



Ontario Report

Transport Action Ontario

(Formerly Transport 2000 Ontario)



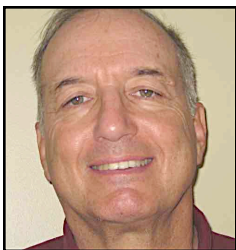
Meeting room of VIA station in St. Marys was at capacity for TAO's launch event October 9. Greg Gormick presented highlights of his report *Out of Steam*. Photo: Dan Hammond.



Featured stories this issue

- Charting the rebirth of the streetcar in the U.S. (page 3)
- China extends its economic reach by railways (page 6)
- Greg Gormick: better train service for SW Ontario (p. 7)

FROM THE PRESIDENT - PETER MIASEK



Urban rapid transit gains momentum in Greater Golden Horseshoe

With provincial and municipal elections now out of the way, our province can hopefully get back to work – at least until the federal election in 2015! Urban transit was a major issue in many parts of the Greater Golden Horseshoe (GGH), and the results were generally positive from our perspective.

As discussed in my President's remarks in the May-June issue of *Ontario Report*, transportation was a key issue in the provincial election. The govern-

ment's "Moving Ontario Forward" plan, contained in the 2015 budget, sets up a dedicated, transparent \$29B fund of new money over 10 years for transportation. The headline project was "Regional Express Rail" (RER), where the GO system would be transformed into an all-day two-way 15 minute electric (EMU) service over the next 10 years. Since then, Metrolinx has started a major push to study RER. An excellent preliminary report was presented in September and substantially more detail is expected to

be available in December. Transport Action Ontario is strongly supportive of the RER concept.

It is not all smooth sailing on the provincial front. A number of transit observers have perceived a lessening of provincial support for the fully-funded Sheppard East and Finch West LRT projects in Toronto. There is a vocal minority of citizens opposing these projects – demanding subways instead to avoid

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Report card on VIA Rail launched October 9 at St. Marys

At the invitation of the Save VIA Committee in St. Marys, Ontario, Transport Action Ontario (TAO) released its latest report, *Out of Steam*. Prepared by Greg Gormick, the report traces the decline of VIA Rail service in Canada, including Southwestern Ontario.

The launch took place Thursday, October 9 at a packed meeting hall in the town-owned VIA station in St. Marys. After opening remarks by Chris West, chair of the grass roots Save VIA Committee, TAO President Peter Miasek introduced rail policy adviser and researcher Greg Gormick, the meeting's main speaker. After putting together all the numbers he could find, his data revealed how badly VIA services have declined across Canada, but especially in Canada's best passenger rail market, Ontario's southwest.

VIA's decline has had considerable social cost. Gormick described how cutting the Montreal-Halifax *Ocean* from 6 days a week to 3 was a big loss for an elderly

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disruption to auto traffic. Transport Action Ontario, along with virtually all transit experts, believes that LRT is the right technology for these corridors, and will be continuing to urge the province to stick with evidence-based transit planning.

Municipally, rapid transit was a major election issue in many GGH cities, including Waterloo Region, Mississauga, Hamilton and Toronto.

Despite contracts being signed and early construction underway, the Waterloo Region LRT project was an election issue. Known as ION, it will be a 19 km LRT line plus 17 km adapted BRT, with a capital cost of \$818M. The project is fully funded with roughly equal contributions from the province, federal government and Waterloo Region itself. A DBFOM P3 approach has been selected and a contract has been signed with Grandlinq, the winning consortium. Happily, voters strongly backed pro-LRT candidates. When completed in 2017, Waterloo will have the first modern LRT system in Ontario.

The \$1.6 B Hurontario-Main LRT project, running 23 km from Port Credit in Mississauga to downtown Brampton was also an election issue. In contrast to most other LRT/BRT projects in the GTHA, this project is unique in that it will reduce the number of general purpose traffic lanes from 6 to 4 over much of the route, rather than widening the road to maintain the number of lanes. This project has an approved Environmental Assessment, but no committed funding. The Mississauga mayor-elect, Bonnie Crombie, strongly supported this project. However, in Brampton, the previous council had expressed concern about the route through downtown Brampton and is asking for a review of other route options.

The proposed Hamilton LRT vision was also an active issue. It is proposed to run 13 km along the King corridor from McMaster University to Eastgate Square. Estimated cost is \$1.0B. During the campaign, the three leading mayoral candidates took different positions on this vision. The winner, Fred Eisenberger, stated that he personally supports LRT, although he plans to "hit the reset button" and establish a citizen panel to dis-

cuss the issue. In our view, this is a counterproductive move as it has already been done.

