

**High-Frequency Rail:  
A destination where frequency and speed meet**

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To begin, I would like to thank the Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan Montreal and its President, Michel Leblanc, for giving me the opportunity to speak to you about an infrastructure project that will change the way we travel in Canada's most populous corridor.

Thanks also to all of you for your interest in the high frequency rail project. We see it on the ground; the feedback is positive; people are waiting for the project; and they are looking forward to riding the train.

Let's remember that the HFR will be a rail service of more than 1,000 km linking Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Trois-Rivières and Quebec City. It will be frequent, reliable and fast on dedicated tracks, creating a strong alternative to cars and planes. The case for it is compelling and it is this momentum that we wish to maintain.

- It's good for the climate.
- It's good for passengers.
- It's good for the communities it serves.
- It's good for business.

It is a project whose time has come.

It is also a great challenge. Major infrastructure projects are complex and the HFR will be no exception.

But let me approach the project from four perspectives: frequency and speed, engagement, reliability and governance.

#### Frequency and speed

You probably all have the same question in mind: HFR or HSR? Frequency or speed? Why not both?

As you probably know, we are in the middle of the procurement process with the Request for Qualifications phase ending today. One of the criteria for this design phase is speed. As Minister Alghabra has made clear, private partners are encouraged to present their vision in this process and to include fast segments, above 200 km/h, where it makes financial and operational sense. But the goal is to save time, not to achieve speed for speed's sake.

Many countries around the world, such as Germany, Italy, and the United States, are combining high-speed segments with 160 and 200 km/h segments in an effort to achieve attractive travel times, while managing public funds carefully.

To speed, we attach frequency, which means more departures to reach the cities on the route. Today, 19 trains leave Montreal for Quebec City, Ottawa and Toronto. Few people are aware, but VIA Rail trains are busier today than ever. We need many more trains departing from Montreal.

Our goal is to triple the number of passengers who take the train in the first 20 years of service. What will that look like?

When the HFR comes into service, we will be talking about 15 trains per day from Montreal to Toronto, 12 trains per day from Montreal to Ottawa, and 10 trains per day from Montreal to Quebec City. If you're keeping track, that's 37 departures from Montreal, every day. Now add the trains from Ottawa to Toronto - another 15 trains a day - and you have 52 trains. And another 52 in the opposite direction. That's 104 trains! That's what we mean by frequency! You'll never be able to say, "I missed the train!"

There are many other ways to save time besides speeding up. For example, why wait in line to board a train? Why not widen the platform so that everyone can get on and off at the same time? Why not have better door-to-door keyless connections by better integrating transit and offering combined fares?

Also, it's a mistake to simply compare 2 hours on a train to 2 hours in a car. In the car, we have to drive, pay attention and follow the traffic. On the train, we can relax, eat, watch a movie, and even work. By taking the train, we can create time for ourselves!

In short, we don't just need higher speed, we need a faster travel experience and travel time.

### Engagement

And that's what we're hearing on the ground as well. That's what you've been telling us in our meetings. We have already met with a number of stakeholders from different backgrounds. Thanks to these leaders in the cities and regions along the HFR corridor, our team has been able to gather as much information as possible in order to better understand the needs, plan the service and mitigate the potential impacts. It goes without saying that we will continue to have ongoing discussions with chambers of commerce such as yours, sustainable mobility organizations, environmental groups and Indigenous communities, as well as with representatives of all levels of government.

### Reliability

This brings me to the theme of reliability. With a project of more than 1,000 km of track, more than 90% of which is dedicated and electrified, it will be possible to control our schedules, offer frequent departures and reduce travel times between various stations. By owning a vast majority of the network, passenger trains will no longer have to give way to freight trains and schedules will be more respected. As VIA Rail has demonstrated, when it owns the tracks, it can achieve a 95% on-time performance rate. This will make rail an efficient alternative to the car and airplane for on-time, downtown-to-downtown travel.

## Governance

So, take a moment to think about how we can make this happen. A rail system that provides faster travel, better schedules, better community benefits and on-time performance.

A project like this involves a large team of professionals and experts. I like to invoke the image of the train leaving the station, that we are on the move, and there is no shortage of examples to support this.

One example of concrete action is the creation of the subsidiary, VIA HFR, which is responsible for signing and managing the contract with the private partner for the provision and operation of the service. VIA HFR's head office is located right here in Montreal.

The first three members of the Board of Directors have been appointed, including Marie-Josée Nadeau, a well-known figure in the Montreal business community, due to her prominent role at Hydro-Québec for many years. A permanent CEO will be appointed shortly.

Add to this the fact that the government will conclude another step in its process later today with the closing of the Request for Qualifications. There has been a lot of interest in this stage of the procurement process. We had over 400 Canadian and international participants at our Request for Qualifications information session earlier this year.

Soon, up to three teams will be qualified and invited to propose their visions and plans for building a better inter-city passenger rail system. Next year, we will select the best one and get to work. That work will involve designing, financing, building, operating and maintaining the new passenger railroad.

In short, all of these critical steps in our project will lead to an in-service date in the early 2030s.

Until then, we will continue to build on the momentum we have created. The momentum that everyone agrees on. The one that says it's time for more reliable, more frequent and faster rail service. And how will we get there?

We'll get there by combining our expertise with that of a world-renowned private partner.

We will do it by continuing to listen to all the communities along and surrounding the corridor.

We will do this by staying focused on the carbon neutrality objectives.

We will achieve this by involving the Indigenous communities to the maximum extent possible in a collaborative approach and in partnership, for the benefit of each and every one.

We will do this with rigour and commitment to the taxpayers. We will do it by protecting the interests of taxpayers because we have a collective responsibility to complete this project that should have been done a generation ago.

We will get it done because this is the project that our generation will pass on to the next.

We will get there... because we believe in it.

Thank you for your attention.

I look forward to your questions.