Putting Canadian Passenger Rail Back on Track: A Multiple Streams Framework Analysis of

High-Frequency Rail

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June 2021

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of

Master of Arts (M.A.)

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Abstract

After decades of stagnation and policy neglect, the lackluster passenger rail services in Canada today pale in comparison to those in other advanced industrialized countries. However, change appears to be on the horizon with the partial implementation of VIA Rail's High-Frequency Rail (HFR) proposal within the Quebec City-Windsor corridor. This study applies the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) to analyze how HFR arrived on the government's agenda.

From qualitative interviews with 13 respondents, three expectations based on the MSF are confirmed: evidence of 1) activity in the framework's three streams (problem, policy, politics) which demonstrate their ripeness; 2) a policy window opening as a result of changes in the politics stream; and 3) a policy entrepreneur who coupled the streams during that policy window.

This study demonstrates the applicability of the MSF to a Canadian transportation policy context, the factors that facilitated HFR's recognition amongst the policy community's short-list of viable alternatives, and the importance of the role of a policy entrepreneur in coupling a proposal with favourable political forces across diverse jurisdictions and partisan affiliations. This case study also offers critical insights into the existing narratives and the present state of the passenger rail policy debate, including the strategies and variables that facilitated this rail proposal's rise onto the government's agenda.

Résumé

Après des décennies de stagnation et de négligence politique, les services ferroviaires canadiens n'ont pas de quoi rendre fier lorsque nous les comparons avec ceux d'autres pays industrialisés. Cependant, le changement semble être à l'horizon avec la mise en œuvre partielle de la proposition du train à grande fréquence (TGF) de VIA Rail dans le corridor Québec-Windsor. Cette étude applique l'approche des courants multiples ([*Multiple Streams Framework*] MSF) afin d'analyser comment le TGF s'est inscrit à l'agenda du gouvernement.

À partir d'entretiens qualitatifs avec 13 répondants, trois observations basées sur le MSF sont confirmées : 1) activité dans les trois volets du cadre d'analyse (problème, politique, politique) qui démontrent leur maturité ; 2) l'importance d'une fenêtre d'opportunité politique qui s'ouvre à la suite de changements dans ces activités politiques ; et 3) la présence d'un entrepreneur politique qui a su articuler les changements dans le flux d'activités à l'intérieur de cette fenêtre d'opportunité.

Cette étude souligne l'applicabilité du MSF au contexte des politiques de transport canadiennes, les facteurs qui ont facilité la reconnaissance du TGF parmi la liste des alternatives viables au sein de la communauté politique et l'importance du rôle des entrepreneurs pour l'articulation d'une proposition politique avec des forces politiques favorables à travers diverses juridictions et affiliations partisanes. Cette étude de cas offre également un aperçu critique des travaux existants et de l'état actuel du débat sur les politiques ferroviaires canadiennes, y compris les stratégies et les variables qui ont facilité l'inscription de cette proposition ferroviaire à l'agenda du gouvernement.

Acknowledgements

This thesis was made possible by the contributions of a handful of important people in my personal and academic life. First, I want to thank a mentor of mine who inspired my curiosity in passenger rail policy – Jacques Fauteux. Under his wing at VIA Rail, I learned so much from his integrity, hard work-ethic, and compassionate leadership.

I must also express my gratitude to several individuals who have helped me grow as a graduate student at McGill University. Ever since our very first meeting, my supervisor, Dr. Daniel Béland, has been unbelievably supportive and motivating. His positive, collaborative outlook and words of constant encouragement always lifted my spirits. I must also give my sincere thanks to Dr. Elisabeth Gidengil. As part of the final assignment from her course, the initial ideas for this thesis were developed and refined thanks to her helpful feedback.

I also had the pleasure of meeting some very bright and supportive friends and classmates who helped me throughout this journey. In particular, Luka A-Jobin, Ozan Bozkaya, Maxine Both, Majka Hahn, and Jianna Marin were sources of incredible guidance and provided me with helpful suggestions for my research.

I am of course most indebted to my beautiful family. I thank my mom and dad for their unwavering encouragement and support, and for constantly making me feel reassured throughout this journey. I must also thank my nanna, not just for her kind words and curiosity with my studies, but also for her generous financial support to my academic pursuits. I want to also thank my grandma for our weekly dinner conversations and scrabble games which were a great distraction to help keep my mind clear. Lastly, I must express my deepest thanks to the best aunt in the world – my aunt Jane. She allowed me to stay with her in Kingston, Ontario for the greater part of this past year – providing me with the perfect setting to complete my studies, expand my thinking, and bounce my ideas off of her brilliant mind. There are no words that can fully express how thankful I am for her and everything she's done for my academic pursuits.

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1. Introduction

The heyday of intercity passenger rail in Canada is long gone. After decades of stagnation and apathetic policy decisions, the lackluster rail services of today pale in comparison to those of other advanced industrial European and Asian countries. While numerous attempts have been made to put Canadian passenger rail back on track over the past half century, including dozens of studies for High-Speed Rail (HSR) technology, none have been successfully adopted or reached a final government decision. However, in recent years VIA Rail Canada's latest proposal for High-Frequency Rail (HFR) has achieved unprecedented progress including receiving funding for partial implementation. In light of this, we seek to understand what caused this change in the government's policy orientation.

To guide our analysis of the HFR proposal through the policy process, we employ the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF). This framework will be especially useful for our case study given it encompasses a variety of relevant factors for explaining agenda change in government. Utilizing the MSF approach, this study asks what conditions were influential in giving rise to the inclusion of HFR on the government's agenda, as evidenced by continued interest and wellfunded studies of the project. This work will contribute to the existing literature in at least two ways. Firstly, our case study will add to the MSF literature by confirming the applicability of the framework to a passenger rail public policy context within the Canadian executive branch.

Secondly, this case study will also contribute to the existing passenger rail literature in Canada. Over the past several decades, much of the passenger rail public policy debate has primarily focused on the adoption of HSR. In response, the literature has developed important insights into the narratives for and against this advanced rail infrastructure. As HFR is a uniquely successful and contemporary example of an innovative passenger rail proposal, this case study will offer critical insights into these existing narratives and the present state of the passenger rail policy debate.

The work proceeds in the following way: In sections two and three, we contextualize the historical trends of passenger rail policy in Canada and subsequently offer a literature review of the competing narratives within the passenger rail policy debate (with a focus on HSR). In section four, we explain the case study for this research – the HFR project, including the basic facts of the proposal and the milestones of its navigation through the policy process. In sections five and six, we outline the theoretical underpinnings and application of the MSF for our case study, along with the methodology for this research. In section seven, we provide our research findings from our MSF analysis of the HFR case study. And finally, in sections eight and nine, we provide the discussion and conclusion of this research, outlining the main takeaways and contributions for both the MSF literature as well as the Canadian passenger rail policy literature.

2. Historical Overview of Passenger Rail in Canada

2.1 The Origins of Passenger Rail

This section will seek to provide historical context for the progression of Canada's passenger rail services from its rapid growth at confederation to its marginal role in the 21st century. Fueled by the onset of the industrial revolution, the young nation's railroad system rapidly expanded throughout the 19th century, fundamentally transforming modern ways of life (Faith, 1990; Keefer, 1972). As a watershed technological advancement for its time, in contrast to the horse drawn carriages and boats that defined the preceding centuries of transport, the train laid the foundations for accelerated development – ushering in new waves of productivity and the political unification of provinces into the Dominion of Canada (Lukasiewicz, 1979).

2.2 The Decline of Passenger Rail

As Canada entered the 20th century, its rail industry struggled in adapting to its new status as one of many viable modes of transport with the emergence of private automobiles and commercial air travel (Dupuis, 2015). Unlike these newer modes of transport, railroads were disadvantaged by infrastructural baggage such as tracks, signals, and stations, which made it ineffective in meeting the post-World War II transportation demands for speed and flexibility (Perl, 2002). By the 1950s, Canada's rail industry was facing economic dysfunction mainly owing to insufficient and declining ridership volumes (Statistics Canada, 1999). In 1961, the MacPherson Royal Commission recommended government policy allow market forces to spur economic growth to enable improved transportation efficiencies (Privy Council Office, 1961).

Initially, Canadian policymakers mostly ignored these recommendations because the rail operators' domination over the freight industry meant that they could cross-subsidize their losses from uneconomical passenger services (Lukasiewicz, 1979). However, by the late 1960s, competition amongst other modes of freight transport had reached a point where passenger deficits incurred by the freight rail industry, namely Canadian National Railways (CN) and Canadian Pacific Railways (CP), could no longer be absorbed. As a result, most of these uneconomical routes continued to operate passenger services, propped up by direct subsidization from the federal government as part of their preservationist policy orientation (Perl, 2002).

2.3 The Creation of VIA Rail Canada

As this preservationist approach failed to reverse declining ridership and profitability, policymakers accepted that major revitalization of the passenger rail industry would be necessary. By 1976, in following the principles of the MacPherson Commission, the federal government issued a directive to slow the growing subsidization of passenger rail by ordering the Canadian Transport Commission, along with both CN and CP, to develop a coordinated strategy to make passenger services more cost efficient (Perl, 2002). Ultimately, both passenger rail carriers and the federal government collectively agreed on the creation of a new publicly owned passenger rail company, VIA Rail Canada Inc. (hereafter referred to as "VIA Rail" or "VIA"). The federal government soon after purchased VIA Rail through an order-in-council, establishing it as a crown corporation.

With no formal legislative mandate, VIA Rail's early years were marred by difficulties in acquiring adequate resources to bring about a revitalized passenger rail service (Lukasiewicz, 1982). Initially lacking any of its own trains, railroads, stations, personnel or other vital equipment, VIA Rail had to negotiate agreements with the two freight carriers, CN and CP, to acquire outdated equipment and operate on shared tracks. Despite VIA Rail's best efforts, sustained low revenues led successive cabinets throughout the 1980s and 1990s to slash services of uneconomical routes and cut capital and operating funds, and thereby further depressing VIA Rail's ridership.

