

Local Railway Items from Area Papers - 2001

17/01/2001 *Ottawa Citizen*

Kingston (CN)

Mallorytown

FREIGHT TRAIN DERAILS NEAR BROCKVILLE

Canadian National work crews start to right a rail car that was part of a derailment at 4:45 a.m. yesterday that involved 27 freight cars near Mallorytown, about 25 kilometres southwest of Brockville. There were no injuries and no dangerous chemicals spilled in the derailment of the 149-car freight train bound for Montreal from Toronto. Two nearby schools were closed as a precaution. The accident closed both lines and VIA Rail passengers, who experienced delays of up to an hour, were bused to nearby stations.

27/03/2001 *Ottawa Citizen*

Winchester

Smiths Falls

Fuel Tank Punctured as Train Derails

Crews race to clean up diesel spill after accident in Smiths Falls

By Don Campbell

Two locomotives fronting a westbound Canadian Pacific freight train left the tracks in Smiths Falls early yesterday, sending 12,000 litres of diesel fuel seeping into the city's sewage system.

The accident occurred while the train was still inside the city's railyards, and while Canadian Pacific emergency crews raced to clean up the spill, emergency officials with the city cautioned nearby residents to check for an odour of diesel fuel in their basements.

"There is very little risk of any explosion or fire," said Aire Hoogenboom, emergency information director for Smiths Falls. "Other than the odour, there should be no danger.

"There is no threat to the city's water system and only those residents who operate off their own wells should check for any signs of fuel seeping into their well." The train had just left the yards about 1:15 a.m., bound for southwestern Ontario when the mishap occurred, no more than a few hundred metres from where the train began.

CP officials said the train originated in Montreal late Sunday and arrived in Smiths Falls late at night for a brief stopover and crew change.

At the point the locomotives jumped the track, the train was travelling about 15 km/h. "The cause remains under investigation and we can't determine the exact cause until the locomotives are moved back onto the track and out of the way," said CP spokesman Mike Spinard.

Both locomotives remained upright, but a fuel tank on the lead locomotive was punctured by the force of the derailment, allowing the fuel to spill.

Fire department personnel contained the fuel as quickly as they could while emergency officials determined what route the rest of the fuel might take and made preparations to clean up the remainder.

Officials reported up to two dozen complaints about the odour of diesel fuel. There were also signs that fuel had seeped to the city sewage filtration plant and arrangements were being made to siphon it off.

The cleanup was expected to be completed today, and the track cleared by this morning.

29/05/2001 *Ottawa Citizen*

Walkley Line

Rail service cuts truck traffic

Ottawa motorists will have to contend with at least 2,000 fewer transport trucks this summer, thanks to the Ottawa Central Railway's new distribution centre.

The new facility allows goods shipped via train into Ottawa to be transferred to trucks and carried short distances to local destinations.

Pulp and paper giant Domtar Inc., the first to use the new arrangement, will transport products from Espanola, near Sudbury, to the new facility on Albion Road South. Then the goods will be transported by small trucks to Domtar's manufacturing facilities in Hull.

"It's a wood-pulp product from a Domtar plant that for years, has been shipped on the highway," said James Allen, general manager of the railway.

28/08/2001 *Ottawa Citizen*

Otrain

Safety Fears Delay Light Rail Project

Officials miss Sept. 4 start date; could be several weeks late

by Ken Gray

Safety violations have caused Ottawa's much-touted light-rail project to miss its Sept. 4 launch date.

Documents obtained by the Citizen show that in an incident on Aug. 21, the bucket of a back-hoe working along the tracks hit a rail, causing the signal to change from clear to stop.

This forced an approaching VIA Rail passenger train into an emergency stop.

Two other incidents - an unsecured piece of heavy equipment, and a mistake by a light-rail driver trainee - have caused railway safety inspectors to give OC Transpo until Sept. 14 to find solutions to these hazards.

No date has been given for the light-rail project to begin, but it is expected to be sometime in mid-September, perhaps even longer. Inaugural ceremonies have been cancelled.

The city's Web site was still announcing a Sept. 4 launch last night even though Mayor Bob Chiarelli is expected to make an announcement on the delay this morning.

The delay is a serious setback for the project that has been vital to Mr. Chiarelli's plan to deal with Ottawa's growth.

The problem also means that the line, running from Green-boro through Carleton University to LeBreton Flats, will miss the opening of the school year and the upswing of commuters returning from vacations.

It is the second delay for the \$24-million project, which was initially to begin sometime this month.

A letter from Rosemarie Leclair, the city's general manager of transportation, utilities and public works, to the mayor and councillors says, "staff is currently reviewing this matter in greater detail to assess all options, including deferral of the launch date.

