



Uniting municipalities for action on rail safety

Dear Members,

The tragedy in Lac-Mégantic has been weighing heavily on my heart and mind since that terrible day. I know the community, the people and the region, and I am struggling to come to terms with the devastating impact this is having now, and will continue to have in the years ahead for our friends in Lac-Mégantic.

I am sure you all share my feelings. Sadness at what has happened to this community and to the families who have lost loved ones. Outrage at the thought it could have been prevented. Fear that a similar accident could happen in any of hundreds of other communities across Canada.

In fact, railcars carrying toxic chemicals derailed on a bridge in Calgary during its extreme flooding just a few weeks ago, fortunately, without any loss of life. It is shocking to conclude that rail transportation, a foundation of so much of Canada's history and prosperity, and the *raison d'être* of many communities, might also present such a grave threat.

I am pleased that the new federal minister of Transport, Lisa Raitt, is in Lac-Mégantic today, to meet with residents and local leaders including Mayor Colette Roy-Laroche. The challenges facing the community are overwhelming and require the attention and support of all of us, especially the federal government.

I am determined that this local tragedy will drive national action to prevent its recurrence. Minister Raitt has agreed to meet with me to initiate a federal–municipal partnership on rail safety.

To support these discussions, I have struck a National Municipal Rail Safety Working Group that will include representation of municipal leaders from across the country, including from the region affected by the disaster in Lac-Mégantic. I have asked Mayor Doug Reycraft, chair of FCM's Standing Committee on Municipal Infrastructure and Transport, to chair this working group.

I will ask the two Quebec municipal associations, UMQ and FQM, to appoint two members to this forum, to bring that province's perspective and experience with the Lac-Mégantic tragedy. I will also ask Mayor Gregor Robertson, chair of the Big City Mayor's Caucus, to appoint a representative from the caucus. And we will also include a representative from the Rural Forum, recognizing the importance of this issue communities in rural areas.

To coordinate our work at the provincial and territorial level, I have asked FCM's CEO Brock Carlton to convene an emergency conference call of executive directors and CEOs of the provincial and territorial municipal associations.

It is clear from the accidents in both Calgary and Lac-Mégantic that federal–municipal partnership is essential to ensuring rail safety. Municipalities are on the front line of responding to these kinds of accidents, and must be properly informed and equipped to protect their residents.

My thoughts are with the community of Lac-Mégantic as it deals with the aftermath of this tragedy and begins the long, hard work of recovering from the destruction and loss of life it has caused. I pledge to ensure that this loss of life, and this destruction, leads to safer cities and communities across our country.

I will keep you informed of our discussions with the federal government as they progress. If you have any questions, concerns or ideas to share about these issues or the next steps I am proposing, please contact me at president@fcm.ca or 613-907-6245.

Sincerely,

Claude Dauphin
President