

VIA Rail changes Ocean train schedule

GILLES GAGNÉ

MATAPEDIA – Since June 19, VIA Rail has modified its passenger train schedule between Montreal to Halifax, and Halifax to Montreal, due to constraints imposed by Canadian National (CN), the owner of the railway tracks.

The eastbound Montreal-Halifax train has had 45 minutes added to its schedule, while the westbound Halifax-Montreal train has had 90 minutes added. The train now leaves Montreal 30 minutes earlier than before June 19, at 6:30 p.m. instead of 7:00 p.m.

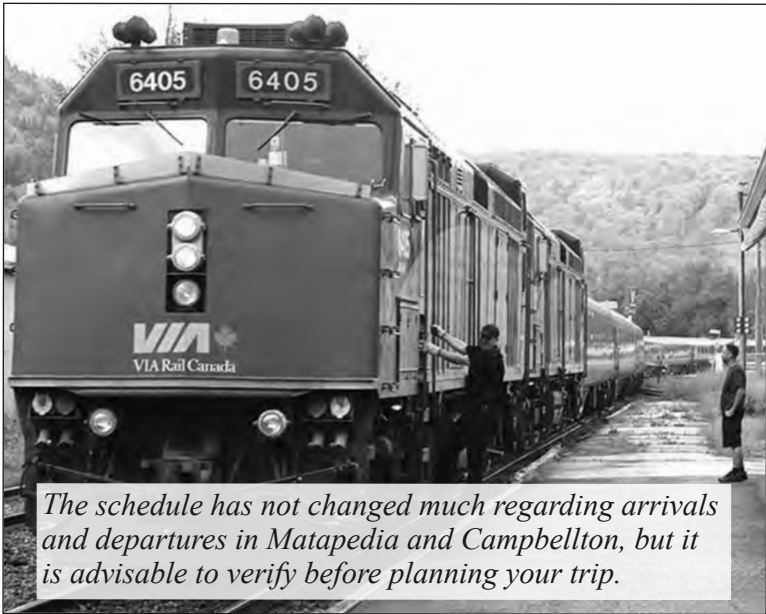
“As the vast majority of railway tracks between Montreal and Halifax are owned by CN, VIA Rail is subject to CN's constraints when operating the Ocean route, and remains dependent on CN's ability to resolve any related problems, with their infrastructure,” replied VIA Rail’s public relations department to SPEC’s question.

The main restrictions are still located on the Newcastle subdivision, which covers the line between Campbellton and the Moncton suburb. So the impact is greater for the passengers going to or coming from the east.

“In 2014, VIA Rail paid more than \$18.3 million to CN for necessary repairs on a 70.8 km section of their Newcastle subdivision between Bathurst and Miramichi, which CN is responsible for maintaining. These funds were exceptionally spent to maintain the status quo of passenger train service on the Ocean, while CN was considering abandoning this portion of the subdivision,” adds VIA Rail, a public transporter owned by the Government of Canada.

The significant sum of money given to CN by VIA Rail had little effect on the state of Newcastle subdivision. In fact, passenger trains remain slow on that portion of the Halifax-Montreal route.

“Unfortunately, since then, the current state of this same subdivision has resulted in operational changes. In response to recurring speed restrictions imposed by CN, as well as a deterioration in operational speeds on this infrastructure due to track conditions, VIA Rail had no choice but to adjust the schedule of the Ocean as of June 19, in order to offer passengers a timetable that



The schedule has not changed much regarding arrivals and departures in Matapedia and Campbellton, but it is advisable to verify before planning your trip.

Photo: G. Gagné

better reflects actual (longer) travel times,” specifies VIA Rail’s communication department.

Asked by SPEC if CN could carry out this maintenance work other than during VIA Rail's peak season and if VIA makes representations in this sense, the public transporter replies “that we are not responsible for the level of track maintenance, we are not the competent authority to answer questions about the condition of the tracks, the evolution of operating speeds in recent years, the nature and results of work and maintenance carried out on the infrastructure or any other information relating to the railway infrastructure owned by CN.”

VIA Rail’s Ocean train coming from Montreal now arrives in Matapedia at 5:40 a.m. and in Campbellton at 7:23 a.m. (local time) on Thursday, Saturday and Monday. The train spends 10 minutes in Campbellton before

continuing its journey.

In the other direction, the Ocean train arrives in Campbellton at 10:08 p.m. (local time), and in Matapedia at 9:52 p.m. on Sunday, Wednesday and Friday.

Between 1986 and 2024, CN’s maintenance shortcomings on the Newcastle subdivision have added two hours and 21 minutes to the Ocean’s train travel time between Moncton and Campbellton, including the little stretch on the Gort subdivision, which passes in downtown Moncton.

The total travel time between Halifax and Montreal has increased by three hours and six minutes between 1986 and 2024, considering that the Ocean was covering the distance in 20 hours and 17 minutes in 1986, compared to 23 hours and 23 minutes now.

About everywhere in the world, the speed of passenger trains has increased over the years. In Canada, train speed has decreased on most routes.