

VIA RAIL'S 2020 ANNUAL PUBLIC MEETING QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

This document contains answers to the most recurring questions received as part of VIA Rail Canada's 2020 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 Annual Public Meeting video is available to watch, in English and in French, on VIA Rail's [YouTube channel](#) and [Facebook Page](#).

Furthermore, we invite you to consult VIA Rail's 2019 annual report, available in our [Media Centre](#).

A. LONG-DISTANCE ROUTES

Q1. Is there a way to do social distancing and to serve meals safely on the *Canadian*?

How often are the quilts and beds laundered on the *Ocean* and the *Canadian*?

What is the plan for the *Canadian*?

Why is The *Canadian* currently being cancelled until at least November 1, 2020, when VIA Rail is continuing (albeit at limited capacity), to run trains in the Corridor?

At the moment, the *Canadian* and the *Ocean*, our long-distance routes, are suspended until November 1, 2020, due to the COVID-19 situation.

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the health and safety of our passengers and employees have been at the heart of every decision we have made.

The VIA Rail team is currently working on developing the health and safety protocols that need to be implemented for the service on the long-distance trains.

We are eager to resume service between Vancouver and Toronto and intend to do so with the utmost consideration for the health and safety of our passengers and our employees.

Q2. My question concerns scheduling of the Montréal-Halifax service. Do you foresee the re-opening of service before November 2020?

As announced in May, the *Ocean*, one of our long-distance route, is suspended until November 1, 2020 due to the COVID-19 situation.

Since, we have been working on developing the health and safety protocols that need to be implemented for a safe travel experience on the *Ocean*.

Q3. I am wondering when the *Canadian* will be back running and what that might look like as far as frequencies, route and services offered.

What are your plans for the Canadian?

The VIA Rail team is currently working on developing the health and safety protocols that need to be implemented for the service on the long-distance train.

We are finalizing our operating plans in order to be back in service in November which will include final train consists, schedules and operating protocols.

We will share more information as soon as our plans are finalized.

Q4. Do you plan on restoring at some point the third full frequency of the *Canadian*?

In April 2019, VIA Rail introduced a revised schedule for The *Canadian*—with two (2) weekly national trains operating between Toronto and Vancouver and one (1) weekly train operating between Vancouver and Edmonton—in order to stabilize the market and offer a more predictable schedule.

Our focus is to resume the service on the *Canadian*, currently suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

We remain committed to serving communities in Western Canada and will evaluate the schedule of the *Canadian* regularly to ensure that our service offering responds, to the best of our abilities, to the needs of our passengers.

Q5. What are VIA Rail's long-term plans for the *Canadian*?

VIA Rail continues to explore transportation options for passengers, based on market demand. Our focus is to resume the service on the *Canadian*, currently suspended due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Q6. What is your plan for continued service of the *Ocean* once the Halterm loop is closed? Can we expect different running stock or other changes in service?

What will the consist of the *Ocean* be starting in November when it cannot be turned in the container terminal?

In order to mitigate VIA Rail's inability to turn trains in Halifax, we will be operating a hybrid train consist made up of Renaissance & HEP equipment which will be composed of different car types. This consist does not require the need to turn trains Halifax.

Some Renaissance cars will continue to operate on the *Ocean* to provide the same accessibility option to our passengers travelling in Economy or Sleeper Class.

Q7. What plans does VIA Rail have to improve passenger rail service in Atlantic Canada? Will VIA Rail consider making the *Ocean* a daily service or supplementing it with additional regional trains?

We understand that Atlantic Canada would like to see more frequent trains in the region. Our goal has always been to provide to the best of our abilities, a service that can respond to the needs of our passengers. The service offered, under normal circumstances, of three round trips per week reflects the current demand and we therefore do not have plans to make the *Ocean* a daily service.

B. SERVICE TO GASPÉ AND WESTERN CANADA

Q1. When will VIA Rail resume service on the Gaspé Coast?

Will VIA Rail restore partial service on the Gaspé line (e.g., to New Carlisle) when the line is repaired, or will you wait until the entire line to Gaspé is complete?

Transport Québec has said that the rehabilitation of the railway line between Caplan and Port-Daniel and Gascons will be completed by 2022. What are VIA Rail's plans to resume passenger rail service to New Carlisle?

VIA Rail intends to resume service to Gaspé once the tracks are deemed safe for the operation of passenger trains and that infrastructure enables the service all the way to Gaspé with competitive trip times.

