



Ontario Report

Transport Action Ontario



Next High Performance Rail system to open in North America: All Aboard Florida, Miami-West Palm Beach-Orlando. Drawing of the Ft.Lauderdale station, T-shaped with distinctive V-columns and glassed-in spaces, limited to two tracks centre platform. Story on Page 4. (Rendering: AAF)

In This Issue:

- > Greg Gormick takes a critical look at VIA's plan for the Montreal-Ottawa-Toronto triangle; first of a two-part series (pp. 1, 2-3)
- > High performance rail (HPR), now being implemented across the U.S., is explained (p. 4)
- > Update on All Aboard Florida, the newest U.S. example of high performance rail (pp. 4-5)
- > Update on California's high speed rail project (p. 5-6)

Op-ed analysis

VIA's HFR scheme: good idea, bad route, lots of unanswered questions

by Greg Gormick

What's so wrong with VIA's proposal to expand its track ownership in the Quebec-Windsor Corridor in order to launch what it describes as high-frequency rail (HFR) service?

As a concept, there's absolutely nothing wrong with it. Giving VIA's trains a route of their own on which to gallop at 110 mph without freight interference and without investing further in privately-owned railway infrastructure sounds ideal. It's especially compelling when you face the fact that VIA's masters are not likely

...continued on PAGE 2

FROM THE PRESIDENT

- PETER MIASEK



Ontario good news stories as 2015 draws to a close

As I write this in the last days of December, I am reflecting on the large number of "interesting" events that have occurred recently relating to Ontario transportation. While the ancient Chinese curse warned of "interesting times," implying they are negative, most of these occurrences have been largely positive. They make for a hopeful 2016. Let me summarize some of the recent interesting events:

Progress on climate change: With the Paris climate change conference now behind us, attention now turns to a new Canadian strategy. Prime Minister Trudeau will be convening a First

Ministers meeting within 90 days. Presumably the national strategy will be built on provincial strategies.

Ontario announced more details of its proposed Cap and Trade system in late November. It will cover most sources of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, including petroleum and natural gas distributors. The initial cap will be set at the best estimate of 2017 emissions and will decline at a rate to achieve the Province's 2020 emission target (15% below 1990 level). Companies can purchase emission allowances from the government through auction, with government revenue being reinvested in GHG emission reduction. As transportation is the largest emission

sector, presumably a significant amount of the revenue will be directed to this sector, e.g. public transit or support for low/zero emission vehicles.

In December, Premier Wynne signed a Memo of Understanding between Manitoba, Quebec and Ontario to permit carbon trading across their respective systems under the Western Climate Initiative (includes California). Full details of the Ontario system will be released in early 2016.

Crombie report: Coordinated review of Ontario land use plans: In December, the Crombie advisory panel released its recommendations on how to amend and improve the Growth Plan for the

...continued on PAGE 2

This Issue's Table of Contents

- * VIA Rail HFR plan: Op-ed analysis by Greg Gormick.....Pages 1, 2 and 3
- * What is high performance rail (HPR)?.....Page 4
- * U.S.A. news: HPR in Florida; HSR in California;Pages 4, 5 and 6
- * GTA freight railway bypass proposal: the "missing link"Page 7
- * Editorial: resolving the transit plan mess in Toronto.....Pages 7 and 8
- * Save VIA on YouTube; TAO contact/membership information.....Page 8

FROM THE PRESIDENT

...continued from PAGE 1

Golden Horseshoe, the Greenbelt Plan, the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Plan, and the Niagara Escarpment Plan. It's a long report with 87 recommendations. Key among these are directing more development to existing urban areas through intensification and less to new greenfield areas, increasing the density of housing and jobs in new developments, establishing stronger criteria to control settlement area expansion, requiring greater integration of infrastructure planning with land use planning, increasing focused investment in transit and increasing efforts on transportation demand management.

The Provincial website states that the Province will review the advisory panel's recommendations and seek public input on any proposed amendments to the various planning acts in early 2016.

Suspension of GTA-West highway plan:

On December 16, the Province announced the suspension of this \$4 billion highway corridor project, which was slated to be an expressway of up to 6 lanes that would connect Vaughan and Milton. This was a surprise, as the project was deep into stage 2 of the Environmental Assessment (detailed route assessment) and the Province had committed to identifying a preferred route by the end of this year. The ministry said it would be reviewing the project over the next few months. The reasons cited were "emerging technologies and the sharing economy" (presumably autonomous vehicles and Uber), the need for natural heritage protection, including the Greenbelt, and the need to live up to climate change commitments.