2.4 Passenger Rail Today: A Stagnant Mode of Transportation

Presently, VIA Rail provides a basic level of year-round services to over 400 communities across a 12,500-km network, held together by annual government subsidies of approximately \$280 million in operating funds (VIA Rail, 2020). VIA Rail's services in the Quebec City-Windsor corridor (QWC), passing through Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal, comprises the overwhelming majority (~95%) of the company's total ridership of approximately 5 million passenger trips per year (p. 60). Within this corridor and various other routes, VIA mostly relies on negotiated contracts for access to shared tracks where they must forfeit the right-of-way to slow moving freight trains, thereby preventing VIA's trains from reaching higher speeds and negatively impacting their on-time performance (OTP) (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2016). While VIA Rail has managed to increase its ridership from 2013 through 2019, the long-term trajectory of the organization remains vulnerable due to repeated government neglect to innovate (Bird, 2009). Apart from the long-overdue government allotment for fleet renewal (Transport Canada, 2018), so far, no major overhauling initiatives, such as dedicated tracks, have been implemented to revitalize Canada's lagging passenger rail service.

3. Literature Review: Passenger Rail Modernization Debate in Canada

3.1 False Starts at High-Speed Rail

While Canada's present passenger rail systems pale in sophistication and efficiency compared to those of some European and Asian countries,¹ for a period between 1968 until 1982, rail services in the QWC operated the Turbo Train with an impressive top speed of 200km/h – sitting amongst the global leaders of rail technology during its time (Shron, 2007).² Since this period, dozens of studies have researched the possibility of building a modern, advanced rail service in Canada,³ especially within the densely populated QWC.⁴ The most common policy option studied for updating Canada's rail systems has been HSR,⁵ making it the main driver of the policy debate and the central focus for this literature. In fact, as a result of such a massive quantity of

¹ Leading countries in advanced rail technology, including France, Germany, Japan and China, have seen major benefits from their capacity to transport people rapidly, efficiently, and sustainably across their metropolitan hubs (see examples in Luis & Deakin, 2017). In contrast to Canada's preservationist policy orientation, a growing list of countries across the industrialized world, including all other G7 states, have invested into technologically advanced High-Speed Rail systems.

 $^{^{2}}$ We should note that the Turbo Train service never actually reaching these speeds during regular operations.

³ See High Speed Rail Canada (2020) for a complete list of the 24 HSR studies in the QWC conducted since 1970.

⁴ Proponents have highlighted this route due to its high population density between three of Canada's four largest municipalities: Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal.

⁵ Defined by the International Union of Railways as any passenger rail service that travels at least above 200km/h under certain conditions and the system complies with a list of requirements (see International Union of Railways, 2018, p. 5).

abandoned HSR studies, comedian Rick Mercer has satirically called Canada a "world leader in high-speed rail *study* [emphasis added]" (Mercer, 2011).

An early initiative to bring high-speed services in the QWC was the Ontario-Quebec Rapid Train Task Force (1991) – a joint initiative between the Premiers of Ontario and Quebec. By 1995, the federal government had also joined this HSR study, along with a consortium of various Canadian and French banks assembled by Bombardier. The resulting tripartite report further elaborated on the original Task Force's study, providing a more detailed analysis of projected ridership, revenues, construction and operating costs, and other socio-economic effects (Transport Canada et al., 1995). Despite the potential benefits, the provincial and federal governments were hesitant to commit to the project given the \$18.3 billion⁶ capital costs for construction.

A more recent exploration of HSR came in 2011 with the EcoTrain feasibility study (EcoTrain Consortium, 2011). As an update to the 1995 tripartite study, this newer study found that HSR within the corridor would produce considerable net economic advantages, as well as other socio-ecological benefits. Nonetheless, after showing little interest for the project, the federal government backed away from pursuing the project likely given the anticipated high construction costs of \$18.9 billion for a 200km/h service or \$21.3 billion for 300km/h.⁷ Since this study, federal policymakers' interest for such a costly and politically risky HSR project seems to have dissolved.

3.2 Competing Narratives in the HSR debate

As a result of these numerous studies and active policy debates over implementing HSR, policy scholarship has put forward a diverse set of competing narratives that occupy the Canadian HSR

⁶ These costs were provided in 1995 Canadian dollar values.

⁷ These costs were provided in 2009 Canadian dollar value.

and passenger rail literature. Aside from the obvious passenger-related benefits of faster and more convenient travel between major cities (Johnson, 2012; Levinson, 2012), proponents of HSR have put forward a variety of potential advantages of such a project in the QWC. From research on the economic benefits of HSR lines elsewhere, scholars have shown that creating a fast, efficient passenger rail line would attract increased ridership and revenues (see for instance, Albalate & Bel, 2012; De Rus, 2008; Nash, 2014; Tierney, 2012). Similarly, scholars, such as Lukasiewicz (1979, 1982), argue that an HSR service in the QWC would make passenger rail more economically self-sufficient, thus reducing the necessity for public subsidizations. Another view argues that improved mobility of people across cities would generate economic growth for local businesses and industries (Chen & Hall, 2011; Vickerman, 2018). Some other economic proponents suggest that investing in Canada's infrastructure has merit in and of itself, as HSR would create new well-paying jobs for both those who construct and operate the service (Green Economy Network, 2016).

Scholars have also argued that as greater scarcity of oil causes the price of driving or flying to rise, HSR will become a more economically appealing option due to its lower fuel consumption levels and greater energy-efficiency (Gilbert & Perl, 2007). Similarly, since HSR has been shown to emit much less fossil fuel per passenger kilometre than oil-dependent alternatives (Åkerman, 2011; Chang & Kendall 2011; Westin & Kågeson, 2012), HSR has attracted environmental advocates who promote this option to reduce the transportation sector's high share of Canada's total carbon emissions (Lowe, 1994; Valli, 2010).

Despite these various potential benefits, some contributors to the passenger rail debate remain skeptical about the economic potential of HSR – claiming that the high costs of construction cannot be justified, and that projected insufficient ridership means continued statesubsidization is inevitable (Albalate & Bel, 2012; Feigenbaum, 2013). Critics have pointed out that the construction of all-new, dedicated HSR tracks could become technically infeasible if the proposed route traverses through developed communities with existing infrastructure. Others have problematized the high costs in relation to the levels of carbon emissions abatement by investing in HSR – arguing that HSR is an inefficient use of funds for reducing carbon emissions (McKitrick, 2012). And finally, some scholars have argued that the development of HSR might not reduce transportation-related carbon emissions in the corridor if this service only increases mobility but does not replace the excessive use of the other, higher-emitting, modes of transport (Katz-Rosene, 2013).

With his analysis, Katz-Rosene (2017) categorizes the various competing Canadian HSR narratives based on "a more fundamental level of disagreement regarding what political arrangements would serve as the optimal backdrop" (p. 759). Moving beyond a simplistic pro-HSR and anti-HSR discourse, Katz-Rosene establishes three core narratives: 1) the Ecotrain⁸ narrative which supports HSR development with public-private partnerships in order to create an environmentally-friendly, sustainable, high speed service; 2) the Turbotrain⁹ narrative which favours public investment to spur economic growth and job creation through a government regulated service; and 3) the Zerotrain narrative which remains skeptical of HSR because of concerns that it would become unprofitable and drain government coffers. Katz-Rosene's contribution reveals a deeper level of complexity to 'the politics of mobility', and therefore, better contextualizes the literature's considerations for innovative passenger rail projects, beyond simply support or opposition to HSR proposals.

⁸ The Ecotrain narrative receives its name from the EcoTrain Consortium, the corporate group responsible for producing the updated feasibility study of HSR in the QWC.

⁹ The Turbotrain narrative is based on the publicly owned Turbo Train service which formerly operated in the QWC from 1968-1982.

Overall, while the passenger rail policy literature has produced intriguing arguments for HSR, a combination of expensive projected capital costs, financial risk, and uncertainty over logistical and technical feasibility have stymied political will to implement such a large-scale rail infrastructure project in the QWC. In explaining policymakers' inaction and the present muddling state of VIA Rail, Bird's (2015) MSF analysis finds that the policy window (see thorough explanation in section five) is closed for any major policy innovations for passenger rail in Canada. However, given the recent emergence of HFR on the government's agenda, we posit that a window of opportunity may have opened for agenda change for passenger rail projects. By developing this understanding of the public policy literature's competing narratives for revitalizing passenger rail, we can more clearly contextualize the emergence of HFR as a viable policy proposal for government consideration.

4. High-Frequency Rail Case Study

As the latest promising initiative to revitalize intercity passenger rail in the QWC, the High-Frequency Rail project serves as the case study for this research. This section will seek to briefly describe the context for HFR's emergence, explain the proposal and its potential benefits, and outline its progress through the policy process.

4.1 Context for the Emergence of High-Frequency Rail

As the window of opportunity was closing for the EcoTrain following the 2011 election, two critical issues were a growing burden for Canada's intercity passenger rail operations. Firstly, as a result of consecutive governments' stalling funds for fleet renewal, the average age of VIA Rail's trains were over 40 years old – far exceeding their life expectancy of 25 to 30 years (VIA Rail, 2016). Secondly, as VIA Rail operates mostly on freight carrier tracks in the QWC, its passenger trains have experienced regular delays since they must give right-of-way for slower

freight trains.¹⁰ This caused VIA Rail's on-time performance to collapse from 82% in 2010 to 76% by 2014 (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2016).