Q2. Are there any plans for expansion in the West? With the loss of Greyhound bus services, there is a void in certain areas that VIA rail could certainly fill a gap both on long and short haul trips.

What plans does VIA Rail have to make passenger rail service competitive with the automobile in Western Canada, particularly on the Victoria-Courtenay corridor and in lower mainland British Columbia?

Are there any plans to run to Calgary?

We understand the negative impact that this situation has on the communities in Western Canada. We are always interested in exploring new routes. Unfortunately, at this time, we do not have the resources (i.e. equipment, infrastructure, tracks, stations) needed to expand our services.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, VIA Rail served more than 130 communities in Western Canada and, to many of those communities VIA Rail provides an essential service.

As the country slowly returns to a new normal, we will be progressively resuming our operations, as conditions allow.

C. REGIONAL SERVICES

Q1. We own a family Camp on the Canadian Pacific line between Sudbury and White River, Ontario. It is only accessible by rail, this two day a week service provided by VIA 185 and 186 has not allowed us to use it as often as we would like. Northern Ontario has few COVID- 19 cases and I can't understand why we are restricted to only been able to travel two days a week. Do you have any plans to increase this service?

When will you resume regular services on the Montréal-Jonquière route?

Since the beginning of the pandemic the health and safety of our passengers and employees have been our number one priority.

The decision to reduce the number of departures throughout the network was made in accordance with the Government of Canada strict public health guidelines and was also based on a significant drop in ridership.

As the country slowly returns to a new normal, we will be progressively resuming our operations, as conditions allow.

Q2. Why is the train between Montréal and Jonquière operated at night? We have been told that it is because of the heatwave. Now that it is over, will the regular schedule return?

Due to heat-related slow orders imposed by the infrastructure owner, VIA Rail modified the Montréal—Jonquière train schedule to operate at night in order to provide reasonable trip times to our passengers.

VIA Rail understands the negative impact this situation beyond our control has on our customers and we continue to work with the infrastructure owner to minimize these impacts.

We are reassessing the schedule and once we can operate our trains at speeds that permit reasonable trip times during the day it will be modified.

D. QUÉBEC CITY-WINDSOR CORRIDOR

Q1. In view of the fact that fares are booked by commuters far in advance for the first eastbound trip of the day, for passage from Windsor to Toronto; and in view of the fact that early morning travel is necessary for many other reasons too, will VIA Rail consider adding several cars to the first eastbound train (Monday to Friday only)? Or as an alternative, will VIA Rail consider scheduling another eastbound train, due to arrive in Toronto prior to 8:30 a.m.?

VIA Rail is working on the return to service strategy and will do so by taking into account variables such as consist size and train schedules.

Q2. When will trains leaving Cobourg to Union station at 7 a.m. resume?

We study and revise our schedules on a regular basis in order to adapt and respond to customers' demands and needs. Our immediate focus is to gradually resume service, based on demand.

Q3. Are there plans in the works geared toward expanding current services in Southern Ontario or the Windsor-Québec City Corridor?

VIA Rail is always looking at opportunities to improve its service levels. Our immediate focus is to gradually resume service, based on demand.

E. COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Q1. What are the plans for the return of Business Class in the COVID-19 era?

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the health and safety of our passengers and employees have been at the heart of every decision we have made.

We are currently working on a revised version of the Business Class offer which would meet the needs of our customers while following recommendations from public health authorities.

We will share more information regarding Business Class once it becomes available.

Q2. What kind of price increase can we expect when regular services and routes resume?

VIA Rail currently has no immediate plans to modify its current pricing structure.

Q3. Due to COVID-19 can VIA Rail stop at extra GO stations for safety purposes? Will VIA Rail be providing services and stops to the new students entering in September 2020—from Toronto to Western University in London, Ontario. Services and stops are only provided at Guildwood GO Station and Union Station. What is VIA Rail doing to increase daily trips between Toronto and London, Ontario?

VIA Rail has no short-term plans to make additional stops at GO stations. We continue to work with our partners such as Metrolinx to align our schedules in order to offer intermodal connection opportunities to our passengers.

Q4. Will there be hand sanitizer and masks available in every car when travelling?

Since the beginning of the pandemic, VIA Rail has followed the recommendations and guidelines from the public health authorities, and we will continue to do so as we resume service.

