

Editorial Page

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Transcontinental service must stay

The long awaited report by VIA Rail on how to reduce operating costs was finally released last week and the future doesn't look good - especially for Northern Ontario.

With their annual budget slashed from \$641 million to \$250 million, services and routes are being cut.

The one change which would affect Northern Ontario the most is the proposed elimination of the transcontinental run. This run is currently costing VIA \$150 million per year to operate - the majority of this cost being incurred on the stretch from Winnipeg to Sudbury.

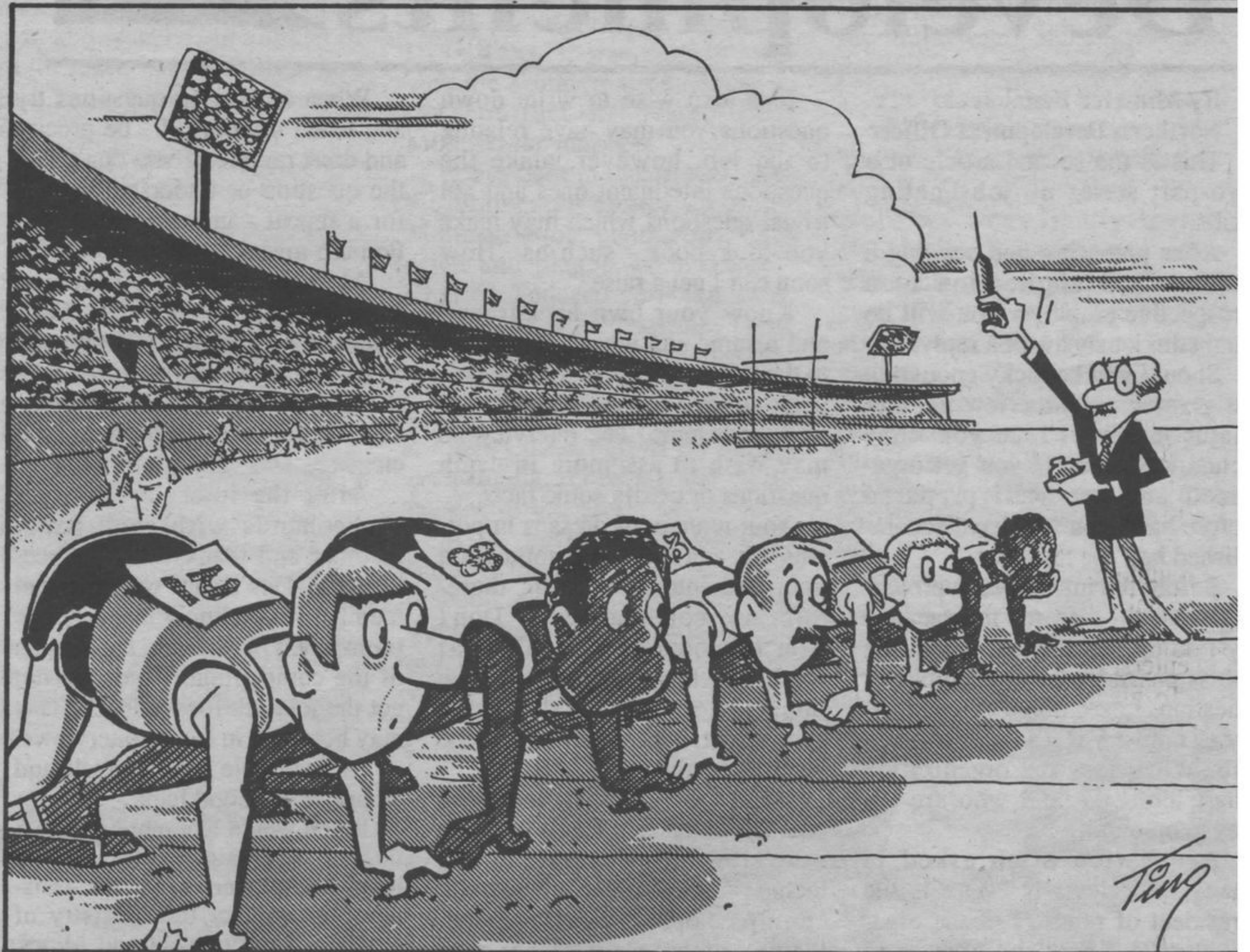
Granted, this is a long and isolated route. But instead of totally eliminating the route maybe they should consider the possibility of making the trip a couple of times a week instead of every day.

