

Minister of Transport
and Quebec Lieutenant



Ministre des Transports
et lieutenant du Québec

Ottawa, Canada
K1A 0A3

September 4, 2024

Françoise Bertrand
Chair, Board of Directors
VIA Rail Canada inc.
francoise.bertrand@viarail.ca

Mario Péroquin
President and CEO
VIA Rail Canada Inc.
mario_peloquin@viarail.ca

Dear Françoise Bertrand and Mario Péroquin:

Further to our discussion yesterday, I must reiterate how frustrated and disappointed I was to hear about the treatment of the passengers of Train 622 this past Saturday. These events are unacceptable for Canadians.

This latest incident is reminiscent of the issues that occurred on VIA Rail trains during the 2022 Holiday service disruptions. VIA Rail claimed to have addressed and resolved communication and operational issues as part of the review of this incident, but when tested this past weekend, that plan failed Canadians. Therefore, I am asking that VIA Rail's Board of Directors be seized with handling the aftermath of these regrettable events and report to me on the corrective actions to be implemented.

Using the same approach when VIA Rail assessed the 2022 Holiday service disruptions, VIA Rail shall mandate a third party to independently investigate the events and its response during this specific incident. In addition, I instruct you to review your current emergency management action plan for significant disruptive events and enhance your emergency action plan posture within the next 30 days. This updated action plan must be robust and demonstrate concrete changes VIA Rail has instituted since the review of the 2022 incident, including clear standard operating procedures, and practical exercises for various scenarios for front-line employees. These events can lead to tense situations that can be challenging for VIA Rail employees. You will therefore also review your employee training to ensure its crews have the proper tools to deal with situations. These procedures shall also ensure that employees are adequately supported throughout any similar situations by the emergency management response team.

Canada

Passenger wellbeing must be at the forefront, and that includes the way the information is communicated to them. In particular, the updated action plan must provide details on how VIA Rail communicates with passengers in a timely and efficient manner during major service disruptions.

VIA Rail must also explain how it intends to provide basic care of passengers (e.g., potable water, food, functioning toilets) and other services, such as a reliable access to telephone and internet connectivity, by looking at alternative solutions. I also expect that this plan will clarify the level of compensation to passengers when such disruptive events occur.

I understand that VIA Rail has established a communication protocol with Transport Canada Rail Safety officials based on the lessons learned following the 2022 Holiday service disruptions. With this letter, I am requesting that this communication protocol be reviewed to ensure more timely and accurate communications with Transport Canada officials and customers when such an event occurs. I encourage VIA Rail to work with my officials to ensure this protocol is firmly instituted in the next 30 days.

I also request that you work with my officials and keep them informed of the findings from your assessment of the mechanical failure with the new Venture trainset. This should include looking into whether the current maintenance program needs to be improved. I am concerned that a breakdown happened with a new fleet, and I want to be sure VIA Rail is taking the right steps, including working with suppliers, to fix the problem. I expect VIA Rail to take action to ensure this mechanical failure isn't a broader issue across the entire fleet of Venture trainsets and to provide confidence that the problem has been effectively addressed.

I understand there will be delays and incidents outside your control, such as weather delays. What is important is to prevent any delays within your control and to respond quickly with clear communication and a robust crisis management plan when they happen. Canadians deserve safe, efficient, and reliable rail service.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

The Honourable Pablo Rodriguez, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Transport and Quebec Lieutenant