



# TRANSPORT ACTION ONTARIO

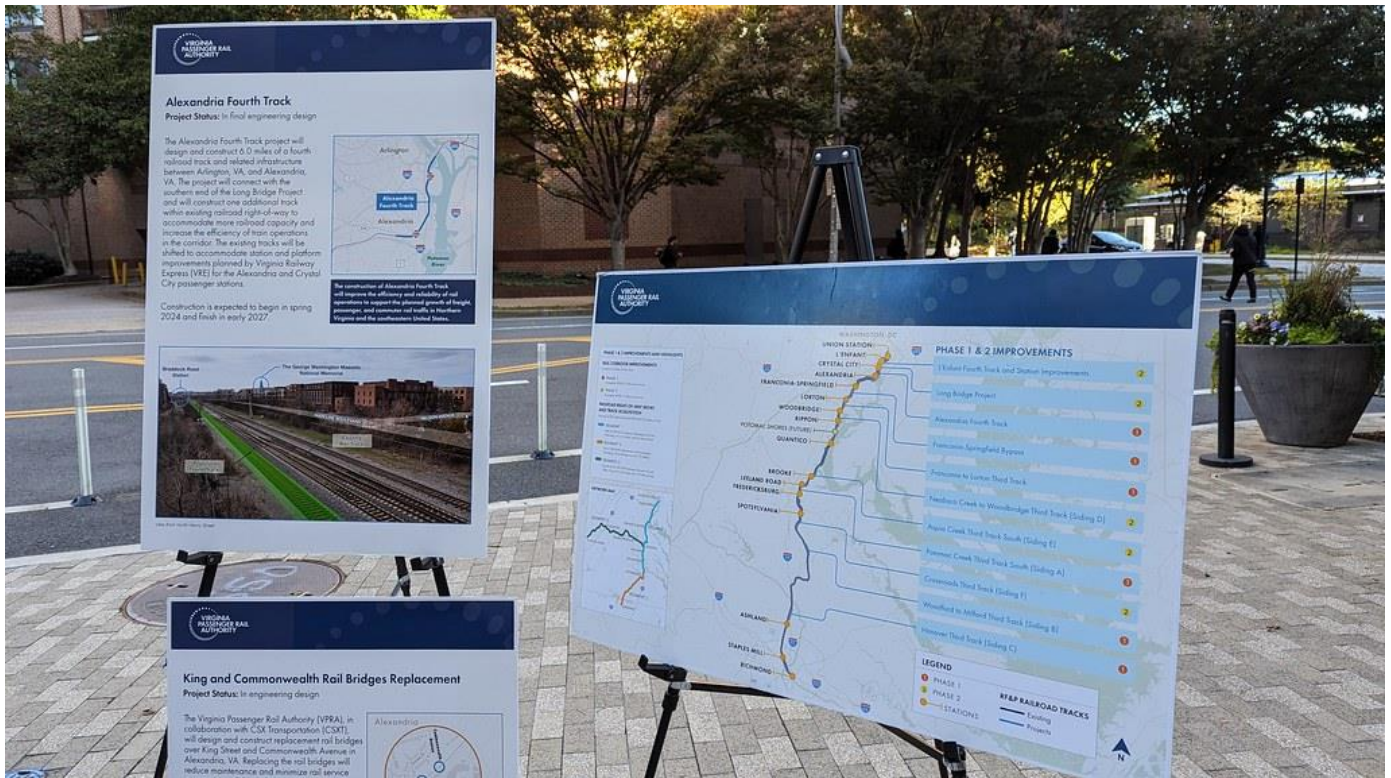
Advocating for Integrated Public Transportation across Ontario

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## Transportation infrastructure: Virginia invests while Ontario spends.



*Like Ontario, Virginia is experiencing severe traffic congestion on its expressways. However, unlike Ontario, Virginia has recognized the negative consequences from building new highways, tunnels or road widenings. Instead, it is opting to work with freight rail companies to improve passenger rail on existing freight corridors. Ontario should do the same.*

In the Province of Ontario, populism and sloganeering seem to dictate our transportation policy. We are engaged in a frenzied tail-chasing exercise of legislating lower costs for drivers while bemoaning escalating congestion on 400-series highways and the City of Toronto. While Ontario is spending billions on new public and regional transit in Greater Toronto, the solution that the politicians brag about and promote is to spend tens of billions on new highways and highway tunnels, add lanes to existing ones and banish cyclists wherever possible. To what benefit?

