



**TRANSPORT ACTION'S  
NATIONAL DREAM RENEWED  
CAMPAIGN**

**PROGRESS REPORT № 1**

**MAY 8, 2013**

## Background

National Dream Renewed (NDR) is a nationwide campaign initiated by Transport Action Canada and its five regional affiliates in response to the VIA Rail Canada reductions that began last summer. This educational outreach campaign will cross Canada to engage Canadians in a series of 50 workshops concerning the future of rail passenger service. Input from the workshops will help shape the production of a blueprint for the re-establishment of VIA as a modern, sustainable and national rail service.

Transport Action is a non-profit organization whose primary purpose is research, public education and consumer advocacy. It promotes environmentally-sound transportation solutions and gets actively involved in a wide range of issues, such as public transportation, safety, accessibility, energy efficiency, environmental protection, intermodal co-operation and government regulation.

Transport Action has been involved in rail passenger issues since before VIA's birth. Formed in 1976 as Transport 2000 Canada by two groups of transportation advocates in Regina and Ottawa, its prime objective was to factually promote a rail passenger revival under full government funding. T2000 worked closely with CN's Passenger Department in the lead-in to the creation of VIA as a stand-alone Crown corporation in 1977.

Through the ensuing years, Transport Action – as the group was renamed in 2009 – has constantly attempted to educate and work with the public, the media and politicians to bring about Canada's long overdue rail passenger renaissance. Still not convinced, government has implemented major VIA cutbacks on three occasions.

The latest round of VIA cuts, announced on June 27, 2012, reduced service frequency on several well-used routes, especially in southwestern Ontario, the Maritimes and on the western transcontinental run. VIA has defended the cuts as "right-sizing" and "the next phase of its modernization project."

Prior to VIA's announcement of the service reductions, Transport Action was already preparing for a major response. To test the concept of a public advocacy campaign to alert Canadians to the dangers facing VIA, Transport Action Ontario and Transport Action Canada hosted a blue sky vision workshop at Toronto's Ryerson University on Saturday, May 26, 2012. As a result of this successful workshop, a group of Transport Action directors made the decision to refine the presentation and take it to the public coast-to-coast on a donor-supported basis.

Thanks to advance knowledge of the impending cuts, NDR was launched on the same day VIA unveiled its cutback plan. With internal funds and contributions by certain Transport Action members, the campaign began to roll under the direction of the following volunteer committee members:

Founding Chair: Harry Gow, Co-Founder, Transport Action Canada  
Acting Chair: Harold Nicholson, President, Transport Action Atlantic  
Directors: Tony Turrittin, Vice-President, Transport Action Ontario  
Ted Bartlett, Vice-President, Transport Action Atlantic  
Ron Haskell, President, Transport Action Prairies  
Matthew Buchanan, President, Transport Action B.C.  
Treasurer: Donald MacLeod, Treasurer, Transport Action Atlantic  
Media Coordinator: Ted Bartlett, Vice-President, Transport Action Atlantic  
Webmaster: Vincent Puhakka

Various directors of the five regional groups that comprise Transport Action Canada have also volunteered to work with the committee on aspects of the campaign that are specific to their jurisdictions.

As well, two longtime supporters of Transport Action have been engaged on a paid, as-required basis to carry out key tasks. As facilitator, Greg Gormick's role is to present the town hall workshops, conduct media interviews, liaise with politicians and the rail industry, and produce background material supporting the promotion of the numerous benefits of modern rail passenger service. Elizabeth Hill's fundraising experience is being used to solicit public donations following each town hall workshop, as well as to generate funding from the Transport Action membership.



**WAITING FOR A TRAIN:** VIA's *Canadian* departed Thunder Bay for the last time on January 16, 1990, but the residents of the North Shore still yearn for its return. One hundred of them attended the NDR Thunder Bay session sponsored by MP Bruce Hyer. Photo by Shannon Cruikshank.

