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Investing in passenger rail

This investment will help VIA to maintain and improve the reliability of passenger service across the country, and ensure that the service remains both cost-effective and sustainable in the future.

- A major investment to rebuild and modernize VIA's oldest equipment will improve reliability and comfort for passengers and better respond to the needs of today's travelers, while reducing maintenance costs.
- In the Quebec City – Windsor Corridor, improved track and signaling will help to eliminate train delays caused by traffic congestion, and increase capacity for faster, more frequent train service.
- VIA will modernize key passenger stations to better address customer needs, and to meet changing operational and safety requirements.
- Investments will also upgrade VIA's maintenance facilities and information systems that are critical to the efficient management of the service.

Equipment

Modernizing locomotives

VIA's total fleet includes 53 F-40 locomotives, which are more than twenty years old. These locomotives are used in all parts of Canada – on VIA's western and eastern transcontinental services, in the Quebec City – Windsor Corridor, and for remote services.

The F-40s are nearing the end of their normal life cycle. As they age, more frequent mechanical problems result in more train delays, and escalating maintenance costs.

VIA will completely rebuild and modernize the F-40 locomotives, extending their service life by 15–20 years at less than half the cost of buying new equipment. Rebuilding will not only bring the F-40s back to their original, as-new condition, but upgrade the locomotives to meet current environmental, safety and operating standards. The rebuilt equipment will provide more reliable train service to travelers, and reduce maintenance costs by up to 15 percent once the project is complete.

Renewing the LRC passenger cars

VIA currently has 98 LRC ("light, rapid, comfortable") passenger cars used for both first-class and coach service in the Quebec City-Windsor Corridor. Although they make up less than a quarter of the entire fleet, the LRC cars generate more than 50% of VIA's total passenger revenues.

The LRCs have been in service for more than 25 years, and they no longer meet the expectations of travelers in terms of comfort and amenities. Obsolete parts are becoming increasingly expensive to maintain, and reliability is deteriorating.

VIA will rebuild the LRC cars to better-than-new condition, and extend their service life by another 15-20 years. This investment will reduce maintenance costs and improve reliability, while upgrading passenger comfort and amenities to meet current standards in the marketplace. New technologies will also make the operation of this equipment more environmentally sustainable.

Improved accessibility

In keeping with its commitment to provide accessible service, VIA is undertaking a number of equipment modifications to make rail service more convenient and comfortable for travelers with restricted mobility. These include enhanced sleeping accommodations on the eastern transcontinental service, along with larger washroom facilities, improved tie-down areas for those with wheel-chairs, and accommodation for service animals. Equipment used in the Quebec City-Windsor Corridor will also be modified to enhance accessible seating arrangements.

Environmental benefits

VIA works continually to reduce the environmental impact of passenger rail operations. Since 1990, VIA has reduced fuel consumption and greenhouse gas emissions (GHGs) by 15 percent, building on the inherent environmental benefits of train travel.

The investment in modernizing equipment will further enhance these benefits. New technologies included in rebuilding the F-40 locomotives will ensure that they meet current environmental standards for locomotive emissions. The rebuilt LRC cars will also incorporate environmental enhancements, including new, more efficient heating, cooling and ventilation systems. Together, these modifications will result in an additional 9 percent reduction in fuel consumption and GHG emissions.

Infrastructure

Most of the rail infrastructure used by passenger trains is owned by, and shared with, freight railways. In the Quebec City-Windsor Corridor, VIA's busiest market, increasing freight traffic has resulted in congestion and frequent delays for passenger trains.

VIA will work with the freight railways to upgrade the infrastructure, with major projects on all Corridor routes. This will allow VIA to improve service between all major cities, including Quebec City, Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Kitchener, Brantford, London, and Windsor – as well as the many smaller communities in between served by VIA trains.

This investment in infrastructure will include:

- Upgraded track, along with new sidings and “passing” track in key locations;
- Improved rail/road crossings and crossing protection;
- New pedestrian over- and under-passes;
- Enhanced security;
- Improved signaling, with VIA’s Centralized Traffic Control (CTC) system extended to cover all Corridor infrastructure.

Improved infrastructure will enhance safety, while eliminating many delays caused by congestion, and allow passenger trains to operate at higher speeds. As a result, capacity will increase, allowing VIA to provide faster and more frequent service throughout the Corridor. VIA projects that it will accommodate more than one million additional passengers – an increase in ridership of 32 percent over 2006 – when the infrastructure improvements are complete.

Stations

Along with infrastructure improvements, VIA will upgrade and modernize key passenger stations to serve customers more efficiently, and to address operational and safety needs. Major station projects include improved platforms, lounges, lighting and boarding gates, interior and exterior renovations, and in some cases expansion or new facilities.

Investing for efficiency

The Government of Canada’s five-year investment plan also addresses the need to keep key facilities and business systems up to date, to support efficient operations. VIA will upgrade its maintenance facilities, including machinery and tools. In addition, VIA is upgrading information technology systems to improve the efficiency of functions such as ticketing and managing customer information.

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