

# Via Rail remains committed to the Maritimes

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In the recent letter to the editor entitled, "VIA Rail appears to be bent on failure," it was suggested that the corporation would voluntarily increase the operational costs of its Ocean service, between Montréal and Halifax, in order to eventually justify cutting it. This allegation is both false and unfounded.

The Ocean offers one of the world's oldest and best rail experiences, and it will be celebrating its 110th anniversary on July 3rd, 2014. We are very proud at VIA Rail to offer this service to Canadians. The Ocean is an unforgettable experience and is one of the best ways to travel to Eastern Canada for many reasons, including its locally-sourced menu serving Canadian products. It is also the safest and most trustworthy means of transport in the country. We are always hoping that more Canadians will choose to take this train. In fact, over the holidays, VIA Rail is bringing back the Ocean's Sleeper Plus class service.

As part of our campaign to attract more passengers and improve service in the area, we added free Wi-Fi to our Ocean trains in June of this year. The Ocean train was also improved last year

with the addition of a dome car, which offers a glorious 360 degree view of the Québec and Maritime landscapes. Since 2007, VIA Rail has invested more than \$25 million in overhauling the Ocean's locomotives and rolling stock, and renovating the stations and infrastructure in the region.

Furthermore, VIA Rail continues to run promotional campaigns for the Ocean which include billboard ads in Québec and the Maritimes and advertisement space on selected websites. VIA Rail representatives meet with

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universities and Canadian and International tour operators to develop partnerships and packages that include the use of VIA Rail's Ocean service. Finally, we send ads through

targeted mailing lists and search engines websites.

Service adjustments made to the Ocean in 2012 were necessitated by the continued decline in ridership from 255,000 to 134,000 yearly passengers, over the past 15 years. All our efforts are aimed at making VIA Rail's

services financially and commercially viable.

Ultimately, our service offering is subject to market demand. Since the frequency adjustments, the performance of the Ocean service has improved. During the third

quarter of 2013, the decrease of ridership was not reflective of the reduction of frequencies. While

there were 50 per cent fewer trains over the time period, VIA Rail only saw a decrease of 39 per cent of passengers and a decrease of 33 per cent

in revenues compared to 2012. Passenger-miles decreased by only 34 per cent, compared to the same period in 2012.

These results demonstrate that we are now offering the frequency that the market can bear and we significantly improved our return on investment while delivering better value to taxpayers.

The number of economy class coaches and sleeper cars used in our train sets are also subject to market demand. Currently, during the peak season, the Ocean train consists of 12 coach and

sleeper cars.

In the off-peak season, there are a total of 7 coach and sleeper cars per voyage. This combination has proven to be the most efficient use of resources on this route.

Last year, VIA Rail developed a national intermodality strategy which involves working with regional carriers to harmonize schedules, facilitate multi-carrier ticketing and connect to markets in the Maritimes currently not directly serviced by train.

Since last year, a new partnership between Maritime Bus and VIA Rail has greatly improved service and added options for Maritime travellers.

The more we integrate transportation options, the easier it is for travellers to use our services, and the better it is for all carriers. These partnerships increase the mobility of Canadians and help them make the most efficient use of the transport system.

Choosing VIA Rail means getting to your destination safely and comfortably.

Our continued goal is to increase ridership and to have more Canadians choose to travel by train across the country.

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