"Work has yet to be completed on the track, resulting in the inability to proceed with operator training on the line within the timelines originally anticipated," said the letter.

"There have been a number of delays over the last few weeks, which have had a cumulative effect on the work plan, and compromise our ability to ensure that all outstanding items can be completed appropriately within the remaining time," wrote Ms. Leclair in the letter, dated yesterday.

Innes Councillor Rainer Bloess called the delay "unfortunate.

"The ideal situation would have been to have it up and running when school starts," Mr. Bloess said. However, "safety is the primary issue."

Cumberland Councillor Phil McNeely blamed the delays on the project's complexity.

"That's not easy to get going," Mr. McNeely said.

Alta Vista Councillor Peter Hume said the delay won't have much impact on Carleton students because they can find alternative travel for a few weeks. "This needs to be right from the beginning," Mr. Hume said. "If that means a short delay, so be it"

O-Train Moves at a crawl toward amid-October launch

By Carolynne Wheeler

Ottawa's long-delayed O-Train, now lurching towards a mid-October launch, has been delayed by outdated government rules and technical difficulties that will keep the train moving at a crawl for its first couple of months.

A memo from general manager Rosemarie Leclair to the mayor and councillors yesterday shows the official launch of the train is now being planned for the week of Oct. 15. Twelve of 28 OC Transpo drivers have finished their training, with the rest to finish by Oct. 12.

The bad news is, the train won't be able to pick up passengers every 15 minutes as first planned. The major delays encountered by the project are:

- Signalling and operations at two at-grade railway crossing "diamond" junctions, one at Walkley and one at Ellwood, were supposed to be transferred over to CP Rail from CN Rail, but that transfer has been delayed. The delay means they can't be fully automated, which slows running times.

- An order from the Board of Transport Commission dating to 1966 restricts speed between those two diamonds to 32 kilometres per hour. Until city staff gets the restriction removed, trains are forced to travel slowly through two kilometres one-quarter of the full track.

- The train's smaller wheels are being nicked and chipped by travelling with any speed over the diamonds, which are designed for heavier trains, to the dismay of Bombardier, the manufacturer that may have to accept the trains back at the end of a trial period. Right now, to avoid the nicks, trains must cross the diamonds at five kilometres per hour. Work is being done at the crossings to try to reduce the damage caused.

- All train stations are complete, except telephones and timetables, which will be installed next week. But the elevator at the Carling station is still being installed, and won't be done until the end of the month at which point it will have to undergo a provincial inspection before it can be used.

"The combination of things will lead to a longer running time on the train than we would have liked," said Helen Gault, OC Transpo's manager of transit planning and scheduling. "This is a freight line, which nobody has even worried about for years, which has been running one train a week.

"It's frustrating, but it is a pilot project. We're learning an awful lot as we go along."

The delays have not sat well with city councillors, who fear the project is running even further into the red.

"The more it's set back, the more we miss out on revenue and the more costly it becomes," said Cumberland Ward Councillor Phil Mc-Neely. "It's one of those things. It's a pilot project, I guess that's what they're stressing."

In August, staff warned councillors the project would be about \$2.4 million over its \$24-million budget. While the final costs aren't tallied, Ms. Leclair said yesterday she expects costs will still be within that budget.

Innes Ward Councillor Rain-er Bloess said he expects councillors will be kept abreast of any changes to that budget.

"My first reaction was, this is turning into a comedy of errors," he said. "I'm starting to wonder if this is really worth it."

13/10/2001 Ottawa Citizen Otrain

O-Train debut gets green light

By Tony Lofaro

The O-Train is smoothly rolling along toward its Monday (15/10) debut after a few false starts, OC Transpo officials said yesterday.

At a morning demonstration of the \$26.4-million light-rail project, the media, OC Transpo personnel and civic officials rode the diesel train on its eight-kilometre north-south route from the Greenboro station to the stop at Bayview Road, next to LeBreton Flats.

OC Transpo officials say problems over signalling and operations at-grade railway crossing "diamond" junctions, the train's wheels which were being chipped when going over the diamonds and the train's restricted travelling speeds have been corrected.

The three train stops are ready, except for an elevator at the Carling Avenue station, which is not completed.

The trains, which travel 60 kmh, can carry 135 seated passengers, plus 150 standing.

Serge Lavigne, project manager for light-rail, said the hard work to get the project off the ground has paid off.

"It's been a big challenge, even though it's not obvious to outsiders, because when you have a project that's five miles (eight kilometres) long, it's as complex as if it was 100 miles long."

The O-Train will run every 20 minutes on weekdays from 6:30 a.m. to midnight, 7 a.m. to midnight on Saturday and 8 a.m. to midnight on Sundays. Passengers can travel free until the end of the year.

