

EDITORIAL

Off the rails?

It is in the best interest of all New Brunswickers that people like Greg Gormick and organizations like Transport Action Atlantic (TAA) succeed. Mr. Gormick, an experienced rail services consultant and TAA executives such as Vice President Ted Bartlett want regular rail passenger service restored to this entire province; a noble ambition.

However despite Mr. Gormick's extensive report some pressing questions remain. Via Rail might be a Crown corporation but it has a mandate to turn a profit and it has chosen, in stages, to look elsewhere other than the Maritime provinces. Naturally we don't like it and we welcome Mr. Gormick's evidence questioning the wisdom of the move, but the fact is Via Rail appears unconvinced.

That means those powers that would 'save the railway' must either come entirely from the private sector, entirely from government or from the private sector with considerable government subsidy. We certainly support the idea of a subsidized railway and invite our elected leaders to convince Ottawa and Fredericton of the wisdom of this, bearing in mind that as far as New Brunswick's share is concerned, we can barely afford to keep the roads repaired, never mind a railway.

If it is to be a subsidized service operated by a private company, we suspect the size of the subsidy would have a lot to do with whether or not it could really be a fully 'trans-New Brunswick' service. A more viable option would likely be a link for the three southern cities. The northern population is shrinking and that is driven by a lack of jobs, not public transportation.

As for the idea of an entirely government-operated service, aside from the massive outlay of public funds that might be required to take over the infrastructure, government has proven time and again that its ventures into the private sector produce disastrous results.