ben Hammer as a new director. He is also recently joined the National Board. In addition to a strong interest in national passenger rail, his background is in pedestrian and bike infrastructure advocacy across Nova Scotia. He is adept at transportation computer modelling, and he has worked with the Air Traffic Controllers Union on measuring avoidable emissions from flight delays.

TAA names two John Pearce Award winners

Transport Action Atlantic has simultaneously named the winners of its John Pearce Award for both 2024 and 2025. The decision was made by the Board of Directors and announced at the virtual Annual General Meeting held on June 6. The honour is normally conferred annually.

The John Pearce Award was created by TAA to commemorate the association's long-time former and founding president, who devoted more than 40 years to public transportation advocacy. It is awarded annually to an individual or group to recognize an outstanding contribution, consistent with Mr. Pearce's life-long passion.

Receiving the 2024 honour was Howard Easton of Moncton, a long-time passenger rail advocate and technical advisor to TAA. The 2025 award goes to Charlene Sharpe, recently retired head of Fredericton Transit, now residing in the HRM.



Howard Easton 2024

In 2024 Howard Easton marked the 32nd anniversary of his retirement from a railroading career that spanned five decades. But he showed no sign of slowing down, retaining the same boundless enthusiasm for passenger rail that he held as a child in the 1930s and as a student in the forties. It was in his genes, growing up in a railway family, and few would have been surprised that his first job on graduation from university was as a transportation economist with Canadian National Railways.

Far from being your typical bean counter, Howard always maintained a keen appreciation of train travel, and it was by happy coincidence years later that he was appointed CN's general manager of

passenger services -- a role in which he oversaw the transition of the company's passenger operations to the new Crown corporation VIA Rail Canada over a period of nearly a decade.

During that process events didn't always unfold the way Howard would have liked, and he well remembers many ill-founded decisions that VIA is still paying the price for today. Interestingly, his next assignment was as president and general manager of Terra Transport, CN's Newfoundland operation. There his responsibilities included the Roadcruiser bus operation that had replaced the legendary "Newfie Bullet" train in 1969. At one point, Roadcruiser was on track to become part of VIA -- but it never happened.

Howard eventually retired as assistant vice-president of CN's Atlantic Region, but the railway never really left him. Clearly, he was a bit of an outlier in the upper echelon of company management, which made him a natural fit for Transport Action Atlantic. His counsel to the TAA board of directors over the years has been invaluable, and so he has been nominated as recipient of the John Pearce Award for 2024.

Charlene Sharpe 2025

In 2025 Charlene Sharpe decided for family reasons to step aside from a highly successful transportation career, and relocate to Nova Scotia. She had headed Fredericton Transit for not quite four years, but during that time the agency underwent remarkable transformative change. The improvements and innovation she implemented during her brief tenure in the

driver's seat combined to produce a 50 percent growth in ridership from pre-COVID levels. Customers paid \$1.6 million of one-way fares in 2024.



In common with many a proud Maritimer, Charlene had heeded the call to come east and get closer to her roots. In February 2022 she chose to leave her promising mid-management position at the Toronto Transit Commission to become manager of transit and parking services with the City of Fredericton. Before her tenure

at the TTC she had held positions of increasing responsibility in several smaller Ontario cities. It must have been a bit of a culture shock and quite the adjustment to move from Canada's largest urban network to a struggling system in a small New Brunswick city – a system that few were satisfied with and that was not meeting the public need.

Charlene clearly wielded considerable influence at City Hall, and she was able to get a level of support from Council that had not previously been evident. The purchase of several new buses was approved, four of which were hybrid electric. While some older vehicles were retired, total fleet size grew from 28 to 31. Routes were adjusted and frequencies were increased to half-hourly on the busiest and high-growth routes. The long-awaited Sunday service became a reality in June of 2024. Technological changes introduced or initiated on her watch included electronic tracking for customer information, onboard audio and visual announcements, and capability for debit or credit card payment of fares. There was also the introduction of on-demand service using an app on some low-density routes.

For her successful modernization efforts at Fredericton Transit, bringing greatly improved customer service, as well as the introduction of data collection measures that will enable better planning of future improvements, Charlene Sharpe has been nominated as recipient of the John Pearce Award for 2025.

VIA Rail awards contract for new Long Distance Locomotives



A rendering of the new Stadler locomotives that will be built for VIA Rail. Image courtesy of Stadler.

