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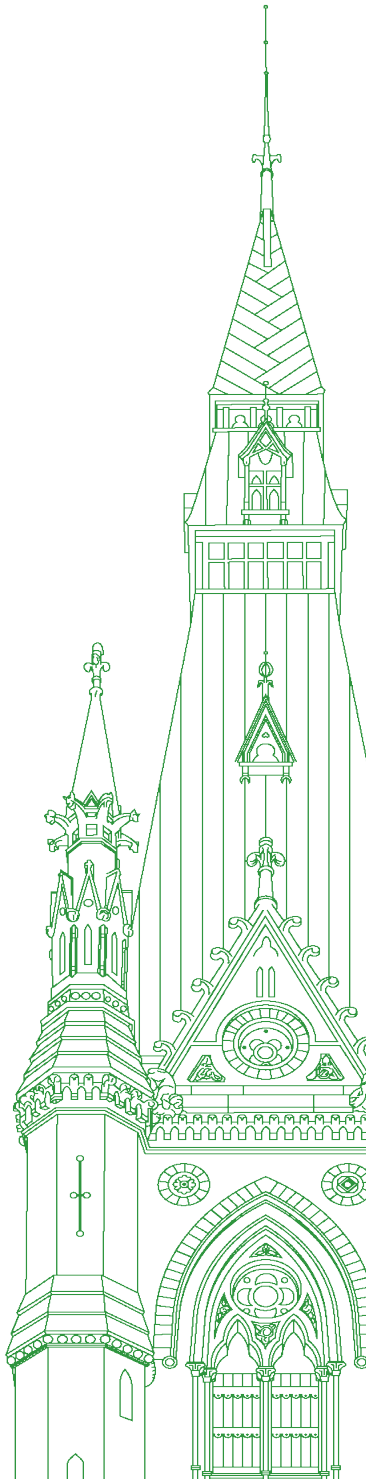

Chair: Mr. Peter Schiefke

Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities

Tuesday, February 13, 2024

● (1135)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.)): This meeting is called to order.

Welcome to meeting number 100 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) and the motion adopted by the committee on Tuesday, March 7, 2023, the committee is meeting to study high frequency rail projects.

Today's meeting is taking place in hybrid format, pursuant to the Standing Orders of the House of Commons. The members may attend in person in the room or remotely using the Zoom application.

[*English*]

Colleagues, although this room is equipped with a very powerful audio system, feedback events can occur. These can be extremely harmful to interpreters and can cause serious injuries. The most common cause of sound feedback is an earpiece worn too close to a microphone. We are therefore asking all participants to exercise a high degree of caution when handling the earpieces, especially when your microphone or your neighbour's microphone is turned on.

In order to prevent incidents and safeguard the hearing health of our interpreters, I invite participants to ensure that they speak into the microphone into which their headset is plugged and to avoid manipulating the earbuds by placing them on the table away from the microphone when they are not in use.

Members of the committee, appearing before us today as witness for the first part, from 11 to noon, we have Mr. Friedemann Brockmeyer from Civity Management Consultants joining us from Germany.

Wie geht es dir? Welcome, and thank you for joining us today.

[*Translation*]

We also welcome by videoconference Mr. Steeve Lavoie, president and CEO of the Chambre de commerce et d'industrie de Québec, or CCIQ, which is Quebec City's chamber of commerce and industry.

Welcome, Mr. Lavoie. We will begin with opening remarks. You have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Steeve Lavoie (President and Chief Executive Officer, Chambre de commerce et d'industrie de Québec): Hello and thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the committee for inviting me here today.

To begin, let me say a bit about the organization I represent. The CCIQ has 4,200 members. Our role is to raise awareness, mobilize and take action to promote economic development for our members and the community. The CCIQ is the largest group of business people in Eastern Quebec, which I am representing today.

Committee members, I am here to say that the people of Quebec City—a million people in the region—have been waiting a long time for a proper rail link with the metropolis of Quebec, the federal capital, and the metropolis of Ontario. We want high-speed, high-frequency and reliable service. This is especially true for business people.

Such a link is vital to the economic development of the greater region of Quebec's national capital, because Quebec City, our national capital, is isolated from other metropolitan areas. In an era of interconnection, this is a significant problem for its economy and for public mobility.

Quebec City is the national capital and home to the National Assembly, Laval University and various other postsecondary institutions, a world-class technology park, manufacturing, insurance and other sectors that are thriving, not to mention our expertise in video game development and a growing tourism sector.

So the Quebec City region has a lot of potential and talented business people. To fully realize that potential, however, Quebec City cannot be an island unto itself. People in business and the public in general need proper transportation to other centres. We need 21st century infrastructure that is strong, reliable and supports business operations.

Right now, there are 33 trains leaving Quebec City every week, with about seven of those leaving daily for Montreal, but no evening departures. The service is limited. Moreover, although the departure time is known, the arrival time is uncertain, in part because there are no dedicated lines. This uncertainly makes it extremely difficult to plan business meetings and limits our ability to conduct business.

The regular delays make it difficult if not impossible to rely on the train as a good way to travel between Quebec City and Montreal, so people choose to drive. That has to change. The people of Quebec City need reliable and efficient service. They need high-speed rail. The line between Quebec City and Montreal clearly needs to be high-speed.

While we are all in favour of high-frequency rail, we also have to consider speed. Right now, the trip from the Quebec City station to Montreal central station takes three hours and ten minutes on average, and that is when Via Rail is not behind schedule. That travel time needs to be cut down significantly. That is the only way to change the habits of people who currently travel by car because they claim it is more convenient for them.

Studies, including one conducted by France's national rail company, conclude that the smallest metropolitan regions benefit more from high-speed rail that links them to larger cities and catchment areas. So Quebec City would derive greater benefits for its economy.

Improving the rail service will of course bring consumers together, including tourists, and will make it easier to attract and retain workers in all sectors of the economy. With full employment in the Quebec City region, improving access will make job opportunities more attractive.

This project will be a real boost for recruiting the best talent in all sectors, including universities and the science and cultural sectors. High-speed and high-frequency rail would also be a strong asset when it comes to attracting and retaining company headquarters in Quebec City, which in turn would have major economic spinoffs. If rail service helps attract people here, it will also open the door to metropolitan areas and the world of business.

When it comes to transportation, we know that demand is influenced by supply. The better the availability, the more people will use it. This project must come to fruition. We have to be rigorous as well as ambitious. A lack of vision and action would have major repercussions for decades to come. Action is needed.

● (1140)

The time has come to improve the link between Quebec City, Montreal and Toronto with high-speed, high-frequency and reliable rail service.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lavoie.

[*English*]

Next, we have Mr. Brockmeyer.

Mr. Brockmeyer, you have five minutes for your opening remarks.

Mr. Friedemann Brockmeyer (Director, Civity Management Consultants GmbH & Co. KG): Thank you very much for inviting me, members of the transport committee of the Canadian Parliament. It's a pleasure.

Let me introduce myself first. My name is Friedemann Brockmeyer. I am a director of Civity Management Consultants. Civity is a management boutique from Berlin, Germany, that is entirely focused on the mobility and infrastructure sector. We are working with all clients in the rail and public transport ecosystem in Europe. That means infrastructure management, ministries, railway undertakings, industrial players and all the important actors.

I presently have a very long track record of more than a decade in analyzing high-speed projects and newbuild projects, especially regarding capex and total cost of ownership. We've worked for several infrastructure managers in Europe: smaller ones like Bane NOR in Norway, but also larger ones like Network Rail, Deutsche Bahn and High Speed Two.

We have a lot of experience from several projects in Europe. I cannot share any experience from Asia. I think it's always worth looking into, but today I can share with you some highlights, findings and lessons learned from the European perspective on this.

First of all, I think it's a great chance for Canada to think about rail, because you have a very large country but are still very fortunate that the vast share of your population is in a very small corridor from Quebec to Windsor. It's always good to have a lot of people in the same area if you want to connect them by rail. In the end, we have to compare all the solutions by rail with other modes of transport, and you always have to be very sure that it's the best solution for transport and connecting these urban centres.

What I can share from the experience from Europe is that there are, let's say, two different kinds of high-speed rail systems. One is more the French style, let's say, so it's a little like wires connecting Paris to the rest of the country. There are long stretches and very high speeds. You can find the same in Spain, for example, connecting Madrid, the capital, to other cities, with longer distances.

Then we have other systems. If you're looking to Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands, Switzerland and Austria, we have more intercity services, metro-like services, and that means where we have densely populated areas and where we are connecting major urban population centres directly. There's a linear line layout. That means that if you have all the cities.... Let's say it's a string of pearls. For example, if you're looking into the whole corridor, it's coming down from Amsterdam like a wire to Brussels, Cologne, Frankfurt, Stuttgart, Munich and Vienna. This is a very long line, where we'll have maybe in the future one service, for example. It's a different approach.

The first lesson I would like to share with you from what I have learned so far from the Canadian plans is that it would be to your advantage to think about a linear line layout connecting Toronto via Ottawa to Montreal and Quebec. Don't have those direct connections: Have a linear line layout so that all the cities are on the same string of pearls. Then have very high frequency—30 or 60 minutes.

The second point is really to think about speed. As far as I know, you're calling this project high frequency rail because you're not planning a very high speed, or a high speed, let's say, of up to 200 kilometres per hour. High speed is a very useful instrument if the topography is easy.

