

Local Railway Items from Area Papers - 2010

01/01/2010 *Arnprior EMC News* *Chalk River*

CP ends lease agreement with Ottawa Valley Railway Transportation Pontiac-Renfrew gets federal funding

The future of one Ottawa Valley rail line is in question, while another looks promising.

On Dec. 18, Rail America Inc., the parent company of Ottawa Valley Railway (OVR), announced it has closed on a transaction with Canadian Pacific (CP) to terminate its lease of the OVR line. As a result, Canadian Pacific now has 60 days as per the Canadian Transportation Act to decide if train service will be restored on the line once OVR has cleared its remaining cars off the line.

Depending on what it decides, the rail line could be abandoned by CP. The rail line stretches from Smiths Falls to Sudbury. The Chalk River subdivision is the track that comes right through Valley towns like Carleton Place, Arnprior and Renfrew.

According to a press release, RailAmerica Inc. received \$73 million (Canadian funds) in gross proceeds as part of the terms of the agreement.

"The OVR operation consists of 342 mainline miles of track and primarily transports bridge traffic, chemicals, and pulp and paper products," stated a RailAmerica Inc. press release.

The issue came up for discussion at the Dec. 21 Arnprior town council meeting when CAO Larry Donaldson presented council with the press release and an e-mail from Canadian Pacific.

"CP wants to consult with municipalities," Donaldson stated, adding CP recognizes the importance of the rail line in the communities it passes through. "CP is looking for a fairly quick turnaround for meeting with municipalities in which the rail line passes through."

In an e-mail from CP manager to community relations Rick Poznikoff to Donaldson, Poznikoff indicated CP, which wants to review its position and next steps, is available for meeting the week of Jan. 4. As such Donaldson suggested the town look to set up a meeting for Jan. 5 or 6.

"We should anticipate we will be having a meeting with CP in the new year," Donaldson stated.

Transportation Pontiac-Renfrew

The CAO noted that the rail line in question is not the same line as the old CN Beachburg line that Transportation Renfrew-Pontiac is looking to take over and operate as a community, tourism and freight line.

"This is not the line to go to Ottawa. There is value in this line (CP line) but its commuter value is dubious at best," mayor Terry Gibeau stated.

Gibeau, who is a founding member of Transportation Pontiac-Renfrew, said the CP situation does have "implications" on the local initiative and was scheduled to take part in a conference call the morning of Dec. 22 to discuss the matter.

As for that initiative, it received some good news Dec. when with Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister responsible for the Outaouais and Member of Parliament for Pontiac, Lawrence Cannon announced that the federal government will provide Transport Pontiac-Renfrew with a contribution for a feasibility study under the National Infrastructure Knowledge Component (NIKC) of the Building Canada Fund (BCF). (This study will include a business case on the feasibility of a commuter train service between the regional county municipality of Pontiac, Renfrew County, and the City of Ottawa.)

"This project to assess the feasibility of a commuter train service linking the regional county municipality of Pontiac (in Quebec) and Renfrew County (in Ontario) to the City of Ottawa, to be carried out by Transport Pontiac-Renfrew, will contribute to the future development of this region. By investing in this study, our government can better plan transport solutions so that families benefit from quality infrastructure and the regional economy develops, particularly in tourism. Thus, we create world-class infrastructure for Canada through applied research," he said in a press release.

The total cost of the project is estimated at \$272,000. The federal government contribution will come from the Feasibility and Planning Studies subcomponent of the NIKC-BCF, which aims to support collaborative feasibility and planning studies on public infrastructure projects.

The feds will provide a contribution of up to 50 per cent of the total eligible costs of the project, for a maximum federal contribution of \$136,000.

Transport Pontiac-Renfrew, a non-profit community organization, will assume the remaining costs.

02/02/2010 *Ottawa Citizen* *Chalk River*

CANADIAN PACIFIC

NOTICE OF SALE OR DISCONTINUANCE OF RAILWAY LINES

In accordance with Section 143(I) and Section 146.01(I) of the Canada Transportation Act (CTA), notice is hereby given by Canadian Pacific Railway Company (CP) that the railway line described below is available for sale for continued operations. CP intends to discontinue and not resume operating the line if it is not transferred.

Parties interested in acquiring the railway line for the purpose of continuing a railway operation must make their interests known in writing by 16:30 M.D.T. April 5, 2010 to:

Marc Shannon
Legal Services
Canadian Pacific Railway Company
Suite 920 Gulf Canada Square
401 - 9th Avenue SW
Calgary, AB T2P 4Z4

RAIL LINE	FROM MILE	TO MILE	TOTAL	PROVINCE
Chalk River	0.5	104.0	103.5	Ontario

Expressions of interest are subject to the timetable for acquiring lines as set out in the CTA and CP's procedures to meet this timetable. This information will be supplied to parties as confirmation of receipt of their expression of interest in accordance with this notice.

If no expressions of interest are received by the date indicated in this notice, or if no agreement to acquire CP's interest in the railway line has been entered into within six (6) months of receipt of an expression of interest, CP may, as set out in the CTA, offer to transfer all of its interests in the railway line to the Government of Canada, Province of Ontario, Urban Transit Authority, and Municipal governments whose territory the railway line passes through. Each level of government will have thirty (30) days to accept CP's offer in accordance with the CTA. CP intends to discontinue and not resume operating the railway line if no agreement is entered into to transfer the railway line as set out in the CTA.

Notice of Discontinuance of Railway Line

In accordance with Section 143 (1) of the Canada Transportation Act notice is hereby given that Canadian National Railway Company (CN) intends to sell its ownership and operating interest in the railway line described below or to discontinue operating the railway line if it is not transferred.

Beachburg subdivision in the provinces of Ontario and Quebec from a point near nepean, Ontario (Mile 14.50) Beachburg Subdivision) to a point near Portage-du-Fort, Quebec (Mile 50.40 Beachburg Subdivision)

-and-
From a point near Portage-du-Fort, Quebec (Mile 50.40 Beachburg Subdivision) to a point near Pembroke, Ontario (Mile 88.70 Beachburg Subdivision)

More

If by May 17, 2010 no party has made its interest known, or if no agreement has been entered into within six (6) months following this date, the railway line will be offered to the federal and provincial governments, to the urban transit authority, and to the municipal or district governments through whose territory the railway line passes. Each will have thirty (30) days to accept the offer. If no agreement is entered into, operation on this railway line will cease.

Footprints in snow led police to suspects

Two alleged copper thieves aren't going to win a gold medal for smarts after police said they traced fresh footprints back to the scene of the crime -- the Wakefield steam train. Gatineau police said a suspicious fire alerted them to two men in the rear of the Kruger factory in downtown Hull. The men, aged 28 and 38, were burning the plastic coatings off some copper wire, police said. When their explanations didn't add up, police said they followed footprints back to the slightly damaged steam train. They also found tools. Manager André Groulx said the thieves took some original wiring under the train that is no longer needed and extension cords used to provide electrical power during the winter. He estimated the damage at \$200, adding it would not affect the excursion season, which starts May 8. Groulx said the train has security cameras, but they did not show the thieves' faces because the suspects were under the train. Charges are expected Monday morning, police said.

SMITHS FALLS - They're getting by with a lot of help from their friends, and with their own dogged determination.

After a decade of dedication and hard work by its board of directors and supporters, the Smiths Falls Community Theatre will finally host performances in its own home at the old train station on Victoria Street.

The Smiths Falls Station Theatre will open with a gala event on April 24.

The Via Rail waiting room will remain at the old station until the new railway station at 42 Union St. is completed. When the new station is operational "construction could begin as early as this spring" the waiting room of the old station will become part of the theatre lobby.

