

AMT offers excuses for latest breakdowns



AMT train broken down at Alstonvale station: Excuses, excuses.

by Andrea Richer

Faced with another spate of locomotive breakdowns and late or cancelled trains, the Metropolitan Transportation Agency (AMT) is proffering up another round of excuses, explanations and promises to improve.

While conceding that the intense cold and increased commuter volumes have been contributing factors, the AMT cites schedule adjustments for most of the disruptions since Jan. 12. Since January 12, the AMT has added 76 new departures, able to handle 57,000 more riders each week.

The intense cold of the last few days has affected [our equipment] which has resulted in lateness and cancellations, the agency said in a website posting. Customers were not informed of the delays due to a malfunctioning public-address system's malfunction, it added.

While apologizing for last week's tardy trains, the agency said additional measures have been taken both on the operations and customer service level in order to solve the issues and return to its regular on-time service "that all passengers are accustomed to."

The AMT says it has instituted a new plan which aims to reduce mechanical failures, meeting CP and CN in order to solve all operational and maintenance issues of the trains and railroad.

The two rail companies are responsible for operating and maintaining the AMT's rolling stock, notes AMT president Joël Gauthier.

"We intend to inform the leaders of the impact of their operations on our clientele and to find solutions which would improve the reliability of the service," Gauthier added.

The AMT is creating a crisis management team that will help keep a closer eye on train maintenance and operation within CP and CN workshops and would include AMT employees, he added.

Additional teams have been put into place on platforms to help provide information and direct passengers. Public announcements will be broadcast on all platforms and aboard all cars, informing passengers if there are disturbances in service. As well, an electronic message board will shortly be put into place.

Gauthier made essentially the same promises back in April of last year when he and Nancy Frechette, Vice President of Commuter Train Operations prefaced a wide-ranging discussion with the Hudson/St. Lazare Gazette editorial board last Friday by apologizing to commuter train users for the agency's performance over the course of the previous winter.

AMT commuter trains were on time only 79 percent of the time in December. The on-time rate rose to 94 percent in January, dropped to 92 percent in February and 91 percent in March. The rate hit 97 percent in April, but for Gauthier, it's not good enough.

"Let's be clear, we weren't as good as we should have been," Gauthier told the Hudson/St. Lazare Gazette's Nick Mayes. "Our customers are angry and they are right to be."

While last year's near-record snowfall presented a major obstacle to trains arriving at their destinations on time, Frechette conceded at the time that the AMT itself was not blameless.

"We got caught with our pants down," Gauthier admitted in relation to the season's first real snowstorm on Dec. 2. According to the AMT's President, there was a fully developed contingency plan in place by the time the season's second snow dump arrived but Canadian Pacific neglected to clear a critical switch west of downtown, making it impossible for westbound trains to pass through the area.

