Ontario Report

Transport Action Ontario

(Formerly Transport 2000 Ontario)

An example of Japan's first Shinkansen trains. Last train of this type was taken out of service Dec. 2008. Photo: Higashi-Hiroshima Station, April 2008, Wikipedia.

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50th Anniversary of first high speed train service in Japan

October 1, 2014, was the 50th anniversary of the opening of Japan's first high speed rail (HSR) line between Tokyo and Osaka, 515 km (320 miles) in length. While interest in HSR dates back to the 1930s *...continued on PAGE 2*

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Op-Ed Analysis

Those VIA cuts plus 25

by Greg Gormick

When 52 per cent of VIA's train miles were terminated 25 years ago this month, it signalled a decline in Canadian intercity transportation that continues unabated today. With other nations investing heavily in public transport to boost their global competitiveness, we should be concerned by what amounts to a mobility gap.

The 1990 VIA cuts were a potent symbol of the disconnection that was about to sweep across this country. With a draconian order-in-council and no public input, communities as diverse as Sydney, N.S., Thunder Bay, Regina and Calgary – along with dozens of smaller points in between – were ripped off the national rail passenger map. The attitude of the Mulroney

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FROM THE PRESIDENT - PETER MIASEK

Intercity Passenger Rail Activities Continue in Ontario, including launch of Network SW Study

Readers may recall my "From the President" article of January-February, 2014 entitled "Passenger Rail - Let a Thousand Voices Sing!" It summarized the recent history of passenger rail in Canada – the cutbacks to VIA Rail Canada in 2012, our National Dream Renewed campaign that held 15 town hall meetings across eastern Canada, the temporary halt of the campaign in mid-2013 due to lack of funds, and the encouraging formation of various local non-government organizations (NGOs) in Ontario to advocate for more passenger rail.

Activity continued at a high level for the balance of 2014 in both Northern and Southern Ontario. In the North, it was announced in February that the Algoma Central Railway (ACR) passenger service would be shut down due to the loss of the federal government subsidy under the remote passenger rail program. Transport Action and its affiliate, Coalition for Algoma Passenger Trains (CAPT), responded promptly, conducting three

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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

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town hall sessions in the Sault, Wawa and Hearst under the National Dream Renewed banner. We believe that these helped persuade Ottawa to grant a one-year extension of the subsidy, to March, 2015. In the intervening year, the ACR Stakeholders Working Group, which includes CAPT, conducted an economic benefits study of the ACR service. Out of that came a tender to contract a third-party operator to run the service at a lower cost than today. A funding proposal to the federal government has been submitted by the stakeholders group. More details should emerge soon.

There has been activity in Southwestern Ontario also. In April, the province announced its Moving Ontario Forward plan, which includes a very ambitious plan to develop High Speed Rail (HSR) passenger service to link Toronto to London/Windsor. Transport Action Ontario welcomes this HSR announcement as it signals a major recognition of the importance of high performance intercity passenger rail in a modern society. In December, the Minister of Transportation announced the start of the Environmental Assessment for the HSR project. Despite this start, HSR service will be years away in the future. We believe that there is an immediate need to conventionally improve rail passenger and intercity bus service throughout the region in the short term, as a stepping stone to the delivery of HSR. More about that below, under *Network Southwest*.

In the spring of 2014, the various Southwestern Ontario NGOs cited in my earlier article, including Transport Action Ontario, took a deliberate step to form a collaborative known as the Southwestern Ontario Transportation Alliance (SWOTA). Our group meets monthly to share intelligence, support each other, and work on common projects to improve public transportation choices in the region. A website has been set up. In October, SWOTA representatives spoke to elected officials from 14 Ontario counties at the Western Ontario Wardens Council.

The most significant project being conducted by SWOTA is just being initiated. In December, we were successful in raising funds to engage Greg Gormick of On Track Strategies to develop a concept plan outlining a four year incremental multi-modal *Network Southwest* passenger improvement plan, based on proven approaches undertaken in other jurisdictions in North America. The plan will cover both intercity passenger rail and intercity bus, using existing infrastructure. The plan is expected to be practical and affordable. As stated above, it will serve as the basis to conventionally improve rail passenger and intercity bus services in the short term, as a stepping stone to the provincial HSR plan.

