

Local Railway Items from Area Papers - 2022

16/01/2022 Eastern Ontario Review Lachute

Calumet

Grenville-sur-la-Rouge wants railway company to repair roof at Calumet station
Efforts to save the old Calumet railroad station continue.

According to Grenville-sur-la-Rouge Mayor Tom Arnold, when council met on January 12, it discussed repairs required on the building, including an immediate need to repair the leaking roof. The building, located at 169 rue Principale in Calumet, is still owned by Genesee and Wyoming, the parent company of the Quebec and Gatineau Railway, which operates freight trains along the line.

"We're in negotiations with Genesee and Wyoming to get access and to get the work done," said Arnold.

The mayor estimated the repairs will cost \$5,000 to \$10,000 and are only intended as a temporary measure, needed to stabilize the structure.

The municipality would like to take ownership of the former Calumet station to restore the building and give it a new purpose as a cultural and heritage facility. In November 2021, council approved entering into negotiations with Genesee and Wyoming to purchase the vacant building.

The municipality has also designated the station as a heritage building. Arnold said the designation obliges the owners to ensure the work is done in a way that respects the heritage designation.

At its meeting on December 14, 2021, Grenville-sur-la-Rouge council adopted a by-law establishing a local heritage council to oversee heritage preservation activities across the municipality.

The railway line through Calumet was built after the creation of the Québec, Montréal, Ottawa, and Occidental railway (QMO & OR) in 1874, which was intended to serve cities and rural areas north of the St. Lawrence and Ottawa Rivers. The line was sold to the Canadian Pacific Railway (CP) in 1882 and passenger service on the north shore of the Ottawa River continued until 1981.

During the later years of CP passenger service, the station building itself was closed and Calumet was a flag stop – meaning that no regular stop was made unless passengers waiting on the platform signaled for the train to stop so they could board.

21/01/2022 thestar.com

Winchester

Railway Safety in North Grenville

Kemptville Ontario - On 11 Jan 2022 Mayor Nancy Peckford posted a photo of a freight train, taken by local resident Craig Stevenson, on Kemptville's community Facebook page.

The Mayor used the photo to highlight the active state of rail lines in the Municipality, urging readers to "be vigilant at all rail crossings at all times."

For many people, railways and railway crossings don't warrant so much as a fleeting thought.

We frequently pass by the raised crossing arms with no train in sight on our commutes, and may occasionally have to wait for a passing train for a few minutes before proceeding.

The only railway company operating through North Grenville is Canadian Pacific Railway (CP), whose so-called "Winchester subdivision" of their Toronto to Montreal branchline runs through east to west.

The line runs south of the Kemptville town limits and just north of Oxford Mills, missing the populated areas in the Municipality

CP recently upgraded the signaling and removed large sections of what used to be a double track line, turning the Winchester subdivision into a single track mainline with "siding" tracks, where trains can pull over to pass each other.

For this reason, locals may notice more instances of trains temporarily blocking rail crossings in remaining double track sections while they wait for another train.

Rail transportation is extremely safe, and accidents, even at grade crossings, are rare.

However, accidents at crossings have a high chance of turning deadly when they do occur, because of the sheer size and speed of trains, and their inability to stop quickly.

A freight train travelling at the maximum allowable speed will often take a kilometer or more to stop if emergency braking is applied, leaving little chance of stopping before an obstruction at a crossing, such as a car or pedestrian.

It is, therefore, incumbent on road users to be aware of rail safety.

Canada's national railway safety campaign, known as "Operation Lifesaver," uses the simple phrase, "Look. Listen. Live", to teach rail safety

"Look. Listen. Live" means exactly that.

When approaching a railway crossing, regardless of whether it has protections such as flashing lights and barricades to warn of an oncoming train, it is important to look and listen for trains to ensure it is safe to cross.

Transport Canada publishes a "Grade Crossings Inventory," classifying pertinent information about specific railway crossings in Canada, including whether they have "active" protection (i.e. lights and gates), or passive protection (i.e. signage only).

Nearly all railway crossings in North Grenville are classified as having active protection, but two stand out as having only passive protection.

One is at McGovern Road, which is crossed only by a little-used spur line of the railway, but the other is at Murphy Road, west of Oxford Mills, where a double tracked section of the mainline crosses the road with no way to warn drivers if a train is coming.

The section of road that crosses the track is considered "un-maintained," but with approximately eight fast, heavy, freight trains passing this isolated public crossing daily, anyone who travels this area should be extra careful to treat the crossing as a stop sign, and this includes off-road vehicle users as well.

Come to a complete stop, turn off the radio, and the climate control fan, and listen for an approaching train.

If no approaching train is heard, creep slowly and look for trains, and proceed only if there are none.

While protected crossings are safer, it is advisable to follow this procedure at all crossings, and note that some well-maintained busier roads in neighboring localities still only have passively protected railway crossings, one such crossing is at Crowder Road near Mountain.

Never attempt to beat a train over the crossing, waiting just a few minutes can save your life, because in a race with a train, even if it is a tie, you lose!

Pedestrian dies after being struck by train in Barrhaven

VIA Rail confirmed that Train 52, travelling between Toronto and Ottawa, was involved in an "incident" with a person at the crossing at around 1 p.m.

