

March 9, 2018

Hon Kathryn McGarry
Minister of Transportation
3rd Floor, Ferguson Block
77 Wellesley Street West
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1Z8

Hon. Marc Garneau
Minister of Transport
330 Sparks Street
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0N5

RE: *Proposal of New Passenger Rail Service Toronto – Quebec*

The Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) would like to offer its support for VIA Rail Canada's dedicated tracks for High-Frequency Rail (HFR) plan.

For more than a century, the OCC has been the independent, non-partisan voice of business. As Ontario's business advocate, we represent over 135 communities and over 60,000 members across the province, all of which are committed to working with government to promote economic growth and prosperity in Canada. The OCC has consistently advocated through its resolution process for an efficient movement of goods and people, within Ontario and the country.

In the spirit of that mission, the OCC believes in the merit of VIA Rail's HFR plan. As shared infrastructure becomes more congested and Canadians demand more of their rail service provider, VIA's proposal for a dedicated passenger corridor will create significant economic development along the route, including providing an estimated 336,000 person-years of employment. The HFR plan will increase access to affordable housing in the new rail corridor and provide new residents with a transit option for commuting. Increasing rail service will also provide an avenue for alleviating some of the ever-increasing road congestion in the heavily travelled provincial roads.

Additionally, hybrid electric-diesel trains running on this route would dramatically reduce carbon emissions by 12.5 million tons of CO₂, the equivalent of a car-pool reduction of 2.8 million vehicles.

In addition to the benefits of more efficient and environmentally-friendly inter-city travel, dedicated tracks for high frequency trains between Toronto – Peterborough – Ottawa will also ensure the corporation can maximize ridership and revenue, and improve their on-time performance to over 95%. Dedicated tracks for passenger service will reduce trip times while also increasing VIA's profitability, effectively eliminating the need for a government subsidy by 2024.

Overall, dedicated passenger tracks will solve VIA's congestion problems, increase its efficiency and profitability, promote economic development while remaining environmentally friendly, and will give commuters better access to communities not traditionally served by transit. It is important to note that track improvements for passenger service will also offer significant benefits to current and future freight users.

The OCC is also supportive of the Government of Canada's recent commitment to renew VIA Rail's corridor fleet of 160 cars and 40 locomotives. Renewing this fleet will be a significant moment in VIA Rail's 40-year history and crucial part of VIA's transformation plan to create smarter ways for Canadians to travel. A new, modern, and accessible fleet of trains will significantly improve VIA Rail's intercity rail service and long-term service levels.

While the OCC was pleased to see positive movement on VIA Rail's proposals in the 2018 Federal Budget, we would ask that both provincial and federal government continue to give serious consideration to VIA's HFR proposal and work with both the corporation and communities along the line to make this plan a reality.

Sincerely,



Rocco Rossi
President & CEO

CC:

Kathleen Wynne, Premier of Ontario
Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada
Steve Orsini, Secretary of Cabinet
Perrin Beatty, President & Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Chamber of Commerce
Sheila Hall, Executive Director, Clarington Board of Trade and Office of Economic Development
Barbara Black, President, Smiths Falls & District Chamber of Commerce
Sherry Boyce-Found, General Manager, Kawartha Chamber of Commerce & Tourism
Stuart Harrison, President & CEO, Greater Peterborough Chamber of Commerce
Shannon Moore, President, Ajax-Pickering Board of Trade
Rae McCutcheon, President, Havelock & District Chamber of Commerce
Mark P. Fisher, President & CEO, Council of the Great Lakes Region