Jamie Schoular is president of the SFCT and explains that, back in 1999 and 2000 the old train station was going to be torn down.

"The railway came to the town and asked if there was any other way the town would like to use it. Our group came forward and said 'Yes, we'll give it a try,'" he says.

The Town of Smiths Falls purchased the property from the railway and has granted a long-term lease theatre group.

For 10 years the board of directors has taken its shows on the road, using other local facilities such as high school auditoriums and church halls, whenever they've been available.

Schoular speaks of the relief now that the "wandering minstrel" phase of the theatre's existence is coming to an end.

"Well, logically it's certainly going to make it an awful lot easier to not have to hall sets from the station to wherever we were performing," he says. "It's going to be great to have a first-class facility that can technically provide the support that a production requires, we won't have to worry about lighting and sound.

"It's going to mean that the patrons are will be in a first-class facility" comfortable chairs, not hard plastic chairs, and there's going to be an atmosphere that is much more theatre-like than performing in a school gym."

Vice-president Pauline Auger has been smitten with theatre footlights since her teen years when she joined the earlier Smiths Falls Little Theatre. When that group was re-established as the SFCT, it was natural that she would continue her association and she has been a board member of the SFCT ever since.

Auger has great memories of the SFCT, with anecdotes of acts of kindness and support by community members. For instance, back in 2002 an opportunity arose to obtain theatre seats at no cost from the National Arts Centre, as the NAC was replacing its seats. Terry Wills of Wills Transfer Limited was there to provide pick up and delivery of the 140 seats. The seats have been in storage at the station and have recently been placed into position as the construction site gradually transforms itself into a charming new theatre.

Auger speaks of the ongoing need for volunteers at The Station Theatre. Amid the challenges and hard work there's companionship as part of a team, an opportunity to develop skills, and also have fun.

"We always need people," she says. "Backstage, tickets, make-up, acting, directing. It's always the great thing about a volunteer theatre company, always the need and there's never too many volunteers. Everyone has a niche, a part they like to play," she says.

Board member Nancy Yunker is responsible for fundraising for the new theatre.

"The amount of money gone into the building is probably around \$1 million, from structure to finishing touches," she says. "The town has contributed to that (by investing in the building), they have been very supportive from the start."

Four grants have been received from The Ontario Trillium Foundation, and grants have been received from FCD AgriSpirit Fund, and from the Rideau Valley Heartland Eastern Ontario Development Program.

The "All Aboard Campaign - The Final Spike" has raised \$83,000 through SFCT's own fundraising efforts. Seat sponsoring for \$200 (sold out), silent auctions, and donations from patrons, is bringing them nearer to their goal of \$100,000.

Yunker says that not everything will be complete on opening night "the kitchen area and parts of the top floor renovations remain as works-in-progress.

"But we have everything we need to open. The sound and lighting will be great, but you can always add on things," she says.

Much of the money raised has been spent on areas that people will never see - in the basement in the ceiling.

"Right off the bat," says Schoular. "The building had to be made structurally secure to bring it up to code, make it useable, so initially a lot of money was spent on the place, making sure the building was secure and safe."

On April 24, 2010, the SFCT will host its gala opening - a \$100 per person, black tie event, when its new theatre will be presented to the community. Its first theatre presentation will take place in late April or May - "The Jasper Station" a little musical about a railway station, appropriate to the occasion.

The SFCT plans to continue its tradition of presenting four plays a year.

Schoular believes that it's part of a well-rounded community to have a cultural-arts component where people have an opportunity to entertain, and to be entertained, at an a

"Not a lot of people want to travel to the National Arts Centre. Now they're going to have their own theatre facility just down the street," says Schoular.

NEW PASSENGER RAIL STATION ON TRACK:

Smiths Falls will get a new VIA station by the end of 2010, located on the edge of town 1.5 kilometres north of the existing station on Union Street. It will be located on VIA's Smiths Falls Subdivision, and reduce the number of conflicts that VIA trains have with CP freight trains at the current station location. The new 400 sq. ft. station will be fully accessible, with standard features such as benches and washrooms. "We believe it will be an efficient environmentally-sound and attractive addition to your lovely town," said Maddy Fahmy, VIA Rail Canada's senior director of real estate. "We've worked hard to ensure that it will be in harmony with its surroundings and your community's rich railway heritage. We hope you'll agree when it opens to serve you." While the number of parking spaces at the new location has been reduced from the 26 originally proposed to 18, the site has room to grow. In addition to the station, Fahmy also announced \$20 million in "VIA-specific" improvements are planned for CP's Brockville Subdivision. That includes two new sidings between Smiths Falls and Brockville, an advanced Centralized Traffic Control signal system, upgraded protection at grade crossings and "strategic" sections of safety fencing. "This will enable us to operate more and faster trains, increasing the speed to 160 kilometres per hour at selected locations," Fahmy stated.

Currently, 20,000 people use the VIA station in Smiths Falls on an annual basis with four passenger trains in each direction stopping there each day. "We're looking at increasing two more trains in each direction," he indicated. When the new station opens, the waiting room in the old (former CPR) station will become part of the theatre lobby of the Smiths Falls Station Theatre, set to open in April.

Smiths Falls mayor Dennis Staples expressed gratitude to VIA and the federal government "for this most important and impressive investment in passenger rail service," and to CP for its co-operation in the initiative. Staples also spoke of continuing this collaboration "to seek ways to further enhance the increased potential for passenger and commuter rail service for this area." (YourOttawaRegion.com, Mar. 2; EMCSmithsFalls.ca, Mar. 11)

07/04/2010 *Pembroke Observer**Chalk River*

There is hope for the future of rail in Eastern Ontario.

Contacted by The Daily Observer, a spokesman for Canadian Pacific has stated it is currently in talks with two parties who have submitted expressions of interest in the rail line, which runs between Smiths Falls to Camspar (Petawawa), the deadline for which passed Monday.

Kevin Hryszak, Canadian Pacific's media relations manager, said because of confidentiality reasons, he cannot divulge the names of the two parties nor offer any details as to the nature of the discussions. However, he did say these are being given serious attention, with up to half a year set aside for negotiations.

"At the present moment, CP is in good faith talks with these parties to see whether a deal can be made," he said. "CP will negotiate up to six months with these parties to come to an agreement that will suit both parties."

Mr. Hryszak said after that time, should the dealings not be resolved within the six-month period or the interested parties part ways at any point within that six months, CP will then proceed to the next step of the Canadian Transportation Act process, which is offering the line to levels of government.

As for the second half of the CP line, running between Petawawa and Mattawa, it will be maintained and operated by Rail America until the last CFB Petawawa military equipment train arrives back at its compound, which should be within the next week. After this, the rail will be handed back to CP, as outlined in the contract with the rail carrier.

Mr. Hryszak said once CP has possession of the rail line, it will begin the same process of seeking expressions of interest (EOI) within 60 days as it had just completed with the first half of the railway.

"When this line will be put up for the 60 day EOI period, is still to be determined," he said.

There has been great concern about the future of the Ottawa Valley rail lines since CP announced at the end of 2009 it was discontinuing its leasing agreement with Railway America, the owner of Ottawa Valley Railway (OVR), and searching for a new carrier to take over the lines between Mattawa and Smiths Falls.

The CP line is one of two running through the Ottawa Valley.

The other, the old CN line known as the Beachburg Subdivision, is also being abandoned.

Petawawa Mayor Bob Sweet, who hosted a meeting in March of municipalities and other parties concerned about the future of the Eastern Ontario rail line, said hearing CP is in negotiations with parties interested in taking over the line is certainly good news for the railroad.