A pedestrian died after being struck by a VIA Rail train at a rail crossing on Jockvale Road in Barrhaven on Saturday afternoon.

The Transportation Safety Board of Canada said it had deployed an investigator to probe the fatal collision.

"The TSB will gather information and assess the occurrence," said a Twitter post made just before 4 p.m.

The train track runs across Jockvale Road near Tartan Drive. Following the collision, Jockvale was closed between Tartan and Weybridge Drive, police said on social media.

VIA Rail confirmed that Train 52, travelling between Toronto and Ottawa, was involved in an "incident" with a person at the crossing at around 1 p.m.

Delays were expected for Trains 42 and 59, VIA Rail said in a statement, adding that Ottawa Police Service officials were also at the site to investigate.

The safety of rail crossings in Barrhaven has been a concern for years. The issue was given added urgency after a VIA train and a municipal double-decker bus collided near Fallowfield Road and Woodroffe Avenue in 2013, killing six people.

In 2017, a joint study by the City of Ottawa and VIA Rail concluded that grade-separated rail crossings were needed at five locations in Barrhaven, including at Jockvale Road.

The report said there should be a plan for a multi-use pathway underpass there because of the high number of pedestrians and cyclists at the location.

At the time, the work was estimated to cost about \$6 million.

Rail upgrades come at a noisy price

People living near Brockville's train station are not thrilled about a summer of noisy nights, but city councillors are welcoming coming upgrades to the Perth Street facility.

Council's planning and operations committee is recommending the full council grant Via Rail a nearly three-month exemption from the city's noise bylaw, to allow construction activities around the station and tracks to happen between 7 p.m. and 5 a.m., from May 15 to August 8.

Via plans to replace its platform, and improve the parking area and service connections to Perth Street.

The city's noise bylaw prohibits construction noise is from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m., extending it until 9 a.m. on weekends and statutory holidays, although Via does not intend to do the work on weekends.

The bylaw also limits construction noise and equipment to a maximum of 85 decibels A (dBA) when measured at the point of reception.

The Via project manager, Juan Carlos Soneira, this week told the committee's virtual meeting the company considers the Brockville station platform one of the most important ones on its Windsor-Quebec City corridor.

"This initiative is part of the forthcoming mobilization put in service of our new trains that are arriving in Canada in 2022," he added.

Among the 49 stations of the corridor, Soneira added, Brockville's is considered 18th, getting around 31,000 passengers boarding here a year.

Via wants to ensure its platform is up to date with health and safety and accessibility standards, he added.

The company has hired Ottawa-based firm R.W. Tomlinson to do the work.

Doing the work at night makes it safer for community members as there is less traffic in the area, and also allows workers to get more done, faster, because fewer trains use the tracks in the overnight hours, said Soneira.

He added Via will have noise mitigation measures in place.

City officials gave written notice of the coming work to property owners within 120 metres of the site, making it clear that "it was the intention for the Chief Planning Officer to approve the request."

City hall got written responses from five neighbours who objected to the work. Planning officials included the responses, anonymously, in a report to the committee.

One opponent said 120 metres is too small a radius for notification.

"Noise travels and this construction work is going to disrupt many more people during the overnight than you think," the respondent wrote, adding Via "can figure something more equitable regarding the noise."

"Many residents within the 120 meters of the subject lands work during the day, Monday through Friday," another respondent wrote.

"Residents should be able to come home, rest and recoup for the following day of work. This exemption to the noise bylaw will take away that ability, for almost three months. Sleep deprivation is a real concern and should not be discounted, especially when it is over an extended period of time."

"While I understand that construction may impact the trains if conducted during the day, I don't understand why my household's quality of life should suffer over big corps making money," another opponent wrote.

"This will be during the summer months when many residents, including myself, have their windows open at night and will therefore be greatly affected by the construction noise while trying to sleep," wrote another.

Council members hoped residents would be reassured by the mitigation measures and the fact the work won't be happening on weekends, and welcomed Via's decision to invest in the Brockville facility.

"We as Brockvillians truly value the ability to be able to get on a train and go to Toronto, Montreal or wherever," said Mayor Mike Kalivas, recalling a time when discussions suggested Brockville could be "left out of the loop" with rail travel.

"We're very pleased, to see that Via Rail has Brockville now as part of the plan," said the mayor.

"It's an economic driver for us, as far as our ability to deal with industry, as well as for the commuters and the citizens that use the train service.

Soneira said that, after the major hubs of Ottawa, Dorval and Montreal, Brockville is the fourth station to get a platform upgrade.

Evan Modler, a project manager at Tomlinson, said the main noise mitigation measures will be ensuring deliveries of construction materials do not happen in the overnight hours, and making work is as productive as possible so there is less noise during down times.

The full council is expected to vote on the recommendation to waive the noise bylaw at its meeting on Tuesday.

North Stormont Landowners Feel They're Getting Railroaded

Finch Ontario - Several residents in North Stormont are among thousands in Canada with railway crossings on their private property who are currently, or could soon be, on the hook for repair and upgrade costs.

And some aren't too pleased about that.