TAO has been heavily involved with this project and provided three submissions expressing concern (on our website). On December 29, the *Toronto Star* came out with an editorial supporting the suspension. So things are looking promising. To be continued...

Introduction of HOT lanes: After first announcing high occupancy toll (HOT) lanes in the 2013 Budget, the Province finally announced more details in December. A four-year HOT lane pilot test will commence in the summer of 2016 on a 16 km stretch of the QEW in Oakville and Burlington. This stretch of road was selected because it has excess capacity in the current HOV lane. Details are yet to be announced, but will likely involve monthly permits that can be purchased for single-occupant vehicles. The first electronic HOT lane tolls will be installed in 2016 on a new stretch of Highway 427 between Rutherford Rd. and Highway 409.

HOT lanes are controversial. Some people decry them as a way for the rich to buy their way out of congestion ("Lexus Lanes"). However, research in the USA has shown that HOT lanes are popular with all sectors of the driving public as they offer a choice. TAO has no position on HOT lanes, but does support new revenue tools for transit, including road pricing.

Storm clouds grow for scarborough subway extension (SSE):

As readers know, despite the negative opinion of virtually every transit expert, including TAO, Toronto Mayor Tory continues to insist that this subway extension makes sense and should proceed. However, storm clouds continue to gather. Toronto's Chief Planner has essentially disavowed the ridership numbers that her department developed back in 2013 that justified a subway. Rumours abound that new ridership modeling, due in early 2016, will show that Tory's other signature project, Smart Track, will significantly steal ridership from the SSE. Lastly, the Building Industry and Land Development Association (BILD) has launched an appeal to the OMB claiming that the planning justification for the subway extension is flawed and ridership numbers are exaggerated.

TAO has long opposed the SSE. We have been advocating for "Smart Spur" – a new branch line for GO EMU trains that would run from the existing

Stouffville corridor to Scarborough City Centre and Malvern. To be continued...

Official end of BBTCA expansion project:

Although federal Transport Minister Garneau had informally announced in November, via Twitter, that the Federal Government would not reopen the tripartite agreement to enable Toronto Island airport expansion and introduction of jets, there was still much speculation that Ports Toronto (PoTo) would continue the Environmental Assessment and related studies and press the expansion case with Toronto City Council. The final word came in an announcement on December 23 that PoTo was not proceeding with further study and the EA would not be finished. A great Christmas present for the many groups that have been opposed to this project!

Best wishes for 2016. ■ Peter Miasek

VIA's HFR scheme: good idea, bad route, many questions

...continued from PAGE 1

to fund a multi-billion-dollar electrified high-speed rail (HSR) plan. We've been down that pathway too many times and the results are always negative.

So, as a means of decreasing its end-to-end running times and increasing both frequency and on-time performance in its Montreal-Ottawa-Toronto core market, VIA's corporate view is that it needs to get off CN's busy Kingston Subdivision and add substantially to the limited amount of track it already owns at a more reasonable cost than HSR.

Following the first tentative announcement of its alternate HFR plan in late 2014, VIA began presenting it to business groups and the media throughout the Quebec-Windsor Corridor, often tying it to other service improvements the corporation says it is considering. But one rather important item has been consistently missing from these presentations: the route's details. It has been presented without any geographic specifics, relying on unsubstantiated statements about the

existence of abandoned or dormant rail corridors that can be easily turned into freight-free VIA track segments. When asked where these potential passenger-only routes are, VIA's response has been silence.

However, sources associated with the HFR project have been more forthcoming. The picture they've painted is, to put it mildly, questionable.

Westbound from Montreal Central Station, the proposed HFR route holds no surprises and no need for concern. VIA would continue to use CN's Montreal and Kingston subdivisions to reach the eastern end of its own ex-CN track just north of Coteau, Quebec. With upgrading, VIA's former CN Alexandria, Beachburg and Smiths Falls subdivisions would provide the HFR route as far as Ottawa and Smiths Falls. It's at this point that the whole idea starts to go wonky.