As a result of VIA Rail's aging rolling-stock and its lack of priority on shared freight tracks, the rail carrier was increasingly facing financial difficulties. Owing to its "inability to deliver reliable, frequent and competitive travel times" (VIA Rail, 2016), VIA Rail's annual ridership decreased from 4.2 million passengers in 2010 to 3.8 million in 2014 (Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2016). With these drops in ridership, congruent lower total revenues meant that VIA Rail would rely upon even greater operating subsidies and were forced to make cuts to frequencies along less economical routes.¹¹

Then in 2014, VIA's newly appointed President and CEO, Yves Desjardins-Siciliano, set forth service and management changes to reverse declining ridership and revenues, and established two key longer-term priorities for revitalizing the rail company as a whole. The first ambitious goal aimed to secure capital funding for the long-overdue fleet renewal for the QWC. The second and most challenging goal was to acquire dedicated passenger rail tracks through Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal – thus ensuring a reliable, faster service, clear of any freight trains congesting the tracks (Desjardins-Siciliano, 2016).

4.2 Description of High-Frequency Rail

In developing their proposal for dedicated tracks, VIA Rail coined the entirely new term, "High-Frequency Rail" – borrowing from established intercity rail concepts such as High-Speed Rail or

¹⁰ Unlike many other countries' rail systems (including the United States), Canada's does not give priority to passenger trains over freight. As a result, VIA notes that CN's growing Carloads per Route Mile, its use of heavier and slower freight trains, and the deterioration of the rail beds, have all contributed negatively on VIA Rail's performance (VIA Rail, 2016).

¹¹ See for instance, the cuts to St. Mary's frequencies resulting in the Save VIA campaign to pressure federal government to restore previous number of frequencies.

High-Performance Rail (HPR).¹² Taking inspiration from the Shining Waters Railway study,¹³ VIA Rail's HFR proposal aims to purchase and upgrade existing freight tracks between Toronto to Quebec City, with stops along medium and large cities including Peterborough, Ottawa, Montreal, and Trois-Rivières, as well as other key smaller communities along the line (see VIA Rail's proposed route in Figure 1). In keeping with its name, HFR would enable VIA Rail to avoid overly congested freight tracks, thus allowing them to triple the number of daily commutes between Toronto, Ottawa and Montreal (VIA Rail, 2021).



Figure 1 – Map: High-Frequency Rail route

Source: VIA Rail (2021). Proposal for High Frequency Rail in the Québec City – Toronto Corridor. VIA Rail Canada. <u>https://corpo.viarail.ca/en/projects-infrastructure/high-frequency-rail</u>

¹² The term HPR, also called higher-speed rail, refers to passenger rail service that have slower top speeds compared to HSR but involve incremental improvements to rail infrastructure to optimize efficiency.

¹³ Shining Waters Railway is a group that was created as a part of a local initiative to study repurposing a rail line to connect Havelock and Peterborough to downtown Toronto (See progress report, Smith, 2012).

Whereas past proposals for HSR in the QWC had projected speeds of up to 200km/h or 300km/h, VIA Rail states that their HFR proposal would reach speeds of up to 177km/h. While slower than HSR, this project would still ensure that trains would be travelling much faster than their current average speeds of 98km/h (VIA Rail, 2019).¹⁴ Given operations would avoid the congested shared tracks with freight trains, VIA expects that its OTP in the corridor would drastically improve to 95% (VIA Rail, 2021).

Moreover, VIA argues that where HFR lacks in its speed as compared to HSR, it makes up for in its cost-savings. For example, while HSR would require the construction of an entirely new, dedicated passenger track, HFR would merely rehabilitate and upgrade most of the existing rail infrastructure already in place. Depending on whether the tracks are electrified, VIA suggests that the costs for HFR¹⁵ would range between \$4 billion to \$6 billion (VIA Rail, 2019) – as compared to the over \$20 billion price tag for HSR. With its relatively simple construction requirements, another comparable benefit for the HFR project is how quickly the project could be completed with a timeline under 4 years long.

In anticipating that more travellers will leave behind their automobiles, HFR has also been recognized for its capacity to reduce congestion on the highways between these major cities. By offsetting more trips by car, VIA Rail estimates that HFR would reduce 10.3 to 13.9 million tons of carbon dioxide emissions over the project's 30-year life cycle. Moreover, unlike past HSR proposals which would only service major metropolitan hubs, HFR would stop in smaller communities along the route, thus benefiting local businesses and spurring economic

¹⁴ This would cut travel times between Ottawa to Toronto from their current 4 hours and 30 minutes to 3 hours and 15 minutes.

¹⁵ While VIA Rail's business case has remained confidential, they have publicly indicated that financing for the project could come from multiple sources, including the Canadian Infrastructure Bank, the Canadian pension funds, and/or other private investors (Barrow, 2016).

growth. In turn, these more frequent stops would also mean that HFR services would reach a broader base of customers, and therefore enable greater economic self-sufficiency for the crown corporation.

4.3 High-Frequency Rail through the Policy Process

Upon his appointment as President and CEO at VIA Rail, Desjardins-Siciliano and a number of senior VIA Rail officials, began an extensive public outreach campaign – criss-crossing communities in Ontario and Quebec to present their plans for dedicated passenger rail (Thomas, 2016). The proposal quickly gained interest and vocal support from key stakeholders across these affected communities. For example, elected officials from various municipalities started a letter-writing campaign with the intention to persuade the federal government to support the project. At the business community level, the HFR project received strong support from local Chambers of Commerce, as well as the provincial and national Chambers of Commerce. The Government of Quebec also put out a statement encouraging the federal government to move forward with HFR (Radio-Canada, 2018). At the federal level, the HFR proposal was steadily gaining multi-partisan support with MPs representing key HFR constituencies beginning to support the project. Ahead of the 2019 election, MPs from the Liberal government, the Conservative party, the NDP, the Bloc Quebecois and the Green party all supported the HFR proposal (Brousseau-Pouliot, 2019).

As the idea of HFR was gaining more attention inside and outside of government, Transport Canada allotted \$3.3 million and \$8 million, in 2016 and 2018 respectively, to study HFR (Department of Finance, 2016, 2018). By June 2019, Marc Garneau, the Minister of Infrastructure, the President and CEO of the Canadian Infrastructure Bank (CIB), and the newly appointed VIA Rail President and CEO, Cynthia Garneau,¹⁶ announced an unprecedented

¹⁶ Cynthia Garneau has no relation to Marc Garneau.

allotment of \$71.1 million to study HFR (Transport Canada, 2019). At this press conference in Trois-Rivieres, the parties involved stated that these funds would support a Joint Project Office (JPO), headed in collaboration between the CIB and VIA Rail to conduct an 18-month long assessment and then to provide a final recommendation for a final cabinet decision.

Following the 2019 election, the Prime Minister asked Minister Garneau in his mandate letter to "work with the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities to create high frequency rail for the Toronto-Quebec City corridor" (Trudeau, 2019). Finally, in the 2021 budget, the government moved forward to support the implementation of HFR by providing VIA Rail with \$491.2 million over six years to "reduce bottlenecks, improve fluidity and connectivity, and allow VIA to take an important step towards high-frequency rail in the corridor" (Department of Finance, 2021, p. 212).¹⁷

5. Multiple Streams Framework

Since the emergence of the field of public policy research, scholars have advanced integrated theories for understanding the "interactions that occur over time between public policies and surrounding actors, events, contexts, and outcomes" (Weible, 2018, p. 2). One of the most highly recognized tools for understanding changes in agenda setting within the *policy cycle*¹⁸ is the Multiple Streams Framework (Rowlands, 2007; Webber, 2008). Originally adapted from the Garbage Can Model of Organizational Choice (Cohen et al., 1972) and first sketched by US political scientist John W. Kingdon (1984), the MSF consists of three parallel elements: the problem stream, the policy stream, and politics stream. Kingdon hypothesizes that at certain

¹⁷ Budget 2021 also allots \$4.4 million in additional spending for the JPO to advance due diligence and to de-risk the project (p. 212).

¹⁸ The foundational contribution of the *Policy Cycle*, ¹⁸ developed by early policy theorist Lasswell (1958), argues that there are five stages of the policy process including agenda setting, policy formulation, policy adoption, policy implementation, and evaluation.

critical times, these autonomous streams become aligned – allowing for a 'policy window'¹⁹ to open, at which point the streams can be coupled together by a policy entrepreneur. In coupling their pet proposals to problems and favourable political conditions, the policy entrepreneur increases the likeliness of agenda change. We shall now briefly explain each of the core elements, the sub-concepts, and how they interact together as part of the MSF (summarized in Figure 2).

5.1 Core Elements

Problem Stream

In the problem stream, there are various non-ideal conditions which come to be recognized as problems based on subjective public and government perceptions (Béland & Howlett, 2016). Because society faces many potential problems, only a limited number of them will receive considerable attention from governments for active problem solving. There are three mechanisms whereby these problems enter policymakers' agenda: rapid changes of indicators, a focusing events which captures public attention, and feedback from existing policies and programs (Baumgartner et al., 2018).

Policy Stream

Within the policy stream, various specialists, experts and advocates within a specific field make up the policy community. Through a process of mutation of different ideas in the 'policy primeval soup', the policy community generates worked-out policy proposals for governments' consideration. Policy entrepreneurs will navigate their pet proposal through this policy community by softening-up others to their idea in an attempt to gain recognition on the

¹⁹ Recent iterations of the MSF have amended the conception of the policy window to distinguished between agenda windows and decision windows (Herweg et al., 2018). The former refers to opportunities for agenda change, whereas the latter indicates an opportunity for a decision to take place. For the purposes of this research, we use the term policy window to encompass only windows for agenda change.

community's short-list of viable alternatives. In order for a policy proposal to receive recognition within the policy community, typically it must meet the 'criteria of survival' which includes value acceptability, technical feasibility, financial viability, and public acquiescence (adapted from Zahariadis, 2014). When a viable policy alternative does become available, this increases the likeliness of a subject gaining status on the government's agenda (Kingdon, 1984).

