



August 7, 2024

# VIA Rail's 2024 Annual Public Meeting

## Questions and answers

This document contains answers to the most frequently asked questions received as part of VIA Rail Canada's 2024 Annual Public Meeting.

We would like to thank the public for their participation and interest in VIA Rail.

Please note that questions of the same nature have been grouped together and that the grammar and syntax of the questions received have been corrected.

The audio recording of VIA Rail's 2024 Annual Public Meeting is available to listen to, in English and in French, on VIA Rail's YouTube channel and Facebook Page.

We also invite you to consult VIA Rail's 2023 annual report, available in our [Media Centre](#).

### Long-distance, Regional and Remote Fleet Replacement

**Can we expect an increase in service when the new trains will be fully delivered? For example, can we expect the *Ocean* to resume its daily frequency or will you start servicing new parts of Canada, such as Calgary?**

- For now, our focus is to replace our pan-Canadian fleet and this is what the funding confirmed at the last federal budget will allow us to do.
- The replacement of this fleet is the latest and most significant in a series of investments in the transformation of VIA Rail and the future of passenger rail service in Canada.
- Considering the complexity involved to design and deliver train cars and locomotives, the procurement process will be launched shortly in order to ensure the continuity of VIA Rail services across Canada.
- Thanks to this new fleet, beyond offering an enhanced travel experience to Canadians across the country, it will also allow us to maintain our coast-to-coast services and to continue to connect more than 400 communities across the country.
- We're always open to reviewing new opportunities to serve Canadians, and having new trains on these routes will certainly help in that sense.

### Service to Gaspésie

**When will VIA Rail resume service to Gaspé and why is VIA Rail not resuming a partial service to New Carlisle immediately?**

- As you know, the tracks in the Gaspésie region belong to the Government of Québec, and the infrastructure is currently undergoing a rehabilitation program to eventually permit a return to passenger service.

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- VIA Rail has always maintained that it would resume service in Gaspésie once the tracks were safe and allowed competitive trip times.
- Beyond the condition of the tracks, VIA Rail must also take into account other factors for the resumption of service, such as the availability of rolling stock and staffing and the modernisation of stations in the region.
- Due to various factors related to operating trains, we don't intend on resuming a partial service to New Carlisle.

## Bicycles

**Can you provide detailed information and a clear timeline on VIA Rail's plans to accommodate bicycles on all trains within the Québec City-Windsor corridor. What will the booking process look like?**

- VIA Rail is continuing to replace its Québec City-Windsor corridor fleet with new and modern trains, which is scheduled to be completed by summer 2025.
- At this time, VIA Rail does not have enough new trains to guarantee round trips with the new fleet if there is a change in equipment.
- As such, travel with bicycles will be gradually reintroduced as of spring 2025. By then, cyclists will be able to reserve and pay for their bicycle transport on trains where the service is available when they book their ticket on VIA Rail's reservation system.
- We thank our passengers for their understanding and patience on this matter. As always, bike transport remains available in baggage cars on our long-distance and regional routes.

## Service in the Corridor

**By 2025, you'll have received all the new trains in the Corridor. Do you think you'll be able to offer passengers new frequencies, for example by increasing the number of trains serving the line to Sarnia?**

- VIA Rail owns only 3% of the rail infrastructure on which it operates, and the rest belongs mainly to freight train companies.
- With the new fleet fully in service by summer 2025, our ability to add frequencies in the Québec City-Windsor corridor will be dependent on the rail infrastructure owners not on equipment availability.
- While we continuously evaluate our service offering, and are in ongoing discussions with the infrastructure owners, we do not anticipate at this time being given access to add services beyond our 2019 full service offering.

## New Reservation System

**Some options like allowing Sleeper Plus passengers who book online to select which cabin or berth they want or having the multi-city option are not yet available with Reservia. When will they be?**

- While it is not possible at this time to book online some Sleeper Plus accommodations, passengers can select lower berths and cabins with showers (where available) through the booking system.
- In addition, the multi-city functionality is not available anymore but you can book your travel segments separately on viarail.ca.

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- The system is designed to evolve over time and we will continue to explore how to adjust it according to the needs and expectations of our customers.

### Access to infrastructure

#### **Can anything be done with regards to track conditions and access to the tracks? For example, on the Newcastle subdivision?**

- 97% of the tracks on which VIA Rail operates mainly belong to freight train companies.
- While we continuously work with infrastructure owners to ensure safe and efficient access to the entire rail network, VIA Rail depends on these owners for access to the tracks. In addition, they are responsible for maintaining and upgrading the infrastructure.
- Regarding the *Ocean* and the Newcastle subdivision, as the vast majority of the tracks between Montréal and Halifax are owned by CN, VIA Rail is subject to CN's constraints when operating this route and remains dependent on CN's ability to resolve any issues related to their infrastructure.
- In 2014, VIA Rail paid over \$18.3 million to CN for necessary repairs on a 70.8 km section of their Newcastle Subdivision between Bathurst and Miramichi, which CN is responsible for maintaining. These funds were exceptionally spent to maintain the status quo for passenger train service levels on the *Ocean*, when CN was considering abandoning this portion of the subdivision.
- Unfortunately, despite these repairs, recurring speed restrictions imposed by CN, as well as a deterioration in operational speeds on this infrastructure due to track conditions have led to operational and schedule changes impacting the travel plans of our passengers.
- As we are not responsible for the level of maintenance of these tracks, we are not the appropriate authority to answer questions about track conditions, changes in operating speeds in recent years, the nature and results of work and maintenance carried out on this infrastructure or any other information relating to the rail infrastructure owned by CN.

### Baggage Policy

#### **Why are you placing limits on baggage weight and starting to charge for additional baggage?**

- Baggage policies with associated fees are a common and standard industry practice and our baggage policy has always included fees for additional bags.
- Following a review of our policy, we've updated in certain fares what's included in the baggage allowance and fees for extra bags: we provide various options for baggage size and fees for additional bags depending on the selected fare.
- For more information, we invite you to visit our website:  
<https://www.viarail.ca/en/plan/baggages>

### Passes

#### **When will VIA Rail bring back commuter passes?**

As part of our ongoing efforts to enhance and modernize the customer experience, VIA Rail plans to launch two new travel passes by the end of August 2024. These passes are designed to help frequent travellers save on trips in the Québec City – Windsor corridor.

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## On-time performance

### **Why does VIA Rail publish schedules that are very rarely met?**

- VIA Rail owns only 3% of the rail infrastructure on which it operates, and the rest belongs mainly to freight train companies.
- As such, VIA Rail's on-time performance is mainly attributable to the fact that the Corporation has limited control over the infrastructure, and that VIA Rail trains are forced to move aside to let freight trains pass.
- On the Montréal-Ottawa line, where VIA Rail owns and manages the tracks, the on-time performance is 97%.
- We are determined to offer the best possible service to our passengers and regret the inconvenience this may cause to their travel plans.

## Panorama cars

**At last year's annual public meeting, you said: "As for the Panorama cars, they are currently undergoing repair work and slated to return to service in summer 2024". Is that still your plan? On what route(s) will they be used?**

- VIA Rail's Panorama fleet consists of three units, one of which has been repaired.
- With the work on one car completed and the need for all departures on the *Canadian* to be identical, the repaired Panorama car is only available for ad hoc demands.
- Skylines and Parc cars are, however, still running and allow our customers to enjoy the Canadian landscape.
- Due to the significant financial and resources investment required, we do not plan on renovating on the short or medium term the remaining Panorama cars in order to, amongst others, prioritize the update of other cars that are crucial to the operation of the long-distance and regional routes.