Branching off the current Ottawa-Brockville-Toronto route, VIA's HFR trains would use a new track connection to reach CP's Montreal-Toronto freight main line and then parallel it for 15.5 miles to Glen Tay. Here, the new VIA line would veer off on the abandoned portion of the CP Havelock Subdivision, with the 92 miles of missing track rebuilt on what is now a segment of the Trans-Canada Trail. From Havelock west, VIA's tracks would be on CP freight rights-of-way through Peterborough to Leaside, then down the Don Valley to Union Station over the dormant ex-CP line owned by Metrolinx.

In total, the HFR project would consist of 366 route miles, of which more than 200 miles would be new to VIA and 107 miles would be track previously purchased from CN. Excluding motive power and rolling stock, VIA originally pegged the cost at \$2 billion, which it expects private-sector investors to fund. This funding is predicated on VIA's assertion that the HFR service would be profitable enough to deliver a double-digit return on investment for its private-sector partners.

VIA maintains this plan would attract about eight million passengers

annually, which is more than three times the ridership handled in 2014 on the individual routes that form the Montreal-Ottawa-Toronto triangle. The expectation of a ridership increase of this magnitude is highly optimistic, especially given the level of air, bus and automotive competition throughout the Quebec-Windsor Corridor.

As for the HFR trainsets, VIA estimates these would cost \$1 billion and would be publicly funded. They would only be ordered after the dedicated track plan is locked down because, according to VIA, the trains have to be "fitted" carefully to the new infrastructure. This ignores the fact that Amtrak already operates several conventional, diesel-hauled trains at 110 mph and that VIA's LRC rolling stock is, in fact, designed for 125-mph service.

The concept of giving VIA more freight-free infrastructure is undeniably attractive, but what has so far been put on the table doesn't make a compelling case for such a momentous and expensive leap. At the very least, some questions need to be asked and answered before VIA's bandwagon rolls any further. The most basic one is whether service would continue to be provided to Kingston, Belleville and other high-volume points on the CN-owned lakeshore route, which received more than \$400 million in upgrading under VIA's 2007-2012 Capital Investment Project.

Stung by the criticism of the HFR proposal that I ventured in *The VIA I-4-10 Plan*, VIA privately responded by saying I misunderstood their plan. The key point made was that the HFR service through Peterborough would generate enough profit to cross-subsidize the continuation of "some" service on the lakeshore. That sounds nice, but since no data has been produced to substantiate this claim, it's difficult to accept.

Equally perplexing have been recent press reports indicating the HFR scheme has morphed from a

110-mph diesel-powered service to an electrified 125-mph operation, boosting the cost to \$4 billion. A change this fundamental only undermines the plan's credibility further.

While it would be nice to be able to endorse VIA's HFR proposal on the basis of its worthy objective, its shifting and unsubstantiated details make it too reminiscent of other long-term dream schemes the corporation has announced and never been able to deliver. By failing to address fiscal, political and operational realities of their time, each of those previous plans tied up funding and managerial attention that would have been better applied to more practical plans that would have improved service, ridership and revenue within a reasonable time span.

Nonetheless, VIA's HFR proposal should not be dismissed out of hand. At its core, the basic concept of separating passenger and freight traffic to the maximum extent possible is valid; it's the route and aspects of the plan's implementation that are flawed.

Furthermore, even though what VIA has offered up is not endorsable in its current state, the corporation deserves some credit for keeping the issue of improved rail passenger service in the news for several months. That can only assist in triggering the public debate that needs to occur if VIA is going to receive the serious attention it requires from the new government.

Rather than just dismissing VIA's proposal, it will be more productive if we ask if there are steps that can be taken to incrementally convert it into a realistic and affordable plan to transform the Quebec-Windsor Corridor into a high-performance travel option. Does the basic dedicated track concept have a chance of succeeding in another form?

Those are questions to be explored in my next column.

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What is high performance rail (HPR)?

HPR is frequent and fast intercity rail service that maximizes the use of existing routes and infrastructure. While offered as a high-quality service in a corridor between cities, its full success also depends on the delivery of a multimodal network that integrates the improved rail services with urban transit and regional bus lines to provide the "first and last mile" portions of a traveler's journey.

As a general rule, HPR trains have top speeds in the range of 128 to 200 kph (80 to 125 mph), with a frequency of at least six trains in each direction and rising to hourly service or better.

HPR should not be thought of as second-rate compared to high-speed rail (HSR). Rather, a fully mature passenger rail system requires both HSR and HPR to be a successful alternative to driving and flying throughout a region. In most cases overseas, HPR preceded the building of HSR.

