



The Honourable Marc Garneau MP
Minister of Transport
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

February 5, 2016

Dear Minister Garneau –

I would like to present to you the *Network Southwest* report prepared by the Southwestern Ontario Transportation Alliance, which sets out a strategy for reviving rail and bus services in Southwestern Ontario, reversing the loss of services to more than 100 communities since 2009.

The community groups that form the Southwestern Ontario Transportation Alliance were formed in response to the cuts to rail services made by the previous federal government in 2011. Many of these groups also worked with their local Liberal associations to draft resolutions calling for a national transportation strategy. These resolutions were adopted regionally and provincially; and eventually blended to form the top-priority resolution at the 2014 biennial convention in Montreal.

Following that convention, we raised some \$15,000 from businesses, individuals, and municipalities to undertake policy research and outreach to determine what a workable public transportation strategy for Southwestern Ontario would look like, and that could be replicated in other regions of the country.

We are well aware of the many Canadian rail studies that have been undertaken at significant expense only to be shelved, and did not wish to duplicate that work. The mandate of our research was thus to seek solutions that could be delivered in a single term of office, using proven concepts, and at modest capital cost. It is our intent that *Network Southwest* can serve as the blueprint for visible results that deliver tangible economic and social benefits to our communities before 2019.

The *Network Southwest* report was released in March 2015, and the launch was accompanied by five public meetings across the region. Several hundred people attended these events and signed postcards addressed to your predecessor endorsing this proposal, and a number of municipalities sent letters of support. I have attached copies of some of these letters for your reference.

We have begun working directly with VIA Rail management and are very pleased that some incremental changes have been made, even with the limited resources available to them before the election, including the installation of lights and gates at two high-risk grade crossings, repairs to salt-damaged brickwork at Sarnia's station. We strongly support the announcements that Yves Desjardin-Siciliano made prior to the election promising additional services for our region in 2016, subject to government funding. These promises mirror recommendations in *Network Southwest*, and we hope that a reversal of the 2011 budget cuts will be forthcoming to allow these promises to be kept.

A key recommendation in *Network Southwest* is investment in 40 new passenger cars, including cab cars, to replace the oldest equipment that VIA Rail currently operates, significantly cutting operating costs per seat mile and enabling bidirectional operation to reduce terminal dwell times from hours to

minutes. Such an investment would have a lead-time of at least two years, so should you wish to see new equipment entering service before 2019, we recommend allocating funding at the earliest opportunity.

Some of our members were also involved in drafting the 2012 Liberal policy resolution on High Speed Rail. We see no conflict between these objectives. Integrated regional public transportation networks can be delivered while HSR projects are being developed, and provide the foundation upon which HSR will reach its full potential, rather than being perceived to serve only the interests of the larger cities.

I would welcome the opportunity to discuss the report with you and answer your questions about our policy research should your schedule permit it.

Yours sincerely,



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