

VIA RAIL'S 2020 ANNUAL PUBLIC MEETING
Speech of Françoise Bertrand, Chairperson of VIA Rail Canada's
Board of Directors

Good afternoon,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to welcome you online to VIA Rail's 2020 Annual Public Meeting.

To begin, I would like to address the unprecedented nature of the date of this Public Meeting, which was, as we are sure you will understand, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This crisis, however, must not steer us away from our rules of sound governance, nor of our obligations of reporting to Canadians, and—of course—to the government. I am proud to be presiding over this Annual Public Meeting which concludes the year 2019.

I have been the Chairperson of VIA Rail's Board of Directors since 2017, during which time I observed how the travel habits of Canadians have evolved. We have seen that many have left their cars at home and have opted to take our trains more and more to travel between cities. Could this be attributed to increased environmental awareness? We sure hope so.

At the end of the year, I remain convinced that passenger rail in Canada is the way of the future, and that 2019's five million passages demonstrates how VIA Rail has been successful in providing Canadians with an accessible, affordable and reliable service. This ridership's positive results reflect Canadians' appreciation for the excellent service offered by the teams in our call centres, our stations, our maintenance centres, our administrative services, and of course, on board our trains.

I applaud and thank our employees, who, through kindness and professionalism, offer our customers an efficient and enjoyable travel experience.

2019 was a year of transition, beginning with the arrival of Cynthia Garneau at the helm of the organization. Ms. Garneau worked with the Management Team and the Board of Directors to establish the strategic planning for 2019–2024, an ambitious plan which not only serves as a continuation of our modernization plan but which will also define VIA Rail's future.

This modernization was already well-underway thanks to government funding for the acquisition of a new fleet to better serve the Québec City – Windsor corridor. Another flagship modernization project is our High Frequency Rail project in the Québec City-Toronto corridor, which aims to build dedicated tracks for the transport of passengers. The Federal government has mandated the Joint Project Office, between VIA Rail and the Canada Infrastructure Bank, in order to analyze the different options for such a project.

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This speech was given as part of VIA Rail Canada's 2020 Annual Public Meeting

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On the technological front, we are working to develop a reservation system that facilitates passenger choice and offers a more efficient user experience. Our teams are also working on improving our logistical organization, our information systems and our market intelligence, all while prioritizing compliance with security standards.

As a result, 2019 was certainly a year of transition, but also one of great achievements. In terms of governance, the committee structure of the Board of Directors has allowed us to work on the VIA Rail of tomorrow by keeping track of multiple strategic projects. I would in fact like to thank my fellow Board members for their commitment and unwavering dedication.

In addition, I would like to thank the Honourable Marc Garneau for his collaboration and trust.

I applaud the leadership and devotion of our President, Cynthia Garneau, and of VIA Rail's Management Team, who were particularly put to the test in these times of pandemic and transition.

The last few months have been challenging. As we emerge from confinement, we are moving forward with a gradual resumption of our operations, safe for both our employees and our passengers, as well as a responsible management of incurred costs, all while continuing to offer the best experience possible.

To conclude, I would like to reiterate our commitment to respect our obligations to connect one coast to another. We are all dedicated to offering a sustainable, safe and enjoyable travel option for Canadians, with the proud VIA Rail signature.

I will now give the floor to Cynthia Garneau, President and Chief Executive Officer.

Thank you for your time.