Politics Stream

The politics stream is occupied by the actors at the political system level and describes the political atmosphere surrounding opportunities for key issues and policy alternatives to gain agenda status. This stream is influenced by three core sub-concepts: the national mood, interest groups, and government receptivity (adapted from Herweg et al., 2018). Recent MSF literature has argued that the national mood and interest groups are not necessary conditions for stream ripeness, but that the receptiveness of government officials is the most relevant determinant for affecting agenda change in the political stream (Herweg et al., 2015).

Policy Window

The MSF theorizes that when these three streams are ripe, meaning 1) there is a compelling problem, 2) there is a viable policy alternative, and 3) the political conditions are favourable for agenda change, then a policy window may emerge (Zahariadis, 2014). Kingdon defines these policy windows as "opportunity for advocates of proposals to push their pet solutions" (Kingdon, 1984, p. 173). Policy windows open because of changes in either the problem or the politics streams – otherwise called "problem windows" and "politics windows".²⁰ For instance, if indicators worsen rapidly or a focusing event brings greater attention to a problem, then policymakers will seek policies that resolve that issue. Alternatively, events in government or the

²⁰ Howlett (1998) further classifies policy windows by their degree of institutionalization, ranging from routine, spillover, discretionary, and random (ordered from most to least institutionalization).

general political climate, such as turnover in administration or shifts in the national mood, can lead policymakers to consider new priorities and policy alternatives on the agenda.

Policy Entrepreneurs

The policy entrepreneur refers to "advocates who are willing to invest their resources – time, energy, reputation, money – to promote a position in return for anticipated future gain in the form of material, purposive, or solidary benefits" (Kingdon, 1984, p. 188). Once a change in the problem or political stream has opened the policy window, the policy entrepreneur employs political manipulation to persuasively frame their policy alternative as a viable solution to pressing problems on the policymakers' radar (Cairney, 2012; Mintrom & Norman, 2009). By coupling the three streams during such a policy window, the policy entrepreneur increases the likeliness of their proposal rising to the governmental and decision agendas. A governmental agenda refers to the subjects on the government's radar, whereas the decision agenda refers to those subjects up for active decision (Kingdon, 1984).



Figure 2 – Multiple Streams Framework: Agenda Setting

Source: Adapted from Zahariadis (2014).

5.2 Application of the Framework

Because of Kingdon's initial applications of the framework, scholars from a broad range of fields of public policy studies across the globe have utilized and adapted the MSF.²¹ Despite Kingdon's original use of MSF to analyze transportation policy (as well as health care), only a small percentage of case studies have since used the MSF to analyze the transportation policy process (Rawat & Morris, 2016). As such, this study will contribute to the MSF literature by returning to this area of public policy studies and confirming the framework's applicability.

While the MSF initially came out of the United States (US), later uses of the framework in Canadian contexts at the federal level have validated the model's applicability (see examples

²¹ In their recent meta-review of MSF case studies, Jones and his colleagues (2016) have identified 311 articles in English-language, peer-reviewed journals between 2000 to 2013 that have applied the framework across a variety of policy issue areas.

of Dykeman & Williams, 2014; Howlett, 1998; Mcnaughton et al., 2013). In adapting the framework to parliamentary systems, Zahariadis (1995, 2003) has suggested keeping the MSF largely intact and simply combining the elements of the political stream into 'party politics' in recognition of their larger role. As a result, we place more emphasis on the role of the political parties in agenda setting in the political stream given Canada's centralized, parliamentary system. Furthermore, because the HFR proposal would just require approval from the cabinet, only the executive branch plays a deciding role in setting the agenda in this case, as opposed to the legislative branch. As a result, this study contributes to literature on the applicability of the MSF to a Canadian context, as well as for agenda setting within the executive branch.

Moreover, despite the expansive body of MSF work, certain scholars (Cairney & Jones, 2016; Jones et al., 2016) have noted that many case study applications of the framework only offer superficial analyses of the core elements given they do not adequately integrate recent theoretical refinements or make use of key sub-concepts. This research will build on recent contributions to the MSF literature by including all five core elements and their respective sub-concepts.

Based on our review of the HFR proposal's timeline through the policy process (see section four), we apply a visual representation of the key events that mark significant steps in the MSF to this case study (see Figure 3). For instance, as HFR received funding for government study in 2016 and 2018, this suggests that the proposal did reach the governmental agenda at that point. With the 2019 JPO announcement, it was apparent that the cabinet was nearing a final decision on HFR – thus suggesting that this policy alternative had reached the decision agenda. With these milestones indicating that HFR had entered the governmental and decision agendas, we posit that, at some point beforehand, we should expect to see activity in the three streams and

evidence for an open policy window. Once this policy window was opened, we then expect that a policy entrepreneur coupled the streams – helping HFR move onto the governmental and decision agenda. Lastly, the substantial funding for HFR in the 2021 budget suggests that the proposal achieved policy adoption – although this study will exclusively focus on the agenda setting stage of the policy cycle.²²

Figure 3 – Timeline: MSF Applied to HFR Case Study



Source: Produced by author.

Generally, this study's application of the MSF anticipates the following: 1) evidence of activity in all three streams which demonstrate their ripeness; 2) evidence of a policy window opening as a result of changes in the problem or political stream; and 3) evidence of a policy entrepreneur who coupled the streams during the policy window, which increased the likeliness of the inclusion of HFR on the governmental and decision agendas.

²² Various scholars have added to the MSF literature by adapting the framework to support analyses of the decisionmaking process (see Zahariadis, 1992, 2003; Howlett et al., 2015; Herweg et al., 2015). Herweg, Huß, and Zohlnhöfer (2015) distinguish between the agenda window (and its associated agenda coupling) and the decision window (and its decision coupling). These scholars propose that the decision window will emerge as a result of successful agenda coupling whereby a policy item rises to the decision agenda. When this occurs, a "political entrepreneur", meaning someone operating in formal government, seeks to couple the streams (problem, policy, political) in order to build a majority coalition of political support for the successful adoption of a pet policy proposal (see Modified MSF in Herweg et al., 2015, p. 445).

6. Methodology

As is typical of case studies that use a MSF analysis, this research uses a qualitative approach that relies on interviews with key participants in the policy process. Data collection consisted of interviews with participants conducted between January to March 2021 (prior to policy adoption in the April 2021 budget). The interviews were conducted over an online video calling application. The 13 participants were selected using purposive sampling techniques. The participants interviewed include three former senior officials with VIA Rail Canada, two presidents of rail advocacy organizations, a distinguished scholar of transportation policy in Canada, six Members of Parliament (MPs) on the House of Commons Transport Committee (6), and the current Minister of Transport, Omar Alghabra.

This sample of interview participants reflects a broad range of perspectives on the policy debate over the HFR project and the factors that enabled its entry on the government's agenda. While most perspectives of the HFR project were supportive, some participants were not totally convinced, and one was opposed entirely. Amongst the MPs who were interviewed, this study included both members of the Liberal and Conservative caucuses. The most strongly opinionated and highly informative interviews were conducted with the members of the policy community – namely the former senior officials at VIA Rail and the presidents of rail advocacy groups.

As this research study is guided by the MSF, the interviews used a semi-structured format that followed an adapted list of interview questions from two credible MSF case studies: Tunstall et al. (2015) and Kagan (2018). Both of these studies effectively utilize the main elements and sub-concepts of the MSF (see interview questions in Appendix I). With prior consent from each interview participant, the interviews were recorded and later transcribed. The transcripts were manually coded using a constant comparison analysis – a data-analytic approach that involves

comparing each interpretation against existing findings from previous data analyses (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004). During the initial round of coding, the participants' responses were assigned into categories based on the major and minor elements of the MSF. In the second round, a set of inductive codes were developed using the initial results of the participant's responses within each of the MSF major and minor components. From using this inductive coding method – whereby codes are created directly from interpreting the results – a set of thematic codes for each component of the MSF could be established. For example, "unreliable service" as a thematic code in the problem stream, or "turnover in government" as a thematic code in the political stream. The third round of coding involved identifying common patterns across the interview respondents' answers for our research findings section. In utilizing this iterative process, the interview responses are thoroughly analyzed, interpreted and coded to ensure a greater degree of accuracy and to mitigate for the possibility of bias.

7. Research Findings

In this section, we provide the research findings from our MSF analysis of the HFR case study. Activity within the three streams of the policy process is analyzed before theorizing the factors that led to the opening of a policy window. Lastly, we discuss the role of the policy entrepreneur in coupling the streams, which enabled HFR to enter the governmental and decision agendas.

7.1 Problem Stream

In terms of issues floating in the problem stream, respondents nearly unanimously agreed that "passenger rail in Canada has been on the decline for many years". Central to this decline is the institutional challenge of VIA Rail's operations on freight-owned tracks; something the Minister of Transport called "a problem that had to be fixed". Because VIA Rail trains do not have

legislative priority over rights-of-way on the tracks,²³ respondents noted that VIA's trains are routinely stuck behind slow-moving freight trains, thus leading to slow travel times and poor OTP. Respondents noted that these issues mean that VIA Rail is unable to offer a more appealing service to customers, thereby inhibiting the rail company from comprising a larger share of the transportation market in this corridor. As a former VIA employee stated: "shared tracks became almost a disincentive for passengers to take the train because they couldn't have predictability of arrival". Given low ridership, respondents pointed to the economic burden of the passenger rail industry on government coffers, as VIA Rail persistently relies on significant public subsidies to cover its losses.²⁴ However, respondents made clear that there has been no steep decline in reliability or major urgency to recover VIA Rail's low ridership and profits. These many problems are constant symptoms of the institutional difficulties from VIA's lack of priority access on shared freight infrastructure. In fact, ridership was steadily improving since 2014 (see Figure 4).

²³ Right-of-way determines which trains have priority access over the tracks. While VIA Rail was never given legislative authority for priority access on freight carriers' tracks, the US Congress gave Amtrak this authority.