One man, who lives in an area west of Finch, near Highway 43 and Goldfield Road, has the Canadian Pacific Railway (CP) line running through his property, and doesn't feel he should be paying for the fixes, for upgrades required to adhere to Transport Canada's new regulations and standards.

The issue was also highlighted by the Chesterville Record with the newspaper reporting recently that Mountain resident Estella Rose, a former deputy mayor of North Dundas, was one of the residents receiving a letter from CP outlining her obligations to look after her railway crossing.

"They want \$1,000 to \$2,500 for liability insurance, but we already have farm insurance," Rose told the newspaper, adding the letter informed her the crossing would need new signage at a cost of \$700, and that a yearly assessment at the crossing will cost \$275.

"They should be paying us. It is an inconvenience for us, we would only go across to plant the seed, and maybe once to spray it, and then combine it.

"They (the railway) have always maintained it. That was the idea when they got the right-of-way. They used to put up fences to keep cattle in. If you called and told them your gate was not up to par, they would drop off a new gate. They always had a machine to cut the brush to be able to see down the track. Are they going to cut that too?"

The Standard-Freeholder contacted the CP media department with some questions regarding residents' concerns, and was told by Stacy Patenaude, the CP manager of government affairs and communications, that "existing federally regulated grade crossings must meet the requirements of the Grade Crossings Regulations by 28 Nov 2024."

Patenaude said Transport Canada has assigned responsibilities to private authorities and CP is trying to "contact and assist all private authorities, as much as possible, to understand the requirements of the regulations."

Patenaude added that residents with concerns can contact Transport Canada through its website.

Or, if they have disputes over costs for their crossing, they can contact the Canadian Transportation Agency at 1-877-850-7148, or through its website.

Incidents, injuries, and deaths are the main reasons for the required upgrades, the Transportation Safety Board of Canada reporting in one of its studies that between 2009 and 2015 there was annual national average of well over 170 incidents each year, with an average of nearly 25 fatalities and 25 serious injuries each year.

The Record reported it was early in 2020 when CP began contacting landowners with private crossings without agreements in place to sort out who was responsible for the crossing.

There are approximately 9,000 private grade crossings along more than 40,000 kilometres of federally regulated railway tracks in the country.

24/06/2022 Ottawa City News

Chalk River

Renfrew

Renfrew's CP Caboose gets a second lease on life

Renfrew's yellow CP Caboose avoided a last minute trip to the scrapyard after town council voted against scrapping it and vows to help maintain it.

The Renfrew CP Caboose, which is referred to by some residents as "the little train that could," did in fact live up to its nickname after Renfrew town council met on June 21 and with a vote of 5-2, the caboose is out of the scrapyard.

The future of the caboose was first raised in early 2021 when the town's recreation director, Kevin Hill, was directed by council to explore all options for the caboose which has remained closed for several years because of accessibility issues and extensive water damage inside the structure.

When he made his initial report to council, Hill provided various quotes to rehabilitate the caboose and one of the quotes was in excess of \$600,000. He also provided council with the option of removing the unit and either designate it as surplus or sell it directly to a scrapyard and recoup \$4,000.

Hill noted that his department was never directed over the last 15 years to maintain the site or address any structural concerns. With no direct maintenance on the caboose, it fell into a state of disrepair leading council to make a decision on its future.

Over the course of a year, the caboose was brought up at various meetings with council unable to make a decision on its future. This lack of action led

Coun. Arlene Jamieson to request a notice of motion with the intent to make a decision once and for all.

In one of the very few meetings held inside the council chambers since COVID forced council to hold the majority of meetings virtually, Mayor Don Eady called the committee of the whole to order and read out the motion which called for the removal of the caboose and sold to a scrapyard or allow the unit to be sold to the highest amount offered.

After the motion was received, Mayor Eady invited councillors Jamieson and Sandi Heins to present their respective reports on the future of the caboose.

Jamieson proposes third party ownership

Jamieson stated she wanted the caboose to remain at the park, but proposed having a third party take ownership of the caboose. Her plan included the conversion of the unit into some type of tourist attraction which could include converting the caboose into an accommodation site that is booked out for tourists to spend an evening sleeping in the car.

Under this model, the town would still retain ownership of the park and the committee would be responsible for the maintenance of the site.

"I really think we can make this work by going back and looking at some of the offers to buy the train that Director Hill received when we first started this," she said. "If we can sell the caboose and the buyer can make something work there, then the town is not on the hook for costs and we don't have to worry about accessibility. It is a win-win for all parties."

Heins lobbies for community involvement

One of the conditions for the special meeting to proceed called for Heins to produce a certificate of insurance at the meeting. Councillors have been requesting the certificate in light of environmental concerns and liability.

Heins produced the certificate for council to examine and town clerk Kim Bulmer said it was satisfactory for the project to move forward if council chose to do so.

Heins previously served as mayor from 1998 until 2010 and was also a councillor when the caboose was placed in Haramis Park. As the spokesperson for the community group, she provided a five-part plan which detailed each individual phase of the restoration and approximate cost for each phase.

Experts Thrilled at Tunnel Visit

Brockville Ontario - A group of tunnel experts took a tour earlier this week of Brockville's own unique tunnel, and came away impressed.