On July 29, the federal government and VIA Rail announced a significant milestone in the renewal of the fleet that supports VIA Rail's long distance, regional and remote (LDRR) services, with an order for 45 new locomotives. This order was awarded to Swiss manufacturer Stadler, a company with extensive experience in European and international locomotive production and a growing footprint in the North American market. The first locomotives will be assembled at a Stadler facility in Spain, and then a new assembly factory will be constructed in Montreal to allow for the final assembly of up to 36 of the locomotives. This means that some element of domestic passenger locomotive manufacturing will be returning to Canada for the first time in many years.

The new locomotives, set to replace the aging but venerable F40 locomotive fleet, will be a novel hybrid diesel and battery design, with batteries (recharged from the diesel engine and dynamic braking) allowing for more efficient operation, lower emissions, and less wear on the prime mover. Importantly, these batteries should also provide a backup power source in the case of emergency engine failures, something that will be welcome on many of the remote services where these locomotives will operate. Stadler has been producing a variety of hybrid locomotive designs for European customers, and will build on that experience with this new North American design.

Stadler has experience with manufacturing locomotives for cold climates and extreme environments, and these locomotives will need to be capable of dealing with the harsh and varying climate conditions that VIA operates through on their services across the country. The first locomotive is planned for delivery as early as 2028, with a testing period ahead of entry into service and the start of domestic assembly. It is imperative that this testing capture the full range of operating conditions to ensure that the continued production run addresses any issues early, and avoids the many headaches encountered with the new Siemens equipment in the Quebec City-Windsor Corridor.

Transport Action Atlantic has been actively campaigning for years to secure government support for VIA's badly needed LDRR fleet replacement, and we welcomed both the announcement of government funding in 2024 that allowed the procurement to begin and the launch of the formal Request for Qualifications in November of that year. We are thrilled to see this order come to fruition, and we are also pleased to see that the base order has increased from 42 to 45 units. We also welcome the return of Canadian manufacturing and the inclusion of a respected European equipment builder.

The next step will of course be the conclusion of the procurement for the even more badly needed LDRR passenger car fleet renewal. At Wednesday's press conference, both the Transport Minister and the CEO of VIA Rail indicated that this announcement would follow "soon", and we look forward to seeing the award of that contract. With the procurement deliberately split into two separate parts, we could well see a different manufacturer for the rolling stock. We will be particularly keen to see the order quantities of the various car types and how this compares to the existing fleet that covers today's service levels. A key part of our advocacy for improved passenger service in Atlantic Canada is the ongoing need to restore a suitable daily level of service on the Ocean, and we hope that the new fleet order will provide sufficient equipment to allow VIA to remedy the short-sighted cuts of over a decade ago.

Sackville, New Brunswick Station Revival



Sackville's station looked forlorn in winter 2025 and offered no indoor waiting facilities, but better times are coming! (photo by Marcus Garnet)

According to the *New Wark Times*, an alternative newspaper based in Sackville, New Brunswick, that town's vacant station building will be hosting a tenant at last: Gaspereau Press, a book publishing company that focuses on quality physical volumes by authors who care about cultural heritage, justice and community. The station will house their relocated printshop, offices and a small retail area, together with washrooms and indoor seating for train passengers as well as space that can be leased to some other business.

<https://warktimes.com/2026/07/14/gaspereau-press-moving-into-sackville-train-station-with-plans-to-open-its-doors-to-the-public/>

Via's Ocean in Another Collision

As if last February's collision with encroaching truck trailers was not enough, on Sunday, July 12, VIA #15 was stopped near Windsor Junction for several hours after hitting a car at around noon. Thankfully there were no injuries, but the lengthy delay arose from the investigation, cleanup, and waiting for replacement engineers. Separately from this incident, the Ocean has struggled with on time performance through July and August, as heat-related speed restrictions and track work have wreaked havoc on the schedule.

Nova Scotia Interest in Potential Regional Transit Operators

The Province of Nova Scotia "is exploring opportunities for an inter-municipal transit service to better connect rural communities with Halifax Regional Municipality (HRM) and address transportation affordability. A request for information was issued on April 15, to

gauge service provider interest and ability to operate transit services between rural communities within 100 kilometres of Halifax and key destinations in HRM. It would offer regular, dependable schedules and routes suitable for daily commuting.” For more details, see <https://news.novascotia.ca/en/2026/04/15/province-seeks-partner-inter-municipal-transit-service>

Electric Water Taxis for Halifax

A new harbour taxi service started in June, using electric vessels offering charters, tours and point-to-point trips in Halifax Harbour. The firm has several electric boats of different sizes, and the website includes a button for anyone interested in commuting. Presumably, if enough people indicate compatible origins, destinations and times, the company would consider operating a regular commuter service. You can call for any type of bookings at **(902) 500-9004**. The firm is also hiring for several positions. The company’s website is <https://halifax.flyteboat.com/> .