²⁴ From 2010 to 2014, the federal operating subsidies for VIA Rail climbed from \$261m to \$317m (VIA Rail, 2015).



Figure 4 – VIA Rail Total Passenger-miles 2011-2019 (in millions)

Source: Produced by author. Data retrieved from VIA Rail's 2014 and 2019 annual reports.

As VIA's intercity passenger rail services comprised a sliver of the transportation market,²⁵ respondents indicated that this hampered Canada's carbon emissions reduction strategy. Given that the transportation sector comprises 25% of Canada's total carbon emissions,²⁶ respondents stated that policymakers had an interest in lessening reliance on higheremitting modes of travel such as private automobiles, and instead sought to increase the usage of more eco-friendly modes of transport such as the train.²⁷ As Minister Alghabra explained, "if we establish reliable, frequent, smart, thoughtful planning for passenger rail then it will persuade a lot of travellers to take the train over driving", and therefore reduce carbon emissions in this busy corridor. Moreover, by reducing the number of cars on the road, respondents mentioned that

²⁵ VIA Rail's services only account for 5% of transportation market between Toronto-Ottawa-Montreal – As compared to New York City to Washington DC (14%) or Rome to Milan (69%) (VIA Rail, 2019)

²⁶ Every year, the Government of Canada submits its inventory of national greenhouse gas emissions to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change. The most recent reports indicate that transportation comprises 25% of human-caused emissions (Environment and Climate Change Canada, 2021).

²⁷ For a useful comparison of emissions produced from different modes of transport, the Center for Clean Air Policy (CCAP) and the Center for Neighborhood Technology (CNT) show how conventional and HSR trains emit far less greenhouse gasses per passenger mile compared to private automobiles or airplanes.

improving the passenger rail services would also help to alleviate traffic congestion on major highways in Ontario and Quebec.

Indicators

Among the indicators that demonstrated these problems, most respondents pointed to the unimpressive OTP in the QWC, which was evidence of delays and reduced speeds caused by congestion on the shared tracks. Two other prominent indicators of concern were the low ridership and profitability of VIA's service. Respondents pointed to the indicators of high carbon emissions across the transportation sector as an indication of this corridor's over-reliance on automobiles and underutilization of eco-friendly modes of transport such as the train. Given this over-dependence on cars, respondents also frequently mentioned the high rates of traffic congestion on the major highways in Ontario and Quebec. While these indicators suggest that there were major problems, we should note that there was little, if any, substantial change across any of these conditions that would lead to an opening of a policy window.

Focusing Events

Most participants did not identify any prominent events that could have sparked greater attention to issues of Canada's lagging passenger rail industry, as these problems remained mostly internal and away from public scrutiny. Some respondents did suggest that the Ontario government's 2014 announcement of HSR between Windsor to Toronto was likely a catalyst for the federal government to recognize inefficiencies in its own intercity passenger rail systems.²⁸ One respondent stated that "this may have spurred the federal government to feel that they should do something if Ontario is going to go ahead with this type of modern high-speed rail intercity

²⁸ In late 2014, the Ontario Ministry of Transportation started preparing plans for HSR connecting Toronto, Kitchener-Waterloo, London and Windsor. The project was estimated to cost of \$11b and would support speeds up to 250km/h. Following the Conservative majority elected in 2018, plans for HSR were put on pause.

service". Some respondents mentioned that the long-overdue announcement to finally replace the antiquated corridor fleet revived discussions of Canada's stagnant passenger rail service in general.²⁹ A couple of respondents also identified the federal government's cuts to service frequencies, especially the 2012 cuts to southwestern Ontario routes, as an event that provoked public backlash to the government's ineffective passenger rail policy orientation.³⁰

Policy Feedback

Lastly, respondents indicated that there was feedback about existing passenger rail policies which may have drawn policymakers' attention to these problems. For instance, some respondents pointed to the 2016 Auditor General's report on VIA Rail's precarious circumstances. Similarly, former VIA Rail officials pointed to the rail company's annual corporate reports which continually highlighted that the existing policy was a major hindrance for the rail company's reliability, ridership, and profits. However, despite this regular feedback from channels of the bureaucracy, respondents were skeptical if this would have drastically altered policymakers' "in-difference and ignorance" to passenger rail issues. Many respondents mentioned that "there wasn't anything that had broken through the mass public consciousness in that regard – it was more of an inside initiation". As one rail policy administrative insiders notice as it gets closer to a crisis point".

²⁹ In the 2018 federal budget, the government invested \$989m towards the procurement and purchase of 32 new trains for VIA Rail's QWC services.

³⁰ In reaction to service cuts to VIA Rail's operations in southwestern Ontario, a group of concerned residents started the grassroots organization called "Save VIA" and later changed their name to "All Aboard St. Marys" (All Aboard St. Marys, 2017).

Conclusion

From analyzing the respondents' answers, we find evidence for activity in the problem stream which made it ripe for coupling. The respondents indicated that the institutional challenges of operating on shared tracks and not being given priority access over freight trains meant that VIA Rail's reliability, OTP, and ridership were severely constrained. These perpetual issues, in turn, had negative effects for VIA Rail's overall profitability and dependency on federal subsidies. Moreover, this fringe role for passenger rail within the transportation market posed serious challenges for Canada's climate strategy of offsetting carbon emissions produced by automobiles and alleviating traffic along busy highways. However, since none of these issues changed significantly or reached mass public consciousness, it is unlikely that the policy window was opened as a result of the problem stream.

7.2 Policy Stream

Respondents agreed that the passenger rail policy community has long been generating policy alternatives to resolve many of the complications within the QWC. Some noted that studies for HSR in the corridor have been taking place on and off for half a century. However, with the latest 2011 EcoTrain study hitting a policy dead-end, it became clear that the government was not willing to risk the massive economic and political investment. By 2014, the new President and CEO of VIA Rail, Yves Desjardins-Siciliano, was taking over the company as ridership and revenues were declining. Respondents stated that this unsustainable situation led the rail company to develop a cost-effective proposal to solve these perpetual issues while not scaring away government or private investors.

Similar to Kingdon's conception of the primeval policy soup, the actual emergence for the idea of HFR seemed to "come from a confluence of a lot of influences", as one respondent put it. For instance, there are clear parallels to past proposals for HSR which involve dedicated passenger rail tracks. Moreover, from the 2011 Shining Waters Railway study,³¹ respondents indicated that VIA Rail's team were likely inspired to propose a set of dedicated tracks that ran from Toronto through Peterborough. Other respondents also noted that the HFR proposal shared many similarities with HPR,³² which involves upgrades to existing rails for a more efficient and comfortable passenger experience.

Softening-up

By 2014, VIA Rail was floating the idea of dedicated tracks in the corridor to a variety of stakeholders and communities on the proposed route in professional presentations across Ontario and Quebec. As the idea was gaining interest, VIA Rail began adjusting and refining the proposal until it was ready to submit to Transport Canada as a final business case in late 2016. While the initial proposal connected Toronto to Montreal, the route was later adjusted to include Quebec City due to public demands from local elected officials. Former VIA Rail officials mentioned that a major point of negotiation was over which communities would receive stops along the proposed route: "we ensured that there were different modifications made to the plan to ensure that we were not going to be under-serving the [smaller communities] who were taking this by prioritizing the end to end". A point of contention early on was whether cities, such as Kingston and Drummondville, who were presently serviced by VIA Rail but who were not on the proposed HFR route, would see a decline in their frequencies. Respondents stated that VIA Rail was quick to reassure these cities that they would offer the same frequency of service along

³¹ The Shining Waters Railway group submitted their study for passenger rail service between Havelock, Peterborough and Toronto (for access to their progress report, see Smith, 2012).

³² The outspoken rail advocate, Greg Gormick, has been leading efforts to introduce HPR for southwestern Ontario. He outlines the details of his plan for SouthwestLynx in his series of reports for Oxford County in 2018 (Gormick, 2018)

these existing QWC routes. Ultimately, from this softening-up process, VIA Rail warmed up the public and the policy community to their plans for HFR and also ensured that certain alterations were made in order to mitigate the risk of opposition.

Value Acceptability

There was strong agreement that HFR met many of the values of the policy community for passenger rail. A common value that respondents mentioned was ecological sustainability as HFR was likely to offset carbon emissions from automobiles on highways with this more energy efficient passenger rail option. Respondents also pointed out that HFR is targeted for the middleclass given the relatively low operating costs would mean cheaper tickets for passengers, as opposed to the more expensive HSR operating costs. Respondents mentioned that HFR would create economic savings for the government since VIA Rail could increase their profit margins and minimize the need for subsidies. Respondents also stated that HFR would address the priority of offering service for unconnected cities or towns such as Peterborough and Trois-Rivières. Some respondents also noted that VIA Rail's incrementalist approach with HFR actually coincided with the policy community's values given rail advocates were anxious to see some form of improved rail service implemented in the near future. As the President of Transport Action Canada, Terry Johnson, stated "our desire is not to see another five to ten years wasted studying something that isn't going to happen".

Technical Feasibility

Every respondent stated that the HFR project was technically feasible as the construction would be fairly straightforward: "[t]he beauty of HFR is that it isn't something magical". Respondents who were familiar with the technical requirements explained that HFR would mostly require the purchase of abandoned and under-used freight tracks along the majority of the route. These tracks would then be upgraded to support faster passenger rail trains. For some segments of the route without existing rail, the HFR project would utilize the rights-of-way at level crossings to lay down new tracks. As many respondents highlighted, this would mean that HFR could be constructed quickly and would minimize complications foreseen in larger HSR projects. Since HSR would require grade-separation of the tracks, this would cause major disruptions to the existing infrastructure along nearby communities and would take many more years to construct. As a result, the infrastructural simplicity and short construction timeline of HFR made it comparatively more technically feasible compared to HSR. However, while the HFR proposal was recognized as technically feasible, some respondents did mention that HFR could suffer from engineering challenges over the entry-points into major cities such as Toronto and Montreal.³³

Financial Viability

Given the interconnectedness of the simple technical requirements, respondents again unanimously recognized that HFR was perceived as financially tolerable within the policy community. Especially compared to the latest estimates for HSR which were upwards of \$20 billion, the HFR project offered a much more realistic cost of \$4 to \$6 billion. In fact, VIA has pitched HFR as one third of the costs of HSR for two thirds of the speed. According to a former senior VIA Rail official, the crown corporation sought to develop a project with a cost of 10-to-20-fold times their total annual deficit. The logic was that while "no one has \$20 billion to solve a \$300 million a year problem," this lower-cost solution would seem much more reasonable and likely to generate government interest.

