



Western Newsletter

Transport 2000 Canada

Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba & Saskatchewan



Pacific Central in Vancouver, BC is home to Greyhound, VIA Rail and Amtrak. Why then does the Canadian Border Security Agency consider this a “new” facility for a 2nd Amtrak train? More on Page 6. Photo: Jon Calon

BRANCH LINE ABANDONMENT REPORT

This report isn't intended to be comprehensive but will cover branchline developments which are well known to the writer.

With CN and CP having a total of 20 subdivisions totalling 712 miles or 1140 kms on their three year abandonment lists which were revised in June this year a total report could rival a government white paper in size! CP has the lion share of the total and as the railway with the most extensive southern prairie network this is no surprise.

Since early July a new online "chatroom" has been in existence with a membership of 60 plus supporting it. The link is <http://finance.groups.yahoo.com/group/MB-SKrails/>. This may provide a means of obtaining current and reasonably reliable information of changes and progress for branchlines in Saskatchewan and Manitoba.

After what can only be described as a concerted attempt by CN and CP to decimate the branch network it appears that the

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PRAIRIE BRANCH LINE ABANDONMENT REPORT (CONTINUED)

short term obsession with bottom line profit maybe giving way to a realization by the Class 1 carriers, that new economic opportunities can be lost without the rail infrastructure to move the freight generated by these new opportunities. The interested groups working to retain the CP Tyvan Subdivision (Regina to Stoughton) and the CN Craik (South) Subdivision are experiencing in both cases a new direct interest in potential new business on these lines which is positive but does make the future ownership of these lines far from clear at present. Interested groups have reached final agreement in the case of CP Empress subdivision, with the Great Sandhills Railway Company assuming ownership of this line as of October this year. The Empress runs from Swift Current to Leader, with a branch to Hazlet. Likewise the CN Cudworth Subdivision will be operated as a shortline from this coming October, with trackage from Meacham to Hoey in Central Saskatchewan. The name chosen by the new operators is Wheatland Rail Inc. In this case Wheatland is leasing the track and motive power, as required, from CN while purchase negotiations continue.

While the Empress and Cudworth acquisitions are encouraging developments, the struggle to retain important rail infrastructure is ongoing. The constantly increasing price of scrap steel now in excess of \$500 per ton is a deterrent factor. It is used as a primary determinate in establishing net salvage value (NSV) which is the baseline for

establishing the purchase price of a line.

A recent additional hurdle has unexpectedly occurred with the Canadian Transportation Agency (CTA), taking a much more favourable view of the residual value of track accessories, particularly ties. The membership of the CTA is appointed by the federal government and unfortunately the present appointees seem far more aligned with the major rail interests rather than communities seeking to retain the rail transportation option. The result is that the CP Radville and Bromhead Subdivisions in Southeast Saskatchewan, after an unhelpful CTA ruling, have been given leave to appeal the CTA value decisions to the Federal Court of Appeal and fortunately the "time-clock" has been frozen. The critical issue is to identify funding for the legal costs associated with the appeal.

The CP Irricana Subdivision from Bassano to Standard in Alberta, is presently under negotiation between local communities, spearheaded by the County of Wheatland with strong support from agricultural chemical producer, Agrium and CP. Agrium has a major production facility at Standard and wishes to resume rail transportation, due to escalating trucking costs. Additionally Rocky Mountain Rail Society (the operators of the former CN steam locomotive 6060 on the Alberta Prairie Steam Excursions based in Stettler have expressed an interest in relocating to Standard, possibly signalling a future tourist railway operation.

The future of the portions of the Napinka/La Riviere sub-

divisions that CP listed for abandonment have been the subject of frantic last ditch retention efforts during 2008 with the formation of Boundary Trail Railway Company. The current result is that the 85 LB steel from La Riviere west to Holmfield was removed in a round the clock salvage operation by Cando Contracting. The eastern section from Binneys Corner west of Manitou east to Morden is the subject of a purchase deal to be concluded by 30th November, which is conditional on finance being in place. This hinges on a \$1.5 million contribution from the government of Manitoba, which is by no means certain. Unfortunately thus far, neither the governments of Alberta or Manitoba have the basic financial support programs in place, which still exist in Saskatchewan.

