



TRANSPORT ACTION ONTARIO

(formerly Transport 2000 Ontario)

Advocating for Rail-Based Public Transportation
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Transport Action Ontario to focus on high-performance rail for the North Main Line and revival of the *Northlander*

By TAO President Robert Wightman, June 5, 2017

The way Canada and Ontario fund, govern and deliver rail passenger service desperately needs change. But to push for those required changes, it has become apparent to the TAO board that we also need to make changes of our own.

I joined the TAO board last April and I am honoured by my election this April as your new president. I accepted this position because I believe TAO does need to sharpen its approach to public transportation advocacy. We cannot be all things to all people if we are to succeed.

It is very apparent our objectives are best served by concentrating our advocacy. In 2016, the board went through an organizational analysis with a professional facilitator and concluded we must focus on intercity and commuter rail issues. Our past achievements on these key issues include four professionally-prepared and well-received reports: *No Little Plan: Electrifying GO Transit, Network Southwest, The VIA 1-4-10 Plan* and *The High-Performance Rail Option*.

At the May 25 board meeting, we resolved to focus further. First, we will ramp up our North Main Line (NML) advocacy by joining forces with All Aboard St. Marys. Our objective is to advance our vision for high-performance rail (HPR), which can be launched rapidly on the entire corridor, and make it an issue in Southwestern Ontario in the June 2018 provincial election.

Additionally, we have decided to assist the Northern and Eastern Ontario Rail Network, which is working diligently on the restoration of the Toronto-North Bay-Cochrane *Northlander*. Their localized efforts have been impressive and, while geography prevents TAO from being directly involved, we can provide resources, advice and contacts that will be useful to our Northern Ontario colleagues on a campaign that is thoroughly in line with our aims.

Our involvement in the NML campaign in conjunction with All Aboard St. Marys will be more hands-on. Here, events have created a unique opportunity for us and we must seize it.

On May 19, the province released its high-speed rail (HSR) report by David Collenette. He endorsed a \$21-billion, 250-km/h Toronto-Windsor service that would stop only at Pearson Airport, Guelph, Kitchener, London and Chatham. The estimated completion date is 2031.

It is doubtful the target dates and budget estimates in the HSR report can be met. This is complicated by the fact it would depend on several other major projects, including the construction of a \$6-billion CN Bramalea-Milton freight by-pass within seven years. The proposal also fails to explain how or if VIA would be able to maintain service on the South Main Line through Brantford, its Sarnia route and the remaining Kitchener-London stub of the NML, which would be bypassed by the HSR service.

As well, the public criticism of the report has demonstrated voters aren't prepared to wait a decade or more for HSR – even if those voters are on the proposed route.

But there is an upside to the HSR report. It has focused public, media and political attention on a rail solution for Southwestern Ontario. It makes a strong case for connecting communities with frequent, reliable and affordable rail service as an alternative to car and air travel.

We, therefore, propose to utilize the principles in the HSR report – growth and sustainability through modernized, expanded and affordable rail service – in making our case for an HPR implementation program over the entire NML now, not more than a decade away.

Achieving success on the NML through the promotion of our HPR vision must be TAO's primary objective. It can serve as the template for the renewal and expansion of VIA's Quebec-Windsor Corridor and other routes across Canada.

This is the new agenda TAO will implement under the guidance of your new board. Here are its members:

President:	Robert Wightman (Brampton)
Vice-President:	Tony Turrittin (Toronto)
Secretary:	Howard Levine (Toronto)
Treasurer:	Tony Rubin (Toronto)
Directors:	James Armstrong (Windsor) Eric Boutilier (North Bay) Richard Crawford (Lakefield) Dan Hammond (Marmora) Peter Miasek (Markham) Avrum Regenstreif (Toronto) Ken Westcar (Woodstock) Gordon Woodmansey (Toronto)

Special thanks to retiring board members Roger Brook, Natalie Litwin and Scott St. John.

Our next board meeting will be held in Toronto on June 22 at 5:30 p.m.

We will update you frequently as we advance our revised and achievable agenda.