In North America, the almost complete demise of passenger rail following World War II has led to political and economic interests that have blocked revitalization and expansion of passenger rail, with HSR being a particular target because of its high costs and civil engineering requirements.

Under the Obama administration in the U.S., HPR has made significant progress. This can be traced back to Penn Central's January 1969 launch of Metroliner service on the Northeast Corridor (NEC) between New York City and Washington, DC. In 2000, the Metroliners were superceded by Amtrak's Acela service between Boston, New York and Washington. Amtrak's Keystone service also fits the HPR category, with 10 New York-Philadelphia-Harrisburg roundtrips.

In terms of frequency, but not necessarily top speed, the emerging HPR operations in the U.S. are the extension of Amtrak's Northeast

Regional service south to Richmond and other points in eastern Virginia (8 roundtrips), the New York-Albany/Rensselaer portion of the Empire Corridor (11 roundtrips), and both the Capitol Corridor and Pacific Surfliner services in California which offer close to hourly service over their most popular route segments.

As well, Amtrak's Hiawatha Service between Chicago and Milwaukee provides seven roundtrips daily, although only at a maximum of 79 mph. Amtrak also has stretches of 110-mph track on its Chicago-St. Louis and Chicago-Detroit routes, but not with many frequencies. Both of these corridors are being upgraded now to provide more frequencies and longer stretches of 110-mph operation.

In Canada, VIA operates eight weekday Toronto-Ottawa roundtrips and six on both the Toronto-Montreal and Montreal-Ottawa runs, with stretches of 160 kph running on all three. Service on these routes has been unreliable with very frequent lateness due to freight interference on the CN-owned track segments. ■

U.S. News

HIGH PERFORMANCE RAIL

All Aboard Florida update

All Aboard Florida (AAF) is a high performance rail passenger project of the Florida East Coast (FEC) railroad. The railway will upgrade its track for up to 110 mph (176 kph) running between Miami, Ft. Lauderdale, West Palm Beach, and Cocoa, with new track to be built from there to the Orlando International Airport, this new track allowing a 125 mph (200 kph) top speed. The property for the 22 miles (35 km) of new track along the BeachLine Expressway was acquired in July of 2013. All environmental requirements have been met by AAF, except for the new track

alignment Cocoa-Orlando, with FRA permission pending on this segment.

November 10, AAF unveiled its new brand name of "Brightline" for the higher speed service. There will be 16 trains a day (hourly) in each direction making the 240 mile trip in less than three hours end to end. The current estimated cost of the project is \$3 billion. Except for the Cocoa-Orlando alignment, AAF uses FEC right-of-way requiring no new land acquisition.

Strong NIMBY opposition to AAF developed along the Treasure Coast portion of its route, but opponents were unable to stop the project. AAF cleared a final major hurdle when, on August 4, 2015, the Florida Development Finance Corporation (FDFC) approved the railroad's request to issue \$1.75 billion in lower interest tax-exempt private activity bonds (PABs). AAF claims that the Brightline project does not require government funding. But the bond tax exemption means an indirect subsidy by the federal government. The PABs will replace a previous \$405 million short-term bond issued at a 12% interest rate return.

As a result of the FDFC decision, opponents took the FDFC to court but failed in their attempt to stop the sale of PABs. Court documents revealed that AAF is planning a range of fares from a low of \$11 for a one-way coach fare Miami-Ft. Lauderdale, to a high of \$143 for a one-way business class fare Miami-Orlando. A study for AAF fixed the size of the travel market between cities to be served by Brightline at 110 million intercity trips annually, mainly by auto. AAF is counting on shifting roughly 10% of this market to rail, beginning with one million annual riders in 2017, to 3 million in 2018 and 5.35 million by 2020. Opponents discount the fare and ridership numbers, claiming that Brightline will never cover its costs and will eventually be dumped on state and local governments.

AAF has already ordered rail cars and locomotives from Siemens, the first train set to be received this coming summer for testing. Service is to start

mid-2017 Miami-West Palm Beach, with full service to Orlando to start later in 2017. Track upgrading is well underway. A second track is being added on the FEC main line between Miami and Cocoa. Lift bridges need upgrading as do the more than 300 grade crossing on the route. Positive train control is being installed.