"It sounds like they are right on time with their scheduling," he said, noting the April 5 deadline was precisely 60 days from when the line was first put up for expressions of interest.

01/05/2010 *Ottawa Citizen**Lachute**Hull*

Gatineau's transit company has bought the rail line between the Prince of Wales rail bridge and Montée Paiement to build a busway, but its plans should hearten Ottawa transit advocates who still hope to see commuter trains cross the Ottawa River.

Spokeswoman Céline Gauthier said the Société de transport de l'Outaouais will pay Chemins de fer Québec-Gatineau Inc. \$2.5 million for the 15-kilometre disused rail line. The STO plans to remove the track on land to complete a 12-station \$233.5-million bus transitway by fall 2011.

But Gauthier said the STO will rebuild the rail line next to the Gatineau busway when the road is completed, in case the line is needed in the future. The STO will own the line through the Société de transport ferroviaire de Gatineau (Gatineau Railway Company).

The City of Ottawa owns the Prince of Wales Bridge, which links the STO's new rail line with the current end of Ottawa's O-Train line at Bayview. The city bought it from Canadian Pacific in 2004, with an eye to someday extending Ottawa's rail service to collect and drop off passengers on the Gatineau side.

Gatineau has resisted, since it settled on a bus-based system for its transit future, but the STO's promise to re-lay tracks to the bridge at least leaves open the possibility of a rail connection between the cities.

"We are working on a study of a link between the two cities with the National Capital Commission and the City of Ottawa," Gauthier said. "The options for linking downtown Ottawa to the downtown Hull sector will be released this summer or fall.

"There will be several crossing options, but I can't say what they will be. We don't know yet whether one of the crossings could be the Prince of Wales Bridge which is owned by the City of Ottawa."

Marie Lemay, the chief executive of the NCC, said the study will determine how to integrate the two transit systems.

"They are looking at a number of short-, medium- and long-term solutions and I hope we will be able to share those with the public in June," Lemay said. "The Prince of Wales Bridge is definitely being considered in all the scenarios.

"Another thing that is being examined is a commuter loop around Confederation Boulevard. At the end of the day the STO and OC Transpo will have to agree with the results of the study because we can't impose a solution."

Read more: <http://www.ottawacitizen.com/Gatineau+transit+rail+line+purchase+keeps+commuter+train+dream+alive/2973054/story.html#ixzz0n3R8eKgS>

The mayor of Mississippi Mills wants the federal government to stop the dismantling of the Mattawa to Smiths Falls rail line.

The 167-kilometre stretch from Mattawa on the Ottawa River south to Smiths Falls, part of the Ottawa Valley Railway, is at risk of demolition after Canadian Pacific Railway Ltd. failed to find an interested buyer in the private sector.

"Loss of this railway will be a disaster for the Ottawa Valley," said Mississippi Mills Mayor Al Lunney, who is speaking on behalf of Lanark County. In a statement released Thursday, Lunney said the municipalities involved don't have the resources to buy the line. "The property tax base simply cannot sustain such a purchase. What we need is for the federal government to halt the process so that all stakeholders -- private and public -- have an opportunity to get to the table and figure out how we can save this railway line. Once the track is gone, it is gone forever."

Last January, CPR announced its intention to sell the Ottawa Valley Railway between Smiths Falls and Sudbury. In early October, RailAmerica signed a five-year lease for the section of track between Sudbury, Mattawa and Temiscaming, but the stretch from Mattawa to Smiths Falls is still on the block.

Under a legislated timetable, the federal government has until Friday to make an offer. The province will have until Dec. 6, followed by OC Transpo until Jan. 5 and then municipalities until Feb. 4. The rail line is being offered at net salvage value, with estimates ranging upwards of \$90 million for the steel. If there are no successful negotiations, CPR can proceed to dismantle the track and sell off the assets.

"This is a major economic development issue for an area that has already been hit hard by the recession," said Lunney. "If the line is dismantled we will lose the ability to sustain and attract new industry that requires rail service. We lose opportunities for new ventures, such as tourist trains. At a time when passenger rail service is considered the way of the future in terms of environmental sustainability, we immediately lose out on inter-city commuter opportunities between all the small and large centres along that line."

Lunney noted CFB Petawawa uses the line to mobilize equipment for long-distance manoeuvres.

14/05/2010 *CBC News**Winchester**Smiths Falls*

The community theatre group of Smiths Falls, Ont., is opening its first show Friday night in a venue that's been 10 years in the making.

The Station Theatre is a renovation of an old CP Rail station built in 1887 at a time when CP used to run passenger service through the town.

The crumbling station was going to be demolished in 1999 when the Smiths Falls Community Theatre put forth the idea to rebuild the site as a theatre.

Pat Smith, the theatre group's treasurer, said members saw it as a way to get out of performing in high-school gymnasiums.

"So really, it was a desire for the community theatre to have a venue of their own," Smith said. "And really, a couple of silly people took on the challenge."

Smith was one of those people, and over the last 10 years he has watched over every detail of the train station's transformation, as the structure was reinforced and the floor of the old restaurant, which had caved in, was replaced by a state-of-the-art theatre that holds 140 seats.

He said the project cost \$750,000 and a decade of volunteer labour. He said it took so long because when they ran out of money for a particular job, the work stopped too.

"It's been a long haul and each time you start, you have to build up that enthusiasm again to continue," Smith said.

The building is still used by rail passengers, since Via Rail has a small waiting area that leads to its platform.

Friday night's night performance is the Norman Foster musical *Jasper Station*, in which a group of people meets at an empty train station.

Read more: <http://www.cbc.ca/canada/ottawa/story/2010/05/13/ott-smiths-station-theatre.html#ixzz0oNLL1pBHq>

27/05/2010 *EMC Kingston**Kingston (CP)**Kingston*

It's full steam ahead to restore *The Spirit of Sir John A.*

The rusty locomotive in Confederation Park will get a large cash injection from the city to pay for its restoration and relocation. Without any debate, councillors voted to sink \$642,000 into the famous landmark at their May 18 meeting.

"I'm absolutely delighted. Yes it's a lot of money but sometimes you've got to look beyond the cost of something and look at the value of something," said Coun. Bill Glover.

The Kingston-built locomotive, also known as Engine 1095, sits on a small rail bed near the tourist information office - on the original section of rail line that used to run through the downtown. It was gifted to the city by the Kingston Jaycees in 1967 in honour of Canada's Centennial.

The big black engine is one of Kingston's most photographed landmarks but experts say it's in danger of falling apart without restoration work. Aside from rusting metal, the track bed is deteriorating and the engine is leaning.

The cash injection, on top of \$340,000 that was earlier spent by the city on exploratory work, will push the engine's total restoration price tag to nearly one million dollars.

Heritage buffs say the 1913-built locomotive is worth saving, not just for tourists, but for its heritage value and as a symbolism of civic pride.

"It's the sole survivor of the 19th century industrial Kingston," said Coun. Glover.

Coun. Dorothy Hector is also pleased the restoration is on track.

"I really believe we need to take care of our monuments a lot better than we have. This is a prime example of something we haven't taken care of and that's why it costs so much to fix it."

Preserving the historic appearance of *The Spirit of Sir John A.* includes relocating the engine about ten metres south of its current location - to maintain its high profile spot in the park - and then constructing a protective shelter around it.

Coun. Hector says visitors will be able to climb aboard the restored engine once it has been made safe. "You used to be able to climb through it and play engineer. We haven't been able to do that for years."

The delicate job of lifting and moving the giant locomotive is expected to happen later this year before the repair work begins.

