

Local Railway Items from Area Papers - 2024

06/03/2024 CBC News

Kingston (CN)

Cornwall

Engine fire forces Via Rail train to stop near Cornwall, Ont.

A Via Rail train travelling from Montreal to Toronto was forced to stop Wednesday afternoon near Cornwall, Ont., due to an engine fire, the company says.

In an email to CBC News, Via said none of the 195 passengers or crew members were injured in the incident.

"Firefighters were on the scene quickly and put the fire out," Via wrote in an email to CBC, adding that passengers were safely moved to cars at the back of the train.

The company said it has activated a plan to get passengers safely moving again and will ensure all passengers reach their destinations.

A passenger on another Via train told CBC their train had been halted for a couple hours before moving again before 5:30 p.m.

Via has experienced similar, yet lengthier stoppages because of mechanical or weather-related problems in recent years.

- Via Rail apologizes to passengers stranded for 6 hours near Montreal

- Travellers stranded as more than a dozen Via trains between Windsor and Quebec City cancelled or immobilized

"We offer our sincere apologies for any inconvenience to passengers caused by this incident," the company said.

13/03/2024 CBC News

Kingston (CN)

Prescott

Alcohol a Possible Factor in Prescott Train Crash

Prescott Ontario - The Transportation Safety Board (TSB) says alcohol was a possible factor in a serious collision between two trains in Prescott two and a half years ago, but a rail safety expert says the watchdog's report falls short by failing to include recommendations.

Three crew members were injured, one seriously, in the head-on crash on the morning of 2 Sep 2021, when a CN freight train pulling 202 double-stacked container cars crashed into another CN train consisting of two engines.

TSB Investigation Report R21H0114 released Wednesday found the rail traffic controller (RTC), who was stationed in Edmonton at the time of the collision, had an elevated blood alcohol level hours after the crash.

The RTC's blood-alcohol level likely ranged from 0.064 percent to 0.109 percent when he started his shift earlier that morning, and from 0.044 percent to 0.069 percent at the time of the collision, the TSB found.

According to the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration, that's enough alcohol to affect one's judgment and diminish their attention.

A report by the chief medical review officer "indicated that the RTC was either drinking alcohol at the beginning of his shift or had significant alcohol intake the early morning, or the night before work," the TSB said.

"This was an accident that resulted from a convergence of several factors, not just the consumption of alcohol.

But certainly that was a red flag for us, a warning, that more needs to be done to reduce the risk of railway employees conducting their activities, their work, while impaired," TSB chair Kathy Fox told CBC News.

3 Injured in Head-On Crash

Those factors also included the RTC's busy workload and his ability to override the safety system despite a warning.

The TSB found the RTC asked the utility train to clear the main track around 09:47 and wait on a spur line to allow the freight train to pass on its way to Toronto.

A little over 30 minutes later, the crew of the first train asked the RTC to allow it back onto the main track to continue toward Brockville.

That involved a crew member manually switching the track, the TSB said.

The RTC approved the request despite a warning showing on his monitor that another train was within a 23 kilometre limit of the switch.

Instead of pressing "abort" on the screen, he pressed "continue," allowing the track to be switched, the TSB said.

As the westbound freight train approached the switch, the crew realized the error and attempted to brake.

However, the train was forced onto the spur line where it collided head-on with the waiting train at around 60 kPh.

One crew member on the utility train suffered serious injuries and had to be hospitalized, while two others on the same train suffered minor injuries.

No one on the freight train was hurt.

"It was significant because it was a head-on collision between two trains," said Fox, who noted one of the trains involved consisted only of two locomotives

"But it could have been a train carrying cars with dangerous goods. It could have been a passenger train," she said.

Four engines, two on each train, were heavily damaged and derailed in the collision, and 14 freight cars also derailed.

The crash caused significant damage to a total of about 300 metres of both the main track and the spur line, the TSB said.

"That's a major collision, that shouldn't happen," said Ian Naish, a rail safety consultant and former director of rail investigations for the TSB.

"I'm surprised nobody died."

