

# Speaking Notes

*Ottawa, June 14, 2011*

**PAUL G. SMITH, CHAIRMAN, VIA RAIL CANADA  
DELIVERED AT THE VIA RAIL ANNUAL PUBLIC MEETING  
CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY**

## **Transformation: Our Vision**

It is an honour to take part in VIA's first Annual Public Meeting, during one of the most exciting periods in VIA's history.

Before I became VIA's Chairman in December, 2010, I served four years on the Board, working with my predecessor Mr. Donald Wright. On behalf of my colleagues from the Board and management, I thank him for his leadership that laid the foundation for VIA's transformation in the years ahead.

The cornerstone of that transformation is the Government of Canada's investment of close to one billion dollars, including \$407 million from Canada's Economic Action Plan, to improve and expand the capacity of passenger rail.

This is an unprecedented infusion of capital. It is the biggest capital investment program in VIA's history. It will give us the tools -- the infrastructure and equipment -- to ensure that passenger rail provides a valuable, relevant service in the years ahead. And through this investment, the Government of Canada will enable a new and better VIA to emerge over the coming years -- transforming passenger rail as a vital, core service connecting Canada and Canadians across the country.

The Government of Canada deserves full credit for making a bold and decisive move to secure the future of passenger rail in Canada.

In the next few minutes, I will outline our priorities for VIA Rail as that future unfolds. These priorities are to:

- Pursue a clear, relevant and sustainable vision that fulfills the Government's expectations for the future of passenger rail services.
- Make VIA Rail a leader in good governance, accountability and value-for-money;
- Maintain strong relationships and communication with the Government as our shareholder, and with the communities and organizations who share a stake in passenger rail; and
- Make VIA's expertise and assistance fully available to the Government as it considers the future role for passenger rail in Canada

## Vision 2017

When Canada became a country in 1867, the railway was already beginning to play a vital role in building and connecting a nation. VIA continues to play an important role, but what role should passenger rail play in the rest of the 21<sup>st</sup> century – so that it continues to have relevance and add value for the country as Canada prepares to celebrate its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2017?

If we look around the world, passenger rail is growing just about everywhere – in the US, Europe, countries throughout Asia. We also see passenger rail as an increasingly key player in public transportation, with growing, not lessening, government investment. And the fact is, no passenger rail service in the world operates without public funding. Even the biggest, most successful operators, like SNCF in France or the Central Japan Railway Company, receive some form of public funding. Governments, and the societies they represent, choose to invest in rail because of the benefits rail delivers.

Ultimately, VIA's role is a question for the Government of Canada to decide. Our job is to pursue a vision that will allow VIA Rail to fulfill that role, and to address some of the key environmental and mobility challenges of the future. Our long term goal is to:

- Ensure that passenger rail is the safest, most environmentally sustainable, and most reliable year-round mode of public transportation in Canada.
- Offer faster and more frequent services, with convenience that equals or surpasses anything else available – and with facilities and equipment that are welcoming, comfortable, and accessible.
- Integrate passenger rail with other modes and the transportation network as a whole, providing seamless connections to local, municipal, regional and international transportation services for communities across Canada.
- Make passenger rail the first travel choice for more Canadians -- and a smart choice for the environment by reducing pollution and road congestion.

## Governance

While pursuing these goals, VIA will continue to strive to become a top model of good governance.

The shareholders in a Crown Corporation like VIA are, ultimately, Canadian tax-payers. The Government of Canada is introducing a range of new measures to ensure that Crown Corporations are more open and accountable to tax-payers.

We fully support and are committed to implementing these measures, and the spirit of open accountability they represent. We will conduct our business in a transparent manner, and give our shareholders a clear picture of what we are doing, how we are spending their tax-dollars, and how well we are performing.

This public meeting today, for example, is an important step in that direction. And in August, as per the federal government's direction, we will begin publishing quarterly reports, giving a clear accounting of VIA's financial and operational performance.

In the spirit of accountability, we are also launching a new social media initiative that will make it easier than ever for Canadians to learn more about VIA, to question or comment on our actions, and to keep abreast of our evolution. I am excited by this new era of dialogue that social media makes possible -- and I look forward to improving VIA with more input, from more Canadians.

### **Connecting With Canadians**

We will maintain and improve strong relationships with the communities we serve, and our partners in the industry.

This means, first of all, maintaining clear and open communication between VIA Rail and the policy-makers in Ottawa.

As a Crown Corporation we strive to embody the values and ambitions of Canada – delivering first and foremost a service that is safe and one that is fully bilingual, affordable, accessible, and reflects our multicultural society. We will maintain and strengthen relationships with those in Ottawa who speak for those values -- Transport Canada and the Transportation Safety Board, and agencies such as the Commissioner of Official Languages and the Information Commissioner.

We also seek to develop and maintain constructive relationships with community groups and organizations who represent those we serve across Canada.

And we want to transform our relationships with others in the transportation industry -- to connect passenger rail with planes, trains and automobiles in a more integrated, national and global network that delivers better, connected service to all Canadians.

### **Progress**

The corporation is moving forward on these priorities. The transformation of VIA Rail is already well underway.

And the Board has full confidence in the VIA's leadership team as the transformation continues -- including three executives who joined the team in 2010: Marc Laliberté, our President and CEO, Yves Desjardins-Siciliano, our General Counsel and Corporate Secretary, and Laurent Caron, our Chief People Officer.

And we have full confidence in the people who run our trains -- they truly are VIA's greatest strength.

You may sometimes hear people complain about our train schedules or our on-time performance -- things we are fixing by buying better equipment and building better track.

But you will always hear people giving our employees high praise for the quality of service in our stations, in our call centers and on board our trains. And that quality of service is priceless.

It is the people who deliver that service day in and day out that are transforming VIA Rail on the front lines. Some of those people are here today. In closing, I'd like to offer them my thanks for making this transformation possible.

Thank you.