As far as I know—and I've been looking at your maps—you have a very flat terrain in the corridor. If you have a flat terrain, that means you don't have to build a lot of viaducts and tunnels. If you have to build a lot of viaducts and tunnels, then it very easily becomes very expensive to build high-speed rail. If you're looking into your terrain, then I would assume that it's not that complicated to build high-speed rail for, let's say, a very reasonable price, and to improve the overall effectiveness of your commercial operations.

● (1145)

Another point is to look into capacity constraints. That's also something we learned bitterly in Europe. Often, we build high-speed rail from outskirts to outskirts and there's still the use of a legacy network in the metropolitan area. These urban stretches define the capacity of a high-speed or high-frequency rail network. This means that, if you want to have a successful business case and motion on the inter-corridor, you have to address this. You have to think about how you can use innovative methods, such as longer platforms and bi-level terrains, to increase the capacity and thus the overall economic benefits of the system.

The last point is also something that's very important. We often look into these projects from a capex perspective or a speed perspective. However, in the end it's all about customer satisfaction. What do I mean by customer satisfaction? Customer satisfaction means having a reliable service that is on time and at frequent intervals. This means you need long-term planning. First of all, you should start from the timetable. Which timetable do you want to offer, and what journey times? When you have this timetable, it's then about the infrastructure, rolling stock and speed you need in order to be competitive against other modes of transport, and also to be competitive against the existing system. These are the advantages.

It's also very worth—

● (1150)

The Chair: Mr. Brockmeyer, thank you.

Unfortunately, we have run out of time for opening remarks. It's very interesting and I know colleagues are going to dive into technical questions with you, because you bring a lot of expertise to the table.

Before we start the questioning, I want to let our members know that, unfortunately, we have lost one of our witnesses temporarily. We're trying to get him back on.

[*Translation*]

Unfortunately, Mr. Lavoie is no longer on line, but we are trying to reach him by telephone.

[*English*]

We're going to begin with our lines of questioning. The only witness we'll be able to question at the moment is Mr. Brockmeyer.

I'll turn the floor over to you, Mr. Strahl, for six minutes. The floor is yours.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): My question is for Mr. Brockmeyer.

I listened to your remarks. I appreciate them.

There's a bit of a debate in our country—you might have seen it as you prepared your remarks—between high-frequency rail and high-speed rail.

You spoke of high-speed rail and the need for a flat terrain, etc. Do you have any comments specifically about high-frequency rail—which is on dedicated tracks but perhaps doesn't have the top-end speed of high-speed rail—versus a purely high-speed rail system? Are there examples in Europe of where that has worked well? Do you have an opinion on the value of one versus the other in terms of ridership?

You said this can be done at a "very reasonable price" if the terrain is right. We're talking about billions of dollars here. We have heard that it's perhaps double to go from high-frequency rail to high-speed rail. If you can, I'd like you to address the difference between the two and what the very reasonable price is.

Can both be built for a very reasonable price in your view, and what does that actually constitute?

Mr. Friedemann Brockmeyer: Both can be built for a reasonable price. It really depends on the topography.

The problem, to make a long story short, is the curve radius. If you want to drive a train at a very high speed, you cannot have a very close curve radius. If you're in a more hilly or mountainous area, you have to build a lot of tunnels and wide bridges. This really drives the prices for building high-speed rail. If you're on flat terrain, then it's much easier, because there are no mountains. You can build the curves as you want to.

You have a lot of urban area. You need all of this urban enabling, to have space in the cities and so on. It's more suburban, as far as I know, so I don't think it's a big issue.

The cost driver for high-speed rail—to make it very short—is how many tunnels and bridges you need. In Europe, we have started with the easy stretches. The French started in the 1970s to build very cheap, high-speed rail lines between Paris and Lyon. The Spanish have done the same. The Germans started differently.

What remains in Europe today and the reason it's so impressively expensive today.... Right now, we're building high-speed rail lines that are more like undergrounds. For example, in Germany we have a new high-speed line between Stuttgart and Munich. This is almost completely in tunnels.

There is another factor that you may also know in Canada. This is crazy stuff from the U.K., where you have a lot of this urban enabling. That's something you have to do a deep dive into. There are reasons and lots of lessons learned from the U.K.

As far as I know, it's more about the complexity of the project organization. It's not driven by high-speed rail. That's very important.

● (1155)

Mr. Mark Strahl: I'll ask you the question I was going to ask Mr. Lavoie. Perhaps you have some experience as well as a consultant on these issues.

We've been told that the high-frequency rail is designed to compete with airlines between big cities. Between Quebec and Montreal, the cost per passenger—I just looked—is about, if you book in advance, $450 return. The cost on the slow-moving train is about $175 return.

In Europe, what price point are passengers willing to pay? What price premium are they willing to pay to go up from the slow train to the high-frequency, high-speed train? Is there a point of diminishing returns? If fares get too high, do passenger loads reduce?

What is the experience in...? I don't know if you have some examples of the level of subsidy that's provided per passenger in the markets you are familiar with.

Mr. Friedemann Brockmeyer: Neither question is very easy to address.

First of all, on the question of the fare box revenues, we have very sophisticated ticket management systems in place for all high-speed operators in Europe. You can say that the mark-up for high-speed rail is between 50% and 100% on slow trains. It really depends, because it's a very sophisticated unit revenue system. It's not very easy, but it's there.

That really depends, again, on the travel time advantages. If you have travel time between two major centres that is below four hours, then you are highly competitive. It would make no sense to go to the airport and take a plane. Then you have a lot of willingness to pay on the part of the customers.

On the second question, around the subsidies, all the high-speed train services around Europe are commercial. The reason for that is we have a different organization in the rail industry. We have independent infrastructure managers, and then we have open access operators on the infrastructure, which operate commercially.

That means all of the subsidies are in the infrastructure. It's not that easy to calculate the subsidies, but you can say they are.... I have to recalculate, but it should be definitely below $10 Canadian per passenger. Let's say so; that's very roughly.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Brockmeyer.

Thank you, Mr. Strahl.

Next we have Ms. Murray.

Ms. Murray, I'll turn the floor over to you. You have six minutes for your questioning, please.

Hon. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Thank you very much.

Mr. Brockmeyer, thanks for your presentation. I have a couple of questions.

You mentioned something about Britain's “urban enabling”. It made me think about how, in Canada, it's quite complex to do projects that require co-operation and involvement at the national level and the regional, provincial and local levels, because there are different powers invested in each level. How is that dealt with in Europe? Do you think it's similar to Canada's challenges?

Mr. Friedemann Brockmeyer: To be very honest, I don't know the challenges in Canada very well. Today I can say of Europe that it really depends. For most of the countries building rail it is really the job of the national level. In some countries, like France, it's highly centralized. In other countries, like Germany, for example, they are federal states. Canada is as well. However, you have to organize. You have to organize municipalities, states and the federal level, but it's manageable. This is not the issue.

In the U.K., it's completely different. The problem in the U.K., in my opinion, is that they have not spent enough time on building up the capacity to build rail. They haven't built railways for more than 70 years in the U.K., so they have no experience in building new lines—obviously there are very few exceptions. In all other countries, we have a lot of experience. They have to buy all the knowledge from outside the U.K., and they've used lots of domestic consultants for that as well, and that is really increasing the costs.

We've worked for High Speed Two people. They were never able to understand why they were so expensive. In all asset categories, they are very expensive—

● (1200)

Hon. Joyce Murray: Excuse me for interrupting, but I have a couple more questions. It ties into what you were just saying, actually.

Is there evidence that there is actually economic growth that results in the communities around high-frequency rail?

Mr. Friedemann Brockmeyer: Yes. If we're building new railways, there is of course a positive macroeconomic multiplier. High-speed rail or new railway lines increase the mobility of labour or human capital, and this is the most important driver. When mobility is high, then you have a better allocation of labour or human capital, and this increases GDP. There's a lot of economic research on that.

Hon. Joyce Murray: That's great.

I think it's key that everything is really done well in preparing for the program, so it doesn't end up with amendments and stoppages and so on. What are the key success factors, from your experience, in the preparation phase?

Mr. Friedemann Brockmeyer: It starts, really, with the design phase—to have a long-term plan. As I was saying, which one is the most successful? Switzerland and Austria are the most successful, because they have a long-term timetable. They have a clear view of what the timetable will look like in 2070, so they can say at which stage and on which day of the week, in the year 2071, a freight train or high-speed train will go from Zurich to Geneva. Then they focused all their industry capabilities on this plan. That's really the plan. You need a long-term plan, and then each change request will increase the costs.

You need a clear vision, and then you will also have a very effective and productive mission to it.

Hon. Joyce Murray: On that, what are the key success factors to getting a clear vision? I like the idea of a very long-term view as being one of them. How do you find the balance between including everyone but actually getting things moving along? What's the key there?

Mr. Friedemann Brockmeyer: Yes, it's difficult. You need long-term planning for the settlement structure, for regional planning, and this needs to be aligned. That's very important. Then, in the end, you need compromise, and you cannot renegotiate each compromise after five or six years. That's really the idea. If you have one set of compromises, we will build with compromise. That's about it. Each change request, again, will increase the costs.

Hon. Joyce Murray: Thank you.

To what degree do you think it is important? What kinds of organizations need to be included in that preparation? Obviously it would be the city government, the regional government, the business community, and so on. Are there others that would surprise us that you think are key players to involve in the planning?

