

## Train Cuts in the Age of Crazy

Darcy P. Higgins, Toronto, July 2012



I'm sitting on VIA Train 85 full of riders, passing the corn fields and towns on the way to Sarnia from Toronto. VIA's been making service improvements, discounts and promotions lately. Sometimes they'll share with you an announcement of a Conservative government official at a press conference throwing some dollars to tweak the lines.

In a couple of weeks, the train I'm on won't be running any more. The service to Sarnia will be cut in half, probably on the path to even less - the *full* train I'm riding on today, a Thursday afternoon.

They say not enough are using it.

Perhaps my eyes lie. Or fair enough, their stats and figures aren't meeting business expectations.

Maybe this smooth ride (well perhaps a little bumpy) with friendly staff isn't attracting enough travelers. If not, it may be pricing, travel times, and infrequent service. All aren't great.

I'd presume a company with a broader national mission would work to improve these things to attract more customers.

But as in everything, all come down to money. And in Canada, we don't invest in these things.

The rail lines that built the country are apparently not worth the real dough that would support rural Canada and connect our urban centres' economies.

What do we have against sustainable, resilient, practical transportation? - the means that move the young and old especially. Why will we only pay for roads and roads and roads. The means ensuring we'll sink our climate, and a liveable planet.

You may have seen the graphic floating around the internet showing our ancient trains compared to those of other countries. Though my grandfather helped worked on these lines, this isn't about nostalgia for me. We need to renew – our trains should be a fundamental base of our transportation network.

Another graphic you might have seen shows our couple of subway lines in Toronto compared with the web that exists in other cities – ones like those in the United States where governments pay to operate lines with taxes.

But here we have VIA's service reductions, at a time we need far the opposite.

It will be harder for older parents to visit their middle-aged children and grandchildren in other cities. It'll be tougher to get to a business meeting, while working along the way.

You'd think Conservative MPs would be mad as hell.