

**Notes for Remarks by Martin Imbleau**

**Chief Executive Officer VIA HFR – VIA TGF Inc.**

**To**

**Canadian Association of Railway Suppliers**

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**National Railway Day**

**Introduction**

Thank you for joining me today. I am deeply honoured to be here.

Before I begin, I will start by acknowledging the land on which we stand today—the unceded territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabeg People. They have lived on this land since time immemorial.

**PAUSE**

It is a pleasure to speak to the members of the Canadian Association of Railway Suppliers on this historic day. Thank you Sylvia for the opportunity.

It is an honour but at the same time, it is a humbling experience to share the stage this morning with knowledgeable and experienced leaders in public transportation, notably my friend Mario Péloquin.

## **PAUSE**

If this date marks an important anniversary, I see the mandate I recently accepted in a similar context. I mean that the project we are developing is transformative and will open opportunities for generations to come.

I know, we have looked at this concept of a faster train Corridor between Toronto and Québec City many times in the past. But this time, we must do it! Otherwise, not only will we regret once again not having done it before, but the next generations will accuse us of having been selfish. Selfish for not providing a service that is so obviously required to enhance both passenger and freight rail services, and ultimately bolster our economy.

### **More than a train**

Our goal, our job, is not the one of a construction company or even to operate more trains. It's to fill a need. It is to provide a solution. It is to improve the quality of life for millions of citizens and communities in the most important demographic corridor. It's a corridor that generates 40% of the country's economy.

- It's more than a train, it's a new take on intercity mobility.

- More than a train, it's taking action for future generations. By travelling more sustainably.
- It's a transformation. It's a required engine to support our economic growth.
- More than a train, it's a mean for reconciliation with indigenous communities.

## **PAUSE**

### **The Challenge**

In the next 20 years, we anticipate the population in Ontario and Quebec to grow from 24 million to 29 million people, with most of these new residents living in the Toronto-Quebec City Corridor.

Their travel needs simply cannot be met by cars. And we know from decades of experience that spending more money on pavement does not reduce congestion. It just induces more people to take the roads.

Immigration will contribute to a large part of the increase in population. These new Canadians will bring with them a culture in which trains are central to everyday life. That is another reason why we anticipate train trips in the corridor to grow from 4 to more than 17 million or more per year.

To address our emerging challenges, we must reconsider our approach to mobility. Business as usual is no longer an option!

We propose a new vision for intercity mobility, one that makes public transport more efficient, one that breaks the status quo.

## **PAUSE**

In recent decades, cars and planes have become the preferred modes of intercity travel. Today, passenger rail in the Québec City – Toronto corridor accounts for only 2% of trips, compared to 94% for cars.

The reason is simple: your car gives you more flexibility. Airplanes, on the other hand, let you cover greater distances faster.

I've been developing major infrastructure projects for over 25 years now, mostly in the corridor. I can't tell you how many times I've been forced to drive or take a plane because trains simply aren't fast or reliable enough or don't run often enough.

I'm sure everyone in this room would love to see passenger rail transportation make a strong comeback. But as Mario can attest, adding more trains is not an option because the tracks belong to the freight railway companies. Further clogging up that network would not be good for anyone. It would make things slower for

passengers, freight, and ultimately the economy. Arriving late for a meeting because you had to wait for a very long freight train can be a very frustrating experience.

When passenger trains have their own tracks and freight companies can focus on moving merchandise, you get the best of both worlds. Goods get to market faster. Travellers get where they're going faster, more flexibly, and more reliably. And that's good for the entire economy.

In short, doing more of the same is not an option. Offering an appealing solution is! And don't worry, I will touch upon the speed aspect of the service later on.

## **PAUSE**

Our railway service is designed for future generations. When we consider the current younger generation, we can see that they are already exploring more alternatives to private cars within urban areas. They're strong adopters of mass transit solutions over personal vehicles. Data shows that fewer of them have driver's licenses than previous generations.