In Toronto, transit was the top election issue with the three leading mayoral candidates presenting dramatically different visions. Certainly the most problematic from our perspective was Candidate Doug Ford's vision of "subways, subways, subways." Mayor-elect John Tory advocated strongly for "Smart Track," a vision resembling RER. He supported the ill-advised (in our view) extension of the Bloor-Danforth subway in Scarborough on the basis that it was approved by all levels of government and it was time to move forward. He supported, although somewhat tentatively, the fully-funded Sheppard and Finch LRT projects.

The next four years of urban transit development in Ontario will continue to be very interesting. Assuming the money holds out, it is conceivable that there will be good progress on many of these projects. Progress would be greatly helped if the federal government would make a consistent, predictable commitment to urban transit. But that's the subject of another column! ■

VIA Rail report launch*...continued from PAGE 1*

woman in Miramichi, NB. Not being able to drive, she relied on the train to visit her husband in a care facility in nearby Rogersville. She could make a trip to see her husband returning the next day, a trip that became impossible once the schedule was cut.

In 1977, VIA provided five round-trip trains a day to St. Marys, now down to two. Basically, service is so poor west of Toronto that same-day trips are next to impossible, with large parts of the day without service altogether, making rail irrelevant for business people, students, seniors, and people headed for the theatre at Stratford, to name a few market segments affected. But the market is plainly there as anyone who drives the congested 400-series highways can attest. Similar highly-populated regions in the U.S. support from 6 to 15 daily trains.

The October 10 edition of the St. Marys *Journal Argus* carried extensive coverage of the TAO launch, written by news editor Stew Slater who also interviewed Gormick following the event.

Gormick has talked with MPs from all political parties over the years and found many supportive of re-investing in VIA and improving frequencies. But the current federal government is not taking those steps. In this regard, Canada is out of step with most developed countries around the world. Even in the U.S. the federal government and many states have rail strategies and plans which include the expansion of passenger train routes.

With regard to the north main line between Toronto and London through Stratford and St. Marys, Gormick suggested that with eight new sets of double-deck cars much like Amtrak uses in parts of the U.S., and some track upgrades to increase speeds, VIA could offer six round-trips a day. This could be done for approximately \$200 million. Gormick argues, Slater writes, that "would improve service, ridership, and the attractiveness of the rail option sufficiently to ensure that investment would pay for itself in cost reductions in 10 years." Without rail service, both St. Marys and Stratford would be without any inter-city public transportation.

While the decline of VIA Rail is discouraging, Gormick urged the audience not to give up the fight. A new president at VIA is trying to build the case for expanding service. And Ontario Premier Kathleen Wynne has stated publicly she is in favour of expanded passenger rail with the province willing to step in to fund some projects if there is federal inaction.

Others speaking briefly at the launch include St. Marys Mayor Steve Grose, Councillor Carey Pope, and Hamilton's then mayor Bob Bratina, a long-time rail advocate, all praising the Save VIA Committee for its advocacy of passenger rail. ■



St. Marys VIA station - October , 2014



Light rail transit renaissance gives birth to streetcar revival

Following World War II, around the world streetcars as a form of urban transit were abandoned in favour of buses, less so in Europe, but even there. In North America they returned as light rail transit (LRT), generally on exclusive right-of-ways with widely separated stops to increase the speed of travel. In North America the light rail renaissance dates from the 1980s, Edmonton opening the first LRT in North America in 1978 followed by Calgary and San Diego in the U.S. in 1981. Since then hundreds of systems have been built worldwide. In particular, European countries such as Gt. Britain, France, and Spain have embraced LRT.

The early part of 2014 has turned out to be full of unprecedented growth of new light rail and tramway systems. In the first eight months, 20 new systems started operating, 12 new systems were under construction, 8 new systems were approved for construction and probably up to 15 were in various stages of planning making a total of 55!

The reason for the success of LRT in North America is not difficult to figure out. LRT is able to move considerable numbers of people swiftly and at modest construction costs compared to subways or heavy rail built from scratch. They also have great public appeal. LRT provides a comfortable ride free from the jolting ride of a bus on poorly maintained streets with unreliable frequency and often severe on-board crowding. Moreover, planners came to realize that LRT

often leads to redevelopment occurring along corridors served by LRT.

