

## 2015 Annual Public Meeting – Questions and Answers

The below document contains all questions sent to VIA Rail leading up to and during the 2015 Annual Public Meeting webcast. Thank you to everyone who participated in the meeting and sent us their questions.

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

### Our routes, our stations and our frequencies

#### *Quebec City-Windsor corridor*

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- 1. Q: On April 28th VIA Rail announced that it was hoping to add two new departures from London, Ontario by the fall of 2015. Will one of these planned new trips be along the London - Stratford-Guelph-Kitchener-Toronto train line? If not, are there any plans to add frequencies on this line? Additionally, are there any further plans to upgrade the infrastructure on this line for better track speeds?**

A: No, both additional departures are being planned through the south line between Toronto and London. Because these tracks are not owned by VIA Rail, we must first have the request approved by track owners in the area, CN and GO. We will be able to launch the new train frequencies following this approval, hopefully in 2016. VIA Rail announced plans to introduce a Stratford-Toronto frequency in 2016. There are currently no plans to upgrade 3<sup>rd</sup> party infrastructure in this area.

- 2. Q: Are you considering a dedicated, high-speed VIA Rail Windsor-Quebec City corridor?**

A: No, at VIA Rail, we believe that what is required first and foremost is a dedicated passenger rail corridor. This will allow more frequencies and greater reliability.

Please watch this short video in which our President explains the reasons why dedicated tracks are the best option for VIA Rail's future. It is available on [VIA Rail's YouTube channel](#).

- 3. Q: Are you planning to further streamline passenger service between Kingston and Toronto, and Kingston and Montreal/Ottawa?**

A: VIA Rail bases train frequency and schedules on customer demand.

Adjustments are planned on a seasonal basis throughout the entire Windsor-Quebec City corridor.

These adjustments are made following careful analysis of ridership results from previous years. We are receptive and responsive to client feedback and continually adjust our service to meet our clients' changing needs.

**4. Q: Are there any plans to put in more seating at the Oshawa and Cobourg stations? Also why did you only put in stairs and no escalator at these stations?**

A: A new station will be constructed in Oshawa (by GO Transit) that will have a larger waiting area and seating capacity to accommodate GO Transit service as well as VIA Rail customers. At the Cobourg station, VIA Rail is presently restoring a vacant area adjacent to the existing waiting room that will provide additional waiting space and seating capacity. At both locations, in addition to the stairs giving access to the accessible island platform, modern elevators are available for ease of access to all passengers.

**5. Q: What are the plans for increased passenger rail service in Southwestern Ontario?**

A: In Spring 2015, VIA Rail announced the possibility of two new departures between Toronto and London, as well as new departures between Windsor – London and Sarnia - London, to potentially be added in the first quarter of 2016. VIA Rail also announced plans to introduce a Stratford-Toronto frequency in 2016.

We are presently planning these services in cooperation with our freight railway partners, who own the track in this area. We will also do a financial analysis of these potential new departures in order to ensure that the services will not be an added burden to taxpayers.

**6. Q: Why did you cancel the late train from Toronto to Kingston?**

**Do you have any plans for a later eastbound train than the 6:35p.m. from Toronto (to Kingston)?**

A: Currently the latest week day departure from Toronto to Kingston is at 6:35p.m.

VIA Rail bases train frequency on customer demand and any adjustments are planned on a seasonal basis throughout the entire Corridor. We are currently reviewing our schedule to see if a later departure would be possible in future seasons.

**7. Q: Why is the last train from Dorval to Kingston so early (in the evening)?**

A: The summer schedule 2015 includes the expansion of train 669 from two days a week to daily frequencies. This train leaves Dorval at 19:04, arrives at Kingston at 21:18. VIA Rail is receptive and responsive to client feedback and continually adjusts its service to meet customer needs and demand.

- 8. Q: Why aren't the connections in Toronto to other VIA Rail trains (going all directions) timed to the arrival of incoming trains so that passengers don't have to wait for their connections?**

A: This would be ideal but only feasible if VIA Rail controlled the traffic on the railway infrastructure. Unfortunately, other railways control the entry and exit into Toronto. Moreover, they control traffic. So to minimize chances of missed connections, the VIA Rail schedule cannot be "timed".

- 9. Q: Why are trains from Windsor to Toronto and the trains from Brockville to Toronto almost always late at the end of the day?**

A: Trains from Windsor experience speed restrictions of 10 mph (16 km/h) at three crossings on the CN track on which it runs. Two of these crossings are being addressed. In addition, Metrolinx is the owner of the infrastructure between Burlington and Toronto Union station, where numerous infrastructure improvements are under way, causing some train congestion.

With regards to the Brockville to Toronto trains, freight train have increased in number and length in this area and all across the country, which causes unfortunate increased delays when VIA Rail's trains follow or meet them. In addition, further delays can sometimes occur when VIA Rail trains have to wait or follow GO Transit trains west of the Durham junction, where Metrolinx is also the track owner.

- 10. Q: Why don't you have a night sleeper between Toronto and Ottawa and Montreal?**

A: VIA Rail bases train frequency on customer demand. This train was cancelled over 20 years ago due to low ridership, however, VIA Rail is always responsive to its clients' requests. We are studying many options, including resuming certain Corridor night trains.

- 11. Q: Is it possible to restore overnight trains or at least late-night service in the Corridor?**

A: VIA Rail resumed 668-669 (Montreal-Toronto) late trains in 2015 and is studying the possibility of resuming certain Quebec City – Windsor Corridor night trains, among other departure options.

- 12. Q: With growing communities in the Niagara region in Ontario, will daily VIA Rail train service be expanded or returned to the Niagara region corridor to Toronto? If not, why was this service eliminated?**

A: VIA Rail is looking into the opportunity of increasing service in the Niagara / St. Catharines region in 2016. The potential in the area is for passengers travelling for leisure or as commuters.