A volunteer group, Engine 1095 Restorers, has fundraised about \$7,000 and invested time to plan the engine's comeback.

"We've contributed 2,000 hours of volunteer effort to get the city to this junction," volunteer John Craig told a council meeting.

He says damage to the weathered engine is "reversible with appropriate action."

"We're truly hoping the work can start this year and it will be fixed up in time for the tourist season in 2011," said Coun. Hector.

Heritage buffs note the timing of repairs to the locomotive will coincide with the 100th anniversary of its building in 2013 and the bicentennial of Sir John A. Macdonald's birth in 2015.

As Craig explained: "Never will the stars be so aligned for this promotional opportunity of a lifetime."

Le Train à vapeur Hull-Chelsea-Wakefield pourrait, dans un avenir rapproché, se rendre jusque dans le centre-ville de Gatineau, où une toute nouvelle gare digne de ce nom accueillerait les milliers de voyageurs attirés chaque année par l'icône touristique de l'Outaouais.

C'est du moins l'un des souhaits que chérit la Compagnie de chemin de fer de l'Outaouais (CCFO).

La gare actuelle, située sur la rue Deveault, près du boulevard Saint-Joseph, n'a rien de très conviviale.

Les membres de l'organisme s'entendent pour dire que l'emblème touristique de l'Outaouais et les milliers de touristes qui s'offrent chaque été l'expérience unique au Québec du train à vapeur méritent mieux que le « garage » actuel qui fait office de gare.

Le CCFO a le mandat d'assurer le développement récréo-touristique du corridor emprunté par le train à vapeur. L'organisme s'appête à embaucher des consultants afin d'analyser comment il serait possible d'améliorer l'offre touristique le long du trajet.

La construction d'une nouvelle gare au centre-ville, ainsi qu'un meilleur aménagement des installations à l'arrivée, à Wakefield, feront partie de la réflexion et de l'analyse de ces consultants.

« Il y a déjà eu des pourparlers, des discussions, des terrains identifiés comme étant potentiellement capables d'accueillir la gare de départ du train, explique la présidente de la CCFO, Louise Boudrias. Il a déjà été question d'un terrain près du Casino, mais il y a aussi beaucoup d'autres options sur la table. Nous étudions aussi la possibilité de se rendre près des berges de la rivière des Outaouais et pourquoi pas à proximité du futur

Musée des sciences et de la technologie. On peut rêver. »

Jean Hébert, aussi membre de la CCFO, ajoute que la Société de transport de

l'Outaouais (STO) a acquis, pour le Rapibus, des tronçons de la Compagnie de chemin de fer Québec-Gatineau. Comme les rails seront conservés, il pourrait être facile, explique M. Hébert, d'utiliser le tronçon qui se rend directement dans le centre-ville.

Offre touristique

Les projets de développement du Train à vapeur Hull-Chelsea-Wakefield ne sont pas étrangers avec tout le concept du projet Destination Gatineau qui doit, selon le maire Marc Bureau, faire de Gatineau une destination touristique de calibre international.

L'étude d'opportunités pour le projet Fascination Jacques-Cartier, don't LeDroit a obtenu copie (voir la chronique de Denis Gratton), viendrait aussi facilement s'imbriquer avec les projets de la CCFO.

« Il pourrait aussi y avoir plusieurs arrêts afin d'embarquer des gens à d'autres endroits le long du trajet, souligne Mme Boudrias. Ça permettrait de rendre le train encore plus familial. On pourrait aussi tenter d'accueillir les cyclistes en leur donnant l'occasion de faire un bout de chemin en train. Ce qu'il faut, c'est améliorer l'offre touristique tout le

long du corridor. On pourrait ensuite développer des formules forfaitaires. »

L'appel d'offres pour l'étude doit être lancé sous peu, assure Mme Boudrias.

« Le comité de développement de la CCFO a eu une première rencontre où on a fait un remue-ménages, note la présidente. Nous croyons être en mesure de présenter nos projets de développement d'ici le début de la prochaine saison touristique. »

11/06/2010 *Brockville Recorder*

Brockville

Brockville

Museum will offer dining experience unlike any other

The Brockville Museum is selling tickets for a unique fundraiser titled "Keefer's Tunnel Banquet" on Thursday, July 8. Celebrants will enjoy a four-course menu reflecting 1860, when Brockville's railway tunnel was completed, 150 years ago. Inspiration for the menu came from a banquet prepared for the Edward the 7th during a North American visit the same year, said museum volunteer coordinator Viktor Kaczowski. "French cuisine was very much de rigueur." Anyone attending the dinner in the south end of the tunnel on July 8 can return the next day in rubber boots for a guided tour of the entire, 1,700-foot-long tunnel, which has muddy sections. Local historian Doug Grant said it was Canada's first railway tunnel and its construction generated controversy -similar to the way the debate over Tall Ships Landing and the Maritime Discovery Centre has divided the community more recently. Grant said the railway tunnel is a major landmark in Brockville and in the city's history and could be developed into a bigger tourism attraction. Kaczowski said the railway tunnel is a solid structure. Repairs have been under way at its north end at Pearl Street. With proper funding and renovations, the entire tunnel could one day be opened up to pedestrians and cyclists. The July 8 banquet is sponsored by CP and the 1000 Islands Community Development Corporation, and a raffle prize of a trip for two has been donated by VIA Rail.

16/06/2010 *Eastern Ontario Review*

Lachute

Lachute

MRC Argenteuil seeks symbols of the past

Lachute. On September 24 and 26 the history of the Lachute train station is expected to come back to life, when city officials cut the ribbon and officially inaugurate the newly restored train station.

Now home to Tourism Argenteuil, Collective Transport and a slew of other regional services, the former train station is once again open to the public, after sitting behind boarded windows for over 20 years.

"We have opened the doors to the exterior populations so that they might rediscover the train station. Our seniors may remember it when it was a train station and those under the age of 30 can discover it for the first time", said Lachute mayor Daniel Mayer.

It is the intention of city officials to use the former train station as a living museum in which photos and articles from Argenteuil's past are displayed for public viewing. Stained glass windows from St. Julien's church are already on display, as are signs and pieces of art and memorabilia.

The MRC Argenteuil is seeking photos of the train station as well as objects that document the history of the region, so that his public buildings might be better preserved.

During Quebec Cultural Day on September 28th, the doors to the train station will be thrown open and an invitation has been issued to those who might like to tour the building and view some of the history of the region.

If you have photos you would like to share contact news@laurentianreview.ca

City orders CN to fix "terrible" train station on Montreal St.

Fix it or face stiff fines.

City council has delivered an ultimatum to the owner of the crumbling 155 year old train station on outer Montreal Street.

"The building has been allowed to fall into terrible condition," observed Coun. Sara Meers, whose district includes the heritage landmark.

Council unanimously backed her June 15 motion to enforce municipal property standards on the vacant site to the "fullest extent" possible to bring it to an "adequate and safe standard."

"We're quite happy to blaze ahead," said Terry Willing, the city's senior bylaw enforcement officials who's also acting commissioner of community services.

The Outer Station, constructed by Grand Trunk Railroad in 1855, once welcomed Kings and Queens to its platform in Kingston's north end. It went out of active service in 1974 when the VIA station opened on a new bypass line that runs through a rock cut further north.

The Outer Station was later converted into a restaurant, but by the mid 1990s it began to fall into disrepair. The building has been a focus of vandalism and arson over the years.

Heritage experts say the roof, now covered by a wind-ripped blue tarp, is in danger of collapse, while weeds have overtaken the property.

Councillors say the eyesore property and rundown condition of the building can not be tolerated anymore.

"I drive by the area regularly and it just breaks my heart every time you go by. It has become dilapidated," said Meers.