In the U.S., there has been an interesting evolution within the spread of LRT. This is the reinvention of streetcars for urban transit. Portland OR was an early adopter of LRT (1986), a key element in the revival and redevelopment its downtown. Portland went on to bring back the streetcar as a downtown circulator, opening its first line in 2001, adding a second line in 2012, for a total track length of 11.6km, the two routes carrying 20,000 riders per day.

What's the difference between LRT and the streetcar? We've already noted that LRT is generally operated on its own right-of-way. LRT is adaptable as it can have a tunnelled section, be on a viaduct, or use the street, and stations are widely separated. LRTs are often in trains. Calgary LRTs are three articulated LRT cars hooked together. Each articulated car can carry 60 seated passengers and 113 standees for a maximum of 519 passengers. By contrast the streetcar operates on streets in mixed traffic, with frequent stops, as streetcars have generally done, and generally using a single car.

Today's modern streetcars stand out in two respects. Firstly, the quality of the overall rider's experience is high: spacious, large windows, air-conditioning, automated fare collection and messaging, low-floor sections to aid people with disabilities and people with strollers, and space for one or two bicycles. Secondly, when the streetcar line is constructed, the whole of the street is rebuilt, allowing for lane configuration for optimal street traffic flow, stops with platforms, bike lanes and sidewalk improvements, and street beautification. The new streetcar is truly part of a new world of urban living.

Writing about the streetcar revival in *Trains Magazine* (July 2014), Paul Grether explains, "The sudden growth of the streetcar can be attributed to the re-birth of the American central city and generational changes, the

declines in automobile use, and a desire by cities to redevelop and repopulate neighborhoods in ways that promote sustainable lifestyles."

As Grether notes, streetcars are appearing in downtown areas to accomplish the goals mentioned above, and to act as downtown people circulators. They are single cars, today probably a three-section articulated car. Portland's streetcar, for instance, has seating for 41 seats and room for 99 standees. But he anticipates that these initial starter lines will be extended. For example, Washington D.C. will likely open its first 4.3km H Street/Benning Road line by November 27. But Washington DC envisages a future priority system of 35.2km, to be extended to a total of 59.2km with service touching every ward of the city. In the future, such systems may use longer cars, with station stops at route extremities set at wider intervals. This would blur the distinction between streetcars and LRT, especially if a long-haul line moves to its own right-of-way at some point. He mentions Toronto as a forerunner in this regard. The TTC has ordered 204 cars for its legacy tram system, these being 100% low-floor streetcars from Bombardier with five-sections for a total length of 30.2m with 70 seated passengers and 181 standees.

Where is all this happening? Portland has already been mentioned. Seattle opened its South Lake Union line in 2007. Tacoma Link opened in 2003. Tucson opened Sun Link in July. New Orleans added two streetcar lines, Riverfront in 1988, and Canal Street in 2004. The latter line uses replica heritage streetcars. Cities planning modern streetcar lines include Sacramento, Los Angeles, Tempe, Milwaukee, Kansas City, Oklahoma City, Dallas, Austin, San Antonio, Grand Rapids, Detroit, Cincinnati, Arlington County, Fort Lauderdale, and Miami, according to Grether.

In addition, there are legacy streetcar systems in the U.S. in Boston, Philadelphia, San Francisco, and New Orleans (St. Charles Avenue, the oldest continuously operating streetcar line in the world). Of these, Boston and Philadelphia are candidate for modernization with low-floor streetcars. In addition there are 22 cities in the U.S. now with LRT. This is indeed some revival! ■



Portland streetcar eastbound at Portland State Univ. stop at Market St. and the South Park Blocks. Wikimedia: Cacophony, 2007.

U.S.A. News

California Update

California high speed rail moves ahead

Two hurdles have been cleared for the high speed rail project in California. The California High Speed Rail Authority (CHSRA) faced two court challenges which it has defeated. On July 31, an appeal court overturned a lower court decision that had blocked the sale of Prop 1A bonds worth \$8.6B for the construction of the early phases of the project. Earlier, on July 24, the same appeal court upheld a lower court ruling that approved the environmental impact assessment as being proper in the selection of the Pacheco Pass route between Gilroy and the Central Valley for high speed trains. On October 15, the California Supreme Court refused to hear appeals of the July 24 and 31 decisions, validating the actions of the appeal court. This likely brings to an end the use of court actions to block HSR in California.