**13. Q: Have you considered or will you consider making Train #82 arrive into Toronto earlier, (by at least 20 minutes)? If so, can you provide an estimated date? If not, why is this a problem for VIA?**

A: VIA Rail is studying possibilities of adding service between London and Toronto, including an early morning train from Stratford.

**14. Q: What are VIA Rail's plans for offering a comparable depth of city-to-city services as in the Corridor beyond the Ontario border?**

A: There are no plans to offer greater inter-city services beyond the Corridor than those currently provided by the *Ocean* and the *Canadian*.

**15. Q: Why doesn't VIA Rail offer service to the United States anymore?**

A: VIA Rail has a partnership with Amtrak, the national passenger railroad corporation in the United States. VIA Rail customers wishing to travel from Canada into the United States can book their trips through Amtrak.

As a Canadian Crown corporation, VIA Rail's priority and mandate is to provide a safe, reliable and cost-effective service to all Canadians, from coast to coast. We do not offer services in the USA, and there are no plans for expansion at this time.

**16. Q: When extra stops were scheduled in Belleville effective next month, why is there an imbalance in the number of trains?**

A: VIA Rail is continuously working on our schedule in order to better accommodate customers. Train departures are based on market demand and are adjusted accordingly.

#### Woodstock

**17. Q: Why did you take away the station agent in Woodstock?**

A: Station services were modernized based on local market demand and in keeping with customer preferences and industry trends. Passenger traffic does not justify staffing this station.

**18. Q: Why did you stop baggage services to Woodstock?**

A: As Woodstock is now an unmanned station, we can no longer offer the baggage service.

**19. Q: Why does the afternoon train from Windsor not stop in Woodstock?**

A: VIA Rail bases train departures on customer demand. Unfortunately, there was little to no demand for a stop in Woodstock at this time, compared to the high through traffic from Windsor to Toronto.

## Aldershot

**20. Q: In the wake of the cancellation of the morning VIA Rail train from Niagara Falls to Toronto, why can't train 82 – morning service from London to Toronto – make a short stop to pick up passengers in Aldershot instead of just passing through?**

A: Currently, by the time Train 82 arrives in Aldershot, it is at full capacity. VIA Rail will look into the possibility of adding a stop, by adding capacity to the train. This change would also be dependent on authorization from the third party track owner.

**21. Q: Why has VIA Rail discouraged so many daily commuters by cutting the morning schedules?**

A: VIA Rail is currently working on offering an improved schedule to commuters, by adding stops and new train departures.

**22. Q: Why was the agent removed from Aldershot station?**

A: Station services were modernized based on local market demand and in keeping with customer preferences and industry trends.

**23. Q: Why not put a display screen showing train arrival and departure information in one of the enclosures at track level at the Aldershot station?**

A: Excellent suggestion. We will investigate feasibility with the track owner, Go Transit.

## Eastern Canada

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**24. Q: When can we benefit from service in the Gaspé or as far as Baie des Chaleurs?**

**When will the train service to Gaspé resume?**

A: It is important to note that the tracks on which VIA Rail operates in the Gaspésie area are owned by the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie and are under provincial jurisdiction. VIA Rail will resume service in the area once the tracks are deemed safe for passenger rail operation.

**25. Q: Do you have plans to improve the connection from Halifax to Ottawa?**

A: VIA Rail is looking to improve all connections in the Quebec City - Windsor corridor as well as for the Montreal-Halifax train. Connections are dependent on access to track infrastructure, which is shared by passenger and non-passenger traffic.

**26. Q: Will there be more scheduled trains from Halifax to Montréal?**

A: VIA Rail is currently evaluating, with the help from the communities along the route, the train service needs of the eastern long-haul schedule. If warranted, the schedule will be adjusted according to these needs and market demand.

**27. Q: After being encompassed by all the comfort on the *Canadian*, why are people relegated to what feels a bit like second class on the *Ocean*?**

A: The train cars and services provided vary from route to route for many reasons. Inter-city, regional and long-haul trains serve different demographics of people with different travel needs and VIA Rail's product offering varies by route.

That being said, each train service in each area offers different classes to suit passenger needs and we encourage our customers to explore the various options for the *Ocean* train.

**28. Q: Given that there were negligible savings from cutting the *Ocean's* frequency to tri-weekly, is VIA Rail now prepared to explore the feasibility of daily service as a way to build ridership, grow revenues, and provide better value for taxpayer dollars?**

A: For the time being, VIA Rail's service between Montréal and Halifax will remain at three departures per week in both directions. We base the frequencies on customer demand. If demand increases, we will increase the frequencies to accommodate more passengers.

**29. Q: VIA Rail had mentioned the possibility of adding a local train in northern New Brunswick. Is this still being considered? If yes, what cities would it serve and when could this service start?**

A: VIA Rail is currently looking at options to enhance services in Eastern Canada, but no decisions have been made at this time. Such a service would serve the same cities as the *Ocean*.

**30. Q: What will VIA Rail do this year to improve coordination between buses and trains, especially in Nova Scotia?**

A: VIA Rail believes in the value of inter-modality. We have partnered with over 20 transportation companies and are always looking for new opportunities to expand our network. We are continuously looking into new partnerships across the country, including in Eastern Canada. VIA Rail's Susan Williams was appointed as the General Manager of this area. She will reach out to local bus companies to implement harmonized schedules, if possible.

**31. Q: Why are there not roomettes for one person on the *Ocean* like on the *Canadian*?**

A: The equipment used on the *Ocean* train (Renaissance equipment) does not have roomettes, however, there are regular comfortable rooms for sale on the *Ocean* train.

**32. Q: Is it possible to put on the Skyline cars on the *Ocean*?**

A: Although not equipped with a Skyline car, there are two service cars on the *Ocean* that provide our customers with free WIFI service and a snack bar. As well, the *Ocean* train does include a Park Car at the tail end which provides our Sleeper car passengers with a lounge and an observation area.