Some 120 geological engineers, tunnelling experts and graduate students from across Canada visited the Brockville Railway Tunnel on Tuesday, getting a chance to cast an informed eye on its many features and formations, before sitting down to a banquet in the attraction in the evening.

"It was quite exciting," said Brian Porter, chairman of the Brockville Railway Tunnel Committee, adding the experts were impressed with what they saw.

Friday marked the fifth anniversary of the official opening of the Brockville Railway Tunnel.

Known as Canada's first railway tunnel, the restored feature has proven a lasting tourist attraction over the past half-decade.

Tuesday's visitors were in Kingston for a three-day conference organized by the Queen's Geomechanics and Geohazards Group, a research group in the university's Department of Geological Sciences and Geological Engineering.

Dr. Mark Diederichs, a professor of geological sciences and geological engineering at Queen's who has brought students to the Brockville tunnel before, brought this group here.

Porter said the interest was palpable as the group's members made their way from the north end through the tunnel.

He added they were addressed by Prof. Diederichs, Profs. Jennifer Day, Jean Hutchinson from Queen's, and Erik Eberhardt, past president of the Tunnelling Association of Canada.

"They were people from all over Canada who work with rock formations, rock hazards, and that type of thing," added Porter.

"They had an appreciation for this early tunnelling project in Canada."

Brockberry Catering took care of the banquet inside the tunnel.

The group got a chance to appreciate historical features most tunnel-goers might miss, and their visit offers more exposure to Brockville's unique attraction, said Porter.

"We've got a treasure," he added.

"When they go back home, they're the kind of people who will talk about this experience. It's good for Brockville."

Dominion Timber & Minerals Railway Connected Kilmar Mine With Canadian Refractories Plant in Marelán

Kilmar Quebec - Throughout most of the past century, several different railways ran from the Ottawa and St. Lawrence Rivers up into the mountains of Western Quebec.

Trains from companies such as the Pontiac & Pacific Junction Railway, the Ottawa & Gatineau Valley Railway, and the Montfort & Gatineau Colonization Railway, all pushed into the rocky hills of the Laurentians to carry settlers north and to bring the resources of the Canadian Shield south to a growing nation. One of the lesser known of these now-abandoned lines was the Dominion Timber & Minerals Railway.

For 65 years it connected a strategically important mine in the hamlet of Kilmar, Quebec, with the Canadian Pacific North Shore railway at Marelán in what is now Brownsburg-Chatham, just across the river from Hawkesbury.

Magnesite is a mineral used in making the bricks that line high-temperature kilns, ovens, and blast furnaces.

In this way it is essential to the production of glass, cement, steel, and a variety of other industrial metals.

The mineral was discovered in the hills around Kilmar at the beginning of the last century, and by 1907 several small-scale mines had been set up to extract the ore.

Unfortunately, its low-grade and the remote location of the deposits made large-scale mining uneconomical.

That all changed with the start of World War I, as access to higher-quality magnesite from the Austro-Hungarian Empire was cut off and the local mines were forced into full production.

From very modest shipments of only 358 tons of ore in 1914, output rose dramatically to 16,285 tons in 1915, 53,796 in 1916, 58,340 in 1917, and 28,564 tons in 1918.

From the start of mining operations until 1916, the ore was carried down to the Canadian Pacific line using horse drawn carts travelling over treacherous mountain roads.

Owing to the obvious inefficiencies of this arrangement, a narrow-gauge railway was built that year to ease the shipments.

The line was approximately 20 kilometres long and ran from Kilmar southeastwards towards Wilson Lake.

From there it passed west of the lake and followed the Calumet River for a while, before heading towards Black Lake.

At this point the line turned almost directly southwards and crossed the Calumet and East Calumet Rivers over several short bridges, before turning eastwards again near McGillivray's Hill and cutting over to the tiny Kingham River.

It followed this stream for a kilometre or so, before jogging to the east and then turning sharply southwards again and making an almost straight line towards Marelán on the CP line.

From Marelán, which was originally known as Magnesite Station, or Magnesite Junction, the ore was shipped to processing facilities in either Hull or Longue-Pointe, Quebec.

In its early days, the railway was equipped with four 15 ton steam locomotives and a number of second hand ore cars.

On some days traffic was so busy that all four engines were in use at the same time, requiring the efforts of more than 30 crew.

During this time the railway, and the magnesite it carried, was critical to the manufacture of steel used for ships, tanks, and artillery pieces that helped to win the war.

With victory, however, demand for Kilmar's magnesite fell sharply and in 1919 the railway only shipped 9,940 tons of ore.

Eager to support this nascent industry, scientists at the National Research Council in Ottawa developed a new refractory material, named Magnafrit, in the early 1920s that made the most of the unique qualities of the Kilmar ore, and these efforts ultimately kept the mines, and the railroad, in business.

By 1929 almost 250,000 tons of magnesite had been pulled from the mines, justifying the expense of converting the railway to a heavier standard gauge.

With this conversion, the original rolling stock was disposed of and the steam locomotives were replaced with three 35-ton gasoline powered engines produced by the Plymouth Locomotive Works of Plymouth, Ohio.

Soon thereafter, in 1933, the two leading enterprises at Kilmar, the North American Magnesite Company, and the Scottish Canadian Magnesite Company merged to form Canadian Refractories Limited, at which point the railway assumed its more commonly known name, the Canadian Refractories Railway (CRR).