³³ Particularly, the compatibility of VIA Rail's trains on the tracks that pass-through Toronto's Metrolinx railyard and Montreal's eastern tunnel for its REM line. Moreover, some other respondents indicated that HFR trains travelling through the winding abandoned freight tracks are unlikely to reach the anticipated speeds of approximately 170km/h.

Public Acquiescence

Respondents indicated that HFR was perceived as likely to be supported by members of the public. Residents in communities that would receive improved services were especially in favour of the project, given the various benefits it could have for their economies, mobility, job creation, among other perks. However, as one respondent noted, "the social acceptability among the communities where the service would travel through but not stop in became a bit more of a challenge because [they] are receiving all of the challenges but none of the benefits". Nonetheless, there was reason to believe that HFR would not get strong push back from residents affected by the development of the project, "especially compared to High-Speed Rail where you would get NIMBYs,³⁴ not just for costs, but for disruptions of the land". Given its minimal disturbance and its positive local impact, HFR was perceived as a project that could gain public acceptance and incur minimal opposition.

Conclusion

To summarize the activity within the policy stream, the community had been floating various proposals for improved passenger rail service in the corridor prior to the emergence of HFR. Through a mutation process of different policy proposals, VIA Rail presented its trial idea for HFR and made subsequent alterations through a softening-up process. Given that the project met the criteria of survival including value acceptance, technical feasibility, financial viability and public acquiescence, the HFR proposal was considered a viable policy alternative on a short-list of serious options by the policy community – thus making the policy stream ripe for coupling. While some prominent voices in the passenger rail community remained skeptical or even hostile to HFR, several key groups eventually came around to this proposal (see Appendix II).

³⁴ NIMBY is an acronym for "not in my backyard" – often used to describe residents that refuse project developments that are perceived as unpleasant within their own community.

Moreover, as several respondents noted, the passenger rail policy community is highly fragmented, consisting of a handful of dispersed rail lobby groups that lack significant power and resources. As one rail advocate noted, "none of the lobby groups have money". On the other hand, by virtue of their organizational legitimacy and access to critical resources, VIA Rail wielded major influence within the policy community and could therefore quickly navigate their proposal onto the short-list of viable options.

7.3 Politics Stream

National Mood

The national mood can have a profound influence on governments' willingness to consider certain policy alternatives. In terms of public perceptions on investments into infrastructure projects, respondents agreed that the national mood was generally supportive around the time HFR was presented: "going into the 2015 election, the mood was that infrastructure spending was good [...] for transit in particular". ³⁵ Some respondents specifically pointed out that interest for rebuilding and revitalizing the crumbling passenger rail system, especially along the QWC, has been brewing for many decades: "Canadians have seen the technologically sophisticated HSR systems across the world and have routinely asked why this cannot be achieved here". A few respondents expected that especially amongst younger Canadians who are less likely to own automobiles, developing an effective rail service would have been seen as a vital way of moving between cities.³⁶

³⁵ Public polling in recent years finds that Canadians are favourable for the most part towards infrastructure spending, especially for the public transit and other projects in the transportation sector (Grenier, 2017).

³⁶ The Canadian Black Book's annual driving statistics finds that younger age cohorts in recent years have much lower vehicle ownership rates compared to older groups. While 48% of Canadians 18-34 own or lease a vehicle, the percentage of Canadians 35-54 (69%) and 55+ (77%) remain much higher (Fariello, 2019).

However, other respondents observed that the national mood on intercity passenger rail is not collectively held across all jurisdictions. Instead, support for passenger rail is localized mostly to large cities and towns along central routes, but not so much in rural communities that mostly rely on automobiles. Nonetheless, it appears that there was no significant opposition to spending on passenger rail infrastructure, even from communities not serviced by these proposals. As one respondent pointed out, Canadians have a nostalgic perception of the railroad from its historical significance – perhaps partially explaining Canadians' sustained curiosity for the revival of the industry.

Interest Groups

The respondents noted that there was virtually no significant advocacy against the development of dedicated passenger tracks. Critically, respondents frequently mentioned that CN, which holds major influence in government rail policy decisions, did not oppose the HFR proposal. Moreover, interest groups and companies from other modes of transport that compete with rail, namely the automobile, bus or commercial air travel industries, also did not express opposition for the plans. On the other hand, from the time that VIA Rail unveiled its proposal, HFR was gaining significant support from community groups, elected officials, business interest groups, and other powerful political forces across Ontario and Quebec. These included various individuals and influential groups such as mayors and city councils, chambers of commerce, elected officials from provincial governments, local MPs and cabinet Ministers (see Appendix II for a non-exhaustive list of HFR supporters). These local ambassadors lobbied the federal government to consider the HFR proposal via public townhalls, written articles in newspapers, and most importantly, a wide-reaching letter-writing campaign. As one former VIA Rail official stated, "when you start counting the number of supportive letters in the hundreds [...] then you have de-risked it from an electoral point of view because you know it's relatively positive". Because HFR had essentially no organized opposition, meanwhile it was gaining strong local advocacy, federal policymakers would have come to a clear image in favour of adopting this project.

Government Receptivity

Lastly, changes in administrations, individual officials, or the ideological composition within government can mean new ideas will see the light of day or different problems are prioritized. As per the issue of passenger rail, most respondents indicated that governments have regularly de-prioritized this mode of transport, thus allowing it to remain stagnant and without innovative solutions for decades. For example, respondents indicated that under the Harper government (2006-2015), "the project was not really gaining any traction". While the idea of HFR was just in its infancy as this point, one former VIA Rail official stated that "under the [Conservative] government, there was limited support for the project at the official level".

While the HFR proposal was designed as a cost-savings strategy, specifically tailored to the Conservative government's priorities to minimize losses, some former VIA Rail respondents found that the project was also well suited to many of the incoming Liberal government's election campaign ambitions. For instance, the Liberal government's priorities for investing in infrastructure to spur economic growth and create green jobs "fit hand-in-glove" with the benefits of HFR, as one Liberal MP stated. With the creation of the CIB in 2017, respondents indicated that this likely made the prospects of a government investment for HFR more tenable as well.

Furthermore, respondents stated that another top priority for the new government was the reduction of carbon emissions, particularly within the transportation sector. The HFR project

seemed to match this government priority as more frequencies of VIA Rail trains and greater ridership would offset a sizable portion of automobile-related carbon emissions. For one rail advocate "to have a government that has recognized that has certainly been favourable to the HFR project". However, other respondents stated that the previous Conservative government may have also been somewhat inclined to implement HFR mainly for its capacity to make the passenger rail line more profitable and less dependent on federal subsidies.

Other respondents suggested that the appointment of Marc Garneau as Minister of Transport (he remained in this post from 2015 until January 2021) likely played a factor. As he was a frequent user of VIA Rail's Montreal to Ottawa services, one former VIA Rail official indicated that he seemed highly receptive to the idea of HFR: "the sell was easier with the then Minister of Transport, Marc Garneau, who was a regular user of the service and who could see the tangible benefits of it".

Moreover, some Liberal MPs stated that their government is more inclined to adopt HFR since, unlike the previous government, a large portion of the Liberal party's seats are based in key constituencies along the corridor including in Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, and Quebec City. Given the above-mentioned reasons, it is probable that the electoral turnover of the Liberal government in 2015 improved the government's receptivity to the HFR proposal.

Conclusion

In sum, prior to HFR rising to the government's agenda, the national mood, interest groups, and government receptivity were generally all favourable to agenda change. Respondents unanimously indicated that the national mood remained consistently positive for innovative passenger rail solutions within the corridor. As per interest groups, growing demands for HFR amongst elected officials and business interests within the corridor gradually influenced and

likely persuaded the federal cabinet to study HFR. Finally, while previous governments have been hesitant to pursue a costly revitalization of passenger rail, the electoral turnover in 2015 from Conservative to Liberal caused a change in administration and political priorities that likely improved the government receptivity's to the HFR project. This was due to a combination of factors including the new Minister's favourable views towards VIA Rail's services, the Liberal party's strategic interest in appeasing their constituents, and the Liberal government's greater emphasis on investing in strategic infrastructure projects that could grow local economies, create new green jobs, and minimize carbon emissions from transport. Ultimately, we posit that this activity likely made the political stream ripe for coupling.

7.4 Policy Window and Coupling the Streams

Based on our review of the three streams, we find evidence of changes in the political stream opening the policy window. Many respondents indicated that the 2015 turnover in government meant that officials in cabinet were more inclined to support infrastructure spending, reduce transportation emissions, and revitalize passenger rail systems in the QWC: "I think that we have a generational shift when Justin Trudeau takes over government" said one rail advocate. Given these issues had entered the government's agenda, the HFR proposal could be coupled as a solution. As a result, we posit that the election of the Liberal government produced a political window. In contrast, the problem stream remained consistent throughout this period as there were no major changes in indicators, feedback or any attention-grabbing focusing events.

Coupling Problems to Solutions

For a policy alternative to rise onto the government's agenda, a policy entrepreneur will couple their pet project with the problem and politics streams during this open policy window: "[o]pen windows present opportunities for the complete linkage of problems, proposals, and politics, and hence opportunities to move packages of the three joined elements up on decision agendas."

