

Planes, trains and carbon footprints

When travelling, method matters

BY TIM BOUSQUET

When it comes to the environment, rail travel is certainly the greener way to travel. And, with higher public investment on the way, it could become better and faster. Let's see what two trips from Montreal to Toronto—one with VIA Rail, the other with Air Canada—mean for your wallet, the environment and public policy.

PRICE VIA's lowest fare between the two cities is the \$87.74 Comfort Supersaver ticket, which must be purchased five days in advance and does not include any food or drinks. Other fares, which have fewer purchasing restrictions and include a meal and a glass of wine, range up to \$223.34.

Air Canada's lowest Montreal-Toronto fare is the \$107.77 Tango ticket, while an executive-class ticket will run you \$611.27 (prices include tax and fees). (If you cab it to the airport, it's \$35 between downtown Montreal and Trudeau and \$46 from Pearson to Bay Street.)

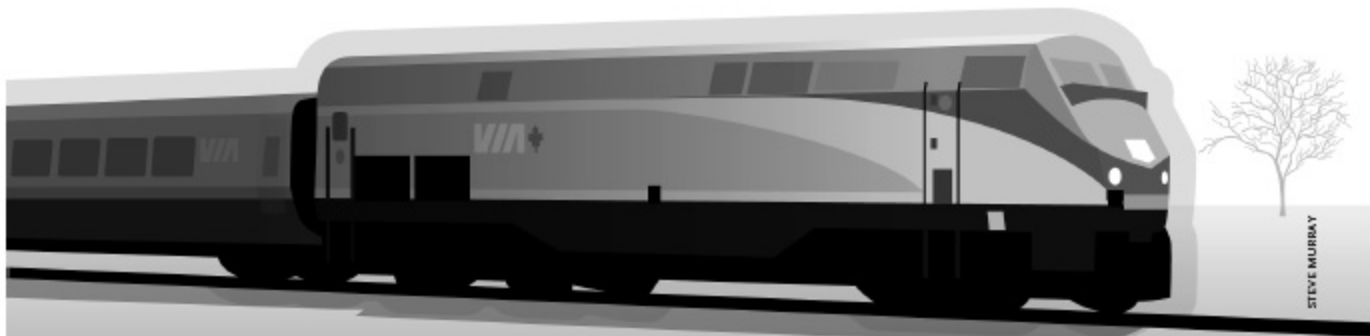


TIME Six VIA trains leave Montreal daily for Toronto. Travel time ranges between four hours and 11 minutes for express trains to five hours and 35 minutes for those with more stops. VIA recommends arriving at least 10 minutes before departure time for trips without checked baggage.

Air Canada has 24 daily weekday flights from Montreal and Toronto, with flying times of about an hour and 25 minutes. Air Canada recommends getting there an hour early, but add in travel time to and from the airport—which, for most people, is much farther than the train station—and the difference shrinks even further.

FUNDING This past October, the federal government announced \$516 million in new capital funding for VIA. Some of this money will go toward improvements in the Quebec City-Windsor corridor, which accounts for 88 percent of train passenger traffic in Canada. The improvements will increase track capacity, alleviate bottlenecks and reduce trip time through increased train speeds.

Public subsidies for VIA were frozen at \$170 million annually in 1999; however, last year's funding announcement also included \$176 million in new operating funds over the next five years.



STEVE MURRAY