## Town Hall Workshops

The NDR workshop is wrapped around a concise PowerPoint presentation delivered by Gormick, which is titled *Unlocking the Potential of Canada's Rail Passenger Service*. It informs the public of the problems facing VIA and the solutions that will put the railway on a stable and sustainable footing, based on the experience of rail passenger operators in other G8 nations. It focuses on the seven pillars of a modern, sustainable VIA:

- (1) Route network and service levels
- (2) Fares and marketing
- (3) Fleet strategy
- (4) Funding
- (5) Management
- (6) Legislation
- (7) National transportation policy

The NDR town hall presentation format is:

00:00-00:10	Welcome by local host
00:10-01:00	PowerPoint presentation by Greg Gormick
01:00-01:50	Review and discussion by workshop participants
01:50-02:00	Closing remarks by local host and Greg Gormick

The NDR town hall workshop has been presented in the following locations:

Sarnia, ON	Sept. 8, 2012	Kitchener, ON	Oct. 25 & 26, 2012
Sudbury, ON	Sept. 13, 2012	Stratford, ON	Nov. 7, 2012
Halifax, NS	Sept. 24, 2012	Sault Ste. Marie, ON	Nov. 8, 2012
Moncton, NB	Sept. 25, 2012	Thunder Bay, ON	Nov. 17, 2012
Campbellton, NB	Sept. 27, 2012	Welland, ON	Feb. 20, 2013
Bathurst, NB	Sept. 28, 2012	Kingston, ON	April 6, 2012
Miramichi, NB	Sept. 29, 2012	Toronto, ON	April 20, 2013
Edmundston, NB	Oct. 8, 2012		

Public turnout at these workshops has ranged from a low of 25 in Sudbury to more than 200 in Campbellton and Sarnia. Attendance averages 50 to 75.

Of special note are the demographics of the audiences. While it was to be expected that older Canadians, who have vivid memories of a well-run and extensive rail passenger system, would show interest in any attempt to revive such a system, the attendance of younger Canadians was most encouraging. Even in a city such as Thunder Bay, which hasn't had regularly-scheduled passenger service since January 1990, younger Canadians with little or no history of using passenger trains comprised a significant portion of the audience.

These younger Canadians have voiced their desire to see Canada develop a modern and nationwide rail passenger system, similar to what they know has been done in all the other G8 nations and many developing countries.

The hosting of the NDR workshops has been handled by a broad spectrum of individuals and organizations. The majority have been under the sponsorship of local mayors, regional chairs or municipal agencies. In three instances – Halifax, Thunder Bay and Welland – local MPs have hosted. In each case, it has been emphasized that Transport Action and NDR are non-political and non-partisan, although the point is also made that VIA is creature of politics; that side of the corporation is discussed in detail.

Future town halls are pending. Among the communities to be approached regarding the hosting of NDR workshops are:

Gaspé, QC	Québec City, QC
Sherbrooke, QC	Montréal, QC
Ottawa, ON	Smiths Falls, ON
Cornwall, ON	Brockville, ON
Belleville, ON	Cobourg, ON
Port Hope, ON	Hamilton, ON
Guelph, ON	London, ON
Windsor, ON	St. Catharines, ON
Niagara Falls, ON	North Bay, ON
Chapleau, ON	Winnipeg, MB
Churchill, MB	Brandon, MB
Saskatoon, SK	Melville, SK
Biggar, SK	Regina, SK
Moose Jaw, SK	Medicine Hat, AB
Calgary, AB	Edmonton, AB
Jasper, AB	Revelstoke, BC
Kamloops, BC	Prince George, BC
Vancouver, BC	Victoria, BC
Nanaimo, BC	Courtenay, BC

## **Media Outreach**

Media attention – largely due to advance work by NDR media coordinator Ted Bartlett – has been large and lasting. Even before the launch of the town hall workshops in Sarnia on September 8, 2012, NDR was being quoted in newspaper, television and radio reports regarding VIA. This was thanks to the outreach that began on the opening day of the campaign. Both Bartlett and Gormick have extensive professional media experience and they have used their contacts and skills extensively in building the public profile of NDR and the rail passenger issue.



NDR has generated or been featured in more than 100 articles in newspapers across the country, particularly in Atlantic Canada and Ontario. An equal number of pieces have been done by the electronic media. NDR has established itself as a credible source that the media turn to on all matters connected with the rail passenger issue.

Among the media tools employed by NDR have been timely press releases and backgrounders on issues concerning VIA. While it was to be expected that the presentation of the NDR workshops would generate local, short-term media interest, the press release strategy has simultaneously kept the issue alive and brought steady attention to NDR's activities in all the cities where the workshops have been staged and beyond.

