



# High-Performance Rail

Fast, frequent and affordable intercity rail passenger service is at the core of the many integrated public transportation systems now operating in thriving regions around the world. For a variety of financial, institutional and operational factors, federally-operated VIA Rail Canada has never had the opportunity to deliver comparable levels of service. The result is that VIA's two Southwestern Ontario routes are not performing up to their full potential, although both do provide a necessary and useful service.

Worldwide experience has demonstrated that an approach known as high-performance rail (HPR)

is an effective option for optimizing rail as part of a multi-modal public transportation system. It is a proven middle ground between VIA's current service, which largely operates at speeds up to 160 km/hour on tracks it shares with freight trains, and high-speed rail (HSR), which operates at speeds of 240 km/hour or higher on new, electrified lines dedicated solely to passenger service.

HPR is often described as an affordable near-term option that can be used to build the market demand that will lead to a more intensive HSR service in the future.



*There are currently six high-performance rail corridors in the U.S. and more than a dozen are under development.  
Photo courtesy of Amtrak*

HPR incrementally improves all aspects of a conventional rail service and builds on the public funds previously invested in it. Operating at speeds up to 200 km/hour with modern locomotives and rolling stock, HPR offers:

- Increased frequency
- Reduced door-to-door travel times
- Enhanced comfort and onboard amenities
- Better on-time performance and all-weather reliability
- Improved, fully-accessible stations
- More and better local and regional transit connections

A major advantage of HPR is that it delivers improvements at each step along a phased and affordable pathway to faster and more frequent service. Where the conditions warrant it, HPR can also be converted from diesel to electric propulsion.

The HPR approach is being taken on several U.S. corridors with distances, demographics and operating conditions similar to those found on VIA's Southwestern Ontario routes. The result has been ridership and cost recovery improvements that

demonstrate the ability of a modernized rail service to provide an alternative to car travel, especially in coordination with improvements to the other modes of public transportation.

With the federal government now reviewing its rail passenger options, and the provincial government studying a potential Toronto-London-Windsor HSR line, the opportunity exists for HPR to be analyzed and considered for Southwestern Ontario.