15/10/2001 Ottawa Citizen Otrain

Future of O-Train 'a real gamble'

Expectations run high as train scheduled to pull out of station today

By Carolynne Wheeler and Mohammed Adam

When the O-Train pulls out of Bayview and Greenboro stations at 3 p.m. today, it will be a major milestone in the bus-or-train debate which has dogged city politicians for decades.

The project has been a steep learning curve for city officials, who for the first time were faced with issues of track ownership and signalling, driver training and strict Transport Canada regulations.

The project's original \$24 million budget now sits at \$26.4 million, and its original proposed launch of early August was delayed first to Sept. 4, when officials planned a major event at Carleton University during its frosh week, and then after invitations for the gala had gone out delayed again until Oct. 15.

This time, the launch is as certain as it can be, four years after regional council began to study the project and two years after they gave final approval.

"I know people are disappointed we are few weeks late. But it's a very fast track to implement," said Helen Gault, OC Transpo manager of transit planning and development.

"It's been an intense time but we've been moving methodically forward.

"Capital Ward Councillor Clive Doucet, a long time supporter of light-rail who is also vice chairman of the city's transportation and transit committee, is both tremendously excited and tremendously nervous. (Today), I think, marks the most important day in my career as a local politician. It's what I have struggled for, and my community has struggled for, for the last four years," he said.

Now, the future of light-rail in Ottawa rests on the success of three light diesel trains and an eight-kilometre track. And expectations are high. "It is scary It's a real gamble," Mr. Doucet said. "I think the fear is we were unable to make it big enough to make a big impact. But we had no choice (financially).

"Thirty years ago, city politicians chose a bus-only Transit-way, rather than light rail, as the commuter transit of the future. But as the city expands, traffic jams at rush hour increase, and heavy snowfall just around the corner, light-rail has never looked more appealing.

"We built roads all over the place in the 1950s to give people freedom, but nobody at the time had ever heard of traffic jams," said David Jeanes, a Nortel engineer and light-rail expert for the national lobby group Transport 2000.

"We have hit a wall, and without massive cost and massive destruction (of homes and green space) road capacity in the city cannot be met. The time has come for light-rail."

This pilot project has a tough journey ahead. At its inception at the former regional council, it was praised by some as a promising first step.

Out of the Ottawa station

The O-Train is lots of fun, a railroad fan's dream of a commuter service for Ottawa. But it will take a good year or two to see whether this light-rail service is truly practical for our city.

The eight-kilometre rail service is being started this afternoon, after an official launch at 2 p.m. After so much time, money and political capital has been invested in this project, city officials are near ecstasy that the trains are actually running. The project was almost dealt a fatal setback when it was discovered that there was a Board of Transport Commission order limiting train speed to 32 kilometres an hour for two kilometres of track. Such a restriction might have forced the city to cut two kilometres off the route, or run a far less frequent service. Then late last week the 1966 order was rescinded and OC Transpo's Helen Gault called "Welcome aboard" to a small group of journalists on Friday, for a little test run at the train's main station at Carleton University. And the train was able to move along at a brisk 60 kilometres per hour, slowing to about 16 kilometres per hour when crossing two intersecting tracks.

The train is a pleasant change for commuters accustomed to smoke-belching old buses. It's sleek, with big windows and 135 comfortable seats. Service will be every 20 minutes. The ride is smooth and quiet, the views are pleasant. On Friday, as the train was heading south from Carleton on the bridge over the beautiful rapids of the Rideau River, the train's most fervent supporter on city council, Clive Doucet, insisted that the view will become known on films and television. Mr. Doucet's enthusiasm for the O-Train is shared by the Transpo staff who are on the project, including 28 drivers who have been trained to run the three trains. "It beats driving the bus. There's no traffic," said George Plunkett, a driver with 31 years of service with Transpo, just before he took the controls of the train Friday. "It is a lot of fun."

One of the remarkable things about this project is how Transpo staff have become its champions. A few years ago, Transpo wanted no part of rail experiments. Today, the company is counting on the pilot project to become permanent.

And if it doesn't happen? "We would be very disappointed. People have put their hearts into it," says Ms. Gault. "It's absolutely changed us."

In fact, there is so much enthusiasm for the O-Train that people at Transpo and on city council are talking about expanding the train system, with an east-west line and perhaps even transforming the transitway, our bus-only road system, into a tracked transit system for trains. But let's not get ahead of ourselves here. Let's not forget the O-Train is a pilot project that is to last two years. The project has had some unexpected glitches already. We don't know whether there will be problems with the trains in the harsh Ottawa winter. We don't really know how the train equipment will wear. And we certainly do not have a firm grasp on the cost of pushing ahead with a big rail-transit system. All we really know is that the trains make public transit fun. That's only a good start.