The experience of the Napinka/La Riviere campaign has been to underline the need to mobilise support at the local community and business level immediately a line is listed or even anticipated to be listed for abandonment. The typical three year process may seem a very comfortable time cushion but the time and effort required have shown this is barely adequate even when all the players are aware of the situation. Failure to be organized with a common purpose has in large measure contributed to the loss of the CN Turtleford/Robin Hood and Amiens trackage in North Western Saskatchewan connecting Spiritwood to North Battleford, the Imperial Subdivision in central Saskatchewan and the CN Lewvan and Northgate Subdivisions in Southeast

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BRANCHLINE (CONT)

Saskatchewan in the past few years. The Lewvan Subdivision from Regina, with its important cross border connection to BNSF was a particularly major loss, and a victim of corporate strategy change by CN.

The only really effective ownership model appears to be a community/local business mix. To their credit the municipalities based in and around Selkirk, Manitoba are reviewing ownership options as the former CN Pine Falls Subdivision currently owned and operated by Cando Contracting in Brandon appears to be facing an uncertain future. Possibly the high value of the line as scrap represents a great attraction compared with the modest revenue generated by operations. Other non-community owned shortlines such as the Hudson Bay Railway (HBRC) operation of the Meadow Lake Subdivision which is defacto closed due to geological conditions demonstrate that shortline operations such as Omnitrax owners of the HBRC are driven primarily by the need to maximize profit and do not represent the best alternative for local shippers, and community interests.

In conclusion the challenges are many and varied to successfully purchasing and operating railines being discarded by "big rail" interests. However, I remain convinced that the tide will ultimately turn more favourably in the direction of economic and social sanity aided by high cost oil and continually increasing environmental concerns.

*Martin Wooldridge
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FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Three federal elections in four years. Wow. It's amazing that we're being asked yet again who we want to lead the country, and as I write this, I'm sure that the list of issues to guide the future government will be considerably different from the list at the time we last voted. Lots more people are concerned about the environment, climate change and of course the price of gas. That many people are seeing the high price of gas and re-evaluating their choice in vehicles and their choice in transportation is encouraging.

Unfortunately, for many of these people choosing to try out transit for their first time, they're finding themselves in very good company. Too much of it as many are experiencing during the peak periods when everyone else is doing the same thing. For most, the ride is either cramped (on the good side) or unavailable due to overloading (on the bad side). While some municipalities are doing their best, most are simply acknowledging the problem and saying they need more funding to increase the service (if the labour situation will allow.) It would be a very good thing for the parties going into this election to pay attention to public transit and passenger rail in this country of ours as the climate change issue is starting to be looked at by virtually every party, save one, though admittedly some plans appear to be more feasible than others. I'll let you take a look at the promises being made by them and allow you to make your own decision as to who should get your vote. But please do go and vote!

Of course, because of the election, some of these bits of news may end up being cancelled, though certainly should be passed along nonetheless.

1) The Keewatin Railway Company will be receiving \$2.8 million dollars to invest in capital improvements to the passenger rail service between The Pas and Pukatwagan in northern Manitoba. It'll go towards the purchase of equipment, track rehabilitation and bridge re-decking.

2) The Southern Railway of BC will receive upwards of \$4.6 million towards the project of building a rail barge ramp at the marine rail terminal on Annacis Island in Delta, BC. This new rail barge ramp allows a more seamless service to Vancouver Island connecting the Southern Railway of Vancouver Island directly to the Southern Railway of BC, instead of relying on CP to do the work of unloading and reloading the traffic on BNSF trackage at the Tilbury dock downstream. Since both railways and Seaspan Intermodal (the operators of the ferry service to Vancouver Island) are all owned by the Washington Group of Companies, we can see the possibilities of more frequent ferry service, better service on the island, an increase in shippers and traffic, resulting in a more viable railway on Vancouver Island and (hopefully) a subsequent decrease in trucks pounding the highway into oblivion.

*Jon Calton
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IFFY WINNIPEG TRANSIT PLAN MAKES LITTLE SENSE

Here we go again.