Production increased sharply again with the start of World War II, as North American industry surged to rearm Canada and the United Kingdom.

Speaking of these mines, in 1941 an Ottawa newspaper proudly proclaimed that "an obscure Canadian mineral deposit, once practically ignored, has become an element in the sinews of steel welded for the Empire's war effort."

In 1951 Canadian Refractories added a much more powerful 65-ton 550 HP General Electric diesel locomotive to its inventory, after which time the smaller Plymouths were relegated to track maintenance and yard work.

For the next 30 years the GE locomotive was employed to carry ore down the mountain and for pulling supplies back up from the river.

This level of industry continued through the 1960s and 1970s, with the Kilmar plant undergoing a major expansion in the early 1980s.

Sadly, the end of the railway came in the summer of 1981.

Faced with annual costs of almost \$250,000, the company realized it was more economical to ship the ore by truck and ceased rail operations.

The GE locomotive and one of the Plymouth engines were sold to the Ivaco Rolling Mills, a steel producer in L'Orignal, Ontario.

The other two Plymouths were scrapped.

Today the track bed of the CRR lies abandoned.

Unlike many former railways, it has not been converted into a formal trail, although parts of it are clearly used by ATVs and snowmobiles.

For the Sunday explorer segments of the route can still be easily found along the backroads south of Kilmar.

There are, for example, obvious sections running beside Scotch Road near Lake Wilson.

In other places the old line is difficult to find, and it is sometimes hard to believe that it has been only 41 years since the last train stopped running.

Still, one could do worse than spending a sunny spring day looking for this lost line and thinking about the strong people of the past who worked so hard along this now almost forgotten pathway.

Nobody Hurt as VIA Train Strikes Vehicle

Ottawa Ontario - Shortly after 19:00, Monday, Ottawa Fire Services said they responded to a collision between a train and a car near the intersection of Piperville and Boundary roads in the Carlsbad Springs area.

Around the same time, Laura Hughes said she was driving home when she saw the aftermath of the crash.

"We could see red lights flashing ahead and all of a sudden I see the train's headlight. But it's not moving, the train is stopped. And as we got closer, you can see there's this red car completely crushed from the back underneath the front of the train. Just a mangled car crushed under the front of a train. It was surreal and surprising. It's not something I would have expected to see," said Hughes.

According to VIA, train 38 was travelling from Ottawa to Montreal when it struck a vehicle parked on the tracks.

Fire officials reported the train dragged the vehicle east about 1,500 metres before stopping.

Train Had Just Left Station

Montreal resident Stephane Racette, whose wife was on the train, said the train had just left a station when the crash happened.

Racette said he was relieved to find out everyone was safe.

Neither the one person in the car, nor the 117 train passengers were injured, according to fire officials.

Firefighters also checked for leaks on the train, disconnected the vehicle battery, and pulled a hose line as a precautionary measure.

Ottawa police and VIA police remained on scene Monday evening.

26/10/2022

Ottawa Citizen

Alexandria

Carlsbad Springs

VIA TRAIN COLLIDES WITH CAR, NO INJURIES REPORTED

No injuries were reported Monday after a Montreal-bound VIA Rail passenger train collided with a vehicle, dragging the vehicle about 1500 metres.

Fire officials said neither the passenger in the vehicle nor the 117 passengers and staff aboard the train were injured.

Ottawa fire said the crash occurred shortly after 7:00 p.m. near the intersection of Piperville and Boundary roads in the Carlsbad Springs area.

VIA rail's train 38 was travelling from Ottawa to Montreal when it struck a vehicle parked on the tracks.

On Tuesday, Ottawa Police identified the vehicle as a Hyundai Elantra.

The vehicle was on the tracks due to "driver error."

Fire officials reported the train dragged the vehicle east about 1500 metres before stopping.

Firefighters arriving on the scene checked for leaks on the train, disconnected the vehicle battery, and pulled an unspecified hose line as a precaution.

The Federal Transportation Safety Board said Tuesday that, "after our initial assessment... it's been determined that this occurrence has little likelihood of identifying new safety lessons that will advance transportation safety." Postmedia News

24/12/2022

iHeartRadio

Other

Transport Minister Critiques VIA Situation as Christmas Day Trains Cancelled

Ottawa Ontario - Canada's transport minister Omar Alghabra took aim at VIA on Saturday after some passengers were left stranded overnight on stalled trains following the recent winter storm.

Riders have reported being stuck for as long as 18 hours on VIA trains.

The Crown corporation says several trains on the Quebec City-Windsor corridor have been immobilized or cancelled due to extreme weather conditions.

A travel alert posted on VIA's website Saturday says as many as 24 trains have been cancelled.

Alghabra's statement did not say exactly how the federal government is working to resolve the issue.

Storm turns Ottawa-Toronto Via Rail trip into a winter horror show

For passengers aboard a Toronto-bound Via Rail train Saturday, their journey was more like a Nightmare Before Christmas than the magic of Polar Express. Already buffeted and delayed by the winter storm after leaving Ottawa at 3:30 p.m. Friday, Train 55 was brought to a halt on the tracks west of Cobourg Friday night when a falling tree shattered the window of the locomotive. What should have been a five-hour trip turned into a 24-hour ordeal, with no food, little water and putrid bathrooms.