City officials were questioned why they didn't enforce municipal property appearance rules sooner. Willing says they were under the impression the train station's owner, CN Rail, was a crown corporation, which would make it exempt from any municipal action. But the rail company is now a private corporation and can be subject to municipal rules, council was told.

Willing says a to-do list of property standards is now being drafted for CN Rail, adding: "Now we will order CN to repair that building."

Failure to comply could cost the rail company \$50,000 to \$100,000 for a first offence, he explained. However, CN can either appeal the order or fight the city in court.

Willing says CN could not easily demolish the train station in order to comply with the city's property standards order because of its federal designation as a heritage structure.

"The ultimate goal would be to see the train station restored to its former lustre but any type of improvement would definitely be a benefit to the area right now," said Meers.

She also noted the rundown station sits on a busy corridor into Kingston. "It would present us in a much better light if we took better care of our historical landmarks."

City council once had the chance to buy the rail station and surrounding property for \$1, but rejected the offer from CN's real estate arm because the Brownfield cleanup and building restoration costs were considered too high.

A local group has continued to lobby CN Rail and city hall to preserve the deteriorating landmark, yet it seems age, pollution and location are prohibitive factors. The train station is located within a bland industrial area that the city recently described as in need of rejuvenation.

30/07/2010 Kingston Daily British Whi Kingston (CN)

Kingston

Full steam ahead with cleanup

Canadian National Railway is complying with a City of Kingston work order to clean up the abandoned train station property on Montreal Street.

Work crews were clearing brush and repairing the safety fence yesterday at the 10-hectare site.

City officials are also hopeful that progress is being made to repair the crumbling historic building, also part of the work order.

An engineer hired by CN was recently in Kingston to compile a report, including preliminary estimates.

"They've given us a letter saying they have an engineer hired who is going over the particulars of the building," city building manager Steve Murphy told the Whig-Standard.

"They have been there. It seems like they are giving us the real goods."

The cleanup work is being done just in time for today's deadline, imposed several weeks ago by the building department.

Murphy said he received a July 6 letter from a CN lawyer indicating the roof and walls of the 154-year-old historic building will be fixed. CN

spokesman Jim Feeny confirmed yesterday that the engineer's report had been received but he said that no work can be ordered until approval is granted by Heritage Canada, the federal ministry that administers the Heritage Railway Stations Protection Act.

"In terms of major work, we are still in discussions with the federal government about what kind of repairs will be done," said Feeny.

"Any work will have to be compliant with the act. The discussions are underway. Initial contact has been made."

17/08/2010 Smiths Falls This Week Smiths Falls

Smiths Falls

VIA STATION CONSTRUCTION TO BEGIN NEXT MONTH:

Construction is expected to begin at the end of September or, at the latest, early October on Smiths Falls' new station. "Early October. latest, is when we'll have shovels in the ground," says Malcolm Andrews, senior manager of media and community relations for Via Rail. "The status of the situation (is that) we're about to issue tenders. We're looking for contractors for construction." Andrews says a 'show and tell' was held at the station site August 10, and contractors interested in the project were given a tour of the location. "It's a normal part of the process," says Andrews. "It shows those who are potentially interested." Tenders were expected to be issued last week and will remain open for a couple of weeks, says Andrews. "The goal is to evaluate the process and select the winning bid," he says. "We hope to complete, with a contract negotiated and signed,

the process by mid-to late September." Construction of the building is expected to take two to three months. "We certainly hope to have construction started and be completed by the end of the year. before snowfall," says Andrews. The project cost is in the neighbourhood of \$700,000. The fully accessible station will be located on the corner of Union and Ruthven streets and is expected to be 400 square feet in size. There will be 18 parking spaces at the station for users. The construction of VIA's new Smiths Falls station is part of the \$516 million capital program announced by the Government of Canada for VIA Rail in 2007. (Branchline)

VIA Rail tree-cutting angers Ottawa residents whose homes back on to track

Look just beyond the homes of Pineglen Crescent, and you could swear a train had run through there.

Tree limbs dangle from mature maples, a soil-filled ditch lies where grass and shrubs once grew.

Not to mention the track, which reaches farther than the eye can see.

A train does run behind those homes, but it's not what caused this damage.

"There was this huge equipment that was basically ripping the trees and vegetation and chipping them," said Nardin Ghahary, who has lived at 79 Pineglen Cres. for 27 years.

Her house used to back onto a thick barrier of trees and plants, but since VIA Rail cut down the trees, all she sees is a dull-looking track and some metal poles which will soon support a security fence.

Because the trees also blocked noise, Ghahary now has to deal with what sounds like a train running through her house every few hours.

One of her neighbours recorded the loudest train at 92 decibels in his home, which is as loud as a lawnmower running by, 10 times a day.

Ghahary is also concerned about the beauty of her neighbourhood, which she described as 'very quiet' with a "country-like atmosphere."

"Now, the place looks like a bomb hit it," she said on Friday, four days after the unearthing of vegetation began.

Fencing the "right-of-way," or the train track, is a common safety precaution, especially near neighbourhoods, said VIA spokesperson Malcolm Andrews.

"In built-up residential areas, more and more, that has been the custom over the last number of years," he said. "We put up safety fencing to prevent, to the extent possible, trespassing."

Ghahary is a member of the Glens community association, which includes people living on Pineglen and Grenfell Crescents, both of which border the train track. She says she and her neighbours were not notified about the fence building project until after VIA's hired contractors chopped down the trees that separated her backyard from the rail.

VIA has apologized for this error.

"The letters didn't go out as soon as they should have, so we apologize to people for not giving them quite as much advance notice as we could have," Andrews said.

Gord Hunter, councillor for Knoxdale-Merivale ward, said the city was not consulted about this work, but that he could not argue with VIA's safety reasons for installing a fence. He added that two young people had died on the line in question in the last 25 years.

Pierre Poilievre, MP for Nepean-Carleton, was also disappointed that he and his constituents had not been informed of the project, but said he accepted VIA's apology and a commitment that future notifications will be provided before any work is done.

Poilievre agreed that fencing is needed near railways to keep the public safe.

"For teenagers who might be wearing headsets, or people who are hearing impaired, or children who have not developed their sense of safety, it can lead to tragedies," he said. "Trespassing has led to fatalities in this region."

Andrews explained that there can be a considerable amount of brush growing beside the track that must be removed before a fence can be installed.

Ghahary worried that the destruction of trees would harm local wildlife, which she says flourishes in her neighbourhood.

Andrews said an environmental assessment was not required for the area. While birds may have lived very temporarily in the trees that were cut down, they likely did not nest there for long due to the loud sounds and vibrations from the trains, he said.

Ghahary's other major concern is that her water quality will be contaminated when a chemical spray is used on the track to prevent growth of weeds and plants. The homes in her area rely on wells and septic tanks.

But Andrews said that railways have always sprayed along the tracks, so spraying should not cause a problem.

"Railways do spray from time to time beside the tracks," Andrews said, "basically to ensure safe operation and reasonable visibility, and to ensure that there isn't undue incursion of plant growth along the rail line in question."

Since 2003, there have been five trespassing incidents on the rail line between Smiths Falls and Ottawa, according to the Railway Association of Canada.

The RAC could not confirm how many instances of trespassing resulted in death.

The Transportation Safety Board of Canada counted 52 trespassing fatalities nationwide in 2009, compared with an average of 59 trespassing fatalities between 2004 and 2008.