Mr. Friedemann Brockmeyer: In the planning, you need each institution that has a right to decide about planning. That means construction but also operations. You also have to include each major institution that has to spend for it.

Hon. Joyce Murray: The funder is most important.

Mr. Friedemann Brockmeyer: Yes.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Murray, and thank you, Mr. Brockmeyer.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval (Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to mention that I would really have liked to ask Mr. Lavoie some questions, but I am happy to ask Mr. Brockenmeyer some.

Mr. Brockenmeyer, welcome to the Standing Committee on Transportation, Infrastructure and Communities.

To begin, I would like to know more about the expertise developed in Europe, namely, their model for this kind of service. People in Canada wonder about the difference between high-speed and high-frequency rail. They also wonder about the model that will be implemented. They wonder whether it will be built and operated by the private sector, or rather built in partnership with the private sector.

The private sector will obviously be involved in building the infrastructure, but once it is built, the service will be publicly managed and operated. Right now, Via Rail, a Crown corporation, is responsible for passenger service. Yet the project we are discussing will be managed by the private sector.

I would like to know if you can share any success stories from Europe where a different approach was used. What model is used most often?

● (1205)

[*English*]

Mr. Friedemann Brockmeyer: As I've said already, the model is different. The infrastructure is owned by so-called infrastructure managers. They are state-owned—these are public institutions—and they are subsidized. All the operators are so-called commercial operators, so they don't get subsidies for operations.

We have very few pure private players in Europe, like NTV in Italy, and they are very successful from a commercial perspective as well as from an operational perspective, which means performance and customer success. All other major operators in Europe are state-owned, but they are competing. They are Italian-owned or French-owned, or whatever, but they are competing and they are successful from this perspective.

If you are looking into public-private partnership models for the infrastructure, as you have, it's always important to know.... I really like it in the English language, because you decide between financing and funding.

Even if you have PPP models, you need funding from a public budget. If you procure PPP, you will not do it because you will get money from the private sector. They may give you money up front, but in the end, if you want to go for a PPP, you will do that because you will want to buy the capabilities. If you don't have the capabilities in your country, then a PPP could be a good solution. If it's about organizing funding, it's still a matter for a public budget because, in the end, private operators may be more efficient, but we are not able to operate the infrastructure commercially.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: I have another question about the links between cities.

We have talked about a link to urban centres, which would be more expensive since the lines would have to be built through existing infrastructure. One might be tempted to take the "lazy" route by building a station that is far from the city centre. There might also be pressure from cities along the line that would also like to have a station, adding stops along the route.

In Europe, do high-speed trains stop in the suburbs of major cities or at stations that are far from the city centre? In your opinion, would that be a good approach or not?

[*English*]

Mr. Friedemann Brockmeyer: The French especially have built high-speed rail from the outskirts of cities to the outskirts of cities. They use a legacy network and have mixed traffic for the last mile going into the city stations. The same is true for all the other European countries, with the exception of Spain.

This is a very good decision, because it's so expensive to build additional tracks into city centres. I think this is really one of the advantages, and I've tried to address it from the beginning. This is also determining capacity constraints, because you have to share with mixed traffic, and you have to bring them into city centres to make the connections to the metro systems and the commuter rail systems to have a good interchange of passengers between your intercity service system and the local trains.

If you have smaller cities, and there are several examples from multiple countries in Europe, then you can really build stations at the outskirts, and there will be big park-and-ride systems, for example, to bring commuters via the high-speed rail system to the major metropolitan areas.

To make a long story short, go to the city centres of the most important cities—Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, and Quebec—and build the stations outside of the smaller cities if possible. If you can't go easily through the cities, then you can't do it, but don't build any tunnels in the smaller cities. That makes no sense, the trade-off is too low to have the advantage of being in the city centre of smaller cities.

● (1210)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: If I may, Mr. Chair, I would like to save my remaining 20 seconds for the next round of questions.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[*English*]

Next we have Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Bachrach, the floor is yours. You have six minutes, sir.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Perhaps I'll start by asking the clerk if my audio is sufficient for the interpreters.

The Chair: We are getting the thumbs-up, Mr. Bachrach. The floor is yours.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: That's wonderful. I apologize for the technical difficulties this morning.

Thank you to Mr. Brockmeyer for joining us. His testimony has been very interesting.

This study has touched on a number of issues, both technical issues and issues around the procurement model and the question of how building high-frequency or high-speed rail can serve the national interest in a large country, so I want to touch on a few of the aspects we've been discussing so far over the course of the study.

Your firm, I imagine, has worked on both publicly procured projects and projects that have a greater role for the private sector, including P3s. What would you say are the biggest differences between public and private rail projects in Europe?

Mr. Friedemann Brockmeyer: That's a very good question. I would say that public projects are less designed to budget; private projects are very designed to budget. I would say that is the biggest difference. In the end, as I stated at the beginning, it's all based on public funding, even if you have a P3 project. They are not very common in Europe. I would say that it's really about the focus on the budget.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: There's only one rail rider, so eventually the budget all comes back to either the passenger or the taxpayer.

You highlighted Switzerland and Austria as examples of countries that have a long-term vision and have really succeeded in incrementally building their high-speed rail network in the public interest. Could you talk about the operational models in those countries? Are these rail lines privately operated or publicly operated? What's the role of the federal governments in those cases?

Mr. Friedemann Brockmeyer: First of all, there's an important difference, because Switzerland is not part of the European Union, so the Swiss don't have to comply with EU law. That means that the business in Switzerland is a little different. It is completely operated by SBB, the national operator of the Swiss federal railways.

In Austria, it's different. There we have two operators. One is the state-owned operator, ÖBB, or Austrian federal railways, and there's also a private operator, WESTbahn, but its minority shareholder is SNCF, from France, so there's a difference in the model.

They are both very successful. In Switzerland, they are commercial, but, as I said earlier, the subsidies are in the infrastructure, so they pay a very small track access charge to the infrastructure manager. It doesn't cover the full cost, but it's an incentive not to use too many tracks. They have the same model in Austria, and both operators were very successful commercially until the coronavirus, when they decided to change the system. Now they're both public service-obliged.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: In Canada, the terms of reference for the project we're talking about, the current government's HFR proposal, are essentially that the private sector will play a major role in designing the project, will finance the infrastructure, will operate the trains and will set the schedule and fares.

When you think about the long-term public interest, what are the questions you would have about how the government should ensure that, 100 years from now, the public interest has been protected, given the role of the private sector in the government's current conception of things?

Mr. Friedemann Brockmeyer: This really depends on the period of the contract. I'm not very familiar with the public-private partnerships model, which is in place in Canada already, or what the plans are.

What you really need, as I said earlier, is a long-term vision here. Why do I have a rail system? What's the long-term plan? What should the schedule in the long term look like? Then, if you're using a private consortium to build and operate the system, you have to agree very early on regarding the long-term schedule.

What's the supply side in terms of intervals and the capacity you expect in 2030, 2040 and 2050? They have to be very clear. Then, on the same side, you have to be really careful to calculate very carefully how much capacity you need on the newbuild stretches as well as on the city access stretches. That's very important.

Let's say, if you have that—

● (1215)

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Mr. Brockmeyer, I just have one more minute. You mentioned that public-private partnerships are usually about buying capabilities. They're not really—or they shouldn't be—about securing financing or these other factors. We talk about risk transfer.

When it comes to buying capabilities, are there other procurement models that allow you to secure the capabilities of the private sector while retaining public ownership and public operation of the service? Does your firm work on publicly operated and publicly owned rail projects in Europe and bring your capability to those projects so that they can tap into the innovation you bring?

Mr. Friedemann Brockmeyer: We do more of the management stuff, but it's quite common.

I will give you another example. Some Scandinavian countries have decided to introduce the European Rail Traffic Management System. They had no capabilities to do that. They hired all the engineers they could get from all over Europe—from Spain, Portugal and Italy—and brought them to Norway and Denmark and set up the system in their publicly owned infrastructure management. They bought all the capabilities from the engineering consultancies.

That's the other way around, if you don't have the capabilities. It's different in Switzerland and Germany. They have the capabilities. They don't need the engineers. They have engineering consultants. They have their own engineers.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Brockmeyer, and thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you.

The Chair: Next, we have Mr. Muys.

Mr. Muys, the floor is yours. You have five minutes, please.

Mr. Dan Muys (Flamborough—Glanbrook, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Brockmeyer, for your perspective from Europe, because I think that's been fairly interesting. Personally, I travelled on the TGVs in France years ago, on a trip, and it was an interesting experience. That's my only vantage point on European rail.

You talked about the four-hour mark as being a bit of a tipping point in terms of viability in competing versus air. What happens after the four-hour mark? What does it look like at five, six, etc.?

Mr. Friedemann Brockmeyer: When you are losing market share to flights, it's very simple. If you are above seven or eight hours, it makes no sense. There are still rail travellers, but they don't have a very high willingness to pay, because of that slow travel. You can see if you're looking into city pairs in Europe, that if the travel time goes below four hours, rail dominates, and below three hours there are no flights. It's very simple. If it's above, then the share of rail is decreasing.

Mr. Dan Muys: What about regions of Europe? You talked about the string of pearls, and that makes sense, particularly across the parts of Germany where there are those cities close together. What happens in other areas of the country? Canada is a very vast country, and we're talking about a proposal for high-frequency rail in one region of the country for billions of dollars that are going to be borne by taxpayers in all regions of the country. Are there many examples, or are they less economic than in other parts of Europe?

