

Sydney Post Dec. 8/22

OPEN LETTER TO SIR HENRY THORNTON

Dear Sir Henry Thornton:

The Post welcomes your taking up the duties of President and directing spirit of the Canadian National Railways; in the first place, because the country has been suffering from the lack of an appointment to the position which you have accepted; in the second place, because all that the Post knows of you is to your credit.

You began your education at one of the best schools of your native country; you completed its scholastic part at one of its most famous universities. You served with distinction a railway which is foremost in the United States for good management.

When invited to take the position of General Manager of one of the railways in England the problems of which were intricate and difficult, you displayed courage enough to accept the invitation and, as far as circumstances permitted, we understand that you were successful in the discharge of the duties imposed on you. You rendered good service to the Empire during the years of war, and you displayed such tact in dealing with the English people—at least as difficult as Canadians—that a recent London paper said that you were one of the most popular of men.

All these things enhance the probabilities that you will make good in a position which requires as much energy, as much ability, as much tact as any problem you have undertaken, and this paper will give you loyal support in your tenure of the office of President of the Canadian National Railways.

From our standpoint we take it as a good omen that you are soon coming to the Maritime Provinces. There is no place where there is such room for improvement, particularly in that part of the line which runs from Truro to the Sydneys and forms the connection with Newfoundland. In Cape Breton county there are the largest coal-mining fields in Canada, the largest steel works, and a population which far exceeds in productivity and in possibilities of developing traffic, any centre along your Eastern lines.

None of your predecessors has ever risen to grasp a fundamental principle of railway administration,—namely, that the traffic most desirable to encourage is that traffic which will produce the greatest revenue. None of them have grasped that there is any traffic in Nova Scotia worth considering, except that of Halifax. The line from Truro to Sydney is still considered a branch line. The trains leave at inconvenient hours; their accommodation is antiquated; your maintenance of way people have forgotten that there is such a thing as ballast or easement curves; your motor power department has failed to impress on its drivers that it makes any difference to the comfort of passengers, and the condition of rolling stock, whether or not they take up the slack of the train in starting and stopping, and it is only when you set sail from England that the officials of the road ceased to subject its patrons to the daily risk of collapse from starvation.

You, Sir, are a Railway Head of experience. It is not fitting, therefore, for the Post to suggest what you should do. It might point out to you however, to save you time, certain facts.

You are familiar with what you have done on your former English road, the Great Eastern, where you have developed a continental traffic via Harwich and therewith an excellent service to Felixstowe and Ipswich.

The problem on your National Eastern lines is the same. You have New Glasgow, the Strait connections, Baddeck, and the Sydneys to correspond to the Great Eastern traffic in Essex.

You have now the Newfoundland traffic to correspond to the continental connection by Harwich.

How have these been handled?

Only one of the two through Expresses to Halifax makes a connection to the East from Montreal or Boston.

For Newfoundland there is a delay of twelve hours—the connecting train arrives in the morning—the Newfoundland steamer leaves at night.

The situation is very much as if you had attempted to work the Eastern Counties and the continental traffic conjointly with that to Southend, and made the long distance passengers change at some place before reaching Chelmsford, at an inconvenient hour, with the maximum of distance to be traversed at this junction, and, with some alleviation to your through passengers by your Ocean Limited, being somewhat late—as the Ocean Limited often is!

The above seems incredible, but send some one you can trust, and in the name of humanity let him be in hard condition, and get a report of a journey from Montreal to the Sydneys, and take his report. A flying visit in a private car surrounded by officials intent on making everything appear right, gives no test of the miseries of the ordinary traveller.

Wishing you every success,
The Post.