**33. Q: During much of March and April, the *Canadian* did not run between Winnipeg and Toronto. Given that this is VIA Rail's flagship train, why weren't arrangements made to detour the train over the Canadian Pacific?**

A: VIA Rail did in fact consider re-routing the *Canadian* over the Canadian Pacific (CP) track between Winnipeg and Toronto, however, it was not practical from an operational standpoint as locomotive engineers would have needed further training to safely run trains on that track. The required training would have caused further delays.

As well, VIA Rail would have needed to negotiate a new service contract with CP, which would have taken some time.

**34. Q: What are the chances of moving and/or adding the *Canadian* train back to its former CP route near Lake Superior?**

A: VIA Rail is currently considering this route. Track availability and track state are some of the operational considerations that are being reviewed prior to making a final decision.

**35. Q: Why does the service to Prince Rupert from Jasper fail to integrate with the westbound transcontinental service?**

A: VIA Rail reviews its schedules on a regular basis and will consider this option the next time this exercise is done.

**36. Q: Are there any plans in action for a passenger train to go to Northern Alberta, Grande Prairie and Northern British Columbia in the near future?**

A: There are no plans in the near future to expand into northern Alberta or British Columbia, but we would consider this option if market demand called for it and infrastructure were available.

**37. Q: Why has the order of sleeping car numbers on the *Canadian* been reversed?**

A: This change was made based on the sequence that the cars are currently sold on the *Canadian*. The new order will provide more consistent access to amenities and services onboard (such as dome cars and dining cars) to all customers. It also provides easier access to stations at intermediate locations.

**38. Q: Has VIA Rail considered re-establishing service between Calgary and Edmonton?**

A: VIA Rail is currently reviewing schedule potential in western Canada, including intercity demand in Canada's prairie provinces.

**39. Q: Why does VIA Rail not warn passengers on the *Canadian*, when they book their tickets, of the likelihood that the train will be extremely late?**

A: Normally, since it is not possible to forecast delays, VIA Rail notifies customers of delays on the day of departure or as soon as we are made aware of delays. However, due to recent experiences of recurring delays we are looking in to ways of advising passengers prior to purchase.

**40. Q: Would VIA Rail consider adjusting the departure of Train #2 to an earlier time to give that train high visibility in the lower mainland (Vancouver area) during the daylight hours and additionally adding scenery from the majestic Fraser Canyon to the route which is now travelled by both Trains #1 and #2 solely at night?**

A: Timetables are reviewed periodically taking into account the impacts of station schedules at all points along the route. Unfortunately, departing earlier from Vancouver is not a possibility at this time.

**41. Q: Do you have any plans to increase service in the West with the *Canadian* plus looking at shorter routes?**

A: VIA Rail is currently evaluating the possibility of expanding inter-city services within the Western provinces but no decisions have been made at this time.



## Our Equipment

**42. Q: Could you please provide some insights into the future fleet planning use of VIA Rail's Renaissance and older stainless steel equipment within the Quebec City - Windsor corridor, and any updates regarding potential fleet replacements in the next 10 years?**

A: Presently, the Renaissance equipment is being used on the *Ocean* service as well as between Quebec City and Montreal. We also occasionally use the equipment during peak seasons in the rest of the Quebec City – Windsor corridor.

We are currently refurbishing some of the Renaissance equipment. Five sets of these Renaissance trains will be back in service by the end of 2016.

A plan is being submitted to the Government of Canada for the replacement of all corridor equipment within the next 7-10 years.

**43. Q: Why not refurbish and / or keep more of the older and more comfortable business cars?**

A: The old stainless steel HEP II Business class cars are designed to travel at lower speeds.

A plan is being submitted to the Government of Canada for the replacement of all corridor equipment within the next 7-10 years.

**44. Q: When are we going to get raised platforms to onboard and de-board the train?**

A: There are already raised platforms at Montreal Central Station and Quebec Gare du Palais Station. Building additional raised platforms across the VIA Rail network is challenging due to the physical clearance requirements for freight traffic trains, the current level of stations as well as other constraints including the significant investment needed to build them. Nonetheless, VIA Rail is assessing the implementation of raised platforms at Ottawa and Toronto.

**45. Q: Please provide an update about the progress of updating the business class cars?**

A: The refurbishment of the LRC Business class cars was completed in 2014.

The HEP II Business class cars will not be upgraded since they will be phased out.

**46. Q: Will you refurbish the rooms and cars on the *Canadian*?**

A: About half of the *Canadian* fleet has been refurbished. There are no plans to complete the balance of the fleet at this time.

**47. Q: Does VIA Rail plan to extend the useful life of the HEP1 and HEP2 series cars with a refurbishment program similar to the LRC refurbishment program in the near future?**

A: The old stainless steel HEP II Business cars have outdated suspension, and are therefore a rougher ride at higher speeds. As well, they are very expensive to upgrade. It would not be a responsible investment for VIA Rail to refurbish them.

As for the HEP I fleet, half of the cars have been refurbished. There are no plans for the remainder at this time.

**48. Q: Why not invest in private tracks as well as work to develop new train cars with Canadian partners like Bombardier in order to revitalize the company?**

A: A plan is being submitted to the Government for the replacement of all corridor equipment within the next 7-10 years.

Regarding investing in dedicated tracks, please watch the video on VIA Rail's YouTube channel: [Top 5 things to know about VIA Rail's plan for dedicated tracks.](#)

**49. Q: Is it possible to have another sleeping class within the Renaissance class cars? Specifically, something along the lines of a "roomette"?**

A: Reconfiguring a sleeping car to create roomette type accommodations is very costly. As well, this investment is not a priority compared to other projects VIA Rail is currently working on.

## Our product offering and purchasing tickets

**50. Q: Could VIA Rail improve its website so that a guide dog user could make a reservation and have the seat for the guide dog to have enough room?**

A: The range of our special and adapted services may vary from one region to another, depending on station facilities and train cars. To help ensure that individual needs are met and our passengers are as comfortable as possible, we suggest passengers with special needs call our customer service department to purchase their tickets to outline the services they will require to ensure a smooth and pleasant trip.