New Digby Ferry Terminal Planning

According to *Daily Commercial News*, the firm Arcadis has been awarded a design contract by Public Services and Procurement Canada and Transport Canada for a new Digby Ferry Terminal.

A new, two-storey building will replace the two existing buildings, and will include ticketing, waiting and arrival zones, public bathrooms and administration services, including communications facilities and staff amenities. For more details, see <https://canada.constructconnect.com/dcn/news/government/2026/07/arcadis-selected-to-design-replacement-ferry-terminal-in-digby-n-s>

Cape Breton Railway in the National Press

A Canadian Press article (June 9, 2026) was picked up by several newspapers including the Toronto Star and the Globe and Mail, noting that “many in the business community are pushing for a revival, hoping that shifting trade patterns — and an elusive major customer — can make a compelling business case. Alberta oil, Saskatchewan potash and local

mining products have all been pitched for the railway, but no business proposal has so far come forward.”¹

Understandably, neither the Province of Nova Scotia nor CN are interested in reviving this strategic rail line in the absence of a business case, but at least its plight and potential are drawing some national media attention.



Inter-Terminal Rail Solution for Halifax

A related project: rebuilding the Tower Road bridge over the Halifax railway cut in the approach to the South End docks. (Photo by Marcus Garnet, taken from the train)

According to RailPrime of *Progressive Railroading*,² this Halifax Port Authority project was financially supported by a \$24 million grant from Transport Canada’s National Trade Corridors

Fund and involves PSA Halifax Limited Partnership that operates both container terminals. The project was launched in 2019, for a total cost of \$105 million.

Two of three portions of work have now been completed: a new maintenance facility at the Atlantic Hub (formerly Halterm) terminal and a new truck marshalling yard at the Fairview Cove terminal. Two new rail-mounted gantry cranes have already been installed at the Atlantic Hub terminal.

The last component will be to redesign and expand the railway yard at the Atlantic Hub terminal, including 14,000 feet of track within the existing terminal. CN also plans upgrades at its nearby Pace (formerly Rockingham) Yard. The new name honours former Chairman Robert Pace.

¹ Devin Stevens, The Canadian Press, ‘Cape Breton business leaders dream of reviving dormant rail line. Can the math work?’ *The Star*, Updated June 9, 2026 at 4:37 p.m. https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/nova-scotia/cape-breton-business-leaders-dream-of-reviving-dormant-rail-line-can-the-math-work/article_6a91d32a-0ba8-583c-aa6d-2508591b5480.html

² Subscriptions available at <https://www.progressiverailroading.com/news/#>

Hopefully by early 2028, a dedicated rail shuttle will start moving containers between the Atlantic Hub and Fairview Cove terminals. The aim is to reduce congestion and cut down on the number of container trucks moving through downtown.

Feds announce \$350 million in Marine Atlantic terminal upgrades – but no reduced commercial vehicle rates yet

Substantial infrastructure upgrades are coming to all three Marine Atlantic ferry terminals. A series of announcements in late June totalled \$350 million in Government of Canada investments, for Port aux Basques, Argentia and North Sydney.

The federal money is for upgrades to better accommodate larger vessels and enable faster and more efficient loading and off-loading of the ferries.

A large portion of funding will be used to remove Vardy's Island – a long-standing navigational hazard in Port aux Basques harbour. The two Newfoundland ports will see \$270 million of the total expenditure.



Fisheries Minister Joanne Thompson is all smiles at an infrastructure announcement at the Argentia ferry terminal on June 25, 2026, but Newfoundland's cabinet representative has yet to explain why her home province was excluded from the 50% commercial vehicle rate reduction on federal-funded services.

Meanwhile, there's been no progress on Ottawa's part toward fulfilling the promised reduction in commercial rates on the Newfoundland ferry service. While the announcement last July included 50% reductions in rates for both passenger and commercial vehicles for the Confederation Bridge and other federal-supported ferries,

Marine Atlantic got the rate cuts only for passengers and their vehicles. Commercial truckers continued to pay full fare, which puts Newfoundland and Labrador at a disadvantage versus the Maritime Provinces and the Magdalen Islands.

In TAA's view this is highly discriminatory, and flies in the face of the Prime Minister's announced intention of making life more affordable for Canadians and our exports more competitive. There's more to come on this story!

Lower fares send Marine Atlantic traffic surging – Argentia season extended by two weeks



Marine Atlantic's MV Ala'suinu will run to and from Argentia for two additional weeks this fall, extending the operating season until October 3.

Marine Atlantic is experiencing what's said to be record growth in passenger traffic in 2026. The huge increase is largely attributed to the Government of Canada's action to encourage domestic travel by slashing rates for both passengers and their vehicles by 50%. In July the company announced a two-week extension to this year's Argentia operating season, adding six round trips to the schedule.