AAF is paying special attention to building attractive stations in the downtowns of Miami, Ft.Lauderdale, and West Palm Beach. At the latter two stations, space limitations and ground water conditions require station areas to be built above track level. In Miami, to accommodate the downtown street grid, Miami Central will have elevated track.

With V-shaped columns holding up the glass-enclosed spaces of its stations, AAF stations will stand out as beacons drawing everyone's attention on the city skylines. FEC has extensive land holdings in downtown Miami dating back to the days it formerly offered scheduled passenger trains. These lands are now also being developed in conjunction with the new Miami station. AAF's station at Orlando, as previously mentioned, is at the Orlando airport and it is being built by the airport authority as an intermodal hub. It is hoped that the new commuter rail line in Orlando will be extended to this location. Miami's commuter rail agency has approved extending its commuter rail to Miami's AAF station, though the necessary track work for this project is not yet funded. ■

HIGH SPEED RAIL

California HSR update

The **California High Speed Rail Authority** (CHSRA) has so far successfully defeated law suits to prevent it from using Proposition 1A (2008) bonds amounting to \$9 billion to build HSR. Also, CHSRA now has a new stable funding source as state legislation recently passed to create a cap-and-trade program to curb CO2 emissions. This year, transportation fuels became subject to cap-and-trade, this source alone

accounting for roughly 40% of California's carbon emissions. HSR receives 25% of cap-and-trade annual revenues, this fiscal year amounting to \$550 million.

Construction of three segments of HSR is now underway in the Central Valley totalling 116 miles (184km). The contractor for the initial 29 miles from near Madera to Fresno was announced last January. The contractor for the second 65 miles from Fresno to near the county line between Tulare and Kern Counties was announced in July. A third 22 mile segment that takes the route just to the north of Bakersfield was announced October 6. The first segment is valued at \$985 million with completion in 2017, the second at \$1.2 billion to be done by 2018, and the third at \$450 million to be finished by 2019. In the near term this infrastructure will not be electrified. It will be available for Amtrak's San Joaquin service. Thus, the cost for basic civil engineering design and construction is about \$22.7 million/mile (\$14.2 million/km) for these three initial HSR segments. HSR is on all new alignments with the property needed often requiring the use of eminent domain to acquire, a time-consuming process.

A dispute with Bakersfield was recently settled with the CHSRA agreeing to work with the city to route its high speed line through the city center where there is to be station.

In considering how its high speed line would traverse the Central Valley, one route considered was following the Highway I-5 corridor. This would have been the shortest route, one that travels the mostly desert west side of the Valley. This route was discarded in favour of a route along the more

heavily populated, and much less earthquake-prone, east side of the Valley, picking up such cities as Fresno and Bakersfield (see map on this page). Similarly, the high speed line will enter the Los Angeles area via the Tehachapi Pass, Palmdale, and Santa Clarita, with its initial terminal at the Burbank Airport 12 miles (19 km) short of Los Angeles Union Station.

Threading HSR through populated areas is bound to bring controversy. The CHSRA is now in the process of determining the route south of Bakersfield and it is facing opposition to its preferred route in places such as the Antelope Valley (Palmdale) and the eastern side of the San Fernando Valley. There is a call to place the rail line in a tunnel between Palmdale and Burbank. CHSRA will now do some deep drilling in a portion of the San Gabriel Mountains to explore soil and rock conditions and thus the feasibility and cost of the tunnel option.

...continued on PAGE 6



California HSR update

...continued from PAGE 5

CHSRA's entrance into San Francisco is further advanced than into Los Angeles. Caltrain, which operates commuter rail service between San Francisco and San Jose (51 miles/82km), has issued requests for proposals for electrification in February, and for vehicles in August. The cost of electrification is \$1.5B and a contractor is supposed to be selected by the end of this year. Installation of Positive Train Control signalling has been underway since 2013. The Advanced Signalling System is expected to be completed this year at a cost of \$231 million. Construction of a new downtown San Francisco Transbay Transit Center started in 2010 and will be completed in 2017, mainly to serve buses crossing the Oakland Bay Bridge into San Francisco. Space has been left in this development for the 1.3 mile extension of Caltrain commuter rail, and the HSR, from the present station at 4th and King to the Transbay Center, a project as yet unfunded. Full electrified HSR between San Francisco and LA, 488 miles (781km), is to open in 2029.