The plan will be released in Sarnia on Saturday, January 31, 2015. Town Hall meetings are planned across southwestern Ontario in February and subsequent months to inform the public, elected officials at all levels of government, and media about *Network Southwest*. Look for the meeting notices in your municipality, and come out and support us! ■

Those VIA cuts plus 25

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government, which had campaigned in 1984 on a platform calling for VIA's expansion, was that other forms of transportation would take up the slack.

What some suspected even then was that the VIA cuts were a foretaste of what awaited the other modes. Not only did air and bus not plug the gaps, they began to retreat geographically, too. The bus system was already in decline before VIA's halving, with many lighter-density lines falling into the red and getting chopped. A vicious cycle began whereby bus frequencies and routes were trimmed to cut costs, leading to further ridership reduction and more cutbacks.

The airline industry was also in turmoil, with two major international carriers battling head-to-head on main routes and a host of regional and charter operators buzzing around on the fringes. Since then, several airlines have come and gone, leaving us with intensified competition on a handful of high-volume routes, but less and more expensive service on lighter-density routes.

In the end, the private automobile has remained consistently the king of intercity travel. It was the car – not planes and buses – that benefitted most from VIA's slashing in 1990, the subsequent cuts that followed and the pruning of our bus and air networks. Those who grew up enraptured by the automotive siren song say that's just the way it is and, if highways and cars connect all the dots on the map, then mobility hasn't been affected.

As public transportation advocates, we know that's not the case. In terms of public spending, energy efficiency, social costs and environmental impact, the car is poorly suited as the backbone of our intercity transportation system. It's the not-so-cheap junk food of transportation.

This car dependence is dangerous given emerging demographic trends. There are growing population segments that simply don't want to drive and eschew car ownership, such as aging Baby Boomers and Millennials. In particular, the transportation choices of the expanding Millennials have serious implications. Companies looking to invest in the kind of jobs Canada requires are dependent on these skilled, younger workers. There are documented examples of Canadian locations, such as Kitchener-Waterloo, that were rejected by major high-tech firms because inadequate public transportation service made them unattractive to the Millennial workforce. Those investments went elsewhere.

In truth, Canada has never had a true intercity transportation system. We've got a series of silos occupied by purveyors of multiple transportation services that have never connected or cooperated adequately to form a complete network. This has been compounded by the general inadequacy of

our urban transit systems – the "first and last mile" public transport providers. The division of regulatory authority and investment between Ottawa and the provinces has contributed significantly to this disarray.

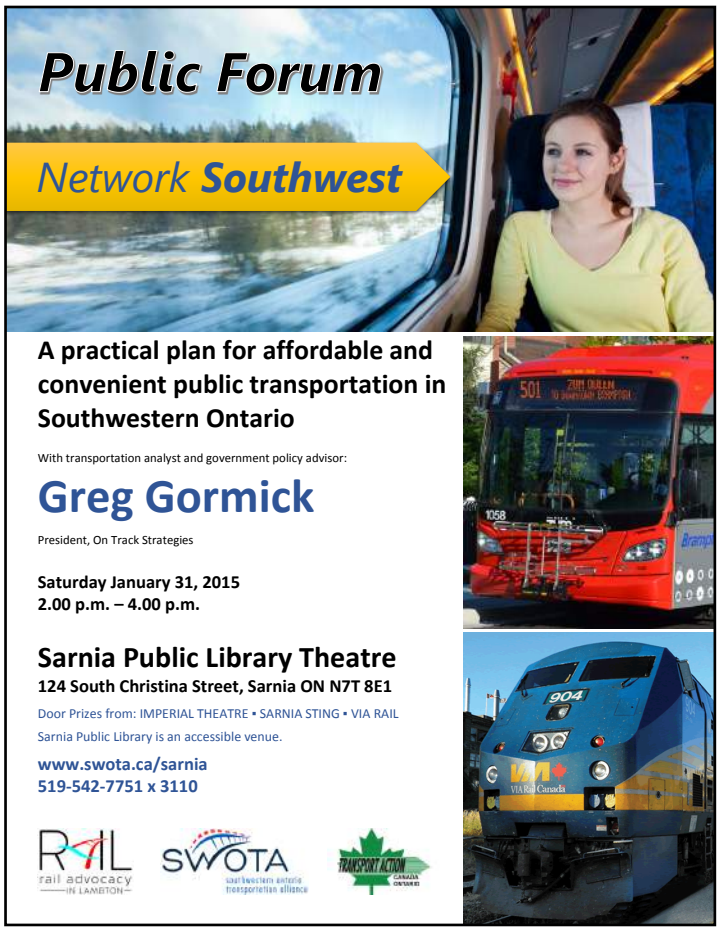
Nations with high non-automotive mobility long ago crafted policies to balance and connect the modes. Even the car-dependent U.S. is recognizing the wisdom and clear benefits in this. The Obama administration recently produced a 30-year plan to fuse its disjointed rail, air, bus and transit services into a coordinated, interconnected system with public transport at its core. National policy, coupled with state policies and strategic public funding, will drive this shift.