While there has been substantial initial funding help from the U.S. federal government for HSR in California (\$3.3B), in the long term most of the funding for this \$68B 832km project will be the state's responsibility. In 2006, California adopted a cap-and-trade system to reduce greenhouse gas (GGH) emissions long-term. Leading GHG producers have been identified and limits for emissions set giving rise to caps on the output of GHGs on an annual basis by industry. The production of CO₂ has thus been monetized and a market for emissions credits established. Caps will be lowered over time giving users of fossil fuel generated energy economic incentives to reduce their GHG outputs through greater efficiencies and technological change. Firms that emit below their cap generate emission credits which can be traded or sold to firms producing over their cap. California's cap-and-trade system is being coordinated with other jurisdictions that have adopted this system, including British Columbia and Quebec.

In order to provide economic flexibility as GHGs are reduced, California will auction off emission credits on a quarterly basis. It is anticipated that this will generate a major new revenue stream for the state government. By law, these funds will be directed to meeting envi-

ronmental and social objectives. In June, the state legislature agreed to set aside \$250 million of the current budget for HSR, with other sums going to transit, housing, and sustainable community programs and projects, the funding source being the cap-and-trade auction. Wide application of the cap-and-trade system starts in 2015. In future years, HSR will receive 25% of the auction income, the main funding source for this new infrastructure program.

On October 4, the CHSRA asked manufacturers for expressions of interest in building 95 train sets for service on the San Francisco-Los Angeles high speed rail line. On October 31, the CHSRA announced that it had received sealed bids from three joint construction ventures to design and build the second phase of the HSR project, the 60 mile segment between Fresno and Bakersfield, a contract estimated to be worth from \$1.5 to \$2B. The first segment now under construction is the 28 mile leg between Madera and Fresno in the Central Valley. ■

Caltrain electrification, the Transbay Center station, and Muni's Central Subway LRT

High speed trains will enter San Francisco along the Caltrain commuter rail line from San Jose. This 80km line will be upgraded and electrified at a cost of \$1.5B. This will include positive train control and the purchase of new bi-level EMU trains. The final environmental impact statement is due soon, with design and construction occurring from 2015 to 2019. Recent news indicates that the total cost of Caltrain modernization may be closer to \$1.76B and opening date between 2020 and 2021.

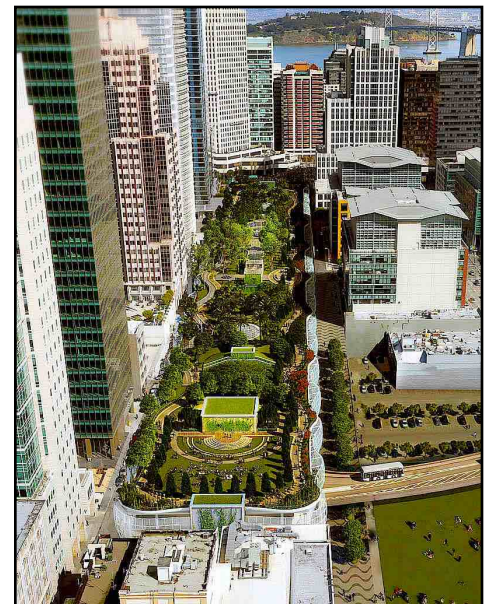
Caltrain's downtown station at 4th Street and King will be replaced by a new terminal to be an easy walk to the city's financial district. The new site is at the 1st Street and Mission location of the TransBay Terminal that opened in 1939 to serve the electrified trains running between the Terminal and East Bay cities over the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge (7 km) that had opened in 1936. Train service ended in 1958, the Terminal then being used by buses serving East Bay cities over the bridge. This 1939 building closed in 2010 when construction started on the new Transbay Transit Center.

Dubbed the "Grand Central Station of the west," this new \$4.5B facility scheduled to open in 2019, will continue as a terminal for East Bay and inter-city buses, and will be the final terminal for electrified Caltrain Peninsula commuter trains, as well as the downtown station for the inter-city bullet trains of the CHSRA. Trains will gain access by way of a 2.1km tunnel extension from the present station at 4th and King. The new Transit Center will also be surrounded by a precinct of homes, offices, parks and shops.

Fourth Street and King will remain a stop for Caltrain services. The City of San Francisco will extend its Third Street LRT line, opened in 2007, from 4th and King north in a tunnel with four stops to Chinatown. Construction of the 2.7km Central Subway began in 2012, will open in 2019, and will partly function as a downtown distributor for Caltrain commuters. ■



Above: Transbay Terminal circa 1939.
Below: Rendering of 2019 Transbay Transit Center by Burohappold Engineering.