Mr. Friedemann Brockmeyer: I think there are two questions.

One, would it make sense at the federal level to build it for a specific region? In the end, yes, because we can increase GDP. All these investments have a positive multiplier from a macroeconomic perspective.

On the other question, it makes no sense to build railways in areas where no people live. There are some exceptions in France, where you have a distance of 200 kilometres or 300 kilometres without a stop between two cities, but I would say that this is more or less the longest stretch that makes sense.

If you have, for example, a stretch that is 500 kilometres or 700 kilometres, that distance would be much too far when we talk about the electrification of airplanes or whatever, which would make much more sense from a transport mode choice.

Mr. Dan Muys: You talked about terrain being an important factor in determining the cost of building these. While it may look like it's a flat, smooth terrain, we are going through parts of the Canadian Shield, which is hard as rock, obviously, on the routes that are being proposed. There would be bridges, and actually quite a few bridges given the number of creeks and rivers and lakes.

Bridges versus tunnels—what are the cost impacts of those?

● (1220)

Mr. Friedemann Brockmeyer: It certainly depends. If you have a stretch where you build mostly at grade—you have maybe a few embankments, a small bridge, or a little river—you can say that in euros, at current prices, it's somewhere between 30 million euros to 40 million euros per kilometre. That would be around $50 million Canadian per kilometre. If you build in a more mountainous region, you go up from 80 million euros to somewhere around 100 million or 120 million euros. It really depends on the rock where you have to build the tunnel.

To give you a hint, you can say that if you build a tunnel, you can at least double the price of a rail system.

Mr. Dan Muys: We've talked a lot about high-speed rail. Certainly that was my experience in France, albeit it was just one country and at one point in time. Are there high-frequency rail systems operating in Europe? Why is it the case in that particular region or along those routes, versus high-speed rail? As well, what has been the ridership, and what is the economic difference?

Mr. Friedemann Brockmeyer: I think most of the rail systems in at least central Europe are high-frequency rail systems. It's standard that you have 60 minutes halfway or 30 minutes halfway on most of the important intercity stretches.

What is the difference? I would say that the important difference is from 160 kilometres onwards. Above 160 kilometres, you need continuous train supervision. Before that, you have a discrete one that's a little cheaper. The infrastructure is not very complex. Above 160 kilometres, it becomes much more complex. It increases exponentially when increasing the speed.

It's not the technical and not the safety system. Again, it's more about building all the civils—tunnels, bridges and that stuff. If you're building for 350 to 400 kilometres per hour, then it really depends on the topography.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Muys and Mr. Brockmeyer.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Iacono, you have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Angelo Iacono (Alfred-Pellan, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

[*English*]

I'll be sharing a bit of my time with my colleague, the chair.

Mr. Brockmeyer, your company's goal is to “improve the quality of life in public spaces”. What drives your company is “city activity, civilisation, velocity, civitas, vivere”. I would refer to it as joie de vivre.

Can you tell us what country in Europe comes closest to Canada? As you know, the Canadian climate is very different and the demographics are very different. Which European country do you suggest would be the most appropriate one for us to look at to create a better vision of our future rail system?

Mr. Friedemann Brockmeyer: That is a very good question. I would say Scandinavia. Unfortunately, Scandinavia is not a country, but the Scandinavian rail system, consisting of Sweden, Norway and Denmark, is very worth looking into from a climate perspective—if we're talking about snow, for example, or about storms—but also in terms of how they have improved their rail system.

They have also decided not to go for very high-speed rail, or for, let's say, really high-frequency rail, but for the conventional upgraded rail lines. There you can really see that if you do it cheaply, as the Swedish have done, when you have to compare it with other countries, where you have—

Mr. Angelo Iacono: When you referred to conventional, would that be a mixture of HFR and HSR?

Mr. Friedemann Brockmeyer: Yes, it's more.... We use upgraded lines, so we've improved a bit of infrastructure. When we bought so-called “tilting” rolling stock, it really does tilt on the curves. That leads to the possibility of improving the speed to up to 200 kilometres per hour, let's say. However, if you're looking into that, it is still not competitive against air. For example, I think it's a very good comparison if you're comparing the connection between Stockholm and Gothenburg and that between Ottawa and Toronto. Then you can really see what it looks like if you have a conventional-upgrade system and not a newbuild system. It's very important. It's not a newbuild system.

If you're looking more into newbuild systems here, then it's difficult because the climate is so different if you're going to France or Spain. I would suggest that you look more into some parts of Germany.

● (1225)

Mr. Angelo Iacono: If we look at our present rail system in Canada, we notice that it caters to mainly the big cities and not the small regions, etc. How can we increase our ridership? How can we make this rail service closer to the population? Would that be by using high speed, or would that be by using high frequency? What would be more appropriate, in your conclusion?

Mr. Friedemann Brockmeyer: What's most important is reliability. The timetable is the face of the product. It has to be reliable, and it has to be on time. Then it has to be, of course, frequent. That's the next step. It makes no sense to have a train once a day or to have two trains per day, so you need a train every two hours or every hour. That's the important part. The next step, really, is to increase the speed to reduce travel time, because it makes no sense to have a very high-speed system with one train per day. I think that's obvious.

I would say that for speeds, frequency is a necessary condition, and if you have high speed, the frequency should ultimately be a result of it.

Mr. Angelo Iacono: Thank you.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Iacono.

[*English*]

Thank you for giving me a portion of your time.

Mr. Brockmeyer, thank you for your expertise today.

I'll just follow up on your comments regarding the Scandinavian countries and the decision they made to go with more upgraded models of their tracks and systems. Did they make that decision because from a logistical perspective—with the climate that they have, which is very similar to the very harsh climate that we have here in Canada—high-speed rail wasn't an option, or...?

Mr. Friedemann Brockmeyer: No.

The Chair: Could you expand on that? There's a debate here on whether or not Canada has a climate that can accommodate high-speed rail. What are your thoughts on that?

Mr. Friedemann Brockmeyer: No. It was a budget decision. The Swedish decided to not spend that much capex on the lines. If you look, for example, at Norway, Norway has a lot of money due to its oil fields, so it built a completely new high-speed rail line network. Whether it makes sense or not we can discuss at a different time, but they built a high-speed rail system, a very expansive one, and they have the same harsh climate.

The Chair: What tools are they using to cope with the harsh climate that they have? The technology does exist, isn't that correct?

Mr. Friedemann Brockmeyer: Yes, of course the technology exists. You have to build it to be a bit more robust. You have to spend a little more on a few items, some design features, but in general it's not an issue. Of course, if you have a heavy snowstorm, then you have no chance. However, then there are also no airline operations, so everybody has to stay at home. I think that's the better decision.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Brockmeyer.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Let's take an example. The distance between Montreal and Quebec City is 250 kilometres. It takes about two hours and forty-five minutes by car, while the train currently takes about three hours and twenty minutes, assuming the train leaves and arrives on time. Under the proposed project, the high-frequency train would take three hours. That is longer than travelling by car, not to mention losing the flexibility of being able to leave when you want and park where you want.

Mr. Brockenmeyer, do you think the project is worthwhile since going by car would still be more convenient, not to mention the option of flying? Shouldn't we focus instead on high-speed rail which, in addition to saving time, would encourage more people to switch from cars to train travel?

[*English*]

Mr. Friedemann Brockmeyer: Yes. The important thing is that you always have to consider the catchment area. As far as I know, you don't have a lot of connecting trains in urban rail transit hubs. If you want to improve the overall journey times, you have to consider the first and last mile. People have to go to the city station, then leave the city station for somewhere else—a final destination. You always have to optimize overall journey times, so you need a transport or mobility model for the overall system.

If you want to become competitive against the car in terms of convenience and all of that stuff, you at least need very competitive travel times. This means they can't take much more time than a car would.

That's it.

● (1230)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: As a percentage, how much faster than travelling by car would the train have to be to make it worthwhile to choose the train: 15%, 30% or 50%?

[*English*]

Mr. Friedemann Brockmeyer: I wouldn't say there's a strict KPI. When there are a lot of other factors.... You also have some convenience. On the train, you can work. You don't have to control your car, take the wheel or whatever. There is no clear KPI, but you definitely have to be faster. That's all I can say. If you look at the high-speed rail systems in Europe, it's roughly between 10% and 40%.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[*English*]

Thank you, Mr. Brockmeyer.

Last, for our first hour, we have Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Bachrach, the floor is yours for two and a half minutes.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and thanks to Mr. Brockmeyer.

I want to pick up on the question of access to city centres.

It seems as if, when we're talking about total trip length and trying to ensure that modal shift, we need to ensure that the new line is connecting with other modes of transportation and existing legacy transit in those cities.

How important do you feel it is that the government's objectives from the outset frame the journey length as downtown to downtown?

Mr. Friedemann Brockmeyer: It's a very important measure, of course, if the downtown is important. You still have very high local demand in the city centre. This is driving the demand for business trips among the travellers with a high willingness to pay. This is driving the business case of high-speed rail. The journey time from downtown to downtown—if downtown is important, which always has to be considered—is very important.

Again, it's about connection—a city station that's well connected, and so on.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: You mentioned the need to avoid bridges and particularly tunnels, due to the cost.

One of the features we have in Canada when it comes to our current rail network is a lot of level crossings. I've heard this cited as one of the cost factors when it comes to building high-speed rail. We need to deal with and eliminate all those level crossings, because they don't function with high-speed trains.