Canada hasn't had such an epiphany. Instead, the feds are reviewing the *Canada Transportation Act*, which is based on laissez-faire, for-profit competition as the sole criteria for service adequacy. Tinkering with this hollow deregulatory legislation is like shuffling the proverbial deck chairs on the *Titanic*.

But Canada's gloomy situation can be corrected, as proven by the U.S. about-face. In particular, there is a lesson to be learned from the focus on rebuilding the most damaged element of the U.S. system, namely Amtrak. While it's been a long time coming, there is going to be a noticeable improvement in rail passenger service over the next two years, as the new equipment and strategic infrastructure projects under the *Passenger Rail Investment and Improvement Act of 2008* come on line. New and more frequent trains with reduced running times and numerous bus feeders on several jointly-funded federal/state corridors will progressively transform Amtrak into a potent element of an efficient, affordable and convenient intermodal intercity system.

With a transportation history and conditions so similar to ours, we should follow this U.S. lead, making VIA's revival and optimization a logical starting point. Giving it the full modernization it has never received, increasing service on key routes and reviving the more strategic ones hacked off in 1990 could easily be a cost-effective (and politically popular) kick starter for the production of the national public transport strategy Canada has never enjoyed.

Believing this approach needs to first be demonstrated in one region, TAO has linked with other advocacy groups to produce the Network Southwest plan, which will be unveiled in Sarnia on January 31. Using successful concepts proven in other jurisdictions, it aims to quickly and cost-effectively improve and connect rail, bus and local transit to provide a practical, seamless network. The key is federal/provincial cooperation to repair the damage being done to Southwestern Ontario by declining public transport options.



A quarter-century ago, the drastic VIA cuts marked the tipping point in Canadian mobility. Making Network Southwest the first step in a policy shift to heal the wound could mark a turning point. Its adoption or rejection will quickly tell us if Canada will start the long march to car-free mobility or increasingly pay a high price for our mobility gap. ■

TTC hit by new streetcar delivery delays

Toronto's transit commission, the TTC, ordered 204 new low-floor streetcars from Bombardier in June 2009 for $1.25 billion. At $6.1 million per vehicle, the TTC paid a substantial premium over their cost in Europe.

The first sign of trouble was the late arrival in March 2013 of the prototype cars for testing. Production models appeared on the Spadina line (510) at the end of August. By the end of 2014, there were to be 43 new cars on Toronto streets; only three were in service on Spadina at year's end. An eight-week strike at Bombardier's Thunder Bay assembly plant caused a gap in production, but delay was in evidence before the strike.

Late penalties in the contract with Bombardier apparently have not been invoked. Andy Byford, CEO of the TTC, has communicated to Bombardier that it must recover and keep to its agreed schedule. The Spadina route requires 12 new streetcars for full service. All new cars are to be delivered by 2019, a rate of 34 per year.

The absence of enough new streetcars has affected TTC riders. The very cold weather in the New Year has crippled 25 of the older cars disrupting their pneumatic brake and door systems and causing bus substitutions on three streetcar routes. The new Flexity streetcars are all-electric and have had no problems with winter so far. ■

Toronto News

Uber under fire in Toronto

Uber is an app-based taxi company founded in San Francisco in 2010. In 2012 it extended its UberX program to include qualified drivers in their own cars meeting acceptable standards. Uber opened in Toronto in 2012, the company claiming that with 1.9 taxis per 1,000 people, Toronto was underserved. Uber now operates in some 200 cities worldwide. It has become highly controversial. (Uber is German for "over," "above" or "across," written with an umlaut as über.)

Using a smart phone, clients reserve a nearby car and driver which then can be tracked on one's phone to the point of pickup. At the end of the trip, a fare is paid automatically through a credit card, Uber tracking the trip and calculating the fare. Uber uses surge pricing, meaning that in periods of demand, prices go up. In part this is done to attract more drivers to take passengers at peak use times. There is no tipping. Because of low overhead costs, Uber riders may save as much as 30% over regular taxis. In some cities, Uber can be used to request a regular taxi.