Florida Update

All Aboard Florida moves forward

The higher speed rail project between Miami and Orlando, reported in the March-April newsletter, continues to move forward. In September, Siemens was selected to build the locomotives and passenger cars for All Aboard Florida (AAF). In Phase 1, five train sets of two diesel locomotives and four passenger cars each would operate between Miami and West Palm Beach by the end 2016. The extension of service to Orlando would start in mid-2017, requiring five additional train sets. In Phase 2, AAF trains would consist of seven coaches. Siemens diesel locomotives would be capable of speeds up to 200kph. The stainless steel coaches will be single-level and will load at high-level platforms. Construction has started on track upgrading and new stations for the Phase 1 section.

AAF requires loans of up to \$1.75B to complete this project. Originally, AAF was proposing applying for a \$1.6B low-interest loan from the federal government's Railroad Rehabilitation and Improvement Financing program. AAF claims that it will build and operate its higher speed train project without cost to taxpayers. Apparently responding to criticism that it was receiving government subsidies, AAF has announced that it will seek funding using another federally supported program, relying on the sale of Public Activity Bonds (PABs). PABs are a financial instrument initiated by states allowing private entities to receive capital for projects that have major public benefits by the sale of tax-exempt bonds. On October 21, both Miami-Dade and Brevard Counties sanctioned the issuance of PABs for AAF thus establishing the local benefits of the new express rail plan. Institutional investors buy these bonds and assume the risk of default. With federal agreement, the state's Florida Development Finance Corporation will issue bonds, the proceeds going to the AAF. The railway pays back the bonds over time.

It may turn out that AAF will use some combination of funding from the low-interest loan program and the PAB program. In reality, both ways of raising capital are an indirect federal subsidy, in the case of the PABs, a loss of taxation

on the interest income received by the bond holders. While tax-exempt bonds have long been used in the U.S. to raise funds for roads, bridges, and schools, PABs are relatively new and have turned up being used to fund a winery, golf resort, museum, and office buildings.

There is wide support throughout Florida for All Aboard Florida though the NIMBYs of the Treasure Coast section of the route just north of West Palm Beach are not fading away. The project has received the tacit support of Governor Rick Scott who was re-elected on Nov. 4. ■

Michigan Update

Michigan acquires orphan Talgo trains

The state of Michigan is to acquire two full-length Talgo trains for service on the Wolverine route between Pontiac, Detroit, and Chicago. The passive tilting Talgo trains are capable of traveling at 110 mph (176kph). These trains were built in Wisconsin for service on Amtrak's Hiawatha line between Chicago and Milwaukee which was to have been extended to the state's capital at Madison. When Scott Walker (Rep.) was elected governor of Wisconsin in 2010, he killed Wisconsin's higher speed rail program, leaving the completed train sets in limbo. In September, Michigan bought the train sets for \$58 million.

With federal government support, Michigan is currently upgrading the Wolverine route to speeds of 110mph, having purchased most of this route from Norfolk Southern. Amtrak operates three daily round trips on the route. With a growing ridership, more daily trains are needed. Michigan is part of a consortium which has purchased 130 high-speed bi-level passenger cars. Michigan is to receive its share of the order between late 2015 and 2018. The purchase of the Talgo trains will allow Michigan to add additional trains to the Wolverine service in the transition to receiving the bi-level equipment.

Talgo trains have been used by Amtrak on the Cascade corridor since 1994. The corridor extends from Vancouver, BC to Seattle, Portland, and Eugene OR. Five Talgo trains serve the corridor and two new ones are being added. Talgo trains have and engine and 13 segments

or sections seating up to 275 passengers. The cars of the train are lower and shorter than the standard passenger rail car. They are permanently coupled with one axle between each car. They offer an excellent ride on quality track. The Talgo trains may well be in service in Michigan in 2015. ■



Amtrak Talgo Cascade at King Street Station, Seattle, July, 2005.

Transit-oriented San Francisco is heavily car-centric, study reveals

Released in October, a study by Transportation Choices for Sustainable Communities shows just how unbalanced is model equity in San Francisco. Aaron Bialick highlights the research findings in sf.streetsblog.org (Nov. 3):

- Parking lanes in San Francisco constitute 15 percent of the paved roadway area, equal to real estate valued between \$8 and \$35 billion.

- Street parking in San Francisco totals 902 miles in length, six times longer than the 143 miles of bike lanes.

- Bicycling constitutes four percent of trips, but only 1.4 percent of roadway space is dedicated to bicycle lanes.

- There are 36 lane miles of dedicated transit lanes, but 211 lanes miles of freeway lanes.

- General tax revenues, not user fees, pay 75 percent of roadway maintenance costs in San Francisco.