Is that a situation you've come across in Europe? How do European projects manage that?

Mr. Friedemann Brockmeyer: Yes, this is an issue. After about 60 kilometres per hour, you cannot use level crossings, so you need small bridges flying over the level lines.

I think you can do it in two ways: the European way or the U.K. style. In Europe, it's not really a cost driver. If you're looking at capex projects to build the bridges.... I'm not talking about the rail bridges. I'm talking about for street bridges. They are not driving the costs. If you are looking into high-speed, too, this is an issue. They build very complex bridges to cross the rights of way and level lines. In the U.K., it's unfortunately the case that it's very expensive to build them. It's completely different if you're looking into mainland Europe.

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

I would like to thank all of our witnesses, particularly Mr. Brockmeyer.

Thank you for your generous time today, for being so technical and for sharing so much of your expertise with our committee on this very important study.

With that, I'll ask the witnesses to log off.

Colleagues, we'll take a five-minute break. I will suspend, and we'll come back for our second session.

Thank you, everyone.

● (1235)

_____(Pause)_____

● (1235)

The Chair: I call this meeting back to order.

Colleagues, for the second half of our meeting today, appearing as witnesses by video conference, we have Mr. Bruno Dobrusin, manager of the urban transport department of the International Transport Workers' Federation, and Mr. Joel Kennedy, national rail director of Unifor.

Welcome.

[*Translation*]

We also welcome Mr. Pierre Barrieau, a lecturer in the faculty of environmental design, school of urban planning and landscape architecture at the Université de Montréal.

Welcome to you all.

Mr. Barrieau, we will begin with your opening remarks. You have the floor for five minutes.

Mr. Pierre Barrieau (Lecturer, Faculty of Environmental Design, School of Urban Planning and Landscape Architecture, Université de Montréal, As an Individual): Hello and thank you for this opportunity to speak to you about such an important topic.

The railway is an important part of the myth of how the modern nation of Canada was built. As you know, with the British North America Act, Canada is the country whose founding documents talk about railways more than any other country in the world.

And yet for the last 50 years, the railway has been relegated to a means of freight transport owing to budget cuts, chronic underfunding, poor technology choices and poor project choices.

This can also be attributed to Canadians raising valid questions about the relevance of the railway. Is it truly a Canadian undertaking? If the train goes through my town once or twice per week, does that service really make me less dependent on my car? The answer is no.

If we want to support an undertaking such as HFT or HST and want Canadians to support it, not only do we need to revitalize rail service in eastern Canada, but we must also support a link between Calgary and Edmonton in the west, as well as links between Vancouver and the United States and Toronto and the United States. Other rail services also have to be revitalized.

If we want to revitalize rail service in Canada, we have to remember that many people do not consider rail travel very relevant or relevant at all. We also have to remember that it is because of gaps in public policy that the importance of rail has decreased and driven people to that conclusion.

● (1240)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrieau.

[*English*]

Next, we have Mr. Dobrusin.

I'll turn the floor over to you. You have five minutes for your opening remarks, sir.

Mr. Bruno Dobrusin (Manager, Urban Transport Department, International Transport Workers' Federation): Thank you very much. Good afternoon to members of the committee. Thank you for the opportunity to present ITF's testimony in this important study.

The International Transport Workers' Federation is a global trade union federation comprising 700 affiliated trade unions from 153 countries, including, in Canada, our rail affiliates, the International Brotherhood of Teamsters and Unifor Canada, from which my colleague Joel Kennedy is here today.

We have nearly 20 million affiliated transport workers as members of our organization. Our mission is to safeguard the rights of all transport workers through our global network of affiliated trade unions.

Upon reviewing the testimony presented to this committee on November 6, we noted that there was a consensus regarding the advantages of a high-frequency rail project, including the obvious benefits for passengers, economic growth through job creation and the environmental advantages associated with rail's low-carbon emissions. While we strongly endorse public investment in enhancing and expanding railway systems, we also share some of the concerns that were expressed by Unifor before this committee regarding the public-private partnership model that is being promoted in this case.

The ITF has found that privatization has led to fragmented and inefficient rail systems and contributed to a decline in the quality of the services and the quality of work for the workers involved through P3s. Public-private partnerships in major national and international transport services have incurred some significant financial losses. Unrealistic bids from the private sector to secure contracts have resulted in failures on major routes, burdening governments with financial responsibilities and often leading to substantial subsidies from taxpayers and passengers. Private sector financing has proven more expensive than the public sector alternative, with profits going directly to shareholders and thus causing underinvestment in services.

Nowhere is this clearer than in the United Kingdom. The privatized rail system requires more public funding than it did before the wave of liberalization. Ticket prices for passengers have surged, and U.K. rail users are some of the most dissatisfied passengers in Europe.

The failure of privatization and P3s has resulted in rail services being renationalized or operated as joint government ventures, such as, for example, the Perpignan-Figueres high-speed rail line between France and Spain. Despite the initial promises, it has been up to the public purse to sustain failed private endeavours. Similarly, in 2012 the Argentine national government was forced to renationalize train services after a tragic accident due to poor maintenance and lack of repairs. In Kenya, the Standard Gauge Railway, a P3 with the China Road and Bridge Corporation, faced transparency issues and operational challenges, leading to state takeover just four years into the 10-year contract.

Private sector financing, including P3s, often entails social costs such as poorer working conditions and risks to the health and safety of transport workers, passengers and affected communities. This has been reported by our affiliated unions operating in railway systems around the globe. A 2012 study of rail P3s globally revealed that these projects are successful only when public authorities guarantee profits for private concessionaires. Rail projects for which concessionaires assume financial risks tend to fail.

The Asian Development Bank highlighted in a review of thousands of P3s around the world that out of 6,273 P3 projects, only 216 were completed between 1991 and 2015, and the vast majority had to be put on hold. The U.K.'s experience, again with rail privatization, including that of the London Tube system and national railway services, illustrates failures, escalating costs and adverse outcomes for workers and passengers. When the Eurotunnel was built, the overestimates of ridership as well as escalating construction costs meant liabilities had to be restructured in 1997 and again in 2007. Adding to that, they had to also increase the contract from 55 years to 99 years to guarantee a minimum revenue for the private concessionaires.

Conversely, Germany, Spain and South Korea demonstrate successfully publicly funded high-speed rail systems. Positive outcomes include reduced travel times, economic development and improved connectivity.

In conclusion, P3s and other forms of privatization and contracting out fail to deliver the promised savings and, in many cases, simply fail, as mentioned above.

The ITF recommends that the government review the HFR structure and take bold steps to invest in a genuine, sustainable public passenger rail system, one that is publicly owned, publicly operated and democratically controlled, with good working conditions and safety that ensure a good-quality service.

● (1245)

We hope this will contribute to your reconsidering the HFR project as it stands today.

Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dobrusin.

We'll begin our line of questioning in this round with Mr. Strahl.

The floor is yours. You have six minutes.

Mr. Mark Strahl: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll start with Mr. Barrieau.

I thought it was an interesting question that you asked. Is it a Canadian project, and what would get that buy-in?

Obviously, we've heard from communities along the route, with proposed stops along the route, that are very much in favour of it. What's your view on how the project as proposed is viewed in communities that are on the current Via line? It's the slow train, if we want to call it that.

How do they view the project, when they are not going to be a stop on the new project? How do you think the new project can address the concerns of those communities, which perhaps feel they are being bypassed?

Mr. Pierre Barrieau: That's a very interesting question. Every time we proceed with a route change, it has a significant impact on communities that feel abandoned and communities that are now energized by having a new service.

I have long been a proponent of a bigger picture. If we take the segment between Montreal and Quebec City, I'm not necessarily against going on the north shore instead of the south shore. It means we can diminish our reliance on the bridge between Quebec and Lévis, and we can get out of the CN corridor.

However, we have to build bridges, and we have to build partnerships, and I strongly believe the solution to fix what you're talking about is quite simple.

In Montreal, we have something called commuter rail, which is trains running on one line between Montreal and Mont-Saint-Hilaire. It would be quite simple in the private sector and hopefully not excruciatingly painful for the public sector to negotiate a deal with the provincial government's Exo and quite simply bring a few of the trains that are running between Montreal and Mont-Saint-Hilaire to two more stops: Saint-Hyacinthe and Drummondville.

By doing that, you're basically serving almost the totality of the traffic with very little subsidy, compared to running trains that are going to be mostly empty if Via Rail is forced to continue to operate regular trains on the south shore.

Mr. Mark Strahl: We heard in our previous panel that the typical cost of a ticket to go from a regular train.... The current service—this is in Europe—costs about 50% to 100% more once a new high-frequency or high-speed rail service is implemented.

Obviously, people like the idea. They like the way it sounds, with increased connectivity, more frequent rail, modern services, etc., but when it comes down to paying for it....

Have you done any modelling or are there any studies that you're aware of that have looked at what people are willing to pay for that shiny new service?

● (1250)

Mr. Pierre Barrieau: You're asking a multi-faceted question. It's actually also a fascinating question, if you want to do a little word play on it.

We have to understand here that high-frequency rail is not going to significantly increase ticket prices if we compare it to other services around the world. In many cases, actually, high-frequency rail was able to bring sufficient ridership to bring about a decrease.

If we go to high-speed rail, it's a whole new ball game. If you go to Italy or France, you're going to have a two-tiered system. The faster you go, the more you pay with high-speed rail. In that case, it's a significantly important question. Yes, high-frequency rail is potentially going to bring higher costs.