At the end of last November, the City of Toronto announced it would seek a court injunction against Uber's alternative taxis as it violates by-laws that regulated the city's taxicab industry. Asked to comment on Uber by CBC's Metro Morning show (Nov. 19, 2014), mayor-elect John Tory said he would not oppose the city's legal action; he then added, "Deregulating carries with it this notion that somehow it is the Wild West, but it's not. It's 2014, and Uber and Hailo and all these applications are here. They're not going away. And I think the sooner we accept that fact and move on to modernize regulation, the better."

The question of whether or not to allow Uber alternative taxis in Toronto raises old issues. Supporters often say that the taxi industry is a monopoly and that regulation is all about maintaining their profits. This is a half-truth. It is hardly a monopoly because there are numerous taxi companies in the city. The number of cabs is regulated as are the fare structures. This is done to insure an adequate supply of quality taxis and drivers, that an adequate living can be made by drivers, and that there are sufficient revenues for capital costs, operations and maintenance.

Following the coming of streetcar systems in Canada's cities, around 1914, jitneys began to threaten urban transit. The jitney was a private car that started to ply transit routes offering to pick up anyone who hailed the car, taking them to a destination on the same route for the same streetcar fare. They arose as streets became paved and cars became relatively cheap to buy. By contrast, operating a street railway was capital intensive. Jitneys began to take a big bite out of streetcar ridership. Streetcar companies asked for and generally obtained by-laws that made jitneys illegal. Later, in the 1920s, there was a rapid increase in taxicabs, unregulated at the time; taxi fare wars led to the almost complete demise of metered cabs.

According to the City's stats, Toronto has 4,849 taxicabs, 3,451 standard licenses, 1,313 ambassador licences, and 85 accessible licenses. More than 15,000 people are employed in the industry. People take 65,000 cab trips a day with an estimated average wait time for a taxi at nine minutes and an average fare of $25. Only 3.5% of taxis are accessible. But much of this is about to change.

The standard taxi licence can be sold and the licence holder does not have to drive the cab. Taxi brokerages can own taxis through acquiring such licences. An ambassador licence cannon be sold and can only be used by the owner. Ambassador taxi owners are not allowed to hire a relief driver.

In February of 2014, after many years of discussing taxi industry reforms, City Council voted to adopt a new taxi regime. By 2024, all current taxi licences must be converted to the new Toronto Taxicab Licence (TTL). Like the standard licence, the new licence can be bought and sold. However, a TTL holder must at least be a part-time driver. That will end fleet garages and non-driving plate owners, the source of perceived exploitation by some in the industry. In effect, all taxi drivers will become independent operators. Observers believe that this change disadvantages the standard licence holders as some of them have bought such licences for as much as $345,000.

All TTL holders must drive taxis that are wheelchair accessible. This means that, in 10 years, Toronto's entire taxi fleet will be accessible, raising the cost of acquiring taxis for licence holders. All taxis will also be required to use snow tires in the winter months.

CBC news analyst Don Pittis (Nov. 21, 2014) drew a parallel between Uber and the rise of cottage industries in pre-industrial times, where middlemen exploited under-employed rural laborers and their families who manufactured goods at home. We would frame the Uber situation in this way: Effectively, Uber offers to pay drivers to become part-time taxicab operators for unregulated compensation. It is a brokerage with no garages or fleets to maintain. It takes advantage of the psychology around private car use where there is little or no knowledge about the real cost of driving. Basically, car owners do not allocate costs to any particular trip. The low fare bonus for Uber passengers is really a subsidy paid by the moonlighting private car owners.

The effects in markets of "low cost" operators are well known. At some point Uber would undercut licenced cabs and the industry would suffer. Some of those allegedly part-time drivers might turn out to be in the business for a living. For people seeking taxi service, the possibilities of discrimination at the point of pickup could be substantially increased. Even jitney-like private operators might reappear, which would not help improve the modal split in favour of transit to be desired for reasons of sustainability. There is sound reason to expect that deregulating the taxi industry would indeed bring back the Wild West. ▪

-- Tony Turrittin

Reference: Donald F. Davis, "The Canadian taxi wars, 1925-1950," *Urban History Review*, 27.1 (October 1998), pp. 7-22.