**51. Q: Why can't we use our VIA Rail Gift Cards online?**

A: As part of a technology improvement project VIA Rail is working on, we are building a payments platform with the capability for users to pay with their gift cards and other forms of payment online. We are aiming to have this available at the end of 2016.

**52. Q: Why does the VIA Rail reservations system not show connections to/from any of the GO Transit trains that were added on the Lakeshore line two years ago, when GO Transit frequency was almost doubled?**

A: Currently, VIA Rail has a manual process for building connections in the reservation system. We are working on an automated connection building process to be implemented in Fall 2015. This, coupled with additional resources, will enable us to show more connections.

**53. Q: Why does the VIA Rail reservations system not offer connections to GO Transit trains at Aldershot or Oakville?**

A: We have a manual process for building connections. We are working on an automated connection building process to be implemented in Fall 2015. This, coupled with additional resources, will enable us to show more connections.

**54. Q: Why does the VIA Rail reservations system not offer connections to the AMT Mascouche trains, in the same way that it provides connections to Deux-Montagnes and St-Hilaire trains?**

A: In fact, we have already added the schedules, connections and fares for the AMT Mascouche trains to our system and it was activated for sale effective June 22, 2015.

**55. Q: Why does the VIA Rail reservations system not offer tickets to the Allandale Waterfront, Mount Pleasant, and Acton GO Transit train stations?**

A: These stations were added to our reservation system and have been available for sale since June 2015.

**56. Q: An article on the VIA Rail web site said that near real time tracking of corridor trains, through an applications called TSI Plus, would be rolled out to the public in fall 2012. That has not happened yet. Do you still plan to make it available? If so, when? If not, why not?**

A: Train Status Information Plus (TSI+) consists of systems used by the Network Operations team to measure and predict how well trains are following their schedules. Since December 2014, the TSI+ has been rolled out to the public through its feed of the "Arrival & Departure" tool on viarail.ca.

Along with TSI+, VIA Rail is also working on the Customer Information System (CIS) project. Ultimately, CIS is the public roll-out of TSI+ referred to in 2012. CIS provides passengers with accurate train status information in any type of circumstance (normal operation, service disruptions, and/or cancellations).

Since February 2015 we have also been offering a Train-Alert Service which allows passengers to sign-up and be notified of their train status, service disruption or delay regarding a specific train by email or SMS (text message).

In August 2015, we will also launch our mobile APP that will give real-time information to passengers regarding their upcoming trips.

**57. Q: When will arrival status information for non-corridor trains be made available on your web site?**

A: VIA Rail is currently working on the introduction of its train status information on its *Ocean* services (Trains #14 and #15) as well as regional services by the end of September 2015.

For the *Canadian* (Trains #1 and #2) this facility should be available by the end of December 2015. A few adjustments regarding the relevancy and quality of our forecast still need to be done in order to offer this service

Please note that train status for all trains will be available on VIA Rail's mobile APP as of August 2015.

**58. Q: Why can we no longer pre-book our meals in Business class at the same time as we make our reservations?**

Although we previously offered pre-ordering of meals this service was rarely used by our clients. Instead, in order to ensure that most if not all our Business class passengers are given their first choice of meal, we increased the number of meals provided to each train. The overall results of this exercise have being extremely successful.

As well, priority meal choice for Premier members is a benefit that is offered to the top tier members of our VIA Preference program as recognition for their loyalty.

### ***Seat selection***

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**59. Q: Will changes to the website be done so that we can choose our seat when reserving a ticket? If yes, when will it be available?**

**60. Why can't we choose our own seats when reserving online?**

A: As part of our technology improvement project, VIA Rail is working on building the capability to select a seat from a seat map by the end of 2016.

**61. Q: Is it possible to remove the assigned seating from the Quebec City – Windsor corridor?**

A: The introduction of assigned seating at VIA Rail was done in response to overwhelming customer demand. The majority of our customers expect seat assignment. In addition, this process is helpful in terms of boarding, disembarking and other onboard management processes at our various stations.

## Marketing and promotions

**62. Q: Why is it that the Unlimited Semester Passes are limited to Economy class only even when seats in Business, Economy Plus or Escape classes sometimes cost the same amount or even less than in Economy? Why can't the system just allow pass holders to book tickets that are of equal or lesser value than Economy class for that particular trip?**

A: The newly reintroduced Youth Summer Passes have a "Plus" option which offers passengers access to the Economy Plus class one day prior to departure. If there is demand for this new option, we will look at offering it on other passes, including the Unlimited Semester Pass.

**63. Q: Why have fares increased so much? What are you doing to keep your costs down so that passengers can see true savings?**

A: On average, fares represent approximately 47% of the actual operating costs of a trip. Accordingly, VIA Rail fares provide great value. To enjoy our best fares, which are lower than ever, we encourage passengers to book as early as possible. At VIA Rail we have been and will continue to improve our fare structure, schedules and network in order to better serve the needs of Canadians from coast to coast.

**64. Q: Will VIA Rail be renewing the CARP 15% reduction on fares in addition to the senior citizen rate? I believe that the current offer expires in August, 2015.**

A: We are currently looking at extending both the CARP and senior citizen rates.

**65. Q: Why don't you have a VIA Rail APP?**

A: We are currently working on the development of VIA Rail mobile smartphone app which is planned for launch in August 2015..

The main functionalities of the app will include:

- My Trips: train status in real-time, boarding pass. Station, baggage, onboard services information.
- Booking & Payment (with change and cancel functionality)
- Adding a Personal Profile
- Train Status & Schedules
- Find a station
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**66. Q: I don't have a smartphone: How will I be able to use existing on line booking and the great offers VIA Rail post if you go 100% electronic for tickets?**

A: This question was answered during our Annual Public Meeting webcast, which can be watched [here](#).

VIA Rail has no plans of using only electronic tickets. Paper tickets will always be available in our stations or at travel agencies, and of course an electronic ticket can always be printed at home or in your office if you do not have a smartphone.