- Group negotiating to purchase CN Beachburg line (e)

Things are rolling along for an organization looking to purchase the CN Beachburg line, which runs the Ottawa Valley to the City of Ottawa. Transport Pontiac Renfrew, a community-based non-profit corporation with a board of directors from Pontiac and Renfrew counties as well as city representation, has been working for a couple of years now to take over the

line. If the organization succeeds, the long-term plan is to not only operate it as a commuter line, but also use it for freight transportation and tourism. A business plan has been completed and the net salvage value for the line has been determined. Both were key requirements before consideration could be given to offer to purchase the line. "We, Transport Pontiac Renfrew, are deep in negotiations with CN to purchase the railway,"

Arnprior mayor Terry Gibeau told his council colleagues Aug. 23. "We are at the offer/counter offer stage." Gibeau is a charter member of the corporation and has been a big proponent of developing the line for various community and industrial uses. In a separate interview with the EMC, Gibeau said he could not divulge details of the financial negotiations, however, he did say the deal "is getting really close" to being completed. "CN is being cooperative and very positive. They don't want to see the rail line closed

any more than we do," Gibeau explained. He said the Transport Pontiac Renfrew board has expanded its size and membership comes from the Ottawa Valley municipalities as well as Ottawa. Ward 5 West Carleton-March councillor Eli El-Chantiry sits on the board of directors with Gibeau. With the Quebec government in support of the rail initiative, Gibeau said he and El-Chantiry would work hard to ensure that same level of support exists in Ontario.

Feds, province to decide fate of Ottawa Valley's Canadian Pacific line

It is now up to the federal and provincial governments to determine the fate of Ottawa Valley's Canadian Pacific rail line, which is in the process of being abandoned.

Last week, the deadline passed for private companies to reach a deal with CP for the 175 kms of line running between Camspur, just north of Petawawa, to Smiths Falls, which means it will be offered first to the federal government and then the province to see if there is any interest.

Kevin Hryszak, Canadian Pacific's media relations manager, said the company did not reach an agreement with any of the parties who made an expression of interest in purchasing the line for erations following six months of good faith negotiations. That period ended Oct. 4.

"We are now moving to the next step of the discontinuance plan, which is offering the line for sale for whatever purpose -not just erations -to the different levels of government," he said.

This process, as outlined under the Transport Canada Act (TCA), is to first offer the line to the federal government, then the provincial and so on. At each level there is a 30-day window to make an expression of interest, with the rail offer passed down the line as each deadline expires.

Mr. Hryszak said negotiations are continuing with an interested party for the CP line between Camspur and Mattawa. This six-month good faith period ends Dec. 20, if a deal is not met.

One party to the Camspur-Smiths Falls rail line which is unlikely to step forward to take over is Ottawa Valley municipalities, which are hamstrung by both the huge financial commitment involved, and the ongoing election, which renders some councils unable to act swiftly until mid-December, when the newly elected councillors are sworn in.

If the federal government decides to pass on the lines by the deadline Nov. 4, the province will have 30 days to make an offer before the ball would be passed on to the municipalities in December, giving them just a couple of weeks to decide if they want to get into the railroad business.

Petawawa Mayor Bob Sweet, who has been working on the issue with municipalities in Lanark County and as far north as Mattawa, hosted a meeting in March to discuss what could be done if no one else steps forward to take over the lines.

The conclusion then is the same as it is now, that there is little if anything the municipal level of government can do, even if they could afford to make such an investment.

"We're in a very weak position to deal with things the federal and provincial governments walked away," he said, adding they have asked CP for more time, only to be told the company is sticking to the deadlines as outlined in federal legislation.

Mayor Sweet said making this complicated is CP's desire to sell the rails and the railway corridor they are sited on in one piece, a sliver of land about 1,000 acres in size. If no one steps forward to take over the line by year's end, he said he doesn't know what will happen.

There is also the question should municipalities be getting involved in railways in the first place?

"This is a very sensitive issue," Mayor Sweet said. "We're really between a rock and a hard place."

The future of the Ottawa Valley rail lines has been a major topic of discussion among area municipalities since CP announced at the end of 2009 it was discontinuing its leasing agreement with Railway America, the owner of Ottawa Valley Railway (OVR), and searching for a new carrier to take over the lines between Mattawa and Smiths Falls.

The CP line is one of two running through the Ottawa Valley. The other, the old Canadian National line known as the Beachburg Subdivision, which runs to Ottawa, is also in the process of being abandoned.

Pembroke Mayor Ed Jacyno said it would be a real travesty if the Ottawa Valley lost both rail lines, considering its importance to the regional economy. He has made it part of his election platform to encourage the development of a Pembroke to Ottawa rail service along the CN tracks, something the Transport Pontiac Renfrew consortium is still working on. That is a cooperative effort between Pontiac and Renfrew Counties and the city to see if they can obtain the tracks for a regular passenger and freight service.

If the CP line is abandoned, the mayor feels trains from CFB Petawawa can use spur lines to connect up to the main CN lines around Pembroke, and this will in turn allow the municipality to look at getting rid of the tracks running through the city's core.

"There have been derailments in the past, which is always a concern," Mayor Jacyno said.

He isn't sure who would step forward to take over the rail lines, speculating Ontario has been pushing to convert to a green economy, so perhaps they can be persuaded to take them on, as train traffic is more environmentally sound.

It is unclear at this time whether the federal government would consider taking over either line.

In a recent press release, Renfrew-Nipissing-Pembroke MP Cheryl Gallant urged all interested stakeholders to forward their comments on the interim report issued by the independent review panel established by the federal Conservative government on rail freight service by Nov. 8, 2010, the deadline for input.

This is four days after the expiry of the 30-day deadline from Oct. 4 for the government to make a decision on whether it wants to take over the CP line.

"With the future of two short-line railways up for discussion in the Ottawa Valley, the OVR (Ottawa Valley Railway) and the OCR (Ottawa Central Railway), I encourage all interested parties, particularly shippers in the forest industry as well as municipalities concerned about economic development, to provide their comments for submission as soon as possible," she said in the release.

Some of the key solutions to the matter of short line railways discussed by the panel include placing a moratorium on line abandonments; amending line transfer provisions to allow more time for entities to consider the railways' discontinuance plans; encouraging public/private ownership of low-volume rail lines with running rights given to all railway companies. Such actions would result in long-term planning of railway infrastructure acquisition of rights of way, upgrading and investment, all in the public interest.

Other solutions include empowering the Canadian Transportation Agency to investigate demarketing and other strategic de-facto abandonment activities of rail carriers; transferring low-volume lines to shortline operators; and providing federal funding to assist in the establishment of shortline railways.

The panel will provide its final report to the Minister of State for Transport Rob Merrifield by Dec. 22, 2010.

Mayor Sweet said he hasn't heard from the province on what it would consider doing, and noted he and other Eastern Ontario municipalities have asked for an audience with the federal railway review panel, but have not received a response.

Stephen Uhler is a Daily Observer reporter

18/10/2010 *Ottawa Sun* *Kingston (CN)*

A freight train derailment is under investigation in South Glengarry Twp.

The derailment happened around 10:19 a.m. Monday west of Fraser Rd. and east of Summerstown Rd. on CN tracks.

The CN train was headed eastbound.

OPP officers are on the scene and have determined 18 cars derailed, three of which contained toxic substances, namely ammonium nitrate, sulphuric acid and sodium cyanide.

Police briefly evacuated nine nearby homes until it was determined there were no leaks. Roads in the area, however, remain closed.

The extent of the damage is unknown and police don't anticipate any threat to public safety.

CN police are will be leading the investigation.

It's not known if any passenger service will be affected, or how long clean-up will take.

