

The train 'tracks' are leaving the station

By [Sean Chase](#), Daily Observer, Pembroke, Ontario

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A last ditch effort to save the Canadian Pacific Railway line between Pembroke and Mattawa has failed, green lighting the company's plans to tear up the tracks along this crucial transportation corridor.

Officials with Transport Pontiac-Renfrew, the not-for-profit organization seeking to acquire the Beachburg Subdivision of the former Canadian National line, confirmed Wednesday two rounds of negotiations ended last week with CP confirming it will decommission the rest of their line running through the Upper Ottawa Valley.

Rails from the 150-kilometre stretch that makes up the Chalk River Subdivision will be shipped to switching yards in Alberta and Saskatchewan, CP told the group.

"We wanted to see if we could keep it," said Terry Gibeau, former Arnprior mayor and Transport Pontiac-Renfrew co-chairman. "If you take that link out between Mattawa and Pembroke then every train coming across Ontario is going to have an extra 14-hour trip."

Efforts had been underway over the past eight months to preserve the line. The Deep River-based citizens group, "Save the Pembroke to Mattawa Railway" began lobbying the federal government maintaining the subdivision was a key link in Canada's rail infrastructure holding the shortest east-west route. The Coalition for Algoma Passenger Trains, a group dedicated to preserving remote passenger train service in the District of Algoma, as well as the adjacent regions around Hearst and Sudbury, had also sought to keep the line open to service a passenger route that bypasses Toronto.

Mr. Gibeau said industries in Renfrew County could use the line to ship raw materials to their factories. One of those companies is ATC Panels, the fibreboard plant in Laurentian Valley that closed its doors in 2008 and employed 200 workers at its peak.

“The saving of the rail was critical to them,” said Mr. Gibeau. “The chances of restarting ATC are probably nil without the line.”

The fate of the former CPR was sealed in 2010 when CP issued its intent to discontinue and sell the Ottawa Valley Railway.

After CP diverted traffic off the line, short-line operator RailAmerica terminated its lease with CP. The Pembroke to Mattawa line was scheduled to be ripped up this summer.

With the economy possibly picking up in the next few years, rail traffic will jump, added Mr. Gibeau further congesting the lines through Toronto where goods must go to reach western Canada now that the Ottawa Valley corridor is gone.

“If there was a real bottle neck in Toronto before moving trains in there, you imagine what it will be like now,” he said. “As it picks up it will just be slower.”

Transport Pontiac-Renfrew had hoped to propose that the CN Beachburg subdivision be linked up with the CPR Pembroke to Mattawa line to maintain that national east-west connection. Mr. Gibeau said it wouldn’t take much to pull it off.

“They do connect in Pembroke. You are not looking at doing millions of dollars of grading and line rehabilitation,” he said. “Pembroke to Mattawa was the key.”

He was perplexed that Ottawa would allow the line to be pulled considering it will leave CFB Petawawa virtually landlocked with flatbed tractor trailers the only means to move armoured vehicles and trucks should the military have to deploy assets from the base.

“It makes absolutely no sense to have one of the major bases in Canada with only one means of transportation - the highway,” he said.

Sean Chase is a Daily Observer multimedia journalist

sean.chase@sunmedia.ca