- The federal gas tax, in inflation-adjusted dollars, is at its lowest point since 1983, when the Reagan administration doubled it.

The city's 275,450 on-street parking spaces would stretch 60 miles longer than California's 840 mile coastline.

Pro-car forces are currently advocating a return to "balanced transportation" to shift city investment away from transit, bike and pedestrian-way improvements. ■



International News

China extending its economic reach by fostering connecting rail links

China has the world's largest system of high speed trains, and a still expanding regular freight and passenger rail system. Chinese railways use Europe's standard gauge with car sizes that match those of North America.

China has made headlines by announcing major extensions of high speed rail (HSR) to Moscow, and to Europe via Turkey, and is proposing HSR to connect with India, Singapore, and Ho Chi Minh City in Viet Nam.

In our previous *Ontario Report*, we highlighted the evolution of Turkey's rail system, its newly opened HSR and tunnel connecting Europe to Asia under the Bosphorus at Istanbul. China's proposed "New Silk Road" HSR would use this tunnel on its way to Europe. This Trans-Asian HSR, some 6,000km long would be built between 2020-2030 at a cost of \$150B. It would stretch from Urumqi in western China, through Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran and Turkey. Presumably it would be standard gauge; passenger trains would travel at 200kph and freight trains at 160kph. The Beijing-Moscow HSR would be 7,000km long, with a two-day trip for passengers instead of the current six on the Trans-Siberian/Mongolia/China route. Cost of construction: \$230B.

While these HSR projects catch the news, the main game for China is to improve rail freight movement to Europe and to help develop railway links to the vast economic region that lies between Europe and China and south of Russia.

E. William Engdahl has written on the geopolitics of China's railway investment strategy ("Eurasian Economic Boom and Geopolitics: China's Land Bridge to Europe" for globalresearch.ca). "Contrary to the dogma of Milton Friedman and his followers," he notes, "markets are not 'free.' They are always manmade. The essential element to build new markets is building infrastructure and for the vast landmass of Eurasia railroad linkages are essential to these new markets." The collapse of the Soviet Union opened up the space east of the Caspian Sea. Fostering railways in

this region will link China economically to this undeveloped part of the world.

China has recently constructed new western rail links. Of note are the two routes west from Urumqi into Kazakhstan leading on to Russia and Europe. Formerly part of the Soviet Union, Kazakhstan and other countries of the eastern Caspian area use Russian broad gauge. However, containers are easily transferred to new cars where there a gauge change occurs. Kazakhstan has offered to build a standard gauge railway from its border with China to Iran which would provide a standard gauge connection to Europe through Iran and Turkey. This project appears not to be moving forward; there is resistance from Kazakhstan's neighbors to the immediate south who may have other plans. But China could foster such a standard gauge link by providing funding.

Turkey has unfinished business regarding its standard gauge railway's links to the Caspian Sea region. Turkey is building and upgrading links it has to the east. It already is linked with the Iranian railways. It is working to connect with the broad gauge railways of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan. But there is a key bottleneck at Lake Van where all rail traffic east-west must use a ferry boat to cross this lake. Little information is available on plans to build a rail bypass at Van in this mountainous region, though a rail tunnel has been mentioned. ■

Iran invests in railway expansion

Iran has a 10,500km rail network, with 3,500km under construction and 4,500 more kilometers planned. The double-tracked 1,500km Tehran-Mashhad route is being electrified.

Aside from its own economic strengths, Iran is the site of east-west and north-south bridge corridors. While connected to Turkey, construction of an improved link through Azerbaijan to Russia is being completed. Iran railways (RAI) are now better linked to the eastern Caspian region by a major upgrade of the rail line from Iran through Turkmenistan into Kazakhstan (926km). RAI is building into Afghanistan to Herat. RAI has improved the line to the Pakistan border, but Pakistan's rail line from

this border point to the rest of Pakistan is in poor shape.

Upgrading of the Tehran line to the Persian Gulf port of Bandar Abbas proceeds. RAI hopes to move containers from Singapore to Russia through this port. Gulf states are investing in a coastal railway that will connect Oman, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia through Iraq to Iran. ■

Mexico selects Chinese consortium to built high speed line

The Mexican government has awarded the Chinese consortium of China Railway Construction Corp. Ltd. along with Mexican partners, a contract to build a high speed rail line from Mexico City (pop. 8.9M) to the north-central industrial city Querétaro (pop. 1.8M), a distance of 210km. The contract is to build and operate for five years. There were no other bidders to the government's tender. Trains will travel at 300kph (188mph) taking less than an hour for the trip. Ridership is anticipated to be 27,000 passengers daily. Current travel time is from two to three hours by highway. Rail passenger services were ended in Mexico in the early 1990s. Mexico's President Enrique Peña Nieto, elected in 2012, has an ambitious program of fast trains for Mexico. An opening of the Querétaro high speed line in five years will result in Mexico having the first true high speed rail line in the Americas.