Another expensive bus rapid-transit announcement with no details, no business plan, incomplete funding and at best a sketchy timeline.

That is, if the city can find the money to do it. If they can, the first half of the route – from downtown to Jubilee Avenue – could be built in three years, says Mayor Sam Katz.

And if the feds are on board for the second half of the route, then maybe they can build that part in six years – but only if the city can obtain the land currently owned by CN.

It's a lot of ifs.

By the way, Katz doesn't think BRT will get most people out of their cars and into transit.

He thinks only light-rail transit can do that. In fact, he promised Winnipeggers during yesterday's announcement that they "will" have LRT and that LRT is "just around the corner." Then why did he and Premier Gary Doer announce BRT?

Well, because if we don't get LRT, we'll do BRT along the same route – even though it won't do much to increase ridership.

Follow?

How can they put a price tag on rapid transit when they don't even know if they're building a bus corridor or a light-rail line?

Considering the city wants to spend \$323 million on a rapid transit, you'd think they would have their act together.

They also had no details on the proposed BRT line.

All they released yesterday was a one-page news release with vague language about "rapid transit." There was no business plan, no funding details and no concrete timeline.

And there are still no estimates on how much faster BRT could transport people compared with regular, on-road buses – a key piece of information required to do any kind of cost-benefit analysis.

The only way you're going to get people out of their cars and into transit is if you shorten travel times. But it has to be a substantial improvement over the status quo.

Right now it, it takes about 20 to 25 minutes to get from downtown to the U of M on a regular, on-road express bus. How much faster would it take with bus rapid transit?

They have no estimates. If it only shaves five or six minutes off the trip, for example, does anyone really think people are going to leave their cars at home and flock to BRT?

Think about it.

Are we going to spend \$323 million on a BRT corridor that sounds nice and flashy and forward-thinking but in reality does very little to increase ridership?

I'd rather see \$323 million go towards something concrete, like fixing Winnipeg's combined sewer system to end the practice of dumping raw sewage into our rivers.

How about using \$323 million for more hybrid government vehicles or to retrofit public buildings with geothermal energy?

Those would result in substantial, guaranteed cuts to carbon emissions.

At best, BRT may attract a few more riders and result in very modest emission reductions, but there's no guarantee.

Sounds like a colossal waste of money to me.

*Tom Brodbeck
The Winnipeg Sun*

PRAIRIE AGM 2008 NOTES

I attended the Transport 2000 Prairie AGM on September 13 and am pleased to report a successful meeting, well chaired by Catherine Verrall. There were nearly 30 in attendance, including Don Mitchell, the NDP candidate in our constituency (Palliser), a former mayor of Moose Jaw and T2000 activist. CTV and Radio-Canada were present and I was pressed into service to do a radio interview in French – on the Craik subdivision project.

There were two very good presentations: one by the Mayor of Craik, responsible for the eco-project and the rail line organization; the other on environmental sustainability by Dan Beveridge, formerly of the University of Regina.

Michael Jackson

At our Transport 2000 Prairie AGM, Saturday, Sept. 13, we were delighted to welcome valiant workers who have gone before us: Michael Jackson, Jim Richards, George Burton, and Don Mitchell. Marion Tolley sent regrets.

A total of 30 people attended, of whom 22 were members (including 2 new members)

The election chaired by Dan Beveridge, elected the following:

- President: Catherine Verrall
- Treasurer: Bob Ivanochko
- Secretary: Denise MacDonald
- Director of Disability Issues: Mellissa Northe
- VP Manitoba: Peter Lacey
- VP Saskatchewan: Ronald Haskell
- VP Alberta: Jon Calon

Catherine Verrall

BUSINESS MODEL IN PLACE FOR RAILWAY

Published: Sept 24, 2008 in the Nanaimo News.

To the Editor,

Re: Finite returns on railway costs, Sept. 13.

J. Sharpe has several excellent questions about the viability of rail renewal for Vancouver Island.

Another question one might ask is why does rail renewal make sense in 2008 when only 10 years ago experienced rail operators were going bankrupt?

There are three fundamental changes that are driving rail renewal across North America.