(Kingdon, 1984, p. 213)

According to the respondents, VIA Rail acted as the primary policy entrepreneur in their efforts to couple the streams (problem, policy, and politics) all into one package: "I think that the biggest policy entrepreneur at this time was the CEO at VIA Rail, Yves Desjardins-Siciliano [...] I don't think that anyone else was prepared to champion it the way that he was able to". In attaching their proposal to pressing issues in the problem stream, VIA Rail highlighted the HFR project as a solution to many of the existing issues in the passenger rail industry. They explained that these dedicated tracks would allow for more frequencies, faster travel times, greater reliability, and could diminish annual operating deficits. Moreover, as they sensed that the new government was particularly concerned with carbon emissions and creating green jobs, VIA Rail highlighted certain benefits of the HFR project that could address these issues. A former senior VIA Rail official stated:

We were conscious of what the government of the day was elected on and what was on its platform. From their perspective, they wanted to create jobs, they wanted to create sustainable mobility and have green projects. We had a project that could not only create jobs, but also do it sustainably and reduce the carbon footprint to help meet the Paris Accord objectives.

Coupling Problems and Solutions to Political Forces

Respondents also described how VIA Rail coupled the problem and policy streams to favorable political forces. For instance, soon after floating their proposal for HFR in 2014, VIA Rail began touring communities all over Ontario and Quebec to give presentations on the HFR proposal to elected officials, community members, and business leaders. In doing so, VIA Rail was assembling a powerful advocacy coalition of political actors that could push for the federal cabinet to include HFR on their agenda. Respondents noted that following VIA Rail's visits to these communities, various mayors and city councils from municipalities along the proposed HFR route began the letter-writing campaign to officials in cabinet to encourage them to implement HFR. Moreover, other prominent political organizations such as local, provincial and national chambers of commerce, and the provincial Government of Quebec also contributed to this campaign in favour of HFR. At the federal political level, VIA Rail also held discussions with various MPs and cabinet Ministers to explain the HFR project and outline what benefits it would offer. This resulted in MPs from various political parties being highly supportive of HFR and advocating in favour of the project to the federal cabinet. By linking HFR with so many influential political forces, VIA Rail increased the likeliness of their proposal rising to the decision agenda. As one former senior VIA official stated:

This de-risks it from a political standpoint because the citizens told you that they wanted it, their elected officials at the municipal and provincial level have told you they want it. So, if everybody tells you they want it [...] then it's easier for the cabinet to make a decision.

Advantages for the Policy Entrepreneur

The respondents identified key resources that help to contextualize VIA Rail's successful coupling efforts. Many respondents, for example, pointed to the persistence and entrepreneurial skills of Desjardins-Siciliano: "you had a CEO who had a vision, and he was dogged in wanting to get this project on the road". Respondents stated that Desjardins-Siciliano assembled a politically savvy outreach team to build social acceptability, layout the benefits of HFR, and connect with influential officials. With such a "wide net to inform people of the project and its merits", this meant VIA Rail was able "to make connections at all levels of government through various networks of influence" which would prove to be essential for building political support for HFR. Another major asset was VIA Rail's credibility and access to detailed technical insights: "VIA had developed mature plans, research, analysis and information which helped

[stakeholders] to understand the value of the proposition very quickly". This meant VIA Rail could be more persuasive in their case for how HFR addressed certain priorities or issues on the government's agenda.

Conclusion

With the turnover in government in the political stream, we suggest that this opened a policy window for VIA Rail to push for their pet proposal. As a result, various new issues such as infrastructure projects, development of local economies, and the reduction of carbon emissions, among others, were now prominent on the agenda. With this policy window open, VIA Rail had an opportunity to frame their proposal for HFR as a solution to these government priorities, thus improving HFR's chances of gaining agenda status. With VIA Rail successfully coupling their pet proposal to the problem and politics streams, this increased the likeliness that HFR would enter the governmental and decision agendas.

8. Discussion

8.1 Summary of Research Findings

As the findings above demonstrate, the application of the MSF to the case study of HFR yielded valuable insights into the passenger rail policy process. Overall, our three expectations from the MSF have been confirmed. As demonstrated in Table 1, we find evidence for activity in the three streams (problem, policy, and politics) before the inclusion of HFR on the government's agenda. For instance, in the problem stream, there were a variety of consistent passenger rail-related issues including poor reliability, slow travel speeds, and low ridership and profitability. Other conditions including high carbon emissions and traffic congestion on highways were also perceived as problems. In the policy stream, the HFR proposal was softened-up to the policy community and ultimately met the criteria of survival, thus giving it staying power on a short-list

of viable alternatives. The politics stream saw a favourable national mood, non-existent opposition, growing support from interest groups, and a receptive administration in government. Secondly, from our analysis of the streams, it is apparent that a policy window was opened in the politics stream as a result of the turnover in government. Finally, we find evidence that VIA Rail acted as the policy entrepreneur in coupling the streams together while this policy window was open. With the priorities of infrastructure spending, carbon emissions abatement, and the creation of green jobs on the policy agenda, VIA Rail coupled the HFR proposal to many of these issues in the problem stream along with favourable political forces in the politics stream.

Major Concepts	Sub-Concepts	Evidence
Problem Stream	Indicators	Poor reliability/low OTP/slow travel times
		Low revenues & high operating subsidies
		High carbon emissions & traffic congestion
	Focusing Events	2014 Ontario HSR announcement
		Fleet renewal for QWC trains
		Service cuts to southwestern Ontario
	Feedback	Auditor General 2016 report
		VIA Rail annual corporate reports
Policy Stream	Softening-up	Presentations to communities & stakeholders
		Negotiations over proposed route locations
		Reassurance of no cuts to existing services
	Value Acceptance	Abatement of transport-related carbon emissions
		Targeted for middle class ticket prices
		Minimizes reliance on federal subsidies
		Provides rail to underserved communities
		Realistic plans for quick implementation
	Technical Feasibility	Minimal disruptions to surrounding area
		Simple technical requirements
		Short construction timeline
	Financial Viability	Reasonable costs, much lower than HSR
	Public Acquiescence	Support amongst near-by residents
		Minimal opposition from affected communities
Politics Stream	National Mood	Supportive of infrastructure spending
		Desire for cheap, sustainable travel options
	Interest Groups	No opposition from CN or transport competitors
		Support from local officials and business groups
	Government Receptivity	Turnover to Liberal government
		Favourable to infrastructure investments
		Political opportunity for local constituencies
		Goals to reduce carbon emissions
		Minister supportive of VIA Rail

Table 1 – Activity in the Problem, Policy and Politics Streams

Source: Produced by author. Adapted from table found in Kagan (2018).

8.2 Contributions to the Literature

Apart from confirming our three expectations (as provided in section five), these research findings also offer important contributions to the MSF and the passenger rail policy literature. Firstly, we note that the MSF was a constructive analytical tool for interpreting the federal Canadian policy process. Despite the HFR agenda-setting process directly involving only the executive branch, as opposed to the involvement typically of the legislative branch, we still found evidence that the elements of the MSF explain the events of the agenda-setting stage. This was evidenced by the activity in the three streams, the opening of the policy window and the coupling by the policy entrepreneur which all facilitated the inclusion of HFR on the cabinet's policy agenda.

Secondly, this study offers critical insights into the policy stream and dynamics within the policy community. For instance, this research supports the MSF hypothesis that as integration of the policy community decreases, it becomes more likely that new ideas can gain recognition on the community's short-list of viable alternatives (Herweg et al., 2018). For example, since the passenger rail policy community was highly fragmented, VIA Rail could more easily gain recognition for their new idea of HFR – likely because the policy community had not established widely supported, viable policy alternatives.³⁷ Moreover, given their resources, access, and organizational legitimacy, VIA Rail was able to quickly gain recognition for HFR within the policy community and elevate their proposal onto the short-list of alternatives.

³⁷ While there were some pockets of support for HSR and HPR, among other policy solutions, the policy community was overall still quite disparate in its perspectives and coordination – therefore leaving gaps for new policy alternatives to emerge and gain support from different rail specialists and advocacy organizations.

Crucially, this work also contributes to the passenger rail literature by demonstrating the necessity of a practical, cost-efficient solution which meets the policy community's criteria of survival. Especially since HFR offered dedicated tracks at a more affordable price and with a shorter construction timeline than HSR, this meant that VIA's proposal was perceived as highly reasonable while still satisfying the policy community's values and priorities. As a result, the HFR proposal had lasting staying power as a viable option on the policy community's short-list of alternatives – thereby increasing the likeliness that it could eventually rise to the government's agenda.

Finally, these research findings offer important contributions regarding the role of the policy entrepreneur and the importance of coupling the streams. For instance, we find that the linking of HFR to the problem stream and favorable political forces was essential in elevating the proposal onto the governmental and decision agenda. VIA Rail did this by coupling HFR as a solution to a wide variety of issues and reaching out to various influential stakeholders and political actors. We note that by utilizing many of the common HSR narratives, such as infrastructure spending, job creation, economic growth, and carbon emissions abatement, among others, the HFR proposal was readily perceived as a solution to many of these same issues. More specifically, we find that VIA Rail's advocacy for HFR fits within Katz-Rosene's (2014) Turbotrain narrative as they framed their proposal as a solution to domestic economic, social, and ecological problems while being operated and regulated in their capacity as a state-owned enterprise.³⁸

³⁸ While Katz-Rosene's (2014) Ecotrain narrative expresses many of these shared goals such as emissions reduction and economic development, proponents of this narrative differ to the Turbotrain narrative as they prefer private enterprises operate the rail service.