As we go to press, on November 6, Mexico's President cancelled the just completed Mexico City-Querétaro tender and ordered a new tender of longer duration, hoping to attract a greater range of manufacturers. *Railway Gazette* (Nov. 7) reported that a government official "reiterated that the now-cancelled competition had met all legal requirements. However, President Peña Nieto was anxious that there should be 'not the least doubt' over a project of such importance and promising so many benefits for Mexico." ■



Op-Ed Analysis

Seizing the opportunity - reflections on the St. Marys report launch

by Greg Gormick

VIA is dying. That's the view of former Amtrak president David Gunn and many other rail professionals. After delving into VIA's skimpy reporting of its performance in its recent annual and quarterly reports, I can't disagree. As I have said in my report, *Out of Steam: The Urgent Need to Modernize VIA Rail Canada*, VIA is hanging on by a very slender thread.

So, is it time to throw up our hands and take the view that VIA can't be saved? Certainly not. There have been developments recently that suggest there is one region of this country where we can undertake a concerted effort to prove the validity of improved rail passenger service.

While VIA has sadly declined as an issue of intense national concern, that's not the case in Southwestern Ontario. The turnout for the release of *Out of Steam* in St. Marys is but one example of the ongoing public interest that exists along the three VIA lines west of Toronto, especially the North Main Line. For this, the St. Marys Save VIA Committee and Rail Action in Lambton (RAIL) deserve top marks. These citizens' groups, formed in the wake of the 2012 service cuts, have refused to give up on their legitimate and very public demands for effective VIA service.

Linked with this grassroots advocacy is a development that represents a real opportunity for those who have long said there are fundamental governance and funding flaws that must be corrected if VIA is ever going to rebound. This is the commitment of the reelected government of Premier Kathleen Wynne to rail-based solutions to cure some of Southern Ontario's most serious transportation woes.

The cornerstone of the Wynne government's \$29-billion Moving Ontario Forward transportation plan is the conversion of the GO system into the electrified, high-frequency Regional Express Rail (RER) opera-

tion. There's also the investigation of the feasibility of a provincial high-speed rail (HSR) service from Toronto to London and Windsor.

While the RER plan is thoroughly supportable, there are many of us who believe this latest HSR investigation will produce little. Studied numerous times by the public and private sectors, the findings have always been that HSR will be extremely expensive, take at least a decade to deliver and still won't bring in enough passengers or revenue to justify its high cost.

Furthermore, the cost of RER and other major projects to which the Wynne government has committed itself will easily consume the entire Moving Ontario Forward budget. There simply won't be enough funds to implement provincial HSR service.

But there is a solution that is both financially and politically palatable. It's high-performance rail (HPR), which is now being implemented on several Amtrak corridors through federal/state partnerships. We will soon see proof of the validity of this approach when the interconnected improvements in equipment, infrastructure and frequency are unfurled on Amtrak's Wolverine (Pontiac-Detroit-Chicago) and Lincoln (Chicago-St. Louis) corridors, to be followed by others across the U.S.

More than speed, HPR is defined in terms of its multiple service attributes, including:

- Frequency;
- Fares;
- Comfort and onboard amenities;
- Station convenience;
- Door-to-door travel time; and
- On-time performance.

In the past, TAO has called for such an approach, which would involve incremental investment in infrastructure and fleet, additional frequencies, maximization of VIA's connectivity with urban transit and intercity bus service, and a combination of federal and provincial funding. But when every previous provincial government was totally resistant to investment in intercity rail service, there wasn't the faintest hope such a

logical approach would ever take root.

Now, the landscape has changed. Right at the start, Premier Wynne expressed her hope that the federal government would become a partner in the Ontario HSR plan, especially given the fact that VIA is already serving Southwestern Ontario, if poorly. There's no reason why such a partnership couldn't be crafted for a more affordable and quicker HPR solution.

Of course, this presumes the feds really do want to have any future involvement in rail passenger service. One would have to believe the current government doesn't and, consequently, there's no case to be made for improved rail passenger service of any type – conventional, HPR or HSR. But a federal election looms.