CN Expert Question Lack of Recommendations

Naish said he had two big takeaways from the report that show "significant safety deficiencies."

The first was the presence of a manual switch, when he believes electronic switch locks could have prevented the collision because they would have identified that there was already a train on the tracks.

The second issue, said Naish, was that the TSB didn't make any recommendations on the switch system or impairment rules for rail employees.

"It shouldn't be that big a deal to make a recommendation," Naish said, adding that he would have done so.

"There's nothing wrong recommending Transport Canada to take a look."

Fox, the TSB's chair, said while the board stopped short of making recommendations in this case, it did express concern that at the time of the collision there was no policy under the Railway Safety Act prohibiting employees from consuming alcohol within a certain period before their shift.

She said the federal transport minister can change rules prohibiting alcohol or drugs without having to amend the act.

Transport Canada said it's working on a response after CBC requested an interview.

The TSB also pointed out that CN has zero tolerance for impairment, but "individuals are expected to self-assess and determine if the effects of alcohol have sufficiently diminished to be fit for duty."

In contrast, it found aviation regulations prohibit the operation of aircraft within 12 hours of consuming alcohol, and prohibit air traffic controllers from drinking within eight hours of their shift.

In a statement to CBC, CN said it's disappointed the TSB didn't issue any recommendations concerning drug and alcohol consumption.

"CN remains firm in its belief that random testing employees in safety-critical positions is the only way to deter impairment at work," it said.

Fox said the TSB has investigated five incidents in the last 29 years in which alcohol or drugs were considered a factor, but weren't necessarily the cause.

Author unknown.

Smiths Falls train station kept busy with travellers

The Smiths Falls passenger station at Union Street on the Toronto to Ottawa mainline, can be busy at times with eleven trains daily stopping here. Smiths Falls has six trains daily from Toronto with the first arriving at 10:44 a.m. and the last at 10:27 p.m. These trains are Ottawa-bound and can be boarded here just before the end of their run.

There are five going to Toronto starting at 6:22 a.m. with the last departure at 6:35 p.m. The missing sixth train is a Toronto-bound express that skips Smiths Falls - a recent schedule change. For both directions the trip takes about four hours.

Depending upon the booking, Montreal can be reached with stops by way of Ottawa, or Brockville, or Kingston. This trip takes about 3.5 hours depending on the layover at the connecting stations.

24/04/2024 *Brockville Recorder**Brockville and Ottawa**Brockville Tunnel*

City to Spend Another \$300,000 for Tunnel Fix

Brockville Ontario - In a narrow vote, city council on Tuesday decided to spend an extra \$300,000 to replace failed equipment in the Brockville Railway tunnel, judging it necessary to take a financial hit in order to maintain a key attraction for the tourism season.

With eight of council's nine members present, council voted 5-3 in favour of a motion to authorize the purchase of additional tunnel lighting components, at a cost of \$300,229, to be covered by reserves.

The decision follows a recent call for tenders in which the city's only tunnel contractor to date, Ford Electric, was narrowly outbid by another company.

Last week, director of operations Phil Wood briefed council on the extent of the faster-than-expected equipment failure in the railway tunnel. Water infiltration, caused by mineral deposits on the lenses of the tunnel lights, has led to their rapid failure, while water infiltration into the pedestals along the tunnel has also taken out many of the enablers that drive the facility's light show.

While this year's capital budget includes \$120,000 to replace failed lighting system components in the tunnel, this was based on an assessment by the contractor at the end of last year's tourism season, staff reported.

But city officials then discovered things had gotten worse in the tunnel over the winter.

The latest staff report notes that the approved \$120,000 was for the replacement of 54 failed lighting strips and four failed lighting enablers.

That initial budget, based on last fall's assessment, led to a recent call for tenders in which nine companies bid, the report adds.

The only two bids that came in under the \$120,000 budget were from Ford Electric (\$118,282) and the eventual winner, ACF Electric (\$118,091). Since then, the additional equipment required has been tallied up at 143 color kinetic lighting fixtures, 10 more lighting enablers, auxiliary cables, and components, the staff report notes.

