



TRANSPORT ACTION ONTARIO

(formerly Transport 2000 Ontario)

Advocating for Rail-Based Public Transportation
Box 6418, Station "A" Toronto, ON M5W 1X3
<http://ontario.transportaction.ca>

2016 11 07

Shawn Tupper
Assistant Deputy Minister, Policy
Transport Canada
Email: shawn.tupper@tc.gc.ca

Dear Mr. Tupper:

High Performance Rail: An Alternative for the Montreal – Ottawa-Toronto Corridor

As you recall, in September, representatives of the Transport Action family of NGOs met with you to discuss several matters relating to passenger and freight rail in Canada. This included discussion on Transport Canada's \$3M due diligence review of the Montreal-Ottawa-Toronto High Frequency Rail (HFR) proposal by VIA Rail Canada. VIA's HFR proposal involves constructing a new dedicated passenger rail corridor between Smiths Falls and Havelock, Ontario, upgrading other remote track in this triangle, procuring new rolling stock and potentially electrifying the corridor, at a cost of up to \$5B. Operating speeds were cited as 176 km/h (diesel) or 200 km/h (electric).

As you know, Transport Action Ontario is a long-standing non-government organization with considerable expertise and experience in advocating for rail-based public transportation.

We have numerous unanswered questions and concerns about the HFR proposal, including

- Feasibility of the route (several questions)
- Standards of speed and curvature on dedicated track route
- VIA's operating cost recovery claims
- Quality of passenger service on the Lakeshore route
- Fleet renewal plans (various questions)
- Updated capital costs

We have requested information from VIA on these points, but have received no information to date.

We were pleased to hear from you that, as part of the due diligence review, Transport Canada would welcome submissions on alternatives to the HFR plan. This letter, and the accompanying report [The High Performance Rail \(HPR\) Option](#) attached provides an alternative. The report was written earlier this year with the explicit intent to encourage decision makers to undertake a detailed analysis of HPR alongside the VIA HFR proposal.

As cited in the report, High Performance Rail (HPR) is a proven concept in the USA and other parts of the world. It involves progressive phased infrastructure improvements, such as third track installation, signal improvements and grade crossing improvements on existing rail corridors largely owned by and shared with freight railways. The speeds of HPR are intermediate between conventional rail (<160 km/h) and high speed rail (>240 km/h). In addition, HPR normally involves new modern push-pull equipment and improved connectivity with other modes of travel such as intercity bus and urban transit.

The improvements allow cost-effective increased frequencies, better on-time performance, higher average train speeds, improved comfort and lower operating costs for passenger trains. The report cites 6 examples of HPR in the USA today, with 8 more in progress.

We believe that HPR would be ideal for the Windsor-Quebec City corridor, and certainly for the Montreal-Ottawa-Toronto triangle. Advantages include

- Existing corridors which run through important intermediate cities such as Coburg, Belleville, Kingston, Brockville etc. would be served with high service quality
- Takes full advantage of the \$400M recently invested by VIA to expand capacity on CN's Toronto-Montreal main line to allow for more passenger service
- Takes full advantage of station upgrades recently completed and now being undertaken by VIA
- Can be constructed incrementally in a phased program

There are three important prerequisites for HPR. These also apply to varying degrees to the VIA HFR proposal:

- A federal policy recognizing the importance of modern passenger rail service, with resultant funding
- Intergovernmental partnership municipalities, provinces, and the federal government
- Cooperation of the freight railways, so they see HPR as "freight neutral" or a "win-win," as has been the case with many USA HPR projects. In case of disputes with the freight railroads, the government can use existing dispute resolution tools (Section 152.1) within the Canada Transportation Act, or invoke specific new legislation. For example, just as was done with the Fair Rail for Grain Farmers Act, 2014, the same could easily be done for passengers. A new VIA Rail Act, modelled after the Amtrak legislation, could be introduced.

Based on VIA's recent capital investment program and similar projects in the USA, the estimated capital cost for HPR for the full Windsor-Quebec corridor would be \$2B for infrastructure improvements to increase track speed to 160 km/h and to reduce conflicts with CN freight traffic, plus an additional \$1B for fleet renewal. Focussing only on the Montreal-Ottawa-Toronto triangle would have a lower cost. We note that the passenger ridership potential is as high for Southwestern Ontario as it is for the triangle.

Specific infrastructure items in this first phase would include a series of siding extensions and single-track lines, addition of several third main line segments on double-track lines, several station reconstructions and track rearrangements to reduce conflicts with freight service, reconfiguration of CN's Coteau yard and road-rail grade separations and crossing improvements to lift speed restrictions. All these improvements would allow for passenger frequency increases, running time reductions and on-time performance improvements.

A second wave of infrastructure (\$3B) could be contemplated once expected levels of ridership, revenue and cost recovery were reached. This would include adding more dedicated passenger-only track to the current VIA-owned network and improving portions of the corridor to achieve 200 km/h.

In conclusion, we believe that the commercially-proven HPR approach as established by ridership levels is an excellent alternative to VIA HFR for the triangle. We urge Transport Canada to undertake a detailed analysis. We would be pleased to discuss this matter further with you.

Yours truly,

Peter Miasek

Peter Miasek
Past President, Transport Action Ontario

Tony Turritin

Tony Turritin
Acting President, Transport Action Ontario

cc. Hon Marc Garneau – Minister of Transport. Email: marc.garneau@parl.gc.ca
Gurveen Chadha – Policy Advisor, Office of the Minister of Transport. email: gurveen.chadha@tc.gc.ca
Bruce Budd – President, Transport Action Canada
Ted Bartlett – President, Transport Action Atlantic