**67. Q: Why is “Discount Tuesday” never applicable to trains from Kingston?**

A: VIA Rail does not have a policy of excluding any particular origin or destination station from “Discount Tuesday”, and the cities between which tickets are offered for sale vary from week to week. We encourage customers to sign up for our weekly “Discount Tuesday” bulletins in order to be among the first to enjoy these special discounts.

**68. Q: Will the Youth Unlimited Semester Pass be available again this fall and next year?**

A: Demand has been high for the Youth Unlimited Semester Passes as students have come to appreciate the freedom and excellent value of these passes. We are happy to announce that, as of June 2015, VIA Rail will offer these passes in the fall and winter semesters going forward.

**69. Q: Can you please advise what happened to the 50% off regular fares in exchange for booking in advance and when we might expect them to return?**

A: VIA Rail offers special discounts and seat sales periodically; we encourage customers to sign up for our weekly bulletins in order to be among the first to enjoy these specials, including discount sales. In addition, we also offer “Discount Tuesday” super savings offering exceptionally low fares even on our most popular routes, both within the Quebec City – Windsor corridor and across Canada on the *Canadian*.

**70. Q: Will you ever consider bringing in VIA Rail pass or the travel companion rates?**

At this time, our system does not support the travel companion logic, but this may be considered in future system upgrades. For the time being, we encourage customers to take advantage of our low everyday Escape fares to travel with friends and loved ones.

## Our services

**71. Q: Do you plan to offer direct debit on-board for purchases?**

A: We are planning to introduce a variety of onboard payment solutions which will allow for payment using both debit and credit cards in 2016.

**72. Q: Have there been any changes made to the lack of information provisions for the sleeper sections?**

A:

Sleeper sections relate to the *Canadian* (Toronto-Vancouver) or the *Ocean* (Montréal-Halifax). Information about our rooms, amenities, onboard services and activities are available on [viarail.ca](http://viarail.ca). VIA Rail offers a wide variety of accommodations and amenities. We are trying to simplify the presentation of our accommodations on [viarail.ca](http://viarail.ca). We also offer a guest directory in each room which describes the amenities offered onboard.

**73. Q: When will high speed internet be available onboard?**

A: Over the past 18 months, we have doubled the capacity of our Wi-Fi onboard system. It is now performing at close to peak, considering the complexity of hosting wireless / mobile Wi-Fi on a train. We are continually striving to improve the system, including upgrades to the On-Train Entertainment system (which offers television shows, news and other programs).

**74. Q: Why can't we pay additional an amount for Wi-Fi to be able to gain full access to things like Netflix and YouTube?**

A: At this time, in a mobile train environment, we do not have the capacity to support the data required to allow many passengers to stream video content simultaneously. We will continue to monitor advancements in technology in this area, however, at this time we do not have the ability to support this kind of usage.

**75. Q: Can the onboard staff arrange to inform passengers of the need for privacy, cleanliness and to respect other passengers so that everyone enjoys their trip?**

A: VIA Rail's onboard staff are trained to ensure a safe and comfortable journey for all customers. Our 'Travelling Better Together' Policy and information contained in the On Board



Guest Directory outline expectations for respectful travel. Any other comments or questions can be addressed to [customer\\_relations@viarail.ca](mailto:customer_relations@viarail.ca).

**76. Q: What is VIA Rail doing to re-open the de-staffed stations using volunteers or part-time staff?**

A: VIA Rail is discussing with municipalities and other community organizations the possibility of using and staffing unmanned stations with their personnel. The objectives are to make these community real estate assets useful to the community.

Re-manning the unstaffed stations with VIA Rail personnel may be reconsidered where warranted by passenger volumes and customer needs.

### ***Food and beverages***

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**77. Q: Why don't you provide free water for your guests?**

A: Water on board our trains is potable and available to passengers. Additionally, in certain classes of service across our network, we offer complimentary bottled water. For our Economy class passengers, our snack offering includes bottled water for sale. As we continue to develop our Economy class service, the idea of offering complimentary bottled water will be taken into consideration.

**78. Q: Why is the delicious egg sandwich with carrots and couscous no longer available?**

A: This particular product was in service for over 5 years and with our recent Economy class revamp we decided to introduce a vegetarian sandwich selection to respond to the dietary needs of all of our customers.

**79. Q: Why is there almost no pepper in the pouches served with meals on Business class Ottawa-Toronto and return?**

A: We will follow up with our supplier to ensure that our quantity is respected, that said, in the meantime, please do not hesitate to ask your attendant for extra pouches as they do have quantities set aside.

**80. Q: Would it be possible to add a special meal in Business class for people allergic to peanuts and nuts?**

A: Unfortunately, allergen free food products are not available from our national suppliers given the difficulty in guaranteeing this standard at this time.

**81. Q: I would like to know why the food in Business class on the Toronto-Montreal route has deteriorated so much lately?**

A: We strive to offer a good variety of the freshest and most popular meal selections in our Business class. Meals are based on our Chef's proposals as well as client and crew feedback. Moreover, we have recently improved the entire menu offered in Business class - including breakfast, lunch, supper and a new mid-day snack. Along with these changes, we have increased the frequency of rotation to ensure repetition is reduced for our frequent travelers.

**82. Q: Will you bring DAVID's TEA as an alternative for anyone who doesn't want coffee?**

A: We are constantly looking at ways to refresh our offer with quality Canadian products where possible. Thank you for your suggestion; we will keep it in mind as we look to renew our beverage offer.

**83. Q: When will you reverse the downgrading in Business class meal service?**

A: It is unfortunate to hear that you are displeased with our meal selection onboard. With the recent revamping of the menu in Business class and the frequent rotation of menus on offer, we hope to be able to meet your expectations.

**84. Q: Will there be non-alcoholic wines available in Business class?**

A: Due to very limited space onboard for storage and the lack of demand for such a product, we do not anticipate adding this to the offer in the short term.