International

50th anniversary of Japan's Tokyo-Osaka bullet train

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in Europe and in Japan, following the end of the World War II, Japan was first off the mark in building HSR. Its first bullet train line showed the world how to do it. Japan now has six Shinkansen routes serving two of Japan's three main islands. In the 50 years since 1964, bullet trains have carried 10 billion passengers without a fatality due to a derailment or collision, an exemplary record for this transport mode.

There is an interesting story behind this anniversary. Because of its mountainous character, Japan's railway network was built to 3ft 6in gauge. Main line routes contained many curves and grade crossings, with congestion due to carrying local and regional passenger trains as well as freight. In 1939, Japan's government railway -- reorganized as the Japanese National Railway (JNR) in 1949 -- began to plan a high speed line between Tokyo and Osaka. Land was acquired and some construction starting in 1941, winding down due to world war. After the war, the railway system had to be rebuilt in the context of a struggling economy. In the early 1950s, following a major train fire and ferry sinking, new leadership was sought for the struggling railway. Brought out of retirement, in 1955, Shinji Sogo became JNR's fourth president.

Born in 1884, educated as a lawyer, in 1909 Sogo went into railway administration. Leaving his government post in 1926, he then joined the administration of the South Manchurian Railway (SMR). China's Manchurian region was seized by Japan in 1931. As were other railways in China, the SMR was built to the standards of American railways.

On becoming JNR's fourth president, Sogo had to confront JNR's capacity limitations due to being built as a narrow-gauge network. He resolved that an entirely new high speed passenger rail line should be built between Osaka and Tokyo using standard gauge. He foresaw the huge economic growth potential of high speed passenger trains.

Assembling a team of experts, he began the planning process to implement HSR, including tackling the difficult sell that would have to be made to the national government for the required capital investment. Electrification of the narrow-gauge line between Tokyo and Osaka in 1956 allowed for the introduction of Kodama express trains in 1958 that reduced travel time to seven hours between end points on this route.

In 1957 JNR's research arm, the Railway Technology and Research Institute (RTRI) drew public attention with a plan for high speed train service between Tokyo and Osaka in three hours. In July of 1958 the research committee of the Ministry of Transportation endorsed the plan, and in December of 1958 the Cabinet gave its approval to the project. Construction began in 1959. Sogo himself tirelessly lobbied for the project. Loud voiced and short-tempered, Sogo earned the nickname "old man thunder." He personally camped out on the steps of homes of some Diet members in order to meet and explain his plan.

The Shinkansen project drew on a staff of engineers headed by Hideo Shima to develop every aspect of the new railway line. While the proposed speed was a modest 200kph, the line was built for above 300kph. Instead of locomotive drawn trains, propulsion was distributed the length of the train itself. Cars were of generous proportions, 82ft long and 11ft wide. The first train sets were 12-cars long.

So as to obtain government support for the project, Sogo and shima low-balled the estimates of the cost of the project -- 200 billion yen or US$556 million. Shrewdly, the project obtained a low-interest loan from the World Bank worth $80 million, about 15% of the estimated cost. The World Bank closely scrutinized the project's business plan before making its loan. The loan was a form of endorsement, indirectly helping to insure continuing government support of the project as a matter of international pride.

As opening day approached, it was clear that the project would cost twice as much as the original estimate. In the circumstances, and reflecting the Japanese values of leaders taking full responsibility, in 1963 both Sogo and Shima resigned their posts. On opening day of Shinkansen service, neither Sogo nor Shima were invited guests. Ironically, the new JNR president had originally opposed the concept of a new standard gauge HSR line.

Sogo was finally honored as the father of Japan's bullet train in 1974. At Tokyo's Central Station, at the south end of the platform serving tracks 18 and 19, there is a relief of Shinji Sogo. In 1974 Sogo was 90 years of age. He died in 1981.

When the Tokaido line opened in 1964, express trains between Tokyo and Osaka ran at 200kph taking four hours for the trip, reduced to 3hrs 10min in 1965 with a speed increase. Since 1987, this route is part of the Central Japan Railway Company (JR Central).

The Tokaido Shinkansen line traverses a highly populated coastal urban corridor. Larger cities on the route south of Tokyo include Yokohama, Odawara, Nagoya, and Kyoto. There are 15 intermediate stops, a station every 32km on average. Kodama all-stops trains take four hours Tokyo-Osaka, whereas Hikari express trains, making different combinations of a few stops, take three hours, and extra-cost, super-express Nozomi trains cut the trip time to 2.5 hours. Maximum train length is 16 cars. The Tokaido line carries 151 million passengers per year, two-fifths of all HSR passengers in Japan, and is the most heavily traveled high-speed rail line in the world.