In the Québec City—Windsor Corridor, all cars (Business/Economy) will have hands sanitizing dispensers in passenger areas in addition to those found in the galley. In stations, and on platforms prior to boarding the train, passengers will also be requested to sanitize their hands.

VIA Rail has implemented a mask policy which requires passengers to wear a mask at all times in stations and on board our trains. Passengers are, however, responsible for bringing their own masks, but we have a limited supply of disposable masks in case passengers have forgotten theirs.

For more information on the measures taken by VIA Rail in response to the pandemic, please visit our [COVID-19 webpage](#) or our [Media Centre](#).

F. CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Q1. Will you be reinstating other payments options on board your trains?

The change implemented in October 2019 on board trains in the Québec City-Windsor corridor, the *Ocean* and some regional trains reflects the transportation industry trend towards cashless transactions.

VIA Rail monitored the implementation closely and the results were positive. As such, no additional payment options will be implemented.

Q2. Will VIA Rail consider adding bicycle racks onto cars on trains without baggage cars, so that cyclists could bring their bicycles on trains, as is done in Europe?

Due to operational and space limitations, current cars cannot be equipped with bicycle racks. VIA Rail's new Corridor fleet, scheduled to arrive starting in 2022, will have more space and racks for bicycles on board.

For more information on the Fleet Replacement Program, we invite you to visit our [website](#).

G. PASSES, DISCOUNTS AND PROMOS

Q1. We have noticed that VIA Rail has not provided any special discount deals for students and customer discount packages other than what they have now? What packages can you provide to these students and/or customers prior to August 24, 2020?

Will the student pass be available again in the fall?

Our current focus is to gradually return our services to normal levels. Our passes and products are currently being reviewed, in light of the pandemic.

Q2. What will you do about rail passes that have not been used due to COVID-19? Will there be extensions or only refunds?

For more information, please contact the VIA Customer Centre by email at service@viarail.ca or by phone at 1-888-VIA-RAIL (1-888-842-7245), TTY 1-800-268-9503 (hearing impaired).

Q3. Why don't you offer a family rate? You could offer advantageous rates to encourage parents to take the train with their children?

VIA Rail offers year-round promotions making travel by train the easy and economical travel option for parents. Many of these were suspended due to the pandemic and we plan to gradually reintroduce promotions as conditions permit.

H. ACCESSIBILITY

Q1. Why does VIA Rail not have a visual electronic display sign in its coaches to display and announce upcoming stops, safety concerns—which would prevent deaf and hard-of-hearing passengers from missing their stops.

At VIA Rail we strive to create a barrier-free travel experience that is enjoyable, easy and comfortable for all.

Due to the age of our current fleet, the structure unfortunately does not allow us to install electronic display. This will, on the other hand, be a feature of the new Québec City-Windsor corridor fleet, scheduled to arrive starting in 2022.

For more information on the Fleet Replacement Program, we invite you to visit our [website](#).

Q2. What improvements is VIA Rail making to provide priority access and sufficient space for a handler and their service dog?

With the implementation of the Accessible Transportation for Persons with Disabilities Regulations (ATPDR) in June 2020, VIA Rail modified several processes to ensure compliance.

We currently provide an extra seat at no charge to a person travelling with a service dog in order to ensure the dog has sufficient floor space.

Additionally, for trains with assigned seating, we have improved our reservation system to restrict the sale of seats adjacent to mobility aid spaces to keep those seats available (for up until 2 days before departure) for persons with mobility aids travelling with a service dog that requires extra floor space, as well as an accompanying support person. We are preparing to update our reservations agents on this new feature.

The new Corridor fleet, scheduled to arrive starting in 2022, will also have dedicated seating areas for passengers with service dogs. Those seats will have sufficient space for service animals.

Q3. When are all VIA Rail employees going to be properly trained in how to use the lift and especially customer service?

As we seek to offer the best travel experience to all our passengers, all active frontline employees including those working in our call centres have received an updated training on accessibility, which includes customer service. In addition, all station and on-train employees need to pass a mandatory recertification regarding the use of the wheelchair lift.

I. EQUIPMENT

Q1. When is it scheduled to renovate the Château cars?

VIA Rail is currently evaluating options related to its long-distance fleet which includes the HEPI Château Sleepers. Once the analysis is completed, a proposal will be submitted to the shareholder for consideration. Meanwhile, we have taken the opportunity of the service suspension due to COVID-19 to perform some work on the Château Sleepers.