Staff contacted ACF Electric to discuss expanding the scope of the contract to include all the newly-required components, and the result is the \$300,000 figure, with an estimated delivery time of nine to 10 weeks.

Wood told council Tuesday this would allow the tunnel to be restored to its previous state in time for early July.

Mayor Matt Wren said expanding the existing contract is permissible under the city's procurement rules, and doing it this way, rather than issuing a fresh call for tenders, could mean the difference between getting the lights on Canada Day or Labour Day.

Another alternative was to continue with the current situation, in which a smaller stretch of lights would remain at white only (no colour light show) with some gaps, while staff further investigated a more permanent fix.

While some councillors favoured this, Coun. Katherine Hobbs, who was once Brockville's tourism director, argued a "white light season" would not only not be as good as the complete light show, but would damage the tunnel's long-term ability to draw tourists.

If the city advertises an exciting light show inside the tunnel and tourists do not see that, "that kind of a reputation is far worse for us than the \$300,000 is, because that will always be with us. Getting word-of-mouth out there that something's bad is permanent," said Hobbs.

Coun. Jane Fullarton agreed.

"It's a terrible expense for us to have to go to, but I don't think we should lose the momentum for the city that the tunnel has created," said Fullarton.

Coun. Jeff Earle balked at the cost of the new contract, in combination with the existing \$120,000 in spending.

"At this point, between the original tender and the modified or upgraded version, we're looking at almost a half-million dollars here. It's the same equipment which could suffer the same fate in the same time period," said Earle.

Earle questioned why no one did any "homework" over the winter when there was time to look for more waterproof equipment.

Earle also warned that backing this expanded contract comes with no guarantee the lights will be delivered on time, raising the prospect that the purchase will be in vain.

"I can't be fiscally responsible and hold my hand up for this," he added.

Coun. Louise Severson also opposed the purchase, and introduced a motion to delay the \$300,000 deal until 14 May 2024, giving staff more time to report on a more permanent fix.

With Coun. Nathalie Lavergne not at the meeting, that motion to defer fell to a 4-4 tie, with Earle, Severson, Mike Kalivas, and Cameron Wales supporting it, while the mayor, Hobbs, Fullarton and Coun. Phil Deery voted against the delay.

The subsequent vote on the initial motion did not, however, produce the same result in reverse.

While Deery, Fullarton, Hobbs and the mayor voted yes, Wales also joined their ranks, leaving Earle, Kalivas, and Severson to vote against.

The motion also directs staff "to bring reports to the general committee detailing remedial, short turn-around solutions to improve the longevity problems of lighting system equipment and further comprehensive long-term solutions intended to resolve chronic lighting system problems."

Ronald Zajac.

via Service Delayed for Hours Due to Suspicious Package Investigation

Kingston Ontario - via service resumed in the Kingston area late Saturday afternoon, after a suspicious package investigation halted train service for up to five hours over the Victoria Day long weekend.

Police said just after noon Saturday that there was an ongoing investigation in the area of John Counter Boulevard and Montreal Street, and asked the public to avoid the area.

A police spokesperson told CTV News Ottawa the investigation was focusing on a suspicious package near the railway tracks.

At 16:30 police said the investigation had wrapped up and roads reopened in the area.

"Police have verified there is no explosive device in the area, and it is now safe for pedestrians and vehicular traffic," Const. Cameron Mack said in a statement.

via said train service was disrupted for between one and five hours due to a police operation "out of its control" that shut down the tracks in both directions.

"The incident does not involve a via train, however, it has impacted our operations," via said in a statement.

"All via trains travelling through the area have been stopped while the police continue their investigation. via's operations team is managing the situation and passengers will be kept informed by service managers on board as the situation evolves."

via says trains received the go-ahead to start moving shortly after the investigation ended.

"Police completed their investigation shortly before 7:00 and as soon as the infrastructure owner completed its signal checks, via trains were on the move again by 17:30. Trains incurred delays of between one and five hours. via regrets the inconvenience to passengers caused by this unfortunate situation" via said.