JNR was privatized in 1987. It was divided on a regional basis into six railways, three for Japan's central main island of Honshu, with Japan's three other large islands each having their own railway. Only the three railways of Honshu are private stock companies. The other three, and the single freight railway that uses the narrow-gauge tracks of the other railways, require subsidies, not listed on stock exchanges, and in effect remain central government owned. JR East, JR Central and JR West paid 9.2 trillion yen to the government for their high speed rail tracks, only about one-third of the actual cost of their construction. ■

Referemce: Bill Hosokawa, *Old Man Thunder: Father of the Bullet Train*, 1997

U.S.A.

Chicago: the case of CREATE

How public policy and public-private sector cooperation have tackled rail bottlenecks and congestion

Transportation is a key element of any economy. While Canada evades coming to grips with its rail transportation needs, in the U.S. there are multiple examples of public initiatives that are transforming the efficiency of its rail sector. CREATE, the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency Program, is an example worth examining.

For almost 150 years, Chicago has been the hub of the North American rail system. Each day Chicago hosts 500 freight trains totaling 37,000 freight cars. Some 760 passenger trains -- long-distance, regional, and commuter -- enter and leave the city. Six of the seven largest railways of the U.S. and Canada have a presence in Chicago.

While a freight train from the west coast may take 48 hours and travel 3,520 km (2,200 miles) to Chicago, it will take 30 hours to just cross the city. The hub city's railway physical plant is a major part of the problem. There are many places at which railways cross each other at grade and there are many rail and road crossings at grade as well. Congestion can get so bad that freights can't enter yards and must wait on main lines tieing up the network further.

Capacity issues became so severe that Chicago's then mayor, Richard Daley, called on the federal Surface Transportation Board to convene a task force of railway, Illinois and Chicago representatives to develop a plan to tackle the problem. This group announced the CREATE program in June of 2003. The CREATE plan proposed building 25 new roadway overpasses or underpasses, six new railway overpasses or underpasses to separate freight and passenger train movements, 36 new freight railway upgrades to track, switches and signals, viaduct improvements, grade crossing safety enhancements, and an integrated information system so that the regioin's train operations would be visible to all dispatchers handling train movements through the city.

What needed to be done was quickly evident. However, it would take time to obtain funds, and more time for building. Each project would be separately planned and funded. But the key feature of CREATE was that it was a partnership that included the operating railways. The total estimated cost was $3 billion, of which $230 million was expected from the private railways.

Englewood Flyover

A major CREATE project was the Englewood Flyover. This $142 million project was begun in 2012 and was officially opened on October 23, 2014. On Chicago's South Side, near 63rd Street and State Street, the Englewood junction sees the north-south Metra Rock Island commuter line, with 78 weekday trains in and out of Metra's downtown LaSalle Street Station, crossing the busy east-west Norfolk Southern (NS) tracks that carry about 60 freight trains daily and 14 Amtrak trains to and from its Union Station. CREATE puts the Metra trains on a bridge over the NS tracks.

Above: 2011 photo of Englewood junction by Harvey Tillis. Below: official celebration photo of Englewood Flyover from Norfolk Southern Corp.

This project is more than the flyover. It included other approach bridges, embankments, retaining walls, and space along the NS tracks for two additional future tracks of a mid-west high speed rail line. There are also other new bridges nearby over highways and the CTA's Red Line rapid transit. Previously, delays to Metra and Amtrak trains at this junction were notorious.

Passenger rail planning beyond CREATE

Chicago Amtrak trains to and from Michigan, which benefit from the Englewood Flyover, still face a chokepoint on NS at Porter, Indiana, near the border with Michigan.

June of 2014 witnessed the kick off of the Indiana Gateway project that brings together Amtrak, NS, the Indiana Dept. of Transportation, and the Federal Railroad Administration to tackle up-grades to the NS track between Porter and the Illinois state line. The project will install universal crossovers at five locations, and three segments of third track. Amtrak will build a new passing siding near Porter. These upgrades will help Michigan provide reliable higher speed trains between Chicago and Detroit. Michigan is upgrading track it recently acquired from NS between Kalamazoo and Dearborn just west of Detroit for 110 mph service.