(Later Saturday, Via would announce it was cancelling all trains between Toronto and Ottawa, and between Toronto and Montreal for Christmas Day.)

Among the passengers on Train 55 Friday were several diabetics and a mother nursing a newborn, which prompted some passengers to call 911 for help, said passenger Flower Lunn, who was travelling to Toronto for Christmas with her husband and nine-year-old daughter.

"It got a little be desperate around 7 or 8 o'clock this morning," she said. "There was a trio of passengers who went up to confront staff. The passengers were very articulate saying this was 'not on' and something had to happen and that's when the staff told us they couldn't get in touch with anyone either."

Passengers asked about calling the police and paramedics for help.

"Staff said, 'We can't call 911, but for sure you guys can.'"

At one point, Lunn and another passenger jumped off the train themselves and trudged to a nearby house.

"He and I went through the snow and knocked on a neighbour's door to ask what the street address was and, if anyone needed to, could they come and take refuge in their house while they were waiting for paramedics," she said.

Meanwhile, she said passengers had "self-organized" and done a survey to see who among them were most vulnerable.

"Other passengers had taken a collection to get whatever snacks people would be willing to share," she said. "By the time police and firefighters arrived, things were pretty well under control."

"They were handing out water, but no one wanted to drink it because no one wanted to use the bathrooms!"

The journey had been going quite normally up until Napanee. At that point the train had to begin slowing to a stop at every level crossing, likely because of the blowing snow and power outages. Lunn said the train was buffeted by the wind like an airplane during turbulence and she could see whiteout conditions from her window.

Although the train maintained power on board, so had light and heat, the fallen tree had given it an uncomfortable list to the side, making sleep difficult, Lunn said.

Stephanie Kalinowski's parents were on board Train 55 and provided the Toronto woman updates on their ordeal via text. Her parents are both in their 80s and en route from their Ottawa home to spend Christmas with their daughter.

"We were watching their progress on Via's train tracker and it was all going well until around Napanee when we could see it was slowing down and then came to a stop. Kalinowski watched the train creep into Cobourg, then it stopped completely just west of Cobourg at around 11 p.m.

Her parents texted that the tree had fallen and shattered one of the locomotive's windows and Via had told them it wasn't safe to continue.

At 12:50 a.m., her parents texted to say another train was on its way to pull the stranded Train 51, but as it neared a CN freight train was stopped on the track, preventing the Via train from getting into position for a tow. Meanwhile, a crew had come to clear the fallen tree but had to stop when they reached their allowable limit of hours worked.

Kalinowski's parents texted that one woman had vomited on the floor and that the toilet in their car was plugged.

Finally, at around 11 a.m. Saturday, passengers were transferred onto a second rescue train that had been dispatched and resumed their journey.

By noon, the passengers were once again on their way to Toronto, more than 21 hours after leaving Ottawa.

Lunn said the Via crew seemed to be doing their best, but she's not happy with the experience. She and other passengers say they expect compensation from Via.

"They were apologetic, but it seems like the crew was trying to figure it out themselves on the fly," she said. "We want Via to step up. The same thing happened in May with the Derecho and trains were stopped so they should have some sort of protocol to follow, but it was pretty obvious there wasn't."

The new train made it to Oshawa where the passengers transferred again, this time to a GO Train for the final leg of their journey. They finally arrived at Toronto's Union Station at around 4 p.m. Christmas Eve, more than 24 hours after they left Ottawa.

The havoc wasn't confined to Train 55. Passengers on a eastbound train from Toronto reported waiting for some 14 hours on the track. While Via Rail's train tracker show trains were still on time, the company acknowledged in a tweet Saturday afternoon at that it had to cancel "various trains" along the Windsor-Quebec City corridor and apologized for the inconvenience.

In tweet Saturday, Minister of Transport Omar Alghabra said the situation with Via was "unacceptable."

"We are in contact with them to resolve all issues safely and efficiently," he said. "The unprecedented weather has caused delays in our transportation system and the safety of passengers and crew is our top priority."

VIA Trains Between Toronto and Montreal Back in Service Tuesday After Major Storm

Montreal Quebec - VIA Rail trains going from Toronto to Ottawa as well as Ottawa to Montreal will return to service Tuesday following the closure of a stretch of track on Christmas Day and Boxing Day as much of Canada was dealing with a major storm.

The rail company said trips between Toronto and Montreal would run on a modified schedule, which will be available on its website and communicated to impacted customers as soon as possible.

On Saturday evening, VIA cancelled all Sunday trips along that corridor.

All Monday trips were cancelled the following evening.

Both cancellations were attributed to a CN train derailment Saturday near Grafton, Ontario.

Around midday Saturday, VIA cancelled various Christmas Eve routes as well after passengers aboard trains that departed Friday night had become trapped for hours between stations.

VIA also reported Saturday that another nine trains had become immobilized en route, causing significant delays.

CBC News heard from passengers who were either stranded on trains or had finally arrived at their destinations after major slowdowns, in some cases nearly a full day after their scheduled arrival.