Q2. When will you move forward with the purchase of new sleepers to replace the Château and Manor cars?

VIA Rail is currently looking at various options to renovate and ultimately replace its current long-distance fleet which includes the HEPI Château and Manor Sleepers. Once the analysis is completed, a proposal will be submitted to the shareholder for consideration.

Q3. Until when will you be operating the Renaissance cars (Business and Economy class) between Québec City and Ottawa? Will they be in operation until the arrival of the new Siemens cars?

The Renaissance trains deployed in the Québec City-Montréal-Ottawa route are to be retired with the arrival of the new Corridor fleet.

Q4. When will VIA Rail be upgrading its passenger cars (upholstery, etc.) on the *Canadian* and *Ocean* route?

We are refurbishing some of our HEP equipment in order to eventually deploy it on our long-distance routes, when the new Corridor fleet will be operational. However, we do not have short-term plans to replace the current *Canadian* and *Ocean* fleets. This said, our maintenance facilities have taken the opportunity of the service suspension due to COVID-19 to catch up with the backlog of work that includes passenger car interior features.

J. MODERNIZATION

Q1. What is the progress of HFR?

When will construction start? Have stations locations been decided?

Following the announcement made on June 25, 2019, VIA Rail and the Canada Infrastructure Bank built a team of experts to complete the Joint Project Office's (JPO) mandate.

As outlined in the [press release](#) from June 25th, the JPO's mandate is focused on:

- finalizing legal and regulatory work related to safety and environmental assessments;
- consulting with stakeholders and Indigenous communities;
- examining required land and track acquisition; and
- completing the technical, financial and commercial analysis required for a final investment decision on High Frequency Rail in the Corridor.

After appointing Vernon Barker as the Project Director of the JPO last October, the Owner's Engineers (OE), a joint venture formed by AECOM and Arup, were hired in January 2020 following a rigorous, competitive procurement process and a thorough evaluation of the proposals. They have since been supporting the JPO with all technical and engineering matters, such as the design of alignment, in order for the JPO to provide its recommendations to government.

Q2. Reconstruction of the tracks and electrification system in the Mount Royal Tunnel is now taking place for the Réseau Express Métropolitain. What concrete steps are being taken during this construction to ensure that VIA Rail's proposed High Frequency trains will be able to share the tunnel with the REM?

For all questions related to current work in Montréal's Mont-Royal Tunnel and any associated firms involved in the construction, we invite you to contact the project owner, *La Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec* (CDPQ).

Q3. Will the new trains for the Québec City—Windsor Corridor have their interiors adapted and redesigned due to the health crisis?

Trains, as airplanes can be reconfigured to deal with service changes (seating arrangement, etc.). Although it is difficult to be precise on the timelines, there is a shared perspective that we will have either a vaccine or medication (or both) prior to receiving the new fleet so no layout changes are contemplated at this time.

Q4. What is the status of the Corridor fleet replacement project? Has the COVID-19 pandemic created any delays in the anticipated delivery of the new trains?

In [December 2018](#), VIA Rail awarded a contract to Siemens Canada for 32 trainsets that would replace the fleet that operates in the Québec City-Windsor corridor. Despite the pandemic, there is no current indication of potential delays to the delivery of the new fleet and the first train set is still expected to be delivered in 2022.

Q5. Are there plans to increase public Wi-Fi aboard the *Ocean* and *Canadian*?

To improve the online experience for passengers, in 2019, upgrades were made to the Wi-Fi service in our Economy and Business class cars in the Québec City—Windsor corridor and between Montréal and Halifax (the *Ocean*) in 2019.

As of the end of 2019, more than 80% of cars travelling on these routes have improved Wi-Fi connectivity and reliability, with the remainder to be completed by the end of 2020.

Additionally, starting at the end of the year, an upgrade to the Wi-Fi service will be performed to allow for improved system performance and a better user experience. VIA Rail does not offer Wi-Fi on the Canadian as cellular coverage is inconsistent on most of the route. The Wi-Fi on board the train is fully dependant on cellular service.

Q6. I would like to know if you plan on involving an occupational therapist in planning of your seating and table options on the new trains?

The new fleet is being designed with the objective of offering an enhanced travel experience in the Québec City-Windsor corridor. Starting in 2022, passengers will thus enjoy an easier and more comfortable trip with wider aisles, a better Wi-Fi connectivity as well as wider seats and retractable tables.