In meeting the public's transportation needs, planning ahead is the crucial role for governments. CREATE is delivering critical new rail infrastructure for Chicago. In September 2014, the departments of transportation of Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan issued a draft Tier I Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) regarding planning rail needs for the Chicago-Detroit/Pontiac passenger rail corridor for the next two decades. Michigan's DOT appears to be the lead agency for this plan. The plan is based on anticipation of major increases in ridership as rail infrastructure is improved for both commuter and intercity rail.

To illustrate the forward nature of this planning effort, these agencies are anticipating that adding passenger trains on the freight-carrying railways

into Chicago west of Porter will likely not be possible. Planning more passenger train capacity "south-of-the-lake" includes considering possible routes for a two-track high performance rail line dedicated to passenger trains in this corridor. Such a corridor would support not only passenger trains between Chicago and Michigan, but also improved rail service between Chicago, Cleveland, and the U.S. east coast. Such track would be electrification ready. The significance of this EIS is that passenger rail is considered as key to this corridor's future mobility needs. ■

High Performance Rail

Waking up to high performance rail: Why HPR's time has come

It's got so many advantages! But what is it? Basically, it's fast and reliable passenger train travel on upgraded, existing railway lines. Speeds are between 140 kph (90 mph) and 180 kph (110 mph). New diesel engines and high-efficiency rolling stock need to be acquired for this kind of service. Station improvements with improved transit connections are required, too. Service should start with at least six roundtrips daily. Fares must be competitive with driving and other modes of public transport.

That's the model for high-performance rail (HPR), sometimes called higher-speed rail. As one of its main U.S. proponents says, speed sells, but it isn't the only factor in how people make their travel choices. HPR's goal is to draw travellers back to trains by providing a wide variety of improvements to make them competitive with cars and planes in markets up to 640 km (400 miles). The expectation is ridership to ultimately justify hourly trains in each direction. Capital costs would be modest, though there would always be the need for an operating subsidy from governments.

Without doubt, the success of high-speed rail (HSR) around the world has been a transport revolution. It has shown it can displace road and air travel in medium-distance markets. In addition to its economic benefits, HSR is a card to play in curbing global warming and achieving sustainable transportation in contrast to oil-intensive road and air travel. But there is little movement toward HSR in the U.S. and Canada.

HSR is expensive, as train speeds mean entirely new right-of-ways with gentle curves. No grade crossings are possible. Tracks need to be on embankments or in trenches, on viaducts or in tunnels. Electrification is essential. Construction takes years and requires a large land take. As the dozens of countries embracing HSR have proven, its high cost is not an absolute barrier – where conditions warrant it.

So why no HSR in the U.S.? Again to simplify, it's because priorities have been military spending, highways and air facilities. Private sector HSR proposals in California, Texas and Florida were stymied because capital costs, even with very good ridership projections, were so high as to make payback insufficient to cover construction out of operating profits. The projects all required large government grants to succeed. More recently, right-wing political opposition has developed against HSR. The claim is usually that America is different and HSR will not draw sufficient numbers of people away from their cars or from flying. A working example of HSR is missing. The California HSR line between San Francisco and Los Angeles will eventually establish its viability, but the opening of the full line is decades away.

Enter HPR. Actually, America has had HPR for some time. Amtrak's Northeast Corridor is the best example. There are also other corridors with excellent fast and frequent service, and even adequate equipment: The Capitol Corridor and Pacific Surf Line in California, the Cascades in Oregon and Washington, and the Chicago-Milwaukee Hiawatha service. These are still held to a top speed of 90 mph.

Between them, Amtrak and Michigan own 242 miles (373 km) of the Wolverine Corridor between Porter, IN and Dearborn, MI. In 2002, Amtrak began the work necessary to bring this line up to the 110mph. Similarly, in cooperation with the Illinois DOT and Union Pacific, upgrading is now under way for a portion of the Chicago-Springfield-St. Louis Lincoln Corridor. These efforts helped to develop the necessary standards for an HPR corridor, including track, train control systems and safer grade crossing protection. By 2010, the test sections were hosting Amtrak trains at 110 mph.

A critical turning point for HPR occurred with the election of President Obama in 2008. He is the first thoroughly pro-rail president since the formation of Amtrak in 1970, adopting a transportation program with substantial rail grants, augmented by stimulus spending, aimed at reversing economic recession. While Obama took pride in what he call his HSR program, the expanded federal support was really about HPR.

In the U.S., states must have rail plans if they want federal rail dollars and, as part of this policy, they began proposing intercity and commuter rail initiatives. HPR has become accepted as legitimate public transportation policy, building passenger rail assets incrementally.