By actively presenting HFR as a solution to a wide-variety of issues, VIA Rail was able to build a multi-partisan, multi-jurisdictional coalition wherein various actors or groups each had their own reason for supporting the project – whether it be as a result of environmental, fiscal, or local socioeconomic benefits. In doing so, VIA Rail de-risked the project from a political standpoint as there was virtually no opposition and near unanimous political endorsement for the project. This demonstrates the significance of this broad coalition given they were able to have a powerful influence on the federal cabinet – making it advantageous for the cabinet to move the proposal onto its decision agenda. This also reveals that the coupling of problems and policy solutions to favourable political forces can be effectively achieved even across different jurisdictions and political parties, given that they can still influence the federal cabinet's agenda setting process.

9. Conclusions

With the inclusion of HFR on the government's agenda, this study has employed the MSF to understand what factors caused a change in agenda setting to occur. From the application of the framework to this case study, we have tested and confirmed three expectations. Firstly, activity in all three streams suggests that they were ripe for coupling: there were issues of policymakers' concern in the problem stream, there was a viable alternative produced by the policy stream, and the political conditions and government receptivity made the timing right for agenda change. Secondly, we find evidence of the policy window opening in the political stream due to the electoral turnover in 2015 which brought in a new administration, and by extension, new priorities and objectives. Third, this study finds evidence for a persistent, well-financed, and institutionally legitimate policy entrepreneur (VIA Rail) who coupled their pet proposal to the issues on the government's agenda as well as favourable political forces. This study contributes to MSF literature by showing 1) the applicability of the framework to a Canadian executive branch context; 2) how the composition and activity in the policy community facilitated HFR's emergence and its inclusion on the short-list of viable alternatives; and 3) the importance of coupling a proposal with favourable political forces, including across diverse jurisdictions and partisan affiliations.

We note that the findings from this study's interviews are likely influenced by the partisanship or personal biases of the individual respondents. While the research design and analysis of the findings attempted to mitigate for such risks, we acknowledge this potential limitation of the study's findings. Another critical limitation of this study was the confidentiality of many details and perspectives surrounding the HFR project amongst the top-level decision makers. In fact, as sensitive HFR discussions were still ongoing, highly involved officials from VIA Rail and Transport Canada declined requests to take part in this study, and therefore, there is potentially important information missing from our research findings.

Another area that this study was not able to explore, which could provide relevant insights for the MSF literature, was the policy adoption stage of the HFR project. Since HFR received federal funding and partial adoption only after these interviews were conducted, the scope of this study is limited to the agenda setting stage leading up to the inclusion of HFR on the decision agenda. Nonetheless, this study's findings did provide insights that could prove to be useful for future research on the policy adoption stage of the HFR project. As Herweg et al. (2015) have hypothesized, a decision window and the political entrepreneur are necessary for any item to pass the policy adoption stage. While much of the HFR discussions around cabinet and Transport Canada are confidential, based on the respondents' answers we speculate that the previous Minister of Transportation, Marc Garneau, seemed to be especially favourable towards the project and may have acted as an HFR political entrepreneur in recommending that the government follow through with its partial adoption. Furthermore, as the JPO was completing its assessment of the project in early 2021, and a cabinet decision was imminent, we speculate that the COVID-19 pandemic may have helped to increase the policymakers' willingness to invest in Canadian infrastructure projects that could help grow local economies and improve the transportation system. As a result, we suggest that future research on this subject should study whether the government's pandemic response may have opened a decision window that helped HFR pass the policy adoption stage.

Finally, this study contributes insights to the literature on passenger rail policy in Canada. For instance, by demonstrating how VIA Rail coupled the streams, we have shown what issues and political priorities were effective in helping HFR enter the government's agenda. These issues included spurring economic growth, creating green jobs, reducing carbon emissions and highway traffic, improving VIA Rail's ridership and reliability, and lessening dependency on federal subsidies.

These insights can also be helpful for practitioners in public policy seeking to increase the likeliness of policy adoption for a passenger rail proposal. Importantly, the extended timeframe between the cabinet's consideration of the project on the governmental agenda to its eventual rise to the decision agenda, suggests that agenda change in Canada's passenger rail policy is a slow and challenging process. For this reason, it is vital that a policy entrepreneur develops a highly feasible and politically de-risked proposal with broad support that will have staying power on the governmental agenda for a long period of time. While this may suggest that more costly and politically risky passenger rail policy options – such as HSR – are presently outof-reach, perhaps the successful adoption and implementation of the incrementalist HFR solution could open the door to these bigger projects. As the benefits of improved passenger rail infrastructure are realized, policymakers' hesitancy and complacency may soon be resolved, and the government's policy agenda could begin to take on a more innovative orientation. Future agendas for research on this subject should seek to determine whether the adoption and policy feedback of HFR does alter Canada's federal passenger rail policy direction over the long-term, thus opening up agenda setting to more technologically advanced infrastructure projects such as HSR.

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Appendix I – Interview Questions

Opening questions

- 1. What is your involvement with the passenger rail policy community in Canada? What organization(s) are you affiliated with?
- 2. How were you involved with the High-Frequency Rail project?

Overview

1. In brief, what would you say caused the HFR project to enter the federal government's policy agenda?

Problem Stream

- 1. In the lead up to the government's considerations of HFR, were there any prominent problems that were on the public or policy makers' radar that could be associated with HFR?
- 2. What role did any indicators (scientific or technical information) play in demonstrating that there was a problem?
- 3. Did anything in particular happen which caused many people to pay attention to this problem?
- 4. Was there any feedback regarding the existing passenger rail policy which made change necessary?

Policy Stream

- 1. How did the idea of High-Frequency Rail emerge?
 - 1. Was the idea of passenger rail in this corridor something that had been discussed previously? For how long, and who was pushing for this?
 - 2. Were there other policy options, besides HFR, that were being discussed?
- 2. What were the original negotiating points or obstacles that were brought up during the introduction of HFR? How were these concerns addressed?
- 3. What values or priorities were at the forefront of negotiations over HFR? Did HFR satisfy the values and priorities of the transportation policy community?
- 4. Was HFR seen as technically feasible?
- 5. Were the potential costs of HFR considered to be tolerable for the federal government?
- 6. Was it expected that the HFR project would be accepted by the public?
- 7. Was there growing support within the passenger rail policy community in support of HFR?

Politics Stream

- 1. What was the national mood on transportation infrastructure spending and passenger rail projects? Was there public demand for improved passenger rail service?
- 2. Were there any pressure group campaigns pushing for or against passenger rail projects? What were these groups and were they a significant pressuring force to deter or promote government consideration for revitalizing passenger rail?
- 3. What was the government's receptivity for revitalization projects for passenger rail, such as HFR? Were there any electoral and/or political changes which increased the likeliness of such a proposal to be considered?

Policy entrepreneur

- 1. Was there any individual or organization in particular that was championing HFR?
 - 1. Would HFR have been considered by the government had it not been for this/these actor/actors?
- 2. What resources were helpful for the HFR advocate(s)? (Access, money, time, community support?)
- 3. What political strategies did this HFR advocate invoke?
 - a. Why did the HFR advocate act when they did? Was the timing right?
 - b. Did they frame the HFR project as a solution to any problems? Did they attach their proposal to favourable political forces?

Category	Organizations/Elected officials ³⁹
Business Community	Bois-Francs-Érable Chamber of Commerce and Industry
	Canada Chamber of Commerce
	Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Drummondville
	Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Trois-Rivières
	Chamber of Commerce of Lotbinière
	Chamber of Commerce of Metropolitan Montreal
	Greater Peterborough Chamber of Commerce
	Laval Chamber of Commerce
	Lévis Chamber of Commerce
	Mauricie Chambers of Commerce
	Milton Chamber of Commerce
	Ontario Chamber of Commerce
	Quebec Chamber of Commerce
	Sarnia Lambton Chamber of Commerce
	South Shore Chamber of Commerce and Industry
	Thunder Bay Chamber of Commerce
Rail/Transport Advocacy	Canadian Urban Transit Association
	Rail Advocacy in Lambton
	Rail Association of Canada
Municipalities and Counties	Eastern Ontario Wardens Caucus
	Frontenac County and Central Frontenac Council
	Kingston City Council
	Leeds and Grenville City Council
	Peterborough City Council
	Pickering City Council
	United Counties of Prescott and Russell
Municipal Government Officials	Mayor of Drummondville (Alexandre Cusson)
	Mayor of Kingston (Bryan Paterson)
	Mayor of Montreal (Valérie Plante)
	Mayor of Ottawa (Jim Watson)
	Mayor of Perth (John Fenik)
	Mayor of Peterborough (Diane Therrien)
	Mayor of Quebec City (Régis Labeaume)
	Mayor of Toronto (John Tory)
	Mayor of Trois-Rivières (Yves Lévesque)
Provincial Government Officials	Dave Smith (PC Ontario MPP for Peterborough-Kawartha)
	François Bonnardel (CAQ Quebec Minister of Transport)
	Philippe Couillard (Liberal Premier of Quebec)

Appendix II – Public Support for HFR

³⁹ Entries that qualify for this list include organizations or elected officials that have made public statements or passed resolutions that explicitly endorse or have expressed clear signals of support for the HFR proposal. This list is non-exhaustive and may be omitting individuals or groups that publicly supported HFR between 2014-2021.

Federal Government Officials	Alain Rayes (Conservative MP for Quebec Centre)
	Alain Therrien (Bloc Québécois MP for La Prairie)
	Gabriel Ste-Marie (Bloq Québécois MP for Joliette)
	Gérard Deltell (Conservative MP for Louis-Saint-Laurent)
	Jamie Schmale (MP for Haliburton-Kawartha Lakes-Brock)
	Maryam Monsef (Liberal MP Peterborough-Kawartha,
	Minister of Women & Gender Equality & Rural Economic
	Development)
	Philippe-François Champagne (Liberal MP Saint-Maurice-
	Champlain & Minister of Foreign Affairs)
	Robert Aubin (NDP MP for Trois-Rivières)
	Yves-François Blanchet (Leader of the Bloq Québécois)

Source: Produced by author. Information based on publicly available statements in newspapers,

press releases, speeches, etc.