

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

Passenger and freight railway services in southwestern Ontario.

InterCityRail is a not-for-profit advocacy organization that supports evidence-based decision making for rail projects in southwestern Ontario. We are encouraging the Province of Ontario to open its restricted Environmental Assessment for high-speed rail service between Kitchener and London to consider all alternatives.

Our observation, and that of other subject-matter experts, is that this approximately \$5 billion provincial project between Kitchener and London fails on every internationally-recognized justification for high-speed rail services. Uncertain capital cost, hypothetical ridership calculations and catastrophic affects on agriculture and rural communities are but three of the critical matters we continue to challenge. Our approach to the Province is constructive, respectful and factual in the face of current ministerial intransigence.

Although the high-speed rail plan calls for the retention of VIA Rail services west of London, we believe that this will be uneconomic due to dilution of premium passenger demand when competing with a potentially faster and more frequent service. Withdrawal of VIA Rail services from Ingersoll, Woodstock, Brantford, St. Marys and Stratford would also conflict with their progressive economic growth and sustainability strategies.

Such competition may occur 15-20 years in the future, but VIA Rail will, no doubt, be considering this now as part of their longer-term service strategy. Since VIA Rail is enjoying ridership growth in southwestern Ontario and could add more frequencies to serve an expanding customer base over this period, we find it disturbing that the Province has no recognition of this in its single-focus Environmental Assessment.

It would be in the best interests of all Canadian taxpayers to ensure that planned investment in passenger and freight rail services in southwestern Ontario is as productive and forward-thinking as possible. For example, the \$5 billion cost of building the greenfield high-speed rail route between Kitchener and London would be better invested in improving the performance of the existing Windsor to Montreal rail corridor for both freight and passengers.

We fully understand that this would need to be a partnership between two levels of government, Canadian National and Canadian Pacific, and affected municipalities. But it also recognizes the federal mandate for improved trade corridors and portals to ensure fluidity and national competitiveness. No such benefit will accrue from the Province's high-speed rail project which is stand-alone, incompatible with planned passenger service improvements in eastern Ontario, those in bordering states and will require much higher subsidy levels than VIA Rail.

Minister Garneau, we believe that Transport Canada must request senior intervenor status in the environmental assessment process. The fact that railways in Canada come under federal regulation, the federal cabinet has responsibility for funding VIA Rail and the Government of Canada is a financial stakeholder in most large infrastructure projects, mandates your involvement.

Sincerely,

Ken Westcar

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