

Canada's sitting on edge of new era on transportation, all it needs is political will

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Canada, more than any other country in the world, is reliant on a strong national transportation strategy. Our size and dependence on international trade means that we require the seamless movement of goods and people through all segments of our transportation network: road, rail, water, and air. The Liberal approach has been, and continues to be, build, maintain, secure and service our present needs while proactively planning for our future directions. The Conservative government has let our transportation system grind to a halt, and has no plans to bring it in line with the rest of the developed world. If we are going to remain competitive in the world, we need to focus on three main policy areas: high-speed rail, a strengthened gateway strategy, and safe and secure air travel.

High-speed rail

There is one leader in North America that sees the benefits of a modern high-speed rail system and is investing billions to make it a reality. Unfortunately, that person is not the Prime Minister of Canada. U.S. President Barack Obama announced late last month \$8-billion in funding for high-speed rail in the U.S. creating tens of thousands of manufacturing, engineering, and operations jobs. American jobs that is. If Canada wants to benefit, we need to start building. The current government is limited by small-thinking. They think they can improve passenger rail by adding side tracks and other tweaks. But you cannot turn a plough-horse into a race-horse. While Obama is busy using the economic crisis to build the transportation network of the future and leaving a legacy for generations to come, our government is commissioning yet another feasibility study. We cannot afford to let the Americans get ahead of us on this. Right now Canada has some of the greatest minds and resources to make high-speed rail a reality and the conditions have never been better.

A gateway strategy

Canada is well-positioned as a conduit for international trade. Our Pacific ports are the closest in North America to Asia and the fastest-emerging global economies. Our Atlantic ports are the closest in North America to Europe, whose combined economies are 20 times larger than China, and are 12 hours away from the wealthiest consumer market in the world—120 million people in the northeastern United States. The St. Lawrence/Great Lakes system is critical to the Great Lakes Basin, American Northeast, and Midwest. The previous Liberal government invested

heavily in building a gateway strategy in these three areas. Under the Conservative government, investment has not kept up with demand. With the Panama Canal expansion slated for completion in four years, our competitive advantages will be severely mitigated. Canada must put the appropriate investments needed to ensure that our gateways are the most efficient hubs to move goods to and from North America.

Secure air travel

As long as there are terrorists who wish to use airplanes to carry out attacks, protecting our aircraft must be a priority. The failed bombing attempt last Christmas exposed a major gap in air security which has not been adequately addressed. While the government was quick to implement restrictive measures and purchase multi-million dollar X-ray scanners, many experts have stated that none of these measures would likely stop a determined suicide bomber. The government needs to get serious about how to secure airplanes while respecting civil rights. This is not an easy task, but while the U.S. is engaged in a top-down review of air safety, our government has shown that they can follow, but not lead.

Our country is sitting on the edge of a new era in transportation. One that is safer, faster, and cleaner. Our times are not that dissimilar to how our founders must have felt almost 150 years ago when they aimed to create a great nation in the vast territory we call Canada. They had the foresight, ambition and most importantly the political will to build a ribbon of steel across a nation with a population less than the city of Toronto. Their dreams created a nation. We too can do great things in our time and leave a better place for future Canadians—it just requires political will.

Liberal MP Joe Volpe, who represents Eglinton-Lawrence, Ont., is his party's transport critic.