## Our policies and practices

**85. Q: Why can't VIA Rail adopt a policy similar to airlines to allow small pets to be brought into passenger cars?**

Unfortunately, carrying pets onboard and placing them under the seat as some airlines allow is not an option given our seat construction. As such, pets would need to be placed in the baggage towers, posing complications from a safety and allergy standpoint. Note that service animals are always allowed on VIA Rail's trains.

**86. Q: Why restrict luggage?**

A: Carry-on luggage is restricted due to the space constraints found onboard as well as the potential hazards in managing larger items on platforms and onboard.

Please refer to our baggage policy, which explains everything in detail, [on our website](#).

**87. Q: If I miss the first train out of Toronto, book a replacement, then cancel by email before my replacement exits, why can't I get full credit for the return?**

Penalties for changes/cancellations are applied separately on each leg of the trip. Missing the outbound segment on a return (two-way) ticket does not influence whether or not the inbound segment ticket can be refunded / exchanged. If the return trip had been booked in EconomyPlus or BusinessPlus, it would have had been 100 per cent refunded with no penalty, even if the outbound trip had been missed.

For bookings in Economy or Escape fares, service fees amounting to 25 per cent and 50 per cent of the fare paid on the inbound segment apply, respectively. Please be reminded that cancellations and exchanges must be made either online, through the call center or at the station; these actions must be made prior to the departure of the train, and cannot be made by email.

**88. Q: Why does VIA Rail force people who must change their plans before the train departs to either lose all their money (cancel) or select a new date for travel (exchange)? Also, why does VIA Rail's web site not state very clearly that the penalty for changing is applied to each direction?**

A: Although our system does not currently support a credit bank, this is in the works and expected to be made available by the end of 2015. We encourage customers to try out the

benefits and flexibility of travelling on EconomyPlus and BusinessPlus fares, which are fully refundable and exchangeable.

**89. Q: What is being done to have correct information given to passengers about arrival and departure of VIA Rail trains?**

A: VIA Rail has invested significantly into our automated Train Status Information (TSI) and Customer Information System (CIS).

The TSI+ uses a system of way-points whereby geo-location coordinates (also referred to as train characterization) along each route in the Corridor are used to measure and predict how well trains are following their schedules.

The CIS project provides passenger with accurate train status information in any type of circumstance (normal operation, service disruptions, and/or cancellations).

Since February 2015, we have also been offering a Train-Alert Service which allows passenger to sign-up to be notified of their train status, service disruption or any delays regarding a specific train by email or SMS (text message).

VIA Rail has more than 40 screens in stations across Canada that provide train status information. We have also introduced automatic radio announcement in stations.

Finally, at the end of December 2014, Network Communication Officers were put in place to ensure that passengers were informed of any service disruption or delay regarding their trains.

**90. Q: What is the status of VIA Rail tickets/passing becoming eligible for the Commuter Tax Credit?**

A: VIA Rail has been in discussions with tax authorities on this matter. We have asked the federal tax authority to allow a Commuter Tax Credit for the users of the VIA Rail commuter pass. We have also requested a ruling from both the federal and provincial tax authorities on granting tax exempt status (GST/HST/QST) to the VIA Rail commuter pass as is the case for the AMT (Montreal) and the GO Transit (Toronto) commuter passes. We are waiting for a response from the federal and provincial tax authorities. The federal and provincial tax authorities have not given a timeline for their response to VIA Rail's requests.

## *VIA Preference members and privileges*

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**91. Q: In case of delays, why can't I get VIA Preference points instead of train credits for another trip?**

A: If you are a VIA Preference member, you can choose to receive five VIA Preference points for every dollar of credit in lieu of a late train travel credit. For example, a \$100 travel credit would be worth 500 points. To claim points, members must send their original receipt to VIA Preference and indicate that they are requesting points instead of a travel credit.

**92. Q: Why remove the lounge benefit from Premier members?  
Why have you added a \$100 surcharge for access to your lounges for VIA Premier members?**

A: Access to our Via Rail Lounges continues to be available prior to boarding for passengers travelling in Business class and also to VIA Preference Premier members who have paid the Economy Plus fare. This policy has been in place for many years, but unfortunately was not applied consistently and this has led to some confusion.

When the Commuter ePasses were first introduced, commuters expressed concerns that discounted fare seats (in line with the fare class used in the creation of Commuter Passes) would not be available on all departures, which would make it difficult for commuters to use VIA Rail services on a daily basis. In order to address these concerns, we made it possible for purchasers of commuter products to have access to Economy Plus seat inventory, even if the actual fare paid is significantly lower than EconomyPlus Fares. We also understand that many commuters want access to the VIA Rail lounges, which has led us to introduce new products that provide commuter product holders the opportunity to access our lounges.

As we evaluated options, it was apparent commuters do not want to pay for a pass at the EconomyPlus price point, therefore, the decision was made to keep the commuter pass price points on discounted fares, with an upgrade option for lounge access.

**93. Q: Why is the 50% off one ticket given to the Premier members only applicable on low season price?**

A: In order to be able to provide VIA Preference Premier members with a wide range of special offers, some of these offers require conditions to protect limited inventory during peak season. There are other Premier coupons that do not carry seasonal restrictions, such as a 50 per cent discount on a reward trip in the Quebec City – Windsor corridor.

**94. Q: Why doesn't it tell VIA Preference members how many points we will earn for booking a particular trip over?**

We understand and appreciate the desire for members to easily see the number of Points they will earn for a particular trip. This is among a group of online enhancements that VIA Preference has identified and hopes to provide in the near future.

## The impact of freight and passenger track sharing on on-time performance

**95. Q: What is VIA Rail doing about the delays caused by CN freight trains?**

A: VIA Rail works closely with its rail partners including CN to develop as realistic and attainable schedules as possible. Discussions include daily and weekly performance reviews as well as executive reviews on a quarterly basis. We maintain a strong and productive relationship with CN, but freight congestion is continuing to grow. Though this is good for the Canadian economy, is it not good for the on-time performance of passenger rail on shared infrastructure. It is for this reason that VIA Rail is looking into the possibility of dedicated tracks for passenger rail. Information about this plan can be seen in the video entitled Top 5 things to know about VIA Rail's plan for dedicated tracks.