With the possibility of political change in Ottawa and a government at Queen's Park that is not averse to rail-based solutions, the time is ripe for the development of a public advocacy campaign advancing the HPR option through presentations to the public and the politicians. That is exactly what TAO intends doing in concert with its allies in Southwestern Ontario.

Time is admittedly growing short for VIA. But those of us involved in this push for improved Southwestern Ontario service firmly believe there has never been a better time to make the case for a pragmatic, jointly-funded plan to deliver widespread mobility benefits relatively quickly and at a reasonable cost.

Stay tuned for the details of what promises to be an exciting campaign to decisively prove that Canadians not only want, but will fight with us for a modern and sustainable rail passenger service. The stakes are high, but so are the potential gains. ■

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TAO report *Out of Steam* is available at the TAO website (see bottom of page for web address). Specific document location:

<http://transport-action-ontario.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/TAO-OutofSteam2014-10-09.pdf>



To celebrate International Car Free Day, Sept. 22, 2014, the Latvian group Let's Bike It created a novel way to demonstrate how cars hog space compared to cyclists. The frames around each bicycle show the envelope required by a car.

Photo: Artūrs Pavlovs
www.visualnews.com

Ottawa News

There has been much activity in the Ottawa area in the last few months. In the mayoral race, incumbent Jim Watson has been popular with the electorate and, with the construction of Phase 1 of the LRT well underway, much of his platform was based on continuing with LRT phase 2. This would extend the LRT further east, west, and the diesel O-Train line further to the south, possibly with an airport spur. Provincial funding is available and if Federal funding comes through, construction could begin soon after the LRT opens in early 2018.

Mike Maguire, a mayoral hopeful, proposed instead to take advantage of underutilized CN lines to run GO-type trains instead of spending billions on LRT Phase 2. While he proposed only a few trains a day to start, implementation could be rapid and travel times could be fast due to higher speeds and fewer intermediate stations. Unfortunately his proposals (similar to those previously put forward by the Friends of the O-Train) attracted more criticism than support. Watson was re-elected with a wide margin and most Councillors who were running were re-elected. What is interesting about the campaign is that most candidates ran on platforms that included improved public transit. Few talked about more and wider roads and bridges.

Work on the LRT tunnels in the core of Ottawa (Bronson to Nicholas/Laurier) is progressing with three road-headers digging, two from the ends and

one at Queen near Kent. On November 7, one broke through connecting the western and central tunnels. However, much work remains to be done on the three deep stations and the eastern half of the tunnel. Surface work will start in one to two years as converting the busway portions to LRT will require major bus diversions until LRT takes over in 2018.

Up the Ottawa Valley, CN has recommenced lifting rails on the Beachburg Subdivision, working along the Ottawa River valley from Portage du Fort back towards Kanata. As this line used to be a major through freight line, much of it is valuable continuous welded rail to be re-used elsewhere. It is expected that most of the right-of-way will be acquired by the municipalities for multi-use pathways. Sadly we will probably never see commuter rail up the valley.

Last Friday saw another bus/VIA incident near the fatal Woodroffe Transitway collision site of September 2013.

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Apparently a VIA train was slow leaving Fallowfield Station siding, so the gate, which had been closed, opened briefly then closed again. In the confusion vehicles proceeded across the intersection followed by an OC Transpo bus which stopped after the white line, but before the tracks and was hit by the crossing gate as it came down. This has renewed calls for complete separation of at least the Woodroffe and Fallowfield grade crossings. Due to soil and water conditions, bridges are estimated to be very expensive and were not built decades ago. Since then VIA and road traffic has increased greatly.

On October 31, VIA Rail announced new trains 45/40 leaving Ottawa and Toronto at 10:30/10:45am, Fridays to Mondays. This means there are now 8 trains on Fridays and Mondays, probably more than ever before, 5 on Saturday and 6 on Sunday. ■ - Bernie Geiger, Ottawa

MEMBERSHIP AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Mail and email addresses/phone:

Transport Action Ontario, Box 6418,
Sta. A, Toronto, ON M5W 1X3.
ontario@transport-action.ca.
Telephone: 416.504.3934 or toll free long-distance 1.866.542.1067 or contact our President, Peter Miasek, at 905.477.8636 or by email at peter.miasek@rogers.com.

Website: [//transport-action-ontario.com](http://transport-action-ontario.com)

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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. TAO is requesting a donation of an additional \$10 to receive a printed copy of our 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](http://www.transport-action.ca).

Board meetings: 1st Thursday of month at 5:30pm at CSI, 215 Spadina Ave., Toronto. If you wish to participate, contact Peter Miasek to confirm as date, time and location may change.