However, one footnote I would add is that we are now seeing the rise of low-cost high-speed rail in Europe, including Ouigo, which is operated by SNCF. It's running high-frequency rail on a low-cost airline model, which is bringing costs down.

That's what we're seeing right now in the market in Europe, and what we're seeing elsewhere in many countries, including South Korea and Japan.

Mr. Mark Strahl: I want to go back to your first answer, when you talked about running empty trains once the HFR is built.

When Via, the current operator, came before us, they believed the new passenger-only dedicated line wouldn't have an impact on their business. Do you agree with that? It's hard to believe that it wouldn't, if there were significant passenger volumes being redirected to the HFR project.

I bring this up because you mentioned running empty trains. Do you think this is a risk to the current mainline communities and the viability of the current Via model? Do you view this as a competitor, or is it complementary?

Mr. Pierre Barrieau: It is complementary. However, with the current ridership level, it is hard to sustain that complementary service, basically because almost the totality of the ridership between Montreal and Quebec City will go automatically on the higher-speed and higher-frequency service. They're not going to stay on the slow traffic.

Those who will stay on that line are the people going to Saint-Hyacinthe and Drummondville. That is a small percentage of the current market share. If we take that market share of Saint-Hyacinthe and Drummondville, the vast majority of those people are actually going towards Montreal, not towards Quebec City. Therefore, the Drummondville to Quebec City is a segment that, in terms of feasibility, will be diminished.

Let's not forget that Via Rail could also decide to operate a codeshare with a bus service, which would also significantly lower operating costs.

I see very rare experiences around the world where we have a service that is 40% faster and is every hour, and people decide no, they'd prefer to take the unreliable and slower route.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrieau.

[*English*]

Thank you, Mr. Strahl.

Next we have Mr. Badawey.

The floor is yours. You have six minutes, please.

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to preface my comments to state that the committee study will in fact contribute to the planning, or some of the information, that Via HFR will utilize within its planning process.

With that said, it is important that the analysts hear the testimony that will achieve that important input that then will be featured in our final report to the minister.

Mr. Chair, through budget 2022, Transport Canada and Infrastructure Canada received $396.8 million in funding over the next two years to advance this project through the procurement phase.

As part of the planning process, I want to ask Mr. Barrieau this.

With your experience as an urban planner in landscape architecture, how important is to work with the local level of government to recognize both municipal official plans and the secondary plans that add infrastructure capacity to those official plans?

How important it is to recognize those two segments of the planning process within a local community to ensure compatible land use planning?

● (1255)

Mr. Pierre Barrieau: It's fundamental. If we look at train systems that are successes around the world, there are those that have worked with cities and communities to build high-density destinations around train stations. As long as we build train stations that are far from where people live, that are hard to get to, and where there's not much to do around them, it's hard to get ridership.

While the Ottawa train station is beautiful, the reality is that if we still had the old Rideau station, downtown on Rideau Street, ridership would be higher.

What we have to do here is build communities around these stations and connect with airports, which is fundamental. Those are the two main drivers for ridership: airports and downtowns. That's what we have to work on.

The federal government has to create these partnerships with cities and communities to get the ball rolling.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Mr. Barrieau. I'm happy you said that. That will now go on the record and be part of our final report because of its importance.

We've heard that a priority is dedicated track for both HFR and HSR. We're going to dedicate track between trade and people, which is a great thing.

However, I think we really have to be cognizant of what high speed actually does and what high frequency actually does. That is, high frequency stops a lot. With that, it's very difficult to then have high speed and get up to those speeds when you have to stop a lot and/or have trains in front of you that are stopping a lot.

I'll guess I'll rely on some experience that you may have on the infrastructure of dedicated track to people. To allow for high-speed and high-frequency track, can sidings be built on the main line or off the main line to allow high-frequency trains to stop frequently and make room for high-speed trains?

Mr. Pierre Barrieau: Yes. However, I would not go toward the siding approach. It's more about getting four-track stations. The idea that we see in most successful European and Asian systems is that you do the scheduling so that at a local stop, the train is able to stop locally and the high-speed train is able to bypass it while it's loading and unloading passengers.

It's a bit like how the transitway in Ottawa used to operate. While buses were loading and off-loading, there were bypass lanes where the direct service buses could go straight. They were able to bypass the embarking and disembarking traffic, let's say at Hurdman station.

That way, you're able to build two tracks on the full length, and at your stations you build four. That's where you schedule the bypassing.

Mr. Vance Badawey: Thank you, Mr. Barrieau.

It was mentioned also—and I want to ensure that this stays on the record—that alignment with all methods of transportation is very important, keeping in mind that a benefit to this is, again, as I said earlier, the separation of lines—trade and people—from moving goods and people. However, there's the importance of aligning all methods of transportation, including a line service provider. We have airports. In my area we have the Great Lakes cruising; we have Great Lakes shipping, and we have other methods of transportation such as road. We have Metrolinx, which has GO Transit coming in from the GTA; and of course we have intermunicipal transit systems and short lines.

How important is it to align the different methods of transportation and the transportation systems all in one area?

Mr. Pierre Barrieau: It's fundamental. If we want to diminish the dependency of Canadians on the automobile, we have to give them a viable option. That viable option comes by having a system that takes them from everywhere to everywhere. As long as we are not able to provide a viable alternative to the automobile, people won't use it. I own a car. Why? Because transit doesn't take me everywhere I have to go in an efficient way.

You give the example of a commuter train in Toronto. A great example of service integration is what we have in suburban Los Angeles, where a monthly pass holder can jump on the Amtrak train or on the Metrolink of Los Angeles between the same stations, and that permits people to try Amtrak and use it sometimes. You're bringing more riders and you're filling up trains. It's always a question of filling up the vehicles to diminish passenger cost.

Mr. Vance Badawey: I have a last question. With respect to our domestic benefits and to try to create more of both capital and operating funding to then help pay not only for the system but for the managing of the system as time goes on, with the replacement that will be needed 30, 40, 50 years down the road, do you feel that we should be discussing this not only here in Canada with our partners but also binationally with our American partners? Therefore, we are actually connecting, for example, Toronto to New York, Toronto to Chicago, Toronto to Detroit and those areas as well. Do you think it's important that we start embarking on that discussion as well?

● (1300)

Mr. Pierre Barrieau: Yes. I would say that the American government has been a better partner than the Canadian government, in that Amtrak comes into Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver, and Via Rail is lacking in terms of co-operation compared to our American friends to the south.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Barrieau, and thank you, Mr. Badawey.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to welcome all the witnesses.

Mr. Barrieau, your remarks were very interesting and covered considerable ground. I hope I have time to get to all the things I want to talk to you about.

In a Radio-Canada interview in July 2021, you said high-frequency rail would pave the way for high-speed rail. That was interesting because it is at the centre of our current discussion, as we are wondering whether we should choose high-frequency rail, high-speed rail or a combination of the two.

A question came to mind that you might be able to answer. Why should we invest tens of billions of dollars in high-frequency rail, knowing that we will have to start over again in 10, 15, 20, 30 or 50 years for high-speed rail? Considering how long it will take for high-frequency rail to be operational—it will not be available for 10 or 15 years—is it realistic to think about starting over again to create high-speed rail? What are your thoughts on the roll-out of all of this?

Mr. Pierre Barrieau: I think your timelines are a bit optimistic. Realistically, once the federal government has been convinced to start building high-frequency rail, for instance, we can expect it will be at least 50 years before they want to build high-speed rail, in my opinion.

Personally, I think Canadians want high-speed rail and that there is a market for it. I also think Canada's airports are at full capacity and that it will be difficult to use environmental studies to make the case for expanding airport capacity. So it would be better to remove unnecessary flights, such as those between Ottawa and Montreal or Toronto and London, to encourage people to take the train.

That said, I do not think that Canadians and the federal government have the appetite to invest $120 billion to build the system. The government has come up with another strategy, a hybrid rail system, which would travel at high speeds along certain lines. For my part, I would suggest you look at what the government did in France. Between Paris and Lyon, the train will travel at 300 kilometres per hour. Beyond that point, the same train will travel more slowly to Marseille.

The Canadian government could therefore decide, at a minimum, to massively upgrade the section between Montreal, Ottawa and Smiths Fall, which is already mostly owned by VIA Rail. That would mean that all trains travelling between Montreal and Toronto would go through Ottawa. The speed could be increased in certain areas. Heading east, the train would initially travel slowly to Quebec City, at 160 to 200 kilometres per hour. As the government injects more funding, the situation could be improved. That is what we hope for.

That said, if we decide to use the current corridor through Peterborough as it is, we will have problems along the curves because the lines are too narrow for a high-speed train, and much of the expense will be wasted.

In closing, let me make a comparison to Ottawa's Transitway. The planners said they would create a bus system and that nearly all of the investment would be held back for potential light rail. In reality, when the O-Train was built, hundreds of millions of dollars had to be spent to widen the 417 so buses could also use it temporarily. It was a construction site for six years, and nearly all the money invested in the Transitway was wasted to build the O-Train. People say that we could make gradual improvements, but that is easier said than done, unfortunately.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you, that was very insightful.