Our project aligns with their preference for public transit by connecting their local systems to others throughout the corridor. We aim to offer a backbone, an inter-city transportation solution.

Our lives are becoming increasingly interconnected. We think and operate at regional, national, and global levels. Just imagine how these patterns will evolve in the generations to come. Our children and grandchildren stand to benefit significantly from the choices we make today. Let's reshape the way people travel between cities in the corridor for the next 50 to 100 years.

## **PAUSE**

### **The Project**

Our ultimate goal is to improve our quality of life while protecting the environment. With the population in the corridor growing, we should and we will shift from cars to rail. It's also imperative to reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

May I remind us all about the climate changes we are witnessing and the devastation we saw in many regions of the country just this last summer. The transportation sector is still Canada's second-largest contributor to GHG emissions, responsible for 22% of CO<sub>2</sub> emitted.

A faster, more frequent and more reliable electric train will offer a true alternative. We will provide travellers with a transportation option that is environmentally responsible. But the aim is not solely to improve passenger comfort and convenience. It's about fostering a collective shift in our travel behaviour. It's a choice that provides immediate significant positive benefits to the environment. If this is obvious to us in this room today, it is an absolute must for our kids.

Think about it for a second: This project will bring our three capital cities closer. It will strengthen the connection between Canada's two largest economic lungs. It will serve 15 million people in a growing corridor. It will have economic impacts yet to be fully assessed.

But we will only achieve our mission by building relationships with communities and stakeholders. We are informing them about the project and its benefits. We are listening and collecting requests, concerns, and ideas to pass on to bidders as they are currently preparing their proposals. I will get back to this shortly.

Our project is transformative. It's an engine of positive change that goes beyond the transportation of people. It is a vehicle to advance economic reconciliation. It is integral to ensuring economic empowerment and long-term economic benefits for Indigenous Peoples. Their perspective is essential to our collective success. Our team has met and is listening to Indigenous communities, organizations and businesses across Quebec and Ontario. We will work with them and include them to minimize adverse impacts and advance viable options for fostering meaningful economic participation, long-term financial sustainability, and fair benefit distribution throughout the project's lifecycle.

The relationships we are building are fundamental to our success.

We are gaining momentum. Last month, the Government of Canada launched the Request for Proposals process for three shortlisted bidding teams (Cadence, Intercity Rail Developers and QConnexiON Rail Partners). They come with various international and local experienced backgrounds.

By next fall, the government will select a team to partner with us and to design and develop the project.



Rather than immediately awarding a contract, our team will collaborate with the preferred private-sector partner to shape the project's crucial components under a progressive design-build approach.

While this approach may require some time, it enables us to address the complexities of this project collectively, resulting in a more precise understanding of its timeline and cost. It combines the strengths of both the public and private sectors, offering the best of both worlds. Ultimately it reduces risk, and surprises, that can harm budgets and delay progress. A collaborative effort with full visibility of all aspects of the project is the right way to go.

## **PAUSE**

## **FEATURES**

Since I joined this Project, all the reporters I have spoken with focused on the same topic: FAST or FREQUENT ? Why focus on frequency when we could have a high speed train?

Well, the answer is not intuitive. Because being fast is not only about top speed. It's actually about the time it takes to get there. It's about the journey time between Toronto and Ottawa. It's about the time between Montreal and Toronto. It took me only a couple of weeks to appreciate that we must be flexible in three key aspects: speed,

reliability, and frequency. It is not about opposing these features; it is about meeting **ALL OF THEM**. It will be reliable because we will run on passenger-dedicated tracks. Frequent because we will significantly increase the number of departures. And last but surely not least, it will be faster.

Not intuitive because we have a duty to improve train literacy in Canada. We take the train in Europe during our holidays and remember how fast they are. Well, we remember this because the service was comfortable and had these exact three features.

What we want to achieve are shorter travel journeys, from door to door. The goal is to save time. We will go faster, and we will cut travel time by finding ways not to slow down. And moving onto tracks reserved for our trains is the right way to go.