Nine trains were stopped at various locations in the Kingston area.

via says all other trains were held at the destination until the track cleared.

The via moving map shows several trains travelling to Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal had stopped in the Belleville, Kingston and Gananoque area Saturday afternoon.

The disruptions in the Kingston area caused delays across the via schedule in eastern Ontario on Saturday.

18/05/2024 CBC News

Kingston (CN)

Kingston

Via Rail trains moving again after Kingston police investigation wraps up

Involved reports of an explosive device, but none was found

Via Rail trains have begun moving again after being halted in both directions Saturday afternoon due to a police investigation in Kingston, Ont. Kingston Police said in a media release at around 12:40 p.m. that they had closed a stretch of Montreal Street in the city's northeast between John Counter Boulevard and Briceland Street.

Police later said they were investigating reports of a possible explosive device.

Just before 4:30 p.m., police said they'd confirmed there was no such device in the area. Montreal Street has reopened, they said.

'Out of Via Rail's control'

In a statement to CBC shortly before 3 p.m., a Via Rail spokesperson said the investigation meant their tracks had been shut down in both directions.

The investigation was "out of Via Rail's control" and did not involve one of their trains, the statement said.

In all, nine trains ended up being halted in total in the Kingston area due to the investigation, Via Rail said in a second statement later Saturday afternoon.

The trains were delayed from one to five hours, the company said. After the investigation wrapped up and signal checks on the line were completed, they were moving again by 5:30 p.m.

"Via Rail regrets the inconvenience to passengers caused by this unfortunate situation," they said in their second statement.

20/05/2024 Trains

Alexandria

via to Retire Renaissance Equipment from Corridor Operations

Montreal Quebec - via will retire its British-built Renaissance equipment from Quebec City-Windsor corridor service on Sunday, 26 May 2024, the passenger operator has confirmed.

The last train to use the Renaissance cars will be Ottawa-bound train 37 departing Quebec City at 12:32.

When the train arrives in Montreal at 15:54 the trainset will be swapped out for Siemens Venture equipment, which will depart Montreal at 16:30 and arrive in Ottawa at 18:37.

VIA currently has received 15 of its Venture trainsets, with eight in service, all between Quebec City and Toronto.

The Canadian Crown corporation ordered 32 trainsets under a \$989 million contract announced in 2018.

While some Venture trainsets have operated west of Toronto for testing training purposes, none have yet run in revenue service.

The Renaissance fleet of 139 cars was acquired by via after the cancellation of a planned overnight service between the UK and Europe via the Channel Tunnel.

The equipment remains in use on the Montreal-Halifax, Nova Scotia, Ocean.

01/06/2024 CTV News

Kingston (CN)

Brockville

Brockville Police says [sic] a pedestrian has died following a collision with a train heading to Toronto.

It happened Saturday just West of Perth Street.

Police say they received a call reporting a collision involving a train and a pedestrian shortly after 11 a.m. When they arrived on scene, they confirmed the incident.

"Unfortunately, this incident resulted in a fatality," Brockville Police said in a news release on Saturday.

"We are currently in the initial stages of the investigation and no further information can be released at this time."

A passenger on the train told CTV News Ottawa she was on train 63 heading to Toronto from Brockville, Ont. with her wife.

The train was stopped for three hours when the incident happened, she said.

The passenger noted that police officers were still on scene when the train left.

CTV News Ottawa has reached out to Via Rail Canada for comments.

02/06/2024 Brockville Recorder

Kingston (CN)

Brockville

A 37-year-old man was struck and killed by a train near Perth Street in Brockville Saturday morning, city police have confirmed.

Police remained sparing on details while the investigation continued, but said that, shortly after 11 a.m., they responded to a collision involving a train and a pedestrian, just West of Perth Street.

"Unfortunately, this incident resulted in a fatality," police added.

On Sunday morning, police confirmed the victim was "a 37-year-old, local male.

"Circumstances around the event are still under investigation, however, foul play has been ruled out," police added.

Earlier, police said they would release no further details at this early stage of the investigation.