Passengers described cramped conditions, out-of-service bathrooms, and a lack of food and water.

Travellers stranded as more than a dozen Via trains between Windsor and Quebec City cancelled or immobilized
 Power outages and downed trees among reasons for cancellations, Via says
 Hundreds of passengers ended up trapped on Via Rail trains running between Windsor, Ont., and Quebec City through Friday night and into Saturday afternoon after several trips experienced significant delays.
 Seven trains in the Quebec City-Windsor corridor were cancelled and another nine were immobilized, Via Rail said in an email statement.
 Via Rail listed power outages, downed trees on the tracks and one tree that fell on a train as being among the reasons for the delays.
 Shortly before 5 p.m. on Saturday, Via Rail said all passengers on those immobilized trains had reached their final destinations.
 Due to a derailment involving a CN Rail train, Via said all of its trains running between Ottawa and Toronto, and Montreal and Toronto would be cancelled on both Christmas Eve and Christmas Day.
 CBC heard from passengers who were either stranded on trains or had finally arrived at their destinations after major slowdowns - in some cases nearly a full day after their scheduled arrival.
 Passengers described cramped conditions, out-of-service bathrooms and a lack of food and water.
 Some people, fed up with the conditions, gathered their luggage and disembarked to continue their travels on foot, according to accounts from witnesses at the scene.
 Kasper Barynin boarded Via Rail train 55 headed to Toronto at the Via station in Ottawa on Friday afternoon.
 Barynin told CBC on Saturday morning that shortly after passing through Cobourg, Ont., a tree fell on top of the train. Once Via staff realized the train had sustained damage, Barynin said, they pulled off to a sidetrack.
 As of Saturday morning, Barynin had been waiting onboard for more than 12 hours since the tree fell, turning what was supposed to be a four-hour journey into one lasting more than 20 hours.
 Barynin said passengers had difficulty sleeping in the fully lit cabin and described dirty, unhygienic bathroom conditions, as toilets stopped flushing shortly after midnight.
 Another passenger on the same train posted a series of tweets on Saturday morning that showed the arrival of first responders who helped transfer passengers to another rescue train.
 Bolaji Laflamme-Lagoke likewise travelled from Ottawa to Toronto but on a different train. He said his train car passed the same towns several times, moving back and forth along the track and extending his trip to 16 hours.
 "The official messages we got were very infrequent," he told CBC News. "Why are we going back? Why are there not crews on hand?"
 'It's very frustrating'
 Others never left the station.
 Richard Craig arrived at Toronto's Union Station for a scheduled 10:30 a.m. departure with the hope of taking the train to Ottawa's Fallowfield station and continuing by car to his family home in Renfrew, Ont.
 After learning his train had been cancelled, he waited for hours at the station, unable to get any information from staff.
 "It's very frustrating at the lack of information," he said. "Via Rail unfortunately just doesn't seem to care very much about the customers."
 Stephanie Green, a student at the University of Ottawa, had already arrived at the train station when she learned that her trip - originally scheduled for 5:30 a.m. on Saturday - had been cancelled.
 "My mom even said that she's willing to pay business class just because she wants me to be home for the holidays," Green said. "We're trying our best to make it work."
 Transport Minister Omar Alghabra called the Via Rail situation "unacceptable" in a Twitter post on Saturday afternoon.
 "We are in contact with them to resolve all issues safely and efficiently," he wrote.
 Via offers full refund
 but not everyone receives it
 Via said it apologizes for the situation and will provide passengers who were delayed overnight a full refund and a travel credit.
 "We deeply regret the stress this has caused our passengers," the company said in its Saturday afternoon statement.
 University of Ottawa student Hamda Omer, however, said earlier Saturday that she had only received a discount of 50 per cent off.
 Omer left from Ottawa at noon on Friday to visit family in London, Ont. She arrived in Toronto at 7 p.m., and after a four-hour delay, departed for the final leg of her trip.
 By the time the train arrived in London at 4 a.m. on Saturday, staff were overworked and supplies of food and water were getting low, Omer said.
 Via said it is aiming to get passengers to their destinations as "quickly and as safely as possible."

'Unacceptable': Transport minister critiques Via Rail situation as Christmas Day trains cancelled
 Canada's transport minister took aim at Via Rail on Saturday after some passengers were left stranded overnight on stalled trains following the recent winter storm.
 Riders have reported being stuck for as long as 18 hours on Via Rail trains. The Crown corporation says several trains on the Quebec City-Windsor corridor have been immobilized or cancelled "due to extreme weather conditions."
 A travel alert posted on Via Rail's website Saturday says as many as 24 trains have been cancelled.
 In another update Saturday evening, Via Rail said due to a CN train derailment earlier in the day, all trains between Toronto and Ottawa and between Toronto and Montreal that were scheduled to run on Christmas Day have been cancelled.
 "The worst hasn't even started yet" for some in the path of winter storm: Environment Canada
 "The current situation with @VIA_Rail is unacceptable and we are in contact with them to resolve all issues safely and efficiently," federal Transport Minister Omar Alghabra said in a statement on Twitter Saturday. "The unprecedented weather has caused delays in our transportation system and the safety of passengers and crew is our top priority."
 Alghabra's statement did not say exactly how the federal government is working to resolve the issue.
 The issues involving Via Rail come after a winter storm swept across Canada on Friday and continued into Saturday, bringing with it snow, heavy winds and extreme cold.
 Via Rail train 55 from Ottawa to Toronto in particular appeared to be impacted, stalling near Cobourg, Ont., due to a fallen tree, which blocked rail lines.
 The Crown corporation told CP24 that while it couldn't say when the trains would start moving, customers will be compensated.
 "We, however, deeply apologize for this situation and the impact for our passengers and we are continuing to work with our teams and the infrastructure owner to either get those trains moving as quickly as possible or bring them to their final destination with new equipment. Passengers who are travelling on these trains will be provided a full refund," the company said.