The elimination of this route would mean local residents would no longer be able to take the train as a mode of transportation. Instead, they would be forced to drive, fly, or take the bus.

Some choice. Considering the cost of flying, and the hazardous driving conditions often faced during the long winters, the train is an attractive alternative. Cheaper than flying, more comfortable than the bus, and safer than driving, the train has a lot to offer.

What other form of transportation offers spacious, comfortable seats, meals, sleeping compartments, breathtaking views, a place to drink and socialize (the bar car), and coaches where you can still smoke?

Yet VIA has proposed the elimination of the only run that links Canada - the only run that travels through Terrace Bay or Schreiber.



This is definitely a time to voice your concerns or objections about VIA's proposed cutbacks. A time to write or call your M.P. so he can let the government of Canada know the people of this country oppose the elimination of the only rail passenger service in this part of the country.

The local M.P. is Reg Belair and his Kapuskasing office address is : Reginald Belair, M.P. Cochrane-Superior, 22 Byng Ave., Kapuskasing, Ontario, P5M 1W4. His Ottawa address is Reginald Belair, M.P. Cochrane-Superior, 465 West Block, House of Commons, Ottawa, Ontario, K1A 0A6.

Belair's Ottawa phone number is (613) 992-2919 and in Kapuskasing he can be reached by dialing the operator and asking for Zenith 21240.

The News welcomes your letters to the editor. Feel free to express comments, opinion appreciation, or debate anything of public interest. Write to:

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 Terrace Bay, Ontario
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In order that we may verify authorship, please sign your letters.

Wishes for the gas stations of yesteryear

Do self-serve gas stations bum you out? They sure do me.

You drive up to the island, get out, pump your own gas, then walk to the pillbox where a bored teenager with a Walkman booming in his ear takes your credit card through a slit at the bottom of a sheet of (presumably) assault-proof glass.

While he checks the card electronically to make sure you're not Baby Face Nelson, you get to read the charming notices on the wall:

DENOMINATIONS OF BILLS OVER \$20 NOT ACCEPTED

NOTICE: TILL CONTAINS A MAXIMUM OF \$20.

ATTENDANT CANNOT OPEN SAFE

Eventually, some computer in Dallas decided that you're good for 12 dollars worth of regular unleaded. Your card

and a voucher are disgorged from the slit. You sign, scribble your licence plate number and you're on your way. No fuss, no muss, no bother.