Since 2007, private investors have been busy planning to build HSR between Los Angeles and Las Vegas, NV, the project known as the **Xpress West**. It has slowly obtained all the permits required for the project between Victorville, CA and Las Vegas. However, promoters have not been able to obtain the \$5B necessary to construct this line. This project made news in September when it was announced that XpressWest had joined forces with China's HSR exporting consortium, the consortium agreeing to help finance and construct this HSR project.

Observers see the XpressWest/China deal as the foot-in-the-door for the export of China's considerable HSR expertise to North America. However, there are unanswered questions. For example, when China has built railways elsewhere, they have brought in labour from China for construction. This may not be acceptable in the U.S. Several

recent attempts by China to build railways in Mexico and Brazil have not progressed.

XpressWest has been in negotiations with the CHSRA because it is planning to bring its trains into Los Angeles using the CHSRA's HSR route from Palmdale into LA. The consortium would have to build a connection between Victorville and Palmdale to do this, a track segment for which environmental assessment and other permits have yet to be obtained.

In planning its San Francisco-LA high speed train line, CHSRA has opted not to build long tunnels. It appears that the concern is the potential for damage due to earthquakes. In such an event the repair and rebuilding of a tunnel could take many months, shutting down or badly crippling a high speed train service. The one place now under study for a tunnel, between Palmdale and Burbank under the San Gabriel range, has the protection of an existing surface Metrolink commuter rail line, originally the Southern Pacific Railroad's route into LA from the Central Valley (Bakersfield-Lancaster-Palmdale-Burbank-LA). We'll have to wait and see what the CHSRA will ultimately do to reach LA from Palmdale. ■

Other U.S. news

Positive Train Control (PTC).

After a serious commuter/freight train collision in 2008 in Chatsworth, CA, the U.S. Congress mandated PTC installation on railway lines carrying hazardous goods and passenger trains. The control system stops trains that violate signals. A deadline of 2015 was set for installation. Unable to meet the deadline, U.S. railways asked for an extension and threatened to shut down otherwise. In late October, Congress extended the deadline to 2018. While PTC has been recommended by Canada's Transportation Safety Board for parts of our rail system, no federal action has ever been taken here to implement this life-saving technology.

Two new rail tunnels under the Hudson River. Mid-November, the states of New York and New Jersey, the U.S. Dept. of Transportation, and

Amtrak agreed to split the cost of building two additional rail tunnels under the Hudson River at New York City. The new tunnels and adjacent track and bridges will cost \$20 billion. The two existing tunnels, built between 1904 and 1908 carry Amtrak trains between Washington DC, New York and Boston. They are also heavily used by NJ Transit commuter trains. The two new tunnels will not only add much needed capacity to and from Penn Station in New York, but also eventually permit upgrading of the older tunnels without jeopardizing the flow of trains in this strategic corridor. The older tunnels were damaged by Hurricane Sandy in 2012 and need rehabilitation. The Port Authority of New York and New Jersey will create a subsidiary that will undertake the construction. The next step is fundraising, with the states of New York and New Jersey in for \$5 billion each.

Amtrak funding secured. Supporters of Amtrak in the U.S. have long advocated dedicated funding for this country's national passenger railway and lamented the annual appropriation struggles that have kept Amtrak going. After a nine-month process, both houses of Congress finally came to an agreement on a transportation funding bill passed and signed by the President in early December. The bill passed is called FAST, the Fix America's Surface Transportation Act. It funds roads, bridges, public transit, and railroad transportation. What's different is that Amtrak was included in this act which is five years in duration.

Amtrak is allotted \$1.39 billion annually, \$288.5 million as an operating grant and \$1.1 billion in capital spending. FAST provides annually for an array of other rail and rail safety groups. Rail advocates are pleased with an annual grant of \$20 million for passenger train restorations. Already municipalities on the eastern Gulf coast are calling for the extension of Amtrak's Sunset Limited from New Orleans to Jacksonville and Orlando, FL, a train service that was lost in 2005 after Hurricane Katrina. ■