VIA Cancels Boxing Day Trains Between Montreal and Toronto

Montreal Quebec - All VIA Rail trains scheduled for trips between Toronto and Montreal on Monday have been cancelled.

The agency made the announcement on Twitter on Sunday evening, attributing the decision to "the ongoing impact of the CN train derailment which occurred on 24 Dec 2022."

The derailment led to cancellations between Toronto and Ottawa and Toronto and Montreal on Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, VIA Rail said.

Nearly 30 trains were affected.

But passenger rail service between the cities is set to resume on Tuesday after VIA Rail said it received confirmation of the reopening of the tracks from CN, which owns the rail line.

It's still not clear when full service would return, though, with VIA saying it would operate a modified schedule on the line.

Hundreds of customers reported they were stranded on trains for hours while travelling between Ontario and Quebec over the holidays because of the derailment and the winter storm that swept across both provinces.

"We thank our passengers for their understanding," VIA Rail said on Twitter.

Sense of normalcy returns for Ottawa train travellers after multi-day shutdown of Via Rail service to Toronto

It looked mostly like business as usual at Ottawa's Tremblay Road Via Rail station on Tuesday morning as travellers queued up to board Toronto-bound trains after three days of major service disruptions.

Some anxiety and frustration lingered like a holiday hangover among those affected by trip cancellations, alongside relief and gratitude to be on the move on the other side of last weekend's storm.

After a CN train derailed on Dec. 24, Via cancelled all trains between Ottawa and Toronto, as well as those on its Toronto-Montreal route, on Dec. 25 and 26.

It's been a rough holiday for Via Rail, to say nothing of what some of its passengers have experienced. Those aboard a Toronto-bound train, which was stopped on the tracks west of Cobourg Friday night by damage from a falling tree, went through a highly publicized travel nightmare that involved spending the night stranded on the train in far-from-ideal conditions, with reports of no access to food, little water and putrid bathrooms.

Via cancelled a number of its trains Saturday, citing "extreme weather conditions and resulting consequences," and then all of them on Sunday and Monday between Ottawa and Toronto, as well as those on its Toronto-Montreal route, after a CN train derailed.

On Tuesday, Lillie May, 20, was heading from Ottawa to Toronto, then on to Stratford to visit her partner, a day later than she'd intended.

She learned at 7 p.m. on Christmas Day that her train the following morning was cancelled and said the last-minute change of plans was stressful. She wished Via had provided more time with its cancellation announcement.

May is supposed to get a refund but said she quickly booked a new train for Tuesday in the interim, seeing that there were just a few seats left, and also changed her return date, spending \$280 more out-of-pocket.

Other travellers reported that making contact with Via did allow them to rebook at no cost, among them, Ottawa retirees Terry and Ilonca O'Donnell, also heading to Toronto on Tuesday.

With their original train departure booked and then cancelled for Boxing Day, and abandoned plans to visit family in the Kingston area, the O'Donnells said Via gave them new Ottawa-Toronto return tickets for the same rate as they had paid for their cancelled Kingston-Toronto round trip.

"It was great," said Terry. He also praised the Crown corporation's decision to combine various trains Tuesday along the Montreal-Toronto corridor, cutting down the number of staggered departures. It left him feeling that if something were to go wrong, it would at least simplify the response.

"Gives me peace of mind," he said.

Joseph Aranas, 31, was also able to get rebooked at no additional cost "otherwise, it would have been double the price, he noted" when he called Via directly following the cancellation of his Christmas Day train.

A newly arrived international student from the Philippines, studying IT at St. Lawrence College's Cornwall campus, Aranas spent two unplanned days in an Ottawa hotel in the interim. While it was a bit frustrating, he said, he used the time to check out sights including Parliament Hill for the first time.

In line to board his train to Toronto, Anthony Derrell, 70, said he was feeling a bit more relaxed than he had been previously. He travelled from Pembroke to Ottawa Monday - he found out halfway that his train had been cancelled - then drove back, just to return again on Tuesday.

"Why does it take three days to get a car off the rail?" he questioned. "I'm not an engineer, I don't understand, but that to me is not rocket science."

Contacted Tuesday, Via's media relations team referred the question about why it took so long to clear the tracks to CN, "as the infrastructure is owned by CN and the derailment involved a CN train."

All Ottawa-Toronto and Montreal-Toronto trains would run according to their regular schedule starting Wednesday, Via tweeted Tuesday afternoon, warning that "due to continued congestion on these routes, some delays are to be expected en route."