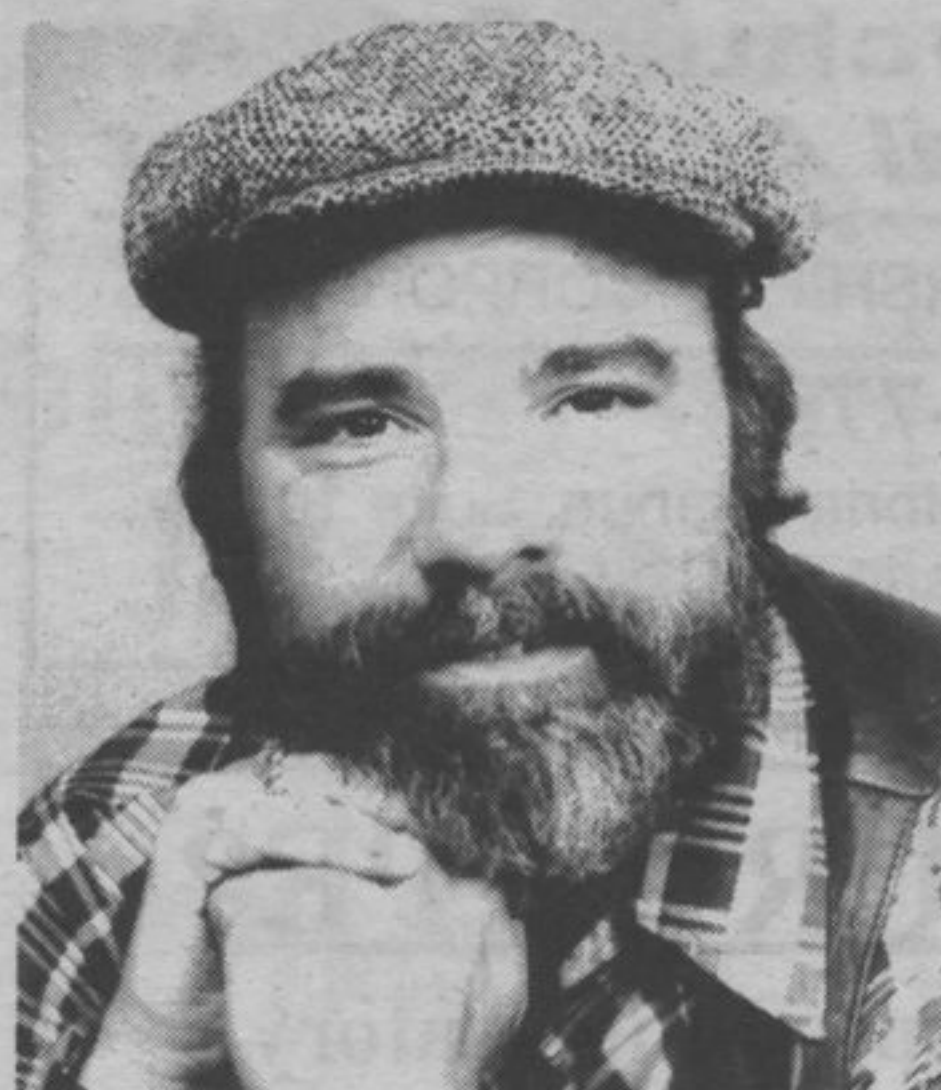
And minimal human contact.

I tell ya, for a cold and heartless way to spend a few minutes, the old Self Serve is hard to beat.

The bad news is that if the big oil companies have their way, that last tiny ember of person-to-person contact - you know, where the attendant slips you your card and says "Have a nice day" -- is destined to disappear. Down in Texas, the oil barons are test marketing fully-automated stations. You drive up to the pump, get out and stick your credit card right into the gas pump. This activates the pump and releases the nozzle. You pump your gas, take your card out and drive away. Some computer in Dallas sees to it that some computer in your bank takes the appropriate

nibble out of your balance.

The oil barons are very big on the fully-automated gas station. "Full automation means not having to wait in line or deal with an intermediary who handles the money" carols an industry



Arthur Black

spokesman.

What he doesn't mention is that the oil barons make more money from fully automated stations by eliminating the attendants paycheck and forcing shmoes like you and me to act as unpaid

employees.

There are some other 'benefits' the industry spokesman doesn't mention when he talks about the impending brave new world of fully automated gas stations -- such as where will we go if we run out of gas or have a flat or need directions or a washroom?

It's a curious byproduct of some forms of progress that as things get more sophisticated they also get more primitive.

I can remember not so many years ago when we paid less for a gallon of gasoline than we now pay for a litre. Driving into one of those old-fashioned, inefficient service stations wasn't anything like the chilly self serve experience. Two, sometimes three people would swarm your car. One would come to the driver's window and take your gasoline order while the other or others would check your oil, top up your battery, clean the windows -- even debug your headlights and buff up the chrome on your

bumpers if there wasn't a line of cars waiting.

The gas station was more like a corner store. It was a place you could take your lawn mower to be fixed, where kids could fill up the tires on their bikes or inflate their inner tubes for a trip to the beach.

There are still stations that provide free air, clean rest rooms and a licensed mechanic, but their numbers are shriveling.

Ten years ago, 75 per cent of all service stations had repair bays. Today, fewer than half of them do.

Donald Anglin is a writer who specializes in automotive matters. He says that full automation personifies the gas station of the future.

"The return on an investment is simply much higher," he writes. "The concept of the service station as a neighbourhood-oriented close family friend is just not there anymore."

Well I didn't kill it. Did you?