



Saskatchewan small cities proposing to lead VIA Rail transformation discussion

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Tuesday, December 12, 2023

Lloydminster, AB/SK – Saskatchewan mayors of Lloydminster, North Battleford, Warman and Yorkton presented a proposal to improve VIA Rail’s passenger service across the province to the City of Saskatoon at a Governance and Priorities Committee meeting at Saskatoon’s City Hall on Tuesday, December 12, 2023.

The proposal involves re-routing VIA Rail’s *Canadian* passenger train service to the CN Prairie North Line, connecting Yorkton, Canora, Humboldt, Warman, the Saskatoon region, the Battlefords and Lloydminster to Canada by passenger rail. Once in Alberta, Vermilion and Vegreville would be railway destinations before the Canadian returned to Edmonton, a current VIA Rail stop on the CN Main Line.

Moving VIA Rail to the Prairie North Line within the Saskatoon North Partnership for Growth P4G, will connect more Indigenous and rural communities while providing greater access to potential passengers. The proposed change will also help improve VIA Rail’s on-time performance, which is measured as arriving within 60 minutes of the scheduled arrival. On-time performance results of the Canadian show the passenger rail company dropped from 84% in 2009 to 8% in 2017.

“The opportunity to help grow Indigenous and Non-Indigenous tourism businesses is key to helping grow our economy for the prairies, and having VIA Rail travel with foreign tourists to the areas rich in Indigenous history and culture is the first step,” says Mayor Gerald Aalbers, Mayor, City of Lloydminster, AB/SK.

The CN Main Line is the heart of the Canadian rail system and moves numerous freight, container and commodity trains day and night across Canada through Saskatoon. The VIA Rail passenger train is often parked on a siding while CN trains headed to tidewater or moving across the country take precedence, resulting in passenger train arrivals being as late as four days in Vancouver or Toronto.

Letters of support for this proposal have been received from communities, First Nations, Tribal councils, industry organizations and groups across the Prairies, seeing the value of the mainline serving the growing prairie economy and improving VIA Rail accessibility to over 120,000 potential customers and new tourists.

Quick Facts

- Re-routing VIA Rail onto the CN Prairie North Line would
 - compete with less CN freight traffic, helping VIA Rail to achieve better on-time performance and improve rail safety.
 - travel through larger population centres, providing access to approximately 128,000 people compared to its current 22,000 people. Not including Saskatoon or Edmonton.
 - connect more Indigenous and rural communities.
 - travel closer to more national historic sites and parks.
 - offer more scenic topography.
- Communities along the CN Prairie North Line have not had direct VIA Rail service since the *Super Continental* was discontinued by the federal crown corporation in 1981.

Attachment(s): The Canadian on the CN Prairie North Line: A Strategic Solution

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