
Investment Required to Support Amtrak Service Improvements in B.C.

1 message

FR Jelfs <j0458@telus.net>
To: premier@gov.bc.ca
Cc: Minister.MOTI@gov.bc.ca

23 July 2024 at 10:05

The Honourable David Eby,
Premier

Dear Premier Eby,

The Vancouver Sun (July 23, 2024, Page A4, "U.S. ambassador ...") reported on your Whistler meeting with U.S. Ambassador David Cohen. One of the topics discussed was the possibility of a partnership with Amtrak to improve passenger rail service to Vancouver during the 2026 FIFA World Cup. This is an idea worth exploring and we would support such a partnership.

However, Amtrak's Service Development Plan for its service to Vancouver notes that several major capital improvements are needed in Canada to support service expansion. The published SDP report, including appendices, is at: [2024 Amtrak Cascades Preliminary Service Development Plan Alternatives Development and Recommendations Report \(wa.gov\)](#).

Transport Action B. C. has written to the federal Transport Minister requesting that the federal government take action on these capital improvements as they:

- Improve public safety around the BNSF rail line through White Rock and Crescent Beach.
- Allow Amtrak to improve passenger rail transportation between Vancouver and Seattle.
- Strengthen our cross-border relationship with U.S. partners.

The text of our letter to Transport Minister Pablo Rodriguez follows my signature.

Thank you for your time. Feel free to reach out to us if you have any questions or if we can be of assistance.

CC: The Honourable Rob Fleming, Minister of Transportation and Infrastructure

Rick Jelfs,
Secretary – Transport Action British Columbia
E-mail: j0458@telus.net
Telephone: 604-868-9946
[Transport Action British Columbia – Towards a Province-Wide Sustainable and Equitable Transportation System](#)

=====

The Honourable Pablo Rodriguez P.C., M.P.,
Minister of Transport,
House of Commons,
Ottawa, On
K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Rodriguez,

We are writing to ask for your assistance and follow-through on three matters concerning Amtrak Cascades passenger train service to Vancouver, B.C. The second also impacts cross-border and Deltaport rail freight and, critically, public safety.

1. Vancouver and Seattle are hosting the FIFA World Cup games in 2026. To facilitate expected high demand Amtrak is reportedly seeking to improve its platform at Pacific Central Station and there are also, to our understanding, needed track upgrades.

Will Transport Canada reach out to Amtrak and work with all participants (BNSF, CN, Washington State Department of Transportation [WSDOT]) to help fairly finance and facilitate these improvements?

2. WSDOT has invited Transport Action Canada for our comments on its Preliminary Service Development Plan (SDP) for Amtrak Cascades service.

The published SDP report, including appendices, is at: [2024 Amtrak Cascades Preliminary Service Development Plan Alternatives Development and Recommendations Report \(wa.gov\)](#)

We draw your attention to points in the SDP that warrant action from Transport Canada, in partnership with the British Columbia Ministry of Transportation and Infrastructure (MOTI), the railways, and other stakeholders to address critical rail infrastructure needs and issues in Canada.

The report clearly puts the onus on Canada to act:

--From page 7 (Executive Summary): Seattle-Bellingham Rail Service: More train trips to Vancouver, BC are not viable **without support from Canadian partners** [TABC emphasis]. However, additional trains to Bellingham, with connecting buses across the border could capture most of the ridership between Seattle and Vancouver, BC and should be analyzed further **if infrastructure improvements in Canada become a challenge** [TABC emphasis].

--From page 31: "Canadian National Railway participated in the Preliminary SDP process but elected not to provide the detailed data needed for the capacity study at this time. **Infrastructure needs in Canada between the Fraser River bridge and Pacific Central Station in Vancouver will need to be addressed** [TABC emphasis] in the CID [Corridor ID] Program SDP work. Because of this, the list of infrastructure needs north of Seattle is considered incomplete."

Our reading of the plan alternatives makes clear that additional all-rail services between Seattle and Vancouver (see Alternative E) would be more successful than rail to Bellingham-bus to Vancouver (Alternatives C, D). This was borne out by the reported low demand when such a bus link was tried prior to extending the second train to Vancouver for the 2010 Winter Olympics.

We raised these issues with WSDOT, and are raising them with you:

--There is an urgent need to address the safety, environmental, and operational issues around the Semiahmoo Peninsula for both Amtrak Cascades and BNSF freight rail.

Long coal trains have blocked access to Crescent Beach, particularly dangerous if first responders need immediate access to the community.

Climate-change exacerbated heavy rains threaten more destructive landslides from the developed, overhanging bluffs, and intense storms can damage the railbed. The danger to train crews, residents, and the environment from a landslide/damaged railbed caused derailment are major. A fierce storm once removed a section of the White Rock Pier, so the threat is real.

There are pedestrian intrusions on the tracks that place everyone in danger. Trains must operate at slow speeds and crews must be extra-vigilant.

--The need to ensure that the planned replacement for the New Westminster Rail Bridge (NWRB) has both the capacity and the ability to handle Amtrak Cascades and VIA Rail passenger trains and potentially commuter rail trains at competitive speeds. We note that the speeds on the proposed replacement spans are very low - 25mph for the new bridge options as outlined in the NWRB study for the Canada Infrastructure Bank performed by HDR - compared to that on major highway crossings.

--The need to resolve Amtrak Cascades service delays at the Colebrook interlocking caused by Deltaport freight train traffic. These delays – which also impact rail freight – will only increase with Deltaport expansion.

Could Transport Canada, with B.C. MOTI, and its partners, and with WSDOT participation undertake a detailed engineering study that examines the option of hardening the existing rail corridor (e.g., with grade crossing removals, bluff tunnelling, fencing, more shoreline protection) OR building a rail bypass in the Highway 99 corridor – that would be future proofed for high-speed rail (HSR) - which would allow the conversion of the existing right of way to a trail.

Could, as a pre-build, a separate detailed engineering study with a view to short/medium-range construction be conducted for a Colebrook fly under/over?

Finally, there have been border station proposals to capture the growing travel market between Metro Vancouver and the Seattle area with the region's population growth. Could such a station be considered – on either side of the border – in both the hardening and bypass options?

3. There is a question about the long-term future of Pacific Central Station considering False Creek redevelopment. Removal/relocation of the rail infrastructure there could free up much needed, valuable land for housing, supported by commercial development, to meet your Government's and the Province's goals. As noted earlier, WSDOT in the SDP acknowledged the need to examine Pacific Central Station.

At the same time, there are proposals to expand the better-located Waterfront Station that would permit direct walking access to downtown Vancouver, to local and regional transportation services, and, critically, to the cruise ships.

Could Transport Canada, with B.C. MOTI and its partners examine relocating Pacific Central passenger rail operations to the Waterfront Station; passenger rail maintenance facilities to secure Vancouver Fraser Port Authority lands, noting shared access with freight rail; and studying value-capture means from future development on the formerly railway lands to finance it?

Thank you for your time and consideration.

CC: Terry Johnson, President, Transport Action Canada

Yours sincerely,

Rick Jelfs,

Secretary - Transport Action British Columbia

E-mail: j0458@telus.net

Telephone: 604-868-9946

[Transport Action British Columbia – Towards a Province-Wide Sustainable and Equitable Transportation System](#)

