



Speaking Notes

Winnipeg, September 16, 2011

**PAUL G. SMITH, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD - VIA RAIL CANADA
DELIVERED AT WINNIPEG – UNION STATION 100TH ANNIVERSARY
CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

Connecting People, Building Communities: 100 Years of Service

It is an honour to take part in launching Winnipeg Union Station's centennial year.

It is a pleasure to do so at a time when VIA is looking to the future – having completed major renovations that make this not only a better station for our customers, but a more environmentally friendly facility for Winnipeg, for generations to come.

The funding for renovations here is part of an unprecedented Government of Canada investment to improve passenger rail services. The Government has committed \$923 million to passenger rail, including \$407 million from its Economic Action Plan. I would like to personally thank Minister Fletcher for his continued support, and for the Government of Canada's support – for the work here in Winnipeg, and for passenger rail across Canada.

Before focusing in on this station, I would like to tell you a little bit about VIA Rail Canada. Since 1977, VIA has operated Canada's national passenger rail service on behalf of the Government of Canada. We carry over four million passengers annually on some 500 trains per week, on a 12,500-kilometer network from the Atlantic to the Pacific Oceans and north to Hudson Bay, providing service in both official languages to 450 communities.

VIA operates stations throughout that national network, but this building is actually the largest facility owned by VIA Rail. In fact, Winnipeg Union Station is one of the most important heritage stations in the country.

It is also one of the most compelling reminders of how deeply rooted passenger rail is in Western Canada, in the communities we serve, and in the history of Canada itself.

Union Station has been the gateway to Western Canada for 100 years. And the people who have passed through this station have helped to shape the character and destiny not just of Western Canada, but the entire country.

Think back to the thousands of immigrants who flooded into the West back when this station was first built – so many that an entire floor of the building was used as an immigration processing centre. This was the start of Canada's great Western expansion, the birth and growth of Western Canada as we know it today.

Over the years, this station was the gateway to a new life for thousands of people from around the world – people who built homes, communities, and cities across the West, and changed the history of Canada.

Think of the thousands of soldiers who passed through the Great Hall of Union Station as troops were mobilized during the two World Wars. This was a major transportation hub for the armed services. Legend has it that during World War Two, so many platoons marched through in formation, on their way to war or returning home, that the rhythm of their marching actually cracked the floor.

Think of the hundreds of thousands of people who have travelled and still travel through Union Station today – on business, connecting with family, tourists getting their first glimpse of the West – people whose lives and memories have been touched by this landmark in downtown Winnipeg.

As this centennial year begins, we are not just celebrating the history of a station, but the role that rail has played in this community – and will continue to play in the future.

Centennial celebrations are not just for looking back. They are an occasion for looking forward.

Thank you.