**96. Q: What is VIA Rail planning to do to improve the stock of engines and cars to increase the reliable, on-time service offered to passengers?**

A: VIA Rail is in the process of an in-depth fleet renewal study. The train fleet will need to be replaced or renewed if the current level of service is to be maintained.

In the meantime, VIA Rail has invested in various equipment overhaul and modernization projects, namely the F-40 locomotive rebuild, the ongoing LRC fleet rebuild, the mechanical system overhaul and interior upgrade of the HEP1 fleet, the Prestige class modernization and the modernization and rebuild of RDC railcars. In addition to these major projects, VIA Rail has smaller projects to maintain a state of good repair of its Renaissance and HEP2 fleets. As well, VIA Rail has a continuous equipment maintenance and overhaul program in place together with engineering resources dedicated to improving equipment safety and reliability. These actions ensure that VIA Rail's equipment is safe and reliable.

Our on-time performance issues are primarily related to track congestion, not our equipment.

**97. Q: With the cohabitation between freight and passenger trains, how can you guarantee that the rail line is safe?**

A: At VIA Rail, safety is our top priority: we are comprehensive and make no compromises.

Passenger and freight operations are subject to strict regulations enforced by Transport Canada. We use performance monitoring and rules compliance measures to ensure the safety of our daily operations. For example, the rails we operate on are subject to geometric and ultrasound

testing to validate integrity. We review our safety performance with freight railways daily, weekly and monthly. As well, our railways are governed by a Centralized Traffic Control system.

VIA Rail has won numerous safety awards over the years and is known for going above and beyond regulations. Our goal is to go from safe to safer, through continuous improvement of safety policies and practices.

**98. Q: What are you doing politically to encourage CN and CP to accommodate passenger service schedules?**

A: VIA Rail is a non-agent Crown corporation. As such, it is not involved in political activity. It proposes options to the Government of Canada through Transport Canada who then makes policy decisions. VIA Rail is a commercial entity that engages in ongoing negotiations with its rail host partners to seek common ground on schedules, trip times and On-Time Performance. VIA Rail has a strong collaborative relationship with CN and CP.

**99. Q: Why does VIA Rail not factor the stops it has to make to let freight trains pass by into their schedule and for as long will this continue to be the practice?**

A: In fact, VIA Rail coordinates closely with its host railway partners in determining departure and arrival times. This process considers the impact of freight traffic on VIA Rail's schedule.

**100. Q: How much does VIA Rail pay CNR/CPR per passenger car mile? How does this rate compare to the rate CNR/CPR charges foreign (US) Class A railroads running interchange freight on CN/CP tracks? Is there a penalty (performance) clause for late arrivals? Does CNR/CPR pay VIA Rail for late arrivals?**

A: VIA Rail's payments to CNR and CP ("Host Railways") for track usage and criteria for host railway performance are set in commercial Transport Service Agreements ("TSA") between VIA Rail and the Host Railways. The terms of those TSAs are confidential and commercially sensitive.

**101. Q: What is the status of the proposed public-private VIA Rail dedicated track? Are there any right-of-way issues which could complicate the project?**

A: The dedicated track project is a VIA Rail management initiative. It does not reflect Government of Canada policy or decisions. The public/private partnership (PPP) structure represents one of the possible alternatives being considered. As well, the train route has not been finalized. The option currently under consideration consists of 78 per cent existing rail and 22 per cent on right-of-ways that used to be in operation. VIA Rail believes this strategy greatly



reduces the risk associated with the project as compared to other infrastructure projects that typically require much more property repurposing from alternate uses.

## Future of VIA Rail

- 102. Q: I know Mr. Desjardins-Siciliano hinted at changes to infrastructure that would reduce the delays caused by freight trains. Can you please share the details?**

A: Mr. Desjardins-Siciliano's plan was outlined in recent speeches to the [Montreal Chamber of Commerce](#) (speech given in French), [The Canadian Council for Public-Private Partnerships](#) (speech given in English) in Toronto and the [Institut pour le partenariat public-privé](#) (speech given in French) in Montréal. Videos of these speeches can be watched on [VIA Rail's YouTube Channel](#).

- 103. Q: How are you seeking to increase your commuter base and your business in general?**

A: For commuters, we are trying to develop new products that will better serve their needs. The biggest challenge is offering a schedule that satisfies the needs of all commuters. We are currently in discussions with host railways about scheduling.

VIA Rail has recently developed a new "Who's on Board" advertising platform. This customer-centric platform showcases real passengers explaining the advantages of taking the train. Other fully-integrated advertising campaigns will be launched during back-to-school and back-to-work seasons in the fall of 2015. Their purpose is to increase train consideration and conversion through owned (www.viarail.ca, email, social, etc.), earned (search engine optimization, social, etc.) and paid media (search engine marketing, display, email lists, etc.), traditional and digital alike.

- 104. Q: Has VIA Rail ever considered using external resources like CN ex-employees or frequent passenger rail users to help create a vision of all possibilities to increase ridership and at the same time considering the needs of CN Rail, Sarnia, Windsor and London area?**

A: VIA Rail has used many forums to gather information regarding customer demand. Recently, our President has spoken to several Chambers of Commerce in Southwest Ontario (including London, Windsor, Sarnia and Stratford) as well as passenger rail interest groups. He also meets passengers every time he takes the train.

- 105. Q: Where is VIA Rail's vision for expanding markets and building demand - investing in new smaller multi-modal networks that feed into the current train infrastructure in Southwestern Ontario and in general?**

A: VIA Rail is studying the possibility to add more trains in Southwestern Ontario and the creation of a hub in London. VIA Rail is also looking to other development but some infrastructure constraints need to be resolved and we are working on these issues.