The State of Virginia is faced with the same congestion problem but is taking a very different approach that will invest taxpayer money rather than just spending it irresponsibly. While Canada frets over per capita GDP issues, Virginia is embarking on a mobility plan that will increase their substantial competitive advantage over Ontario on this metric while improving the wellbeing of its citizens and acting as a magnet for inward investment.

America's High Speed Rail Alliance (HSRA) facilitated a [presentation by the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority](#) on February 7<sup>th</sup> that demands the attention of Ontario's Minister of Transportation, Prabmeet Singh Sarkaria and his regional planning teams at MTO. It's also a valuable tool for municipalities prepared to lobby for mobility solutions appropriate for 2050 and beyond, rather than the 1980s.

D.J. Stadtler, Executive Director for the Virginia Passenger Rail Authority (their rough equivalent to a combination of Metrolinx and VIA 's Ontario service) provides a lucid, logical and factual analysis as to why passenger rail expansion was chosen over adding more lanes to the heavily congested Interstate 95 between Washington DC and Fredericksburg and beyond. This highway has many similarities to Highway 401 between Windsor and Kingston but Virginia's solution to congestion is starkly different from that being pursued by Ontario.

Mr. Stadtler's presentation is a deep dive into all aspects of the decision to significantly expand passenger rail along the Interstate 95 and 81 corridors in the State of Virginia and demonstrates how pragmatism and partnerships will achieve superior outcomes over the outdated tunnel vision we are currently subjected to in Ontario. Here is an executive summary:

- **Interstate 95 and 81.**
  - Crippling traffic congestion resulting in extended travel times – “all day rush hour”.
  - High collision rates incurring extraordinary personal, economic and social costs.
  - Major source of pollution and consequent adverse health effects.
  - Population and industry growth similar to southwestern Ontario.
  - Estimated cost of single lane (both directions) additions to I 95 between I 495 and Thornburg (62miles/99km) is US\$12.6bn (C\$18bn) in 2020. Approximately C\$91m/km.
  - Adding 2 lanes will take approx. 10years.
  - One lane closed in each direction during construction means traffic standstill for extended periods.
  - No net benefit for drivers since induced demand and population growth will absorb all increased lane/km on the expanded highway from day one.
  - 2009 introduction of VPRA single return trip passenger rail service between Washington DC and Fredericksburg planned on 30,000 rides annually but achieved 100,000 rides in year 1, indicating strong demand for alternative to driving.
  
- **Rail alternative development strategy.**
  - Identify existing rail corridors serving target routes.
  - Broad stakeholder input.

- Form joint committee with rail infrastructure owners, NSC and CSX to identify, analyse and discuss capacity constraints.
  - Involve Amtrak in planning process as a potential beneficiary.
  - Understand NSC and CSX concerns and seek win-win solutions that have no negative effect on these private sector, Class 1 railways.
  - Work diligently to minimise legal costs and conflicts.
  - Preliminary engineering to 30% level to provide accurate cost estimates of bottleneck removals. No estimates prior to 30% engineering.
  - Ensure expanded infrastructure will allow travel times equal to or better than driving.
  - Identify funding sources (gas tax levy, state and federal grants etc.).
  - Decide on contract responsibility (VPRA or infrastructure owner), project by project.
  - Separate contracts by VPRA for stations (intermodality, accessibility and passenger volumes) with “last mile” considerations.
  - Design for 110mph (177kph), Tier 4 diesel-hauled trains (some bi-mode). Electrification not economically justifiable south of Washington DC.
- **Futureproofing.**
    - VPRA is arm’s length from state government and mostly insulated from 4-yearly gubernatorial cycles and material changes in political and economic ideology.
    - Build and maintain internal project execution skills
    - Incorporate scalability.
    - Maintain constructive, long-term relationships with NSC and CSX.
    - Meet or exceed passenger expectations to maximise revenue.

- **Summary and recommendations.**

Transport Canada and MTO should study VPRA’s model for passenger rail expansion as it seems to offer more astute use of taxpayer funds than the current highway-centric strategy that binds the province to relentless spending with very short-lived public benefit and significant harm to the environment. A very constructive and professional partnership is required with CN and CPKC at the federal and provincial level to ensure that their businesses are held safe while public funds are applied to increase rail system capacity for both freight and passengers.

VPRA’s strategy matches the recommendations of Transport Action Canada’s [“Beyond HFR” report](#) that emphasizes the need for passenger rail expansion across Canada employing solutions that are affordable, practical and effective. Our national transportation status-quo and outdated provincial strategies will be detrimental to our competitiveness and prosperity. The State of Virginia has already figured this out.

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