In 1998 oil was \$11 per barrel, today we know that oil costs more than 10 times that much. Since rail is up to 14 times more fuel efficient than rubber-tired traffic, this supports a dramatic resurgence of rail not only on Vancouver Island, but throughout North America.

Secondly, the new ownership of the corridor by Vancouver Island communities means an historic change for Island shippers.

In the past, freight from Vancouver Island was only connected to North American markets through CPR. Today shippers have access to all four class one carriers.

And finally, we are just now entering an era where carbon emissions are more fairly priced. Estimates of the value of carbon credits currently range from \$50 per tonne to as low as \$6 per tonne.

Using even the low end of this range, rail renewal could generate up to \$4.5 million/year revenue stream from this source alone.

Taken together, these changes provide a significant value proposition for rail on Vancouver Island.

The letter also asks who has signed on the dotted line? In this regard, it may be helpful to know discussions about potential freight contracts are ongoing and rail reinvestment will advance where firm commercial commitments are in place. Rail reinvestment should be undertaken only where a clear and tangible benefit can be confirmed. On this point, Sharpe's concerns are equal to those of the ICF board of directors.

Sharpe suggests the forest industry's problems are related to a weak U.S. economy. True, but it is also temporary.

And since 35 per cent of the cost of forest products is related to transportation, action now to prepare an efficient and cost effective transportation system will allow the Island economy to achieve the greatest possible benefit when these markets rebound.

Who would pay for annual maintenance costs? The current proposal for rail renewal is designed to provide a sustainable rail infrastructure.

This means that the operator would be responsible for all ongoing rail maintenance costs. With Southern Rail of Vancouver Island we have an excellent short-line rail operator with 110 years of rail experience in B.C.

It is aware of these obligations and understands the business model required to sustain ongoing rail operations.

Sharpe might ask one more question.

What are the costs of doing nothing?

*Doug Backhouse
Executive Director
Island Corridor Foundation.*

PRAIRIE PRESIDENT REPORT

We live in ominous times.

A basic challenge in the world today is for good-caring individuals and groups, political parties and nations, to see our common concerns and then work together to create change. In Saskatchewan, T2 Prairie has aimed to show the interconnections between transportation and climate change, health, urban planning, energy use and development, library closings, peace and war, poverty and women's well-being here and around the world. We are challenged to build our network of communications especially through social justice, faith, peace, health, political, educational, farm, union, environment groups (such as the Saskatchewan Environmental Society, a T2 member). We are strengthened by our working partnership with Regina EcoLiving. The actions of each one of us are critical.

As members it is our job to expand our own knowledge, to examine and change our own life-ways, and then to spread the word. We can be infiltrating awareness wherever we go. As people and groups become members, they are opened to new understandings, and add their strength to our work. In T2Prairie we gained 19 new members since April- partly in our public events with treasurer Bob Ivanochko sitting at the welcome table, and mostly by T2 members talking to others, aided by a flyer. Summer bus tours with the Saskatchewan Historical Society (one exploring northern Saskatchewan and Manitoba) gave

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captive audiences for me to tell about T2000, relating our issues to heritage, and gaining 2 new members as well as many good conversations. Most of the "regulars" in Regina's weekly "Making Peace" vigil have become T2 members, and sometimes our fact-sheet handout (up to 200 each Thursday noon) focuses on transportation.

This issue includes a T2000 Prairie membership form. We ask you to use it as a talking tool: hand-print in your own contact number, make copies and put them in your library, church, club, health store, friendly restaurant, as well as your pocket.

Our Prairie AGM held in Regina Sept. 13 elected a strong

executive, but we need everyone's help with ideas and action. We especially welcome our new Saskatchewan Vice-President, Ron Haskell, a teacher who lives in Melville (where there is a VIA train!), and Bob Ivanochko, a just-retired librarian and activist, as treasurer. We honoured the presence of valiant workers who have gone before us in T2Prairie: Michael Jackson, George Burton, Jim Richards, Don Mitchell (who is presently running in the federal election.) We thanked those executive members who had to resign mid-term: John Jory (who continues his important volunteer work with a City committee), Mike Cormier (who has transferred back to Nova Scotia), and Martin Wooldridge (who

continues his good work supporting shortline railways in the prairie provinces, through the Louis Riel Railway Group).