**106. Q: Why, when the rest of the world is increasing passenger rail capacity, is VIA Rail scaling back?**

A: That is incorrect. Since last year, VIA Rail has grown its service offering and commenced plans for further growth. VIA Rail's objective is to be the preferred transportation choice for as many people travelling within Canada as possible. However, we must work within the constraints of the infrastructure on which we operate (98 per cent of which is not owned by VIA Rail) as well as available car inventory. We are always working to improve our service and attract new passengers to the train.

**107. Q: For Business class passengers, what desired service or in-car improvements has your market research identified? Of these "wants" of business travelers, which are on your list to be fixed-introduced-changed?**

A: We have recently upgraded our current Business class offer with newly refurbished interiors on our LRC fleet. This upgrade included new leather seating, upgraded washrooms, LED lighting, floor and wall coverings and refreshed galleys. We have also introduced a larger selection of new meals. Future plans may include greater Wi-Fi bandwidth for Business Class passengers among other improvements.

**108. Q: VIA Rail exists to move Canadians and stimulate the economy. What plans are in place to move more people for the same subsidy and support these goals by using VIA Rail effectively throughout Canada?**

A: Please watch our [Annual Public Meeting](#) webcast where you will hear from our Chairman of the Board, our President and our Chief Financial Officer about our past performance and upcoming projects.

As well, all the speeches and the presentation from the Annual Public Meeting can be downloaded from our website: <http://www.viarail.ca/en/about-via-rail/our-company/annual-public-meeting/2015>

**109. Q: To tap into and build on the interest in Canada by tourists especially from other countries, I would like to ask if VIA Rail may consider looking at ways to improve passenger train travel across the country.**

A: Foreign tourists are counted among VIA Rail's travelling public, certainly on our western and Quebec City – Windsor corridor services. We are continually trying to improve our offer for both domestic and foreign travelers.

**110. Q: What type of private investor would be interested in financing and developing dedicated passenger train infrastructure? Are there private investors who have already showed interest?**

A: We are encouraged by the interest in rail infrastructure demonstrated by Canadian pension funds. The £2.1billion investment by Borealis Infrastructure (an Omers company) and Ontario Teacher's Pension Plan as well as investments by the Caisse de Dépôt et Placement du Québec and their interest in Montreal South Shore and West Island train projects are great examples of demand by investors for sound train infrastructure projects.

Canadian and international investors are looking for sound investments in politically stable countries. VIA Rail's management believes that a dedicated passenger rail project in the Toronto-Ottawa-Montreal corridor would meet both of those criteria. Given the exploratory nature of VIA Rail's management dedicated tracks project, VIA Rail has not formally contacted potential investors.

## Other

**111. Q: Why not offer seasonal work to employees who have already been trained by VIA Rail?**

A: A person who was once employed by VIA Rail and who would like to return to the company must follow the usual recruitment requirements.

Similarly, a former contractual employee must reapply through VIA Rail's careers website. On the application form, the applicant can indicate that they have already worked at VIA Rail and include the name of their supervisor.

Our HR department will review all applications in order to choose the best candidate is selected for the position. Note that previous experience with VIA Rail will be taken into consideration during the hiring process.

**112. Q: Have you already begun discussions about a Charter for VIA Rail, the *VIA Rail Act*? Have there been updates about when VIA Rail might have the same status as Amtrak?**

A: VIA Rail is a non-agent Crown corporation that does not have enabling legislation specifying its mandate and powers. The decision as to whether VIA Rail should have a legislated mandate is one that belongs to VIA Rail's shareholder, the Government of Canada.

**113. Q: Why was the porter service eliminated?**

A: As part of VIA Rail's goal to respond to passenger needs and travel industry trends, porter duties were reviewed. It was decided that, in full service stations, assistance to people with disabilities or customers requiring physical assistance such as luggage handling would be provided by agents with a multifunctional role. This is a more efficient distribution of tasks with the same level of service. These changes create station teams with more flexibility, to efficiently meet the needs of the fluctuating volume of daily passengers.

**114. Q: Who would be the main contact at VIA Rail for discussion of ideas that could generate extra revenue or potential opportunities?**

We thank our customers and stakeholders for their interest in and support of VIA Rail. To best triage submissions of this nature, please contact customer relations at [customer\\_relations@viarail.ca](mailto:customer_relations@viarail.ca) where we will forward the information to the appropriate person or team.

**115. Q: Will Tour Operator Partners provide added support leading up to and during Canada's 150th Anniversary in 2017 to put together packages using VIA Rail Canada? If yes, how will this be presented to tour operator partners and will the information be provided in a timely manner?**

A: We do have strong relationships with tour operators and relevant information will, of course, be provided in a timely manner.

**116. Q: Is VIA Rail looking at equipment and a dedicated infrastructure that is capable of running at 120 mph?**

A: Currently, in Canada, top allowable speed is 100 mph or 160 kph. Any new equipment that we buy for the Corridor will be capable of at least 125 mph / 200 kph. The type of infrastructure that we install will determine the speed at which we operate.

**117. Q: Does VIA Rail have an estimated time of arrival for when new equipment will be purchased?**

A: It is not known when funding will be made available for new equipment, however, the overall project schedule from tendering to first delivery can take approximately five years.

**118. Q: Is there current plan for purchasing any track from CN or CP that VIA Rail is currently operating on?**

A: VIA Rail is always considering the acquisition of additional infrastructure whenever there are opportunities.

**119. If VIA Rail is able to build a dedicated system, will it be looking at a double track system, or single track with lengthy sidings? Furthermore, how much will the route deviate from the current CN Kingston sub?**

A: VIA Rail's objective is to improve service to its current customers and provide service to new communities while not increasing the financial burden to Canadian taxpayers. The dedicated tracks project is a VIA Rail management initiative and does not reflect Government of Canada policy or decisions. As such, it is still in its preliminary stages and we are still considering routing and configuration options. Notwithstanding, the option currently under consideration includes a combination of service using the Kingston subdivision to continue serving communities that are currently on the VIA Rail schedule and dedicated tracks that would serve certain existing and new client communities. At this time, it is designed as a single track system with sidings is being analyzed.