A sampling of the media articles regarding NDR may be reviewed via the links on the NDR website at <http://nationaldreamrenewed.com>

## **Political Outreach**

While Transport Action and NDR are non-political and non-partisan, VIA is a highly-charged political issue. This is explained thoroughly at the town hall workshops. A key objective of the NDR campaign is to make VIA a public issue that will evolve into a political one, becoming a major point of debate in the next federal election campaign. VIA's fate is in the hands of the politicians and it is imperative that they not only realize this, but take action.

NDR has reached out to politicians of all stripes. As previously stated, three of the workshops were hosted by MPs, two of them NDP and the other an independent ex-NDP MP. NDP interest was expected, given the party's traditional support for all rail matters.

With the exception of Senator Art Eggleton and the president of the Sarnia Lambton Liberal Riding Association, outreach to the Liberal Party of Canada has yielded little. Nor have responses been yet received from the Bloc Québécois or the Green Party, although local representatives of the latter have attended the town hall workshops.



**OPPOSITION PARTY SUPPORT:** NDP MP Mike Sullivan (centre) was welcomed to the NDR Toronto session by (left to right) Transport Action Ontario president Peter Miasek, NDR facilitator Greg Gormick and Transport Action Ontario vice-president Tony Turriffin. Sullivan monitors the VIA situation closely, but admits the opposition currently has little power to bring about change. Photo by Dan Hammond.

Most encouraging has been the interest expressed by two concerned members of the Conservative government. Both of these relationships have been beneficial and there has been a free flow of information and ideas between NDR and these MPs. This is a major accomplishment. It is the current government that will determine VIA's fate and the prospect of behind-the-scenes influence on that decision is certainly visible.

As well, proposals for NDR-directed rail passenger research projects have been submitted to municipal politicians in Atlantic Canada and southwestern Ontario. Municipal funding is in place for the Atlantic study, the *New Brunswick Rail Revitalization Concept Plan*. This project, to be undertaken by NDR facilitator Gormick, will commence later in May.

The southwestern Ontario study proposal, titled *Network Southwest: A Rail Passenger Concept Plan*, will require further negotiation. Other plans of this nature are being contemplated and will be pursued at the appropriate local government levels. All of them cover subjects that are components of the final NDR blue sky vision plan for VIA.

As well, NDR has established the first of what needs to be many contacts with provincial governments, which have long avoided the entire question of intercity rail passenger service, always portraying it as a solely federal responsibility.

In conjunction with Transport Action Ontario president Peter Miasek and longtime member Andrew Schultz, NDR's Gormick appeared on April 10, 2013, before the Ontario Legislative Assembly's Standing Committee on General Government. This all-party committee has taken it upon itself to investigate a series of pressing transportation issues, including mobility in rural and northern Ontario.

The standing committee members of all three parties agreed with the Transport Action/NDR view that the province can no longer sit on the sidelines while our intercity rail and bus systems continue to contract, leaving thousands of Ontarians with no public transportation options. This message needs to be taken to the other provinces. This will be an element of NDR's 2013 work plan.

That NDR has evolved into an organization that has built these bridges with politicians at all levels of government and all political stripes is a major accomplishment. Our upcoming reports will not only strengthen NDR's ties to influential politicians and governments that can affect the desired changes at VIA, they will boost the group's professional credibility and keep the issue in the spotlight.

## **Other Activities**

Early in the NDR campaign, a dedicated website was launched. It is designed to contain information on upcoming town hall workshops, details of NDR's activities and background information useful to those who wish to pursue the improvement of rail passenger service on their own. Work remains to be done and incremental improvements made. The committee believes the website can become a much more effective component of the campaign through the hiring of a professional web designer to improve its look and functionality.

The success of the town hall workshops has spurred the development of one citizens' committee that is working locally to advance the VIA issue. This group has members in New Brunswick between Tidehead and Moncton. NDR has served as a resource for the group, but it is operating on its own. The most useful component of the group's work to date is the collection of more than 12,000 signatures on a petition that will be presented to Parliament, likely by the Conservative MP for Moncton, Robert Goguen.

The formation of two other rail passenger citizens' committees is expected. One will be in southwestern Ontario and it has already involved Transport Action members. The other is expected to form in Thunder Bay and along the Lake Superior North Shore.

A major side benefit resulted from the Thunder Bay workshop hosted by Independent MP Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay - Superior North). Following the November 17 workshop, Hyer maintained close contact with NDR. He has for many years been fighting for restoration of VIA service on the CP main line between Toronto and Thunder Bay.