Via station work to be completed by year's end

Saumure & Sons Construction is working hard to complete all ground work at the new VIA Rail Station on Union Street in Smiths Falls before the frost arrives this year. Foundation work began approximately two weeks ago on the facility and will continue into the cold months. "We expect construction work to be completed by the end of the year," confirmed Ashley Doyle VIA Rail spokesperson. The building should be open for use by late January 2011, Saumure estimates. Doyle added landscaping will be undertaken once the spring thaw has taken place in 2011.

The design of the facility was unveiled earlier this year, but discussion on whether or not the building will have washrooms is still underway between the VIA and the town. "At present there is no facilities right now," Saumure said. During last week's Committee of the Whole meeting, Elaine Mallory, planning and administrative director said: "It's my understanding that they're constructing washrooms but not connecting them to water or sewer." Mallory further informed councilors at last week's meeting that VIA has opted to exercise its federal authority and not go through the town's building approval process. Mayor Dennis Staples asked staff to provide him with the details of the project as they know them and he will make contact with VIA officials in an effort to find an agreeable resolution for all.

The issue of washrooms has been ongoing, and earlier in 2010 council wished to maintain their current development standards and require VIA to extend the services at their cost and to town standards. The EMC did contact VIA for further information on their decision to not participate in the planning process and whether washrooms would or would not be part of the new facility, but a response was not available by deadline. Mallory said the town would need to receive written notification on VIA's intention to exercise their federal authority. (Branchline)

11/11/2010 Brockville Recorder

Kingston (CN)

Brockville

In Brockville, an estimated investment of \$4.5 million, with \$3 million coming from the Government of Canada's Economic Action Plan, a new station will be built adjacent to the existing station. Construction is scheduled to begin in the first quarter of 2011 and be done by the fourth quarter. Workers will demolish the old, disused building just to the east of the current VIA station and build the new 2,400 square foot facility there, with the current building demolished after that to make room for 60 parking spots. It's a scaled-down version of an initially more ambitious \$7-million project announced a year ago, that design included an overpass from the new station to an intended passenger loading area for a third track on the south side of the tracks. The new station will have over 30 seats and provide waiting passengers with wireless Internet access and television. The mural depicting Brockville's history, painted by art students at Thousand Islands Secondary School and unveiled in 1997, will be preserved. The Brockville station project is linked with other work underway at key points along the crucial Quebec-Windsor corridor, including a new two-mile track that will run from the new Brockville station to a point close to the Highway 401 underpass on the western edge of the city. (Branchline)

16/11/2010 Brockville Recorder

Kingston (CN)

Brockville

DESIGN IRKS LOCAL HISTORIAN: The preliminary design for the new VIA Rail station proposed for Brockville "simply looks like a greenhouse with two garages added on each end," local historian and heritage advocate Doug Grant says in an e-mail to Leeds-Grenville MP Gord Brown. Grant's message to Brown urges him to intervene "at the highest level" to change the plan. "The people who approved this release (design) should be ashamed of themselves," writes Grant. "What has also been overlooked is that the original charm and heritage of the existing station is hiding under a layer of aluminum siding."

Grant is upset that in Cobourg and Belleville, existing train stations will be retained, while the one in Brockville will be "torn down and replaced by a parking lot." The brick building

underneath the aluminum siding could be restored for far less than \$4 million, adds Grant. He understands VIA's need to build a station further to the east, in order to accommodate where passengers actually disembark. He also understands the company's desire to have passengers see the trains coming and going. But there is such a thing as too much window space, he said. Grant feels the existing structure could be preserved and expanded to accommodate the need to greet passengers further to the east. Included in the upgrade will be a new two-mile track that will run from the new Brockville station to a point close to the Highway 401 underpass on the western edge of the city.

VIA Rail spokesman Catherine Kaloutsky said the plans for Brockville's station have not yet been finalized. That said, the existing building no longer meets the needs of VIA's customers, she said. "The kinds of upgrades we're looking for... We just can't do that in that current location right now," said Kaloutsky. VIA trains must stop well to the east of the current station in order not to block motor vehicle traffic on Perth Street, she said. That means passengers must walk nearly the full length of the platform to get on and off. The Cobourg and Belleville stations are being preserved because they have been designated as heritage properties, she added. VIA will take into account the need to blend in with the local community, but the needs of its customers are paramount, said Kaloutsky. Also, VIA stations everywhere are meant to have a certain similarity. "We have a design in mind in terms of corporate identity," she said. (Branchline)

24/11/2010 Ottawa Sun

Beachburg

PEMBROKE - A major obstacle to preserving the CN line running between Pembroke and Ottawa via the Pontiac has been overcome, paving the way for freight and passenger traffic to resume starting next year.

On Tuesday, Transport Pontiac-Renfrew (TPR) announced it has signed an agreement-in-principle with Canadian National Railway for TPR to acquire the lines, known officially as the Beachburg Subdivision.

In a press release, Louise Donaldson, director of Transport Pontiac-Renfrew, said this is a significant development.

"This initial agreement is a big step in the acquisition process," she said. "Some specifics of the deal still need to be worked out, but the parties are eager to complete the transaction."

No one is more pleased by the announcement than Izett McBride, Whitewater Region's new deputy mayor. He was an original member of the group that wanted a commuter rail service established on the line.

"They still need to dot the I's and cross the T's for this," he said. "I think it is terrific they were able to reach an agreement and keep it in public hands."

The fight to save the rail started back in 2008, when private and public groups on both sides of the Ottawa River began exploring the possibility of reintroducing passenger service. A special Sunday "commuter excursion" was held on Oct. 5, 2008, in which a group of mayors, officials, reeves, media and invited guests were taken on a short rail trip to prove the feasibility of the idea.

Days later, the Ottawa Central Railway and its parent Quebec Railway Corporation, which owned the Beachburg subdivision, were sold to CN and within months after that, the line was placed on CN's abandonment list.

Fearing the impact on local industry, the non-profit Transport Pontiac-Renfrew group was formed in an attempt to ensure rail service remains in the Upper Ottawa Valley and Western Quebec.

"Rail is key to revitalizing our communities," said Ms. Donaldson. "It'll serve as a major benefit when courting new industry, plus it will attract future rail-served clients which in turn will create jobs."

Once acquired, the TPR will begin freight operations along the line as soon as possible. If all goes as planned, this is expected to be rolling in the spring of 2011. Passenger/commuter service will be brought in later, with possible tourist excursions added to the mix.

"The freight is the more profitable side of this," McBride said, which will bring in the revenues needed to upgrade the lines so they can bring in a viable passenger service.

The upcoming reopening of Trebio's Smurfit-Stone pulp mill in Portage-du-Fort to manufacture energy wood pellets will be dependent on rail service, along with other industries within Renfrew County.

The tracks have been graded to 40 mph, which is usable for freight, but need to be upgraded to allow trains to run at 60 mph for passengers.

Mr. McBride said TPR expects the rail service to be self-financing, and except for items such as the construction of stations along the way, won't be looking for municipal funds to keep the rail line going.

"They know municipalities are not in the position" to be partners in this, he said.

The Ottawa Valley Railway, which runs around 400 kilometres from Sudbury to Smiths Falls, is currently out of use and is set to be dismantled by its owner, Canadian Pacific Rail.

This week the company gave interested governments 30 days to buy the rail line before it starts ripping up the tracks to sell the steel - worth an estimated \$50 million.

Al Lunney, the outgoing mayor of Almonte, Ont., said losing the tracks will be a huge loss for the area's future, but the municipality can't afford to buy them. He said his community could use the railway for a range of projects from tourism to light rail transit.

"I think there's huge potential," Lunney said.

"It may be 10 years on the road, maybe five years down the road ... but as I said, once it's torn up, it's gone."