Colin Tibbo, Marine Atlantic's Vice-President of Service and Innovation, tells TAA that the seasonal Argentia service is proving to be exceptionally popular, and the company has identified this as an area of strong potential growth. The booking surge began very soon after the fare concessions were announced in the late summer of 2025. Virtually all sleeping accommodation for this year aboard MV *Ala'suinu*, which serves the Argentia run

three times a week in each direction, was sold out before Christmas. By January there wasn't even space on wait-lists for passengers wanting cabins.

Mr Tibbo added that on most days in July and August demand was so heavy there was no vehicle space available for booking on either the *Argentia* or *Port aux Basques* routes. Furthermore, the company had over 6000 reservations for 2027 on file by mid-June of this year.

Meanwhile, Marine Atlantic will soon be taking delivery of another vessel for its fleet. A sister ship to the former *Atlantic Vision*, *MV Ile Rouge* was acquired on a five-year charter, with the original intention being to retire the aging and much smaller *Leif Ericson*. However, the rapid traffic growth has prompted the company to review its plans, with options being explored to increase capacity using a different fleet configuration. One possibility is keeping the *Ericson* to carry commercial traffic during the 2027 peak season. Mr. Tibbo noted that one of the challenges with a potential fleet expansion is securing qualified crew.

The *Ile Rouge* was named to recognize the francophone community of Newfoundland and Labrador. The ship has a generous 1891 lane-metres of deck space – almost 25% more than the *Ericson*. It can accommodate over 900 passengers, and has 150 cabins. It's expected the newly-acquired vessel will operate on both the *Argentia* and *Port aux Basques* routes in 2027.



MV Ile Rouge, shown here newly repainted in Marine Atlantic colours during refit in Greece, will join the company's fleet this fall, with delivery in Canada now expected sometime in September.

Meanwhile in Quebec...



Newfoundland's "other" ferry: this service links the north end of the island to Blanc-Sablon on Quebec's north shore, from which one can drive to Labrador. (published with permission from source)

The general situation of public transport in Québec has shifted somewhat with retirement of the populist premier Legault with his preference for prestige road-based projects. His successor, Christine Fréchette cut short a long-standing stalemate with the Federal Government over the signing of an agreement for funding of public transport, releasing substantial funds in support of transit. This should benefit the Québec tramway and the Montréal Blue line Métro extension project. There is no word yet on the fate of the Gatineau tramway project or the Montréal East End tramway proposal. Mme. Fréchette has said her support for the highway Third Link across the St. Lawrence River at Quebec City is conditional on it being a private sector project.

Regarding the Alto high speed rail proposal, consideration is being given to shifting the route on the approach to Montréal run further northward to take advantage of federally-owned airport lands in the Mirabel area, which has been a hot spot of protest over potential expropriations. In general, public support for Alto is high in Québec.

The Réseau Express Montreal (REM) branch to l'Anse-a-l'Orme (near Ste-Anne-de-Bellevue) parallel to Highway 40 opened this spring. The branch to the Trudeau International Airport at Dorval is still pending.

A new, second airport for Montreal has opened at St-Hubert, but will not be served by the REM system, nor by the nearby St-Hilaire Exo commuter rail line, as the air terminal is

located at the opposite end of the airport. The new facility will serve as many as 40 daily flights, notably including many Porter services.

In Via Rail news, CAD in Lachine has been awarded the contract to refurbish the Manor and Château stainless steel sleeping cars.

An informed source reports that VIA is evaluating the feasibility of an earlier revival of the Gaspésie train service on an interim shorter, daytime route originating in Quebec City and extending into the Gaspé Peninsula as far as track and bridge rebuilding has already been done. The remaining third of the route must await rebuilding until the Quebec government funding moratorium expires.

Volunteer opportunities

As always, if you would like to write an article or take a photo for us to publish, please contact us at christinemillsgarnet@gmail.com or Transport Action Atlantic, P.O. Box 268, Dartmouth NS B2Y 3Y3.

If you would be interested in becoming our Editor for this or an improved newsletter, please let us know! This volunteer opportunity would involve compiling transportation news and opinions, as well as photos, into an attractive, readable format for both online and paper circulation. Content could be provided by others as well as the editor, and of course it would be important to respect copyright for any articles and pictures taken from elsewhere.

Beyond that specific role, we are always looking for interested volunteers to help drive our advocacy forward. If you would like to be more involved or have ideas for how we could improve what we are doing, please reach out.

Compiled by Marcus Garnet and Tim Hayman with help from Harry Gow, Ted Bartlett and cited media sources.