

Councillor Request for Information

Included on Agenda
(Submitted to Municipal Clerk's Office
by Noon Thursday)

Added Item
(Submitted to Municipal Clerk's Office
by Noon Monday)

Date of Council Meeting: April 25, 2006

Subject: VIA Rail Service

Request:

Please include the above item on the April 25, 2006 Regional Council agenda.

Reason:

I will be introducing the attached resolution for Council's consideration and approval.

I would like this response as:

- Resolution of Council - as attached
- Email to Mayor, Council and Municipal Clerk's Office
- Memo to Mayor, Council and Municipal Clerk's Office
- Information Report to Community Council Regional Council
- Recommendation Report to Community Council Regional Council

Councillor Linda Mosher

District 17

RESOLUTION - VIA RAIL SERVICE

WHEREAS:

VIA's trains provide a vital, affordable, accessible, reliable, secure and efficient transportation service to our community and across Canada. Residents and businesses alike depend on VIA. VIA carries nearly 4 million passengers a year, connecting over 450 cities and towns.

WHEREAS:

Passenger trains are worthy of continuing support and investment. They help relieve overcrowded highways and airports that are also financed by Canadians. A 2-track rail line, only 7.3 metres wide, can carry the same number of people as a 7 lane 51-metre-wide highway and typically costs one half or less per km. than an equivalent road. A train station can process the same number of passengers as an airport in the fraction of the space.

WHEREAS:

Commercial air, as desirable as it is, is only financially sound on high-volume routes serving large markets. As fuel prices climb, air travel will become more expensive, fewer people will travel and fewer destinations will be served.

And

Growing highway congestion threatens to decrease accessibility to our community, yet building our way out of traffic jams does not work; it also takes farmland, greenspace and future commercial and residential land out of production. (The City of Burlington estimates that a 2 km stretch of a typical 4 to 6 lane limited access road, 150 metres wide, consumes the same land as 350 homes on a straight stretch, 608 homes with an intersection. That amounts to an annual tax loss of \$1.23 million to \$2.13 million respectively.)

WHEREAS:

VIA trains are at least three times less polluting and three times more fuel efficient than aircraft or car: the only other non-marine travel options most North will use; they won't, if they have the choice, take intercity buses. When many communities lost their trains in 1990, we found that VIA customers did not switch to buses. However, the public will ride buses as feeders to airports, and trains.

GO Transit's integrated rail-bus commuter network and American rail carrier Amtrak's successful Thruway intercity rail-bus system in California is proof that this partnership works.

WHEREAS:

Trains can also help bring in tourism dollars. As one example of the benefits of rail-

based tourism VIA's daily train on the Esquimalt & Nanaimo Railway, on Vancouver Island, generates over \$3 million/year in tourism dollars. That surpasses the approximately \$2 million/year cost of providing it. Expanding that passenger train service could draw in over \$12 million per year.

WHEREAS:

VIA requires funding from the federal government, just as other transportation modes have also been assisted. As one example, a study by the US Federal Highway Administration shows that intercity buses are also subsidized by other road users by over \$160 million a year.

WHEREAS:

VIA's locomotive and rolling stock, most of which are over 15 years old, are breaking down, causing delays that are inconveniencing customers, which discourages ridership and revenues, thereby jacking up VIA's deficit. These malfunctions are also holding up deliveries to shippers.

And

VIA has put together a programme that will fix up the trains and stations, improve signaling and build spur lines.

WHEREAS:

Unfortunately, underinvestment in VIA compared to the huge amounts of tax dollars spent on airports and roads has led to a critical situation that could derail rail service to our community. If this is allowed to happen we will lose this vital service by default.

AND WHEREAS:

The federal government will be bringing down its budget in April.

BE IT RESOLVED THEN

That the Halifax Regional Municipality urge our Members of Parliament to support continued operating funding for VIA Rail Canada, at \$169 million; also to approve a four-year capital improvement programme costing \$808 million that will maintain the long term sustainability of rail passenger services.