Greater Toronto Area

New railway freight bypass proposed for the GTA

The cities of Mississauga, Cambridge, Toronto, and Milton commissioned IBI Group to study a freight railway bypass that would separate most freight and passenger train movements in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). Released August 28 and entitled "Feasibility Study and Business Case of Constructing the Missing Link," the proposal would give CP freight access to the existing CN freight bypass at Milton, this bypass running north of the City of Toronto just above Steeles Avenue, to Pickering where CP and CN have track heading east towards Montreal. CN's bypass was built in the 1960s to serve its new freight yard at Concord north of Toronto. Using this bypass, CP freight trains would access the CP's main yard at Agincourt in northeast Scarborough by a new connection where the CN now crosses the CP route to Peterborough and Havelock. "Missing link" refers to the most expensive element of the project, entirely new track connecting CP's Milton line, along the Highway 407 corridor, to Bramalea where it would join the existing CN bypass route after passing over a bridge above CN's Georgetown line to Kitchener. This stretch of new track and bridge and other pieces of connecting track and bridges of the proposal altogether would cost an estimated \$5.5 billion.

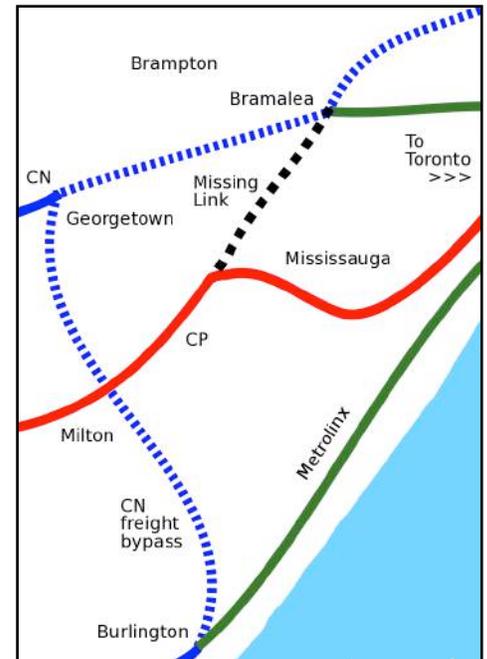
This project has been in the media recently. The *Mississauga News* carried two stories, one on September 10 following Mississauga's city council meeting (Sept. 9) that considered the IBI report, and another published on December 19.

The sponsoring cities all wish to see all-day two-way GO train service established in the GTHA sooner rather than later. GO's Regional Express Rail is in part delayed because CN and CP are asking for additional track where GO would operate its frequent regional trains. CN is opposed to electrification on any track used by its long freight

trains. GO has been planning to construct the necessary extra track by widening the existing corridors, mostly through Brampton and Milton. Expanding track, especially through Brampton on the Georgetown line, would require major land acquisition in downtown Brampton. Expansion of enough extra track in Milton and Brampton for both freight and GO trains is in itself a \$5 billion project. Just in time, the "missing link" alternative is a better solution as it deals with freight and passenger train conflicts not just on Toronto region's west side, but for the whole of the region, has much less land take in built up areas, also provides for GO electrification, and, as an important added benefit, removes CP freight trains from its east-west route across Toronto north of Dupont Avenue, and through Rosedale and across much of Scarborough.

TAO has long supported the concept of a combined CN-CP freight by-pass as proposed in the "missing link" study. Especially appealing is an early construction of a railway bridge at Bramalea that would allow GO and VIA to increase train service to Guelph, Kitchener, Stratford, St. Marys and London. TAO has met twice with Mississauga technical staff to discuss details of the IBI report. We were pleased to hear that Minister Del Duca is taking the idea seriously and has directed Metrolinx to study it. Initial meeting with CN and CP have apparently been satisfactory.

The cities that have backed the missing link feasibility concept plan are mindful that the Ontario and federal governments budgets are under preparation. The feds have indicated they may have funding for major rail infrastructure. Missing link supporters would like to see a GTA freight bypass that unlocks the region's commuter/ regional passenger train potential, and TAO would add, intercity passenger rail as an urgent public infrastructure investment. This GTA freight bypass is one of the essential transportation projects of our time for the Greater Golden Horseshoe. ■



Editorial: Resolving the transit planning mess in Toronto

Sensible transit planning seems to have been sidetracked in Toronto. After sidelining former mayor Ford's subway mania, city council then replaced the already province-funded conversion of the Scarborough RT to a three station Scarborough subway on a different alignment. In the meantime, the province announced its plan to electrify GO's commuter rail system for all-day two-way service calling it Regional Express Rail (RER). Then John Tory, in his campaign for mayor (2014), announced he would build a SmartTrack "surface subway" following GO's Stouffville line in Scarborough to GO's Lakeshore East line, then through Union Station out on GO's Georgetown line to Mt. Dennis where it would diverge westward onto Eglinton to the Airport Corporate Centre (ACC). This \$8b project would be funded with new tax revenues from the increased property values of new development along the line.