The government is asking the bidders to present two solutions for delivering faster and more efficient service in the corridor. They've been tasked to provide us options that we will co-develop and optimize afterward.

The first will require trains to travel at speeds of up to 200 kilometres per hour. The second solution will include high-speed options for delivering even shorter journey times.

When we take a closer look at Europe, we discover that the average speeds of many high speed services are similar to what we will be offering.

One example is the high speed Paris to Amsterdam train. I rode this train often, the last time being in May of this year. I did Paris to Brussels - a little less than 300km - in about one hour and a half, averaging a speed of around 200km/h.

And then, the journey from Brussels to Amsterdam, spanning about 175km took over 2 hours. It's exactly the same train, but the travel time is longer and the average speed is around 100km/h. The reason? Stops in Antwerp, The Hague and Rotterdam.

Yes, train speed is important, but there are other ways to cut travel time, such as making fewer stops, and reducing slowdowns when approaching cities and shared tracks.

So we will do Toronto-Montreal in about 4 hours or less. Potentially, 3 ½ hour or even 3 hours and 15 minutes.

The bottom line for us: faster, more reliable, more frequent. That's the service we plan to deliver.

## ME

People ask me why I agreed to embark on this new adventure. It will certainly be a long one fraught with challenges. I don't doubt that for a second.

But I did not leave a two-century-old institution to give speeches on an abstract concept or a fleeting vision.

We need to develop a transportation service that Canadians will pick over driving that is also the smarter, more eco-friendly choice.

I'm here because our vision of mobility is changing. It's more than just about trains—it's about doing something as a society to change how we travel and boost sustainable transportation and economic growth in communities along the corridor.

We're all looking for solutions that will:

- significantly increase intercity train traffic and improve the passenger experience,
- reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and
- contribute to reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples.

In light of the growing populations in both provinces and their complementary economies, what are the alternatives? Diesel passenger trains that have to wait behind freight trains? Millions more cars and more short-distance flights? Adding lanes to the 40, 20, 401 and 417 and causing more congestion in and around airports? Less productivity and more GHGs? Really?

## **The Future**

When I close my eyes and project myself in 2040 or even 2050, I just can't imagine million more cars on congested and costly new highways. It's clear that we need to act now for the benefit of future generations. That's why I accepted the CEO position of this new Crown corporation mandated to develop one of the country's most important infrastructure projects.

## **FAST. FREQUENT. RELIABLE. AND ELECTRIC.**

Think about it: University students will reach their classrooms throughout the corridor and get back home more frequently, and often on the same day. Workers in the nascent battery factories will commute reliably between the two provinces. Business people will leave early in the morning, enjoy their coffee, be on time for an early meeting, and relax with a glass of wine on their way back the same day. Fast to get

there in the morning, frequent so same-day return becomes a common way to travel.

## **PAUSE**

It's an ambitious project. No doubt about it. But we won't do it alone. We'll do it with you. There are challenges ahead. We'll follow the right sequence to bring this project to a successful conclusion. Instead of viewing it as a single 1,000-kilometer project, I see a collection of ten projects, each 100kms long with unique requirements.

We will join forces with partners in the private sector to benefit from best practices and innovation, and to develop alternatives tailored to the project and community needs.

To the issues of when we will begin service, and at what cost, let me observe that we have plenty of homework to do before we throw around figures and dates. We need to advance our designs. And as I said before, our approach is one of engagement and collaboration. We will actively involve the local and Indigenous communities.

This is the key to making a permanent change.

## **PAUSE**

### **The Ask**

I'm the new kid on the block. This project offers a solution, but to deliver it, I need your help. We **CANNOT** do this project without you.

I am turning to you for knowledge, wisdom and assistance. Oh and by the way, if you know of talents looking for a job, send them my way!

The members of the CARS know the importance of passenger rail service and how this can be a game changer for this country.

This project is not a new idea, I know. But facts are stubborn, and good ideas stand the test of time.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak with you. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.