Melissa Northe, Director of Disability Issues, gave an impressive report of her work. The main program entitled Prairie Rail and Healthy Communities showed how transportation, especially rail, is vitally related to the well-being of communities, and our threatened planet. See reports of presentations by Rod Haugerud, mayor of Craik Saskatchewan, and by Dr. Dan Beveridge, in Transport Action.

Each of us can **Do Something** where we are.

*Catherine Verrall
President, Transport 2000 Prairie*

TRANSPORT 2000 ASKS STOCKWELL DAY TO LOOK INTO DELAY OF SECOND AMTRAK SEATTLE-VANCOUVER TRAIN

Jon Calon, Editor of Transport 2000's Western Newsletter, has written Stockwell Day, the Minister responsible for the Canadian Border Security Agency to protest the delay to the startup of the second Seattle to Vancouver B.C. Amtrak train. A letter has also been sent to Day's Deputy minister, Suzanne Hurtubise. The train was to debut August 1, 2008.

The CBSA reportedly wants \$1,500 per day to clear the train, calling it a new facility despite the existence of a first train with all the necessary facilities. Airports are grandfathered but CBSA has a

different standard for rail transportation.

In the letter Calon wrote: "The statement that Pacific Central Station in Vancouver, BC is a 'new facility' is patently false. (It has) been hosting an Amtrak train every day and the CBSA is already screening passengers at this facility".

Transport 2000 British Columbia and Transport 2000 Canada have hired Ken Rubin to make an Access to Information request to find out more. BC invested \$3.5 million dollars in a new passing siding to make the

second train possible, and it is now losing the tourist dollars it expected.

Said Harry Gow, Founding President of Transport 2000 Canada, a transport advocacy group headquartered in Ottawa: "There are disturbing elements and stories going about and that is why we have asked Ken Rubin to seek some daylight on this travesty. The needs of the travelling public are being ignored and the provincial and private investment wasted. We want to know why".

Jon Calon.

TRANSPORT 2000 MEETING IN VANCOUVER, BC OCTOBER 31-NOVEMBER 1, 2008

We're coming to Vancouver, BC at the end of October! Transport 2000 Canada's national executive will be holding their annual board meeting at the Quality Inn on False Creek on Saturday, November 1st. Members are invited to attend the meeting, and we will have a speaker give a presentation in the afternoon. If you're interested in attending, please contact Jon Calon or John Bakker for additional information.

Jon Calon.

SASKATCHEWAN REGIONAL MUNICIPALITIES TAKE A BEATING FROM CANADIAN TRANSPORTATION AGENCY

Although it may seem as if the prairie branch line rail network has been completely skeletonized by the major railways, the job is not yet truly complete. CP still has 911 kilometres of track on its Three-Year Plan for abandonment in the prairie provinces, and CN has 613 kilometres. Nor does this rule out further abandonments by the major carriers. At least one major railway has stated that there are still too many grain elevator points and by extension, too many rail lines.

When the railways seek to abandon track, there is a formal process laid out in the Canada Transportation Act. At one time, prior to the passage of this act, the Transportation Agency had to take public interest into account in deciding whether or not to allow an abandonment. That idea was vanquished some time ago. The railways merely have to follow a prescribed procedure, and cannot be prevented from abandoning track, no matter what the government may think. It isn't exactly what the country's founding fathers had in mind when they granted the original railway charters.

The only defense of the public interest left in federal rail legislation is the stipulation that a railway must offer a line for sale to various levels of government before it can rip it out of the ground. Of course, this wouldn't mean much if the railway could charge whatever price it wanted. The rules say that the price will be the net salvage value of the track - the amount of money the railway would get by selling the materials

less the cost of tearing out those materials. If the parties can't agree on that amount, the Canadian Transportation Agency (CTA) will decide.

Until recently, the Agency has been fairly reasonable in these determinations. Neither party usually got what it wanted completely. But two recent net salvage value determinations on Saskatchewan branch lines seem to indicate the tide has turned in the railways' favour. The new Members of the Agency, freshly appointed by the Harper government, gave the railways a huge and questionable bonus in these recent rulings.