A U.S. HSR revolution is not at hand. But a rail passenger evolution surely is, one that has HPR as a legitimate part of the development of an integrated transportation network that will lay the foundation for HSR in several corridors.

Canada might have made this evolution continent-wide. In 2002, VIA Rail produced its VIA Fast plan, which was really a Quebec-Windsor Corridor HPR proposal. It was tentatively accepted by the Chretien government and then iced by the Martin government. Between 2007 and 2012, the federal Conservative government did fund a number of VIA projects to nudge it towards becoming a high performance railway in the corridor. But then this all unravelled.

TAO is currently working to bring public attention to how a revival and revitalization of passenger rail can be achieved in Southwestern Ontario with the application of a modest investment, requiring the joint efforts of all levels of government in the region. What we're calling for is what the U.S. is now getting: HPR. ■

-- Tony Turrittin

Tokyo Station, July 2013, showing new JR East high speed trains. Green E5 is a 10-car set coupled to a red E6 7-car set used in northern Shinkansen service. Top speed is 320 kph. Train sets are capable of operating in winter weather. Behind is an E4 bi-level train set. Two coupled 8-car E4 train sets have 1,634 seats, the highest capacity high speed trains in the world. Top speed is 240 kph. Photo: Kyle Woodmansey.

TAO Activities.

Transport Action Ontario's (TAO) advocacy and educational work by board members and other volunteers is ongoing. The Latest News section of our website summarizes recent projects with a link to a written statement, submission or report. Recent activities include:

Canada Transportation Act Review. In June, 2014, Transport Minister Lisa Raitt announced a review of the Canada Transportation Act. The Honourable David Emerson, supported by five eminent Canadians, will report back to the Minister with recommendations by the end of 2015. Initial submissions from stakeholders to the review panel were to be submitted by December 30, 2014. Transport Action Ontario, working with other Transport Action affiliates, has made a submission to the review panel. The central focus was railway-based transportation, where we have extensive collective knowledge and professional experience.

Toronto Island airport. On December 9, 2014, the first public meeting for the Environmental Assessment (EA) for Billy Bishop Toronto City Airport (BBTCA) was held. This is one of a series of concurrent studies underway by the proponent (Toronto Port Authority) to amend the Tripartite Agreement to allow for an extension of the runway and the introduction of new-technology jets. TAO has been very active on this file, and has met with the EA team twice to provide input into the scope of the study. The public meeting posed four questions pertaining to the scope of the EA. In response, we provided written answers to these questions and sent these to the EA team.

Rail safety in Canada. TAO representatives participated as expert panelists in a Community Forum on Rail Safety on November 28, 2014, organized by three Toronto MPs – Carolyn Bennett, Chrystia Freeland, and Adam Vaughan – whose ridings border the CP main line in central Toronto. The Forum was very stimulating, with many good questions and comments from the audience. Following the Forum, we felt it would be helpful to summarize the position of TAO, as expressed at the meeting, with our statement being forwarded to the MPs sponsoring the meeting.

Meeting with Premier and Transportation Minister. Move the GTHA, a coalition of which TAO is a member, met with Premier Kathleen Wynne and Minister of Transportation Steven Del Duca on October 14, 2014. We discussed several items relating to transportation funding, project prioritization, potential new legislation and securing federal involvement. Subsequently, Move the GTHA sent a follow-up letter summarizing the discussion and identifying next steps. ▪

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Join Transport Action to help us advocate for sustainable transportation. By joining Transport Action Ontario, you also become a member of Transport Action Canada. Members receive *Ontario Report* as well as our national newsletter *Transport Action*.

To join, send your name, address, telephone number, email address (if any), and membership fee to our box address above. Our annual membership fees are: introductory (1st year only) $20; regular $35; senior $30; student $25; low income $20; family $50; non-profit affiliate $75; business $170. Transport Action Ontario is requesting a $10 supplement on a membership for mailing a paper copy of its newsletter, *Ontario Report*.

Transport Action Canada is a registered charity. Donations to it receive a tax-credit receipt. Its website address is //www.transport-action.ca.

Board meetings: Feb 5, Mar 5, Apr 2, June 4, July 30, Sept 9, Oct 1, and Nov 5 at 5:30pm at Centre for Social Innovation, 215 Spadina Ave., Toronto. Our AGM is to be Apr 25. If you wish to participate, contact Peter Miasek to confirm as date, time and location may change.