As you said, the objective of such a project is to reduce road and air traffic and to increase the use of rail transportation. That said, we are unfortunately under the impression that, if the proposed train reduces the commute time between Montreal and Quebec City from three hours and 25 minutes to three hours, it won't be much better than the time it takes to drive. The government is proposing a high-frequency train, but some would prefer a high-speed train, and others say the solution is a hybrid train—a high-frequency train that increases its speed on certain lines.

Is that a solution that would save us enough time to compete with the airplane and the train? It seems to me that what is on the table right now would basically result in spending a lot of money without a sufficient increase in the number of users.

● (1305)

Mr. Pierre Barrieau: The Montreal-Quebec trip is definitely an example of what can cause problems. Those who are familiar with the area know that trains from Quebec City have to go all the way to Dorval and turn around before coming back to the downtown area; trains cannot easily access the downtown area.

I think we have to ask ourselves the following question. Does the high-frequency train really need to get into downtown Montreal? There is actually a mantra according to which the train must go to downtown Montreal. However, if the answer to my question is no, it is possible to reduce the travel time by 20 minutes. For example, there could be a station in the Saint-Laurent borough and a mega-station in Dorval. People could also use the Réseau express métropolitain, REM, to get to Saint-Laurent in four minutes.

In Japan, a number of high-speed train stations have been built in the suburbs, including in Osaka and Tokyo, because bringing them downtown would require tunnels that are too expensive. So there is a way to optimize the route and the journey, even though I know that not everyone agrees on that. Some people believe that trains should go to downtown Montreal. But if I can reduce the trip time by 20 minutes, including the time spent on the REM, I would personally prefer that option.

For the rest of the line, the time savings would be better, including for the Ottawa-Montreal trip. You have to remember that the time VIA Rail is proposing for the trip between Ottawa and Montreal with a high-frequency train is almost identical to what it was more than 20 years ago, one hour and 21 minutes.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Barrieau and Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[*English*]

Next we have Mr. Bachrach.

The floor is yours. You have six minutes, sir.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I'll start with some questions for Mr. Dobrusin.

Mr. Dobrusin, I read over the brief that you provided the committee, and it's very detailed and interesting and really lays out and describes in detail the pitfalls of the public-private model when it comes to rail development around the world.

Given the track record of public-private partnerships in the rail sector internationally, why do you think the Government of Canada seems so hell-bent on proceeding with such a problematic model for this HFR project?

Mr. Bruno Dobrusin: That's a very good question.

I think there's a similar pattern to what we've seen with other governments around the world. There is this idea that by doing a public-private partnership it's going to be less expensive for a government budget and the government will not ultimately be responsible for it. I think this is one of the key motivations behind why any government is really going into this. We're not going to spend much on it. It's going to be the private sector, and also we're not going to be responsible for operations, so if anything fails or there are any problems, we can put it on the private sector as well.

I think those two are key mistakes, because at the end of the day what we've seen across the world in the vast majority of public-private partnership projects is that it ends up being on the public and it ends up being on the government, and not just the federal government but the other levels of government that may also jump into a proposal like this.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: There isn't really a risk transfer to the private sector, then. In the end it's the passengers and the citizens who end up paying for the rail project, regardless of what model is employed. Do they end up paying more or less, in your view, under public-private partnerships?

Mr. Bruno Dobrusin: The evidence is they end up paying more. I think the example of the U.K. may be one of the most tangible for us to see. After 30 years of rail privatization and public-private partnership projects all over its rail system, it's now one of the most expensive rails in Europe, not just to operate but for the passengers. It also has worse working conditions for workers when compared to other systems, like the French or the German ones, which have remained in public hands.

On top of that, they had to extend contracts. When you look at the Eurotunnel, which was a public-private partnership project, they had to extend that concession by 40 years because the profits of the private concessioners were not guaranteed in the original span of time they had said, which was 55 years. That's another example where the public ends up paying and also we pay more than originally stipulated.

● (1310)

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: You mentioned your two Canadian affiliates, Unifor and the Teamsters. It's wonderful to have Mr. Kennedy here with us as well.

Do your affiliates in Canada support the government's current approach to HFR?

Mr. Bruno Dobrusin: I'll pass it on to Joel to respond to that.

Mr. Joel Kennedy (National Rail Director, Unifor, International Transport Workers' Federation): Currently, no, we don't. Our position, as we mentioned on November 6, when we had our elected representative Jen Murray come and do a presentation for this committee, is that we don't support the government's proposal on HFR.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Does it not seem misguided to forge ahead with a project model that isn't supported by the two main labour organizations that represent the people who are going to be operating the trains?

Mr. Joel Kennedy: It certainly is irresponsible, in our view. I think both the stakeholders, the Teamsters and myself...and I can speak on behalf of the Teamsters. I have their blessing. They agree with our position and they wholeheartedly stand behind us in this regard.

With proposals like this, we've seen that they are not thought-out. They're more whimsical, and it's more of a pipe dream. What we need here in Canada is a well-thought-out plan for a national transportation network that's accessible to all Canadians, that is going to be a gold standard for the next hundred years, and that's also in line with our green initiatives.

When we see private enterprises come into these proposals, as my colleague, Bruno, has also mentioned, we see working conditions, wages and all sorts of things towards health and safety diminish as well.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Mr. Dobrusin, you're familiar with some of the companies, both private and state-owned, that are currently putting forward proposals for the HFR project. What are those companies' records working in other countries on other rail projects? Do you have concerns in that regard?

Mr. Bruno Dobrusin: I will say that they have a unique record. It's a pattern, I think, with many other companies. What I think is sometimes shocking for us to see is the difference between how they operate in their home countries, where they're often publicly owned and state-led—Keolis being one example that is one of the bidders here—and how they operate abroad, including in North America, in the U.S. and Canada, where Keolis has a large presence. They do not follow the same patterns here that they follow at home.

One of our biggest concerns is how they deal with labour relations, for example undercutting staffing and trying to review collective bargaining agreements that were in place before it was privatized and now are under their management. They're reviewing them to lower the overall operating cost, because usually these companies basically try to underbid each other, and one of the areas where they cut in those bids is labour costs. That later transfers not just to working conditions but to safety as well.

Another of the operators you mentioned is Renfe, which is a Spanish-owned operator. We've also seen problems with Renfe. They're part of one of the bids in the Texas project for HSR that has been delayed for I think about a decade. Renfe has just gone through a change in its management because of a corruption scandal in Spain.

Nobody has a perfect record on this, and certainly these are concerns that we have.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dobrusin, and thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

For a second round, we have Mr. Muys.

Mr. Muys, the floor is yours. You have five minutes, sir.

Mr. Dan Muys: Thank you. I have more questions for Mr. Barrieau.

You talked about how in the Montreal-Quebec City corridor HFR basically will render Via.... Well, it would basically take all of their passengers and make it economically unviable. Beyond the passengers going from Montreal to Quebec City, you have those in the outlying stations that could be using provincially or municipally operated transit lines, frankly, rather than HFR.

I'm wondering if, in your view, if you've looked at the Ontario side of the proposed route—because it does run a little more northerly, through Peterborough—whether that's the same case, and whether it's Toronto to Ottawa, or Toronto to Montreal, we'd cannibalize the Via passengers, and whether there would be any benefit beyond that.

● (1315)

Mr. Pierre Barrieau: Well, I think the same model that I propose for Montreal could potentially be a partnership built between GO Transit or Metrolinx with Via Rail in extending a few of their trains to Belleville, for example, or something like that. The reality is that going by Peterborough.... I mean, we're using the old CP line. It is a complicated line. It's not an easy line to get to Toronto. As well, there are issues in entering Toronto from the north. Historically, it's easy to enter Toronto from east and west. There's a lot of rail infrastructure that's available. There are rights of way. The Peterborough line fixes a lot of the problem until you get to suburban Toronto, and then you're jammed when trying to get to downtown.

To get to the other question, that being the stations, fundamentally we have to find ways so that people don't feel abandoned by this project, but at the same time we have to also look at the greater good and how we can combine the greater good with the local good. That's the way we will be able to get the buy-in for this project.

It is exactly by building those partnerships with the local transit authorities to keep a relative level of service that they won't feel totally abandoned and won't turn against the project. We have to build those relationships, though, and that means partnerships between federal, provincial and regional operators.

Mr. Dan Muys: What you're saying, then, basically, is that for HFR to even work, GO and Metrolinx are going to have to build those lines that don't exist to Belleville and other places like that.

Mr. Pierre Barrieau: Well, it could be as simple as, for example, expanding a few trains or something like that. There are strategies that are there. The network is there. If Via Rail is disappearing on the CN main tracks and whatever, we're going to be liberating capacity.

We also have to see this at the same time as adding more capacity for freight. Let's not put our heads in the sand. For the little revenue they're getting, CN's not going to be sad at seeing Via Rail disappear. It's going to give them a lot more flexibility on their network, and it's going to give them a lot more potential traffic for their freight without having to invest in the infrastructure.

In the end, everybody benefits if we do it correctly.

Mr. Dan Muys: What about the timelines proposed? We've already seen a couple of delays in the early parts of the process. Do you think they're realistic? When do you foresee—if all goes on time from here on in—this operating and reaching a critical mass so that it has enough ridership to be viable?

Mr. Pierre Barrieau: I think there are certain segments where we can get into high gear as soon as contracts are signed, and get them operational, including Ottawa-Montreal. It's a line I use. It's Via Rail-owned, with almost no expropriations needed to get it done. It's a short distance. We can do that.

