

VIA's Ocean train to resume two weekly trips starting on December 8

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MATAPEDIA - VIA Rail Canada's gradual service resumption will see the return of the Ocean train's second trip between Halifax and Montreal, starting on December 8. VIA Rail has confirmed all details with the infrastructure owner, Canadian National Railways, to bring back this second weekly trip, "which will provide travellers with more choices on this popular route," the public transporter says in a press release.

Since August 11, VIA Rail has been running one weekly return trip between Halifax and Montreal, with the departure from Halifax on Wednesday around mid-day and the departure from Montreal on Sunday, early evening. Effective December 8, there will be a departure from Montreal on Wednesday and on December 12, a departure from Halifax on Sunday.

So, the two trains will cross one another on every trip, like it used to before the long service halt that started shortly before mid-February

2020 and that ended on August 11, an 18-month hiatus.

In its press release, the public transporter maintains that its "objective has always been the safe resumption of all our services across the country when conditions allowed. As VIA Rail announced in October, the return to full operation will occur progressively to resume full service in the region, and across the country, by June 2022."

A spokesperson of Transport Action Atlantic, Ted Bartlett, as well as Bernard Babin of the Coalition of Gaspésians for the return of the train, both expressed earlier this fall disenchantment at VIA Rail's slow return strategy, considering the much higher level of service in the Quebec City-Windsor corridor, especially between Quebec's capital and Toronto.

They also find June 2022 a late date for the full resumption of the Ocean train schedule, considering that three round trips a week are already insufficient. Mr. Bartlett believes that a shortage of staff



Gaspé Peninsula passengers will be able to count on two Halifax-Montreal weekly round trips starting in December.

Photo: G. Gagné

might explain that slow return. When asked to do so, VIA Rail has refused to comment on that hypothesis.

"The return of this second trip of the Ocean is good news for our passengers who now have more travel options in time for the holiday season," says Cynthia Garneau, VIA Rail's president and chief executive officer, "We are excited to be welcoming our passengers and employees

back on board, and we could not be happier to be able to finally proceed with this next phase of our gradual return to service in this region."

As of October 30, 2021, passengers over 12 years and 4 months are required to be fully vaccinated to travel on VIA Rail trains, as well as to access VIA Rail Business lounges. Up until November 30, 2021, as an alternative to showing full proof of vaccina-

tion, travellers will be able to board a train if they present proof of a valid COVID-19 molecular test performed within 72 hours prior to the scheduled departure time.

The Montreal-Halifax train is used by Gaspésians since the suspension of the Montreal-Gaspé train in September 2013. The Gaspé Peninsula railroad is currently under repair over the Caplan to Gaspé stretch.