Lunney and others from the Ottawa Valley-area are planning to rally on Parliament Hill on Dec. 9 in hopes the federal government will block CP Rail's plans. So far, though, neither the provincial nor federal government have paid much attention to the stretch of railway, he said.

Retired military colonel and Mississippi Mills resident Garry Rice has fond memories of the railway, both as a rider and as someone who used it to transport military cargo to his base to CFB Petawawa.

"It's a sad day for Canada when they start ripping up the very links that hold this country together," Rice said.

"The biggest tragedy would be the strategic loss of a vital, strategic asset."

06/12/2010

*Ottawa Citizen**Chalk River*

OTTAWA -- Ottawa Valley politicians want the federal government to put the brakes on a plan that would see Canadian Pacific dismantle and sell off a rail line that runs between Smiths Falls and Mattawa.

Stakeholders, including Lanark and Renfrew counties, learned about CP's plan to discontinue the Ottawa Valley Railway between Smiths Falls and Sudbury last January after short-line operator RailAmerica terminated its lease with CP. Prior to that, CP moved its eastbound cross-Canada freight traffic off the OVR to the main line through Toronto, causing the volume of carloads on the OVR to drop dramatically.

RailAmerica has since signed a five-year lease agreement to operate the rail line from Sudbury to Mattawa and up to Tamiscaming, but the 167-kilometre line from Mattawa to Smiths Falls remains on the block.

Various levels of government each have 30 days to express an interest in buying the line, but if no one steps forward, CP has the green light under federal law to dismantle the line, sell or move the steel and remove the trestles. Municipal leaders say if the federal or provincial governments don't step forward, the municipalities — which argue they have the most to lose if the rail line disappears — don't have the resources for such a purchase. The group plans to hold a press conference on Parliament Hill Thursday.

Al Lunney, the former mayor of Mississippi Mills, says CP has told him the steel from the rail line is worth about \$50 million and could be ripped up and moved out West to be used on rail lines there.

But the loss of the direct line from Western Canada to the East hinders future economic development in the Ottawa Valley as it will limit easy access to shipping ports in Montreal and on the East Coast, Lunney said. It also represents a loss of potential for the communities along the line, such as the possibility of developing a tourist train or setting up short-line freight service for the local natural resources and agriculture sectors.

"Once those tracks are gone, they are gone forever. Allowing the line to be dismantled may not be felt tomorrow or next year, but it will have a dramatic effect on the future of communities up and down the line," he said, adding the group wants a one-year moratorium on the process to bring the federal, provincial and local governments to the table to brainstorm potential future uses of the line before CP is allowed to just remove the tracks.

"Both Lanark and Renfrew counties and most of (the) residents just do not see the logic in tearing out rail lines in today's world," he said.

Mike Lovecchio, a CP spokesman, couldn't say how much the rail line is worth and said it's too soon to speculate about what might be done with it.

He noted the discontinuation process under way is mandated by the federal government and is not something CP has any say over.

Still, Lovecchio said the company has met with all the communities that would be affected to explain the process and lay out the options, such as operating the track as a rail line or buying the land to protect it for use as a future rail line.

"They've had lots of time to get familiar with their options and to make decisions about how they want to approach it," he said.

Lunney said municipalities are also concerned about who will be responsible for the "unholy mess" of rail bridges, crossings and trestles left behind if the rail line is mothballed, as well as increased road congestion if transport trucks have to be used in place of freight trains.

The move could also effect operations at CFB Petawawa, which currently uses the line to transport fuel and equipment.

Base commander Lt.-Col. Keith Rudderham was quoted in a local newspaper saying the move would cost the base more time and money. "It's not our life line by any means," he told the Eganville Leader.

"It's not a show-stopper for anything we do or plan to do, but it will be a major frustration and it will be a big cost issue."

A dozen representatives of Lanark and Renfrew counties braved the frigid temperatures on Parliament Hill on Dec. 9 to protest the proposed removal of rail lines leading to and through the counties.

The 104-mile long Ottawa Valley Railway line between Smiths Falls and Mattawa has been flagged for dismantling, as the steel and components of the rail carry a roughly \$50 million sale price for the Canadian Pacific Railway. The track has been in use for the last 125 years.

"We're out here to get some publicity on this issue of CP's plans to rip up the tracks between Mattawa and Smiths Falls," said Al Lunney, retired mayor of Mississippi Mills and a consultant for the Lanark County on the rail. "We had a consultation with their stakeholders to see if there's a future for these rail lines." The tracks have not been used since January 2010, but Lunney suggests there is plenty of life left in the rails.

"What CP had done is they said there is no business for it," said Lunney. "It isn't quite true, because they've done is taken all the business that was there before and swung it up through the Toronto corridor, which allows them to say 'well, there's no business on this corridor, so let's disband it.' We're very concerned about that, because it's putting more and more traffic through Toronto, and the congestion in Toronto is huge."

Communication has been a problem, as the municipalities do not know what CP Rail is expecting for the railway, whether it's a \$100 million price tag or a single dollar. The federal government bypassed their deadline to purchase the rails on Nov. 5, as did the provincial government on Dec. 6. OC Transpo has the next option to purchase until Jan. 5, followed by the municipalities on Feb. 4, but the municipalities lack the resources for the purchase. After the Feb 4. deadline, CP Rail has the right to dismantle the line and sell the materials.

Lunney brought many of his friends from Lanark and Renfrew counties to speak on the steps of Parliament Hill. Speakers during the rally included John Fenik, warden of Lanark County, Dennis Staples, the mayor of Smiths Falls, and Peter Emon, the Reeve of Greater Madawaska.

"This is about Canada," said Fenik. "Once that rail line is torn up, once those rails are gone they will never come back. There is a responsibility for the federal government to make a stand and say we're not about tearing up infrastructure in this country, we are about moving forward and maintaining infrastructure." According to Lunney, there is precedent of railways in the Valley causing heartache after their dismantling.

"The main issue is the line has to stay there," said Lunney. "If you look at the line that was taken out of Carleton Place about 15 years ago, no one would have ever thought Carleton Place would grow to the extent that it did, but it grew, and now they would die to get that track back in. It's just the wrong time to take out rail lines."

The group's best hope to apply pressure is to produce a business proposal that will coerce CP Rail to leave the tracks where they are through several joint business ventures, such as tourism and passenger lines.

"It's important for all of us here in Lanark and Renfrew County to come together with our two other levels of government, provincial and federal, private sector, rail authorities and understand the implications of this significant decision which is under way," said Staples. "The ball is in our court. We need our federal and provincial partners at the table with CP rail to understand where the opportunities are. We can make this a great success if we do our job well. That's why we have tremendous support here today in Ottawa, to do this work for our future generations and the future of rail policy."

The next step for the group is to lobby all three levels of government to keep the lines in place. The morning before the rally, Lunney and his group met with Minister of State for Transport Rob Merrifield.

"We don't feel any small municipality can decide this on their own," said Lunney. "They really have to have the federal government, the provincial government, City of Ottawa, they got to have all the partners, the tourism industry, everybody, at the table and say 'is there a possible use for this rail line?'"

The problem with the group's lobbying is it is difficult to identify a branch of government that will take responsibility for the lines.

"The minister is saying it is CP Rail's responsibility, it's their line, they own it," said Lunney. "The federal government has washed their hands of it. The provincial said no, they can't do anything with it. The City of Ottawa which has a small part of running through the city, they're looking at it at the present time, but they don't quite know what they're going to do with it. At the end of the day it boils down to no municipality, Lanark or Renfrew county, are not going to say 'Hey we found \$50 million, here, we want to buy the line.' There has to be a partnership."