What's going to be difficult is the western portion of the line, where there will be a lot of changes in the route. Even if we buy the CP route, there are a lot of curves that are tight. We're looking at expropriations that are going to take many years. Look at the U.S., where expropriations have historically been absolutely horrendous on high-speed and high-frequency rail systems.

For me, that's the biggest hindrance to the timeline of this project: expropriation. We can build this thing in about 10 years. However, how long will it take the courts to allow us to bring in our shovels and work on those properties we need to get to?

Mr. Dan Muys: Let me turn it over to our friends from the International Transport Workers' Federation. They haven't had as much say in this discussion thus far.

I'll ask a similar question in terms of the timelines you've seen, read and heard about for this project.

Based on your expertise in building these things, are they realistic? What are the red flags? What are the causes for concern?

Mr. Bruno Dobrusin: Thank you.

From what we've seen, this is a commonality among PPP projects. The timelines get more extended than originally thought. As the other speaker mentioned, the U.S. is an example of very long delays on HSR and HFR. I think there is sometimes a difference in Europe or locations where there is a stronger control of state-led companies. As we discussed here, they have more control and more familiarity in dealing with other levels of government than some of the private operators being proposed here do.

I think, from what we've been able to gather, that this is going to be a further-delayed project. What can also come into play is the state of those private bidders bidding under certain conditions now. They're probably going to want to change how those bids were done a few years down the line, and that's going to potentially delay the projects even more.

● (1320)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Dobrusin, and thank you, Mr. Muys.

Next, we have Mr. Rogers.

Mr. Rogers, the floor is yours. You have five minutes, sir.

Mr. Churence Rogers (Bonavista—Burin—Trinity, Lib.): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

I'll be sharing my time with my colleague Ms. Koutrakis. We'll split the time here.

First of all, welcome to the panellists. It's always great to hear from people with knowledge and expertise. You're providing the committee with the benefit of your views and opinions on this project.

Mr. Barrieau, when the government announced its two bids, the big key factor was a speed of 200 kilometres an hour for one, while one referenced high speed. Of course, the debate is ongoing about what it is we should be doing and why we should be doing it—whether it's for economic reasons or moving people and goods, with timelines and these kinds of things.

Do you believe higher speeds would be beneficial to this project? Are they critical to whether or not this project is a success?

Mr. Pierre Barrieau: High-frequency rail is going to be competitive with the automobile. High-speed trains are going to be competitive with the airplane. It depends on what your final objective is.

I have a certain vision. I believe Air Canada would abandon most flights served by high-speed trains. The trains would enter directly into the airports. It would be codeshared. I might even be able to get my Air Canada lounge benefits or Aeroplan points using Via Rail. If I'm out west, I'm able to get my WestJet points when I'm using the Calgary-to-Edmonton line. That's the dream I have. That integration cannot be done with high-frequency rail. That integration can be done only with high-speed rail.

If we choose high-frequency rail and not high-speed rail, we won't be able to significantly diminish air traffic in the triangle or these short flights, which are those—if we look at Europe—that can easily be replaced by trains. In this case, if you want to diminish airport congestion, remove a flight from Ottawa to Montreal. It's a shame for the 14 people in that plane, but if I can replace that flight with a new flight direct to, I don't know, Johannesburg, what will the better economic impact be? I think the better economic impact is to have a Montreal-to-Johannesburg flight at the airport, rather than a Montreal-to-Ottawa flight.

Mr. Churence Rogers: Thank you very much for that perspective. I appreciate it.

I'll turn my time over now, Mr. Chair, to my colleague.

The Chair: Ms. Koutrakis, the floor is yours.

Ms. Annie Koutrakis (Vimy, Lib.): Thank you very much, and thank you, Mr. Rogers, for being so generous with your time. I really appreciate being able to ask a question.

My question is for Mr. Barrieau, and I'm putting on my hat as PS to the Minister of Tourism and Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Quebec regions. I'm going to share two of my thoughts with you, and I'd be very interested to hear what your thoughts are on my beliefs.

I believe this project would essentially create a more competitive supermetropolis out of four separate metro areas—Quebec, Montreal, Ottawa and Toronto, perhaps Calgary and Edmonton and the smaller cities in between—by making travel for work, education, business, tourism, or visiting family and friends much more efficient than anything we have today.

I also believe that high-frequency rail is aligned with the government's direction to double tourism's contribution to our economy in a decade and that, once HFR is implemented, tourism will be boosted further, as domestic and international visitors will be able to seamlessly travel between those six great Canadian cities, as well as Banff and smaller centres, including Red Deer. You talked about Peterborough and Trois-Rivières.

I'd be interested to hear from you, from a socio-economic perspective, about moving people between those cities. Is this something that you share?

Mr. Pierre Barrieau: I agree. Any improvement is going to be an improvement. That has to be clear and transparent.

We have to look at tourism and its impact, and, of course, trains are a major impact on tourism, we know, because it's a question of accessibility. When we look at traffic around the world, people go to countries where there are trains. They will travel much more to regions where there are trains than to those where they have no trains. That's a given.

Regarding your concept of bridging and creating these metropolitan areas and merging them together, that's exactly what Amtrak has been planning since the 1990s with the mega-region concept.

As for Via Rail, yes, they have tourist trains that are long-distance, but we have to look at focusing on where the traffic is and where the demand is, and creating these megaregions is the way to go. As metropolitan areas grow and grow, they're becoming closer and closer together, and more and more people travel between the two.

I used to fly between Montreal and Toronto on the Porter flight. I always took the last flight out when I was teaching at York University, and over half of the people on the plane were always the same people every week. We knew each other.

These communities do exist, and this merging of a lot of workers does exist. We have to set up that service if you want people to use it. If not, they'll use their car.

● (1325)

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Koutrakis.

Thank you, Mr. Barrieau.

Mr. Barsalou-Duval, you have the floor for two minutes.

Mr. Xavier Barsalou-Duval: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

In a previous committee meeting, I asked a witness the same question that I will now put to the witnesses. If I'm not mistaken, 90% of VIA Rail's current revenue comes from the line between Quebec City and Toronto. However, creating a new line operated by the private sector and transferring passenger traffic to it will very likely eat into that 90% of revenue.

VIA Rail has not only this line to cover, but also a number of other regions in Quebec, including Gaspésie, eastern Quebec, Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean and Abitibi-Témiscamingue, and even elsewhere in Canada.

Mr. Kennedy, what could happen financially to VIA Rail if it was to stop operating the northern part of the network and, on top of that, it lost 90% of its revenue, which was already being used to cover the costs of other unprofitable lines?

[*English*]

Mr. Joel Kennedy: Thank you very much for raising that. That's a very valid point, and that's a major concern of Unifor's as well.

Once we siphon off that money from the corridor, what's going to happen to the rest of Via Rail's operation around Canada? We owe a form of connectivity to our citizens living in rural and urban parts of Canada that are not easily accessed.

What we see here in Manitoba, for example, is very poor train service going up to Churchill. We only get a couple of trains a week, and we're secondary to freights. What we've seen here is similar to the Greyhound story across Canada. We saw that was very good service at one time that was diminished, diminished and diminished, and it doesn't exist any more.

That's exactly our fear once we start siphoning off the profits from the corridor. What's going to happen to the rest of the fleet? Via's fleet right now is aging. It's poor. It's not really practical at all anymore, and it's not reliable. It's a major concern of ours. It's a very valid point that you raised and one that we're very much behind.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Kennedy.

[*Translation*]

Thank you, Mr. Barsalou-Duval.

[*English*]

Finally for today, we have Mr. Bachrach for two minutes, please.

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I will pick up where my colleague left off, because Via Rail in the rest of Canada faces two major threats. One is the fact that HFR, if it's built along the current model, will remove 95% of Via Rail's revenue. It's going to be tasked, unreasonably, with operating passenger rail in the rest of Canada along rural routes with only 5% of its current revenue.

The other major threat it faces for its long-distance routes is the age of its rolling stock. We've heard testimony at committee. Some of us have met with Via's CEO. The situation is quite dire, because the government has put off the replacement of these trains, which were built in the 1950s, for far too long. If we don't see the government committing to the replacement of that rolling stock in this spring's budget, we risk losing all of Via Rail's long-distance routes across Canada.

As someone who represents a riding in remote and rural British Columbia, that's not something I'm going to stand by and allow to happen.

With your forbearance, Mr. Chair, I would like to move the motion I have put on notice. I move:

> That the committee report to the House, urging the government to commit in the 2024 budget to the replacement of Via Rail's long-distance fleet following an expedited timeline that allows for uninterrupted service.

I appreciate that we're near the end of the meeting, but I hope my colleagues will vote in support of this motion. Time is short, and we need to send a unified message to this government that we will not stand by and allow Via Rail passenger service in the rest of Canada, outside the corridor, to wither on the vine. We cannot lose these vital services for rural communities.

With that, Mr. Chair, I'll turn it back to you. I hope we can get to a vote on this motion.

Thank you.

● (1330)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Bachrach.

Mr. Muys.

Mr. Dan Muys: I move a motion to adjourn.

The Chair: Okay.

Looking around the room, do we want to go with a recorded vote? Is there any opposition to adjourning?

Mr. Taylor Bachrach: Yes.

The Chair: We have opposition, so I'll turn it over to the clerk for a recorded vote.

(Motion agreed to: yeas 8; nays 2)

The Chair: The motion to adjourn carries.

I'd like to thank all of our witnesses on behalf of all members. We wish you a nice rest of your day.

This meeting stands adjourned.