But what of the congestion on the Yonge subway, especially at Bloor-Yonge where the Bloor-Danforth

...continued on PAGE 8

Editorial ...continued from PAGE 7

subway riders use the Yonge line to go further downtown. For many years a Relief Line (RL) subway has been seen as a solution to this problem, a subway connecting with the Bloor-Danforth line at Pape, running south to King Street, then westward past Yonge. RL has been part of Metrolinx's *Big Move* plan and still is.

What is there here that does not make sense? For starters, the Scarborough subway is estimated to cost \$3.6 billion. Evidence keeps mounting that it will have poor ridership and that an LRT would better serve the transit needs of this low density area. Worse, with SmartTrack (or RER) which would also serve this part of Scarborough, the need for the Scarborough subway is further diminished.

SmartTrack duplicates RER lines, so how is it different? Though SmartTrack would have more local stations than the usual GO rail line, RER could carry a local service that would serve the stations on the SmartTrack route. Indeed, in a letter to Toronto's City Manager in October, Metrolinx CEO Bruce McCuaig said quite clearly that Smart Track would only be an incremental upgrade of GO service, not a separate operation running on GO's trackage.

There is one serious problem with SmartTrack. It is now clear that an extension to the ACC will have to be in tunnel or on viaduct, another several billion dollars. A much less costly extension of the Eglinton Crosstown LRT to the ACC would actually be more useful to local residents.

Where in all of this is the RL? The City and the TTC continue to study an east side RL to the Danforth. Metrolinx still considers the RL necessary to relieve the Yonge subway line, especially because the plan is to extend it north into York Region. The extension of the RL north to Sheppard is to be considered by Metrolinx.

Much study but no money or detailed engineering.

Another confusing area is fares. SmartTrack was advertised by Mayor Tory as having TTC fares. How does that reconcile with Metrolinx and GO's plans, which likely involve premium fares and fare by distance?

So, given that RER is going forward, is SmartTrack really needed? Given that the Stouffville line will be electrified and become RER, which is close to being a subway-style operation, is the Scarborough subway extension really needed? Does a subway to the ACC make sense when the Eglinton LRT can serve this route? How then to serve old Toronto's west side where residents have been asking for a long time for more local stops on the GO Georgetown line and would prefer TTC fares and easy transfers to the local on-street TTC network.

As the prime funders of rapid transit in Toronto, Metrolinx and the Province must sort this all out. These Toronto-oriented transit projects have major implications region-wide. Let's hope that Metrolinx is able to make the sensible decisions that reflect the need for higher order transit -- LRT on dedicated right-of-way, subways, electrified regional rail, etc. -- to form an integrated network enhancing mobility across the whole of the GTHA for everyone. ■ - Tony Turriffin

Ontario Report is published by Transport Action Ontario bi-monthly in Feb., Apr., June, Aug., Oct. and Dec. Contributions of news and items are welcome. Submissions, including articles and letters, are subject to acceptance and editing. Statements in this publication are those of the respective authors and are not official policy which is approved by the Board of Transport Action Ontario. Photos by the editor unless otherwise indicated.

Thanks to all who helped out with this issue. News to December 31, 2015.

Editor: Tony Turriffin (turritti@hotmail.com).
ISSN 1923-1040 (Print)
ISSN 1923-1059 (Online)

Save VIA on YouTube

Save VIA YouTube "ads" ask tough questions of our elected representatives

As part of its continuing efforts to bring improved intercity passenger rail to Southwestern Ontario, Save VIA of St. Marys has prepared three video "ads" that can now be seen on YouTube. Links are not yet on the group's website but the short videos may be accessed as follows: go to www.youtube.com; type into the search box at the top of the screen "Save VIA." Open the three short videos labeled as follows:

- >>Save VIA - Clearing the Tracks for VIA
- >>Save VIA - Modern Passenger Trains for a Modern Canada
- >>SAVE VIA - An Expensive Train Robbery ■

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Board meetings: July 30, Sept 9, Oct 1, and Nov 5 at 5:30pm at Centre for Social Innovation, 215 Spadina Ave., Toronto. If you wish to participate, contact Peter Miasek