**RAIL PASSENGER CHAMPION:** MP Bruce Hyer (left) has been a staunch supporter of both improved rail passenger service and the work of NDR. He not only sponsored the November 17, 2012, workshop in Thunder Bay, but also commissioned NDR project facilitator Greg Gormick (left) to produce the report, *Waiting for a Train: Restoring the North Shore's Rail Passenger Service*. Photo by Shannon Cruikshank.

Although his opportunities are limited by his current independent status in the House of Commons, Hyer has worked with NDR to advance the VIA issue whenever his allotted time during question period allows. He was particularly effective in alerting the media and his fellow MPs to the potentially fatal damage that would be done by the reduced VIA funding indicated in the Main Estimates.

Hyer then asked NDR if Gormick could produce a report on the VIA situation and the outcome of the Thunder Bay town hall. Some funding was provided by Hyer and an additional amount was drawn from Transport Action's John McCullum Fund, which is used for the production of research to further the rail improvement cause.

As this progress report is written, NDR and Hyer are about to release that report, titled *Waiting for a Train: Restoring the North Shore's Rail Passenger Service*. This report covers not just the North Shore issue, but many of the root problems at VIA and the solutions NDR proposes. It is, in a sense, a specialized test run of the ultimate vision plan NDR will produce before the next federal election.

Frustrated by the unwillingness of VIA and the government to release current data on the rail passenger program, NDR has also taken a step that may contribute significantly to advancing the issue within government, where its solution ultimately rests.

Information is what will allow us to expose the specious arguments VIA and others are using to defend the self-destructive course on which the railway has been set. Attempts to acquire this data through Freedom of Information legislation are invariably blocked on the grounds that such data will compromise the competitive positions of VIA and third parties, such as CN.

However, the Auditor General of Canada cannot be denied this data. Therefore, NDR has requested the Auditor General to undertake a full investigation of the controversial Kingston Subdivision capital project. It was entrusted to CN and it has run over schedule and budget. It has also failed to deliver many of the benefits VIA promised.

As well, this is VIA's year to undergo a full investigation by the Auditor General. NDR intends filing additional information to help further this audit, pointing the Auditor General to areas of concern within VIA.

## **Next Steps**

It is Transport Action's belief that – if not opposed by a broad spectrum of concerned Canadians – this latest slashing of VIA is the prelude to abandonment of the entire network with a doomed privatization program, outright route discontinuance or a combination of both. Through NDR, Transport Action is the only advocacy group equipped with the knowledge and the passion to alert the public, energize them around the issue and offer credible solutions based on real-world railway experience.

The work ahead for NDR includes the presentation of at least another 30 town hall workshops across Canada. Just as important will be the production of at least 10 reports on selected aspects of VIA and the international rail passenger renaissance. The Thunder Bay and New Brunswick reports are but the first. The others will include:

The High-Performance Rail Passenger Corridor Concept  
Western Transcontinental Service  
Remote and Regional Services  
The Bi-Level Advantage  
Network Southwest  
Network Southeast  
The Amtrak Model  
VIA Legislation



**ASK NOT WHAT VIA CAN DO FOR YOU:** At the NDR Welland session on February 20, 2013, facilitator Greg Gormick told the audience of the strong role they can play in bringing about the rail passenger renaissance that Canadians from coast to coast are demanding. Photo by Dan Hammond.

These studies will yield considerable material for inclusion in NDR's final blue sky vision plan to make VIA a national public transportation service that can proudly take its place alongside the publicly-owned rail passenger systems of the other G8 nations.

As outlined above, certain elements of the NDR campaign require further refinement, such as the website. Ongoing media and political outreach will be essential.

## Summary

In slightly less than one year, NDR has accomplished a great deal. To restate, our achievements include:

- Launch of the NDR website;
- Design and production of the NDR town hall workshop presentation;
- Presentation of 16 workshops in 15 communities;
- Fundraising exceeding every previous Transport Action initiative;
- Engagement with municipal politicians and civic agencies in some of the communities where we have presented the NDR workshops; and
- Ongoing media attention in those areas of the country where the workshops have been presented and beyond.

With limited resources, we have mounted the largest and most successful advocacy program in the 37-year history of Transport Action. NDR has placed the future of rail passenger service on the public agenda and reintroduced the Transport Action brand to the public, the media and politicians.

This vital work must continue if Canadians are to have the modern, sustainable and national rail passenger system they want, require and will support.

Greg Gormick  
Project Facilitator  
National Dream Renewed