The bonus revolves around a section of the Canada Transportation Act that requires the railways to pay to municipal governments, on abandonment, an amount equal to \$30,000 per mile, for each mile of rail line that runs through the municipality. This provision only applies to grain dependent branch lines in western Canada. The rationale for this was to compensate municipalities for road costs they would incur when rail service ended.

It would seem this condition imposes quite an obligation on the railways. Prior to the recent run-up in commodity markets, including steel, a railway would likely have ended up in a negative position when it abandoned track. This makes it all the more odd that this provision in the act was, if memory serves me correctly, first proposed by CP.

The fact is, CP was quite clever in suggesting it. Municipalities have been fighting

with each other ever since the act came into effect. While one municipality may want to buy the track to operate a short line, another will see only the short-term prospect of hundreds of thousands of dollars of revenue.

Given this provision, it would seem logical that the net value of the track would include consideration for the \$30,000 a mile. If the railway abandons the track, it can sell the materials but must take the payment to municipalities out of that money. There is no way around this. Salvaging the track includes a compensation cost to the municipalities.

At least that is what seems logical. Unfortunately for farmers on the Radville and Bromhead branch lines, Harper's appointees to the Agency don't appear to see it that way. If CP sells to the RM's in question, it gets to have its cake and eat it too. The RMs pay the full price and lose the benefit of \$30,000 per mile. And if they want to start a short line, they are still at the mercy of CP as to all and any conditions the line would run under.

To top it off, the Agency also ruled against the RMs where their reclamation bylaws were concerned. Having seen the condition of many abandoned branch lines, some municipalities enacted bylaws requiring the railways to clean up abandoned railway sites. The RMs in this case felt the amount of such a clean up should be deducted from the salvage value. Again the Agency ruled in CP's favour on this.

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FUEL SHORTAGE WILL RESHAPE TRANSPORTATION BEATING (CONTINUED)

The column, "Rendering the old world obsolete" (Leader-Post, July 15) hits the nail on the head – it hits gas-burning cars into their coming place: as an alternative for special uses. The price of gas will inevitably climb, due to the costs of extracting diminishing, finite supplies. Our lives are immeasurably dependent on petroleum for a host of daily items, such as plastic and food, as well as transportation. To maintain our lives in the future, we'd better smarten up and set the possibilities in place now.

We commend the government of Saskatchewan for bolstering already-established shortline rail projects, helping them keep pace with the current economic momentum, as well as climate change imperatives.

Also, we commend successive governments of Saskatchewan for maintaining the Saskatchewan Transportation Co. I found every last seat filled on a recent journey from Regina to Saskatoon.

Instead of allowing the rail companies to abandon more rail tracks, the government of Saskatchewan should substantially

assist developing community groups attempting to save their track. This government could become a partner in ownership of the Craik subdivision line between Davidson and Regina. Saving this track is essential if freight and passenger services between Regina and Saskatoon are to follow. A traveler by plane between Regina and Saskatoon burns about nine times the energy of doing the same trip by modern train. It's time to bring back the trains.

For cities, it's time to massively invest in public transit. More riders will need more buses to run more often, with more drivers, shelters and benches, and convenient routes. The province as well as the federal government must get involved with the cities. In Regina, we welcome the transit review starting now, when citizens will be urged to give our views, and will be listened to. Bicycles are coming into their own. But we must have more effective bike lanes, bike racks, safe lock-ups at work and enforcement of laws..."

*Catherine Verrall
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The resulting purchase prices for these branch lines are exceedingly high. It is possible that the Agency's rulings might fit the letter of the law as laid out in the act, but they violate any sense of natural justice.

There is one last recourse in this case. The rulings can be appealed to the federal court of Canada. A successful appeal would have implications far beyond the two branch lines in question, and extend to the other 1300 km on the railways' plans for discontinuance.

Given the cost of such an appeal, and the wide implications, the government of Saskatchewan should consider funding it. For a province swimming in oil money, it would be a small amount. For some beleaguered RMs, it would be a godsend.

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