

Budget reserves \$2.2 million for Gaspésie Railway Society

Gilles Gagné

NEW RICHMOND: – Quebec government's budget that was announced on March 26 earmarked \$2.2 million towards operations, track and rolling material maintenance of the Gaspésie Railway Society. The amount that will be allotted for bridge repairs will only be announced later, says Gaspésie Railway Society President Éric Dubé.

The \$2.2 million will come from the department of Economic development, Innovation and Exports. The budget also confirmed the \$3.9 million acquisition offer submitted by Transport-Québec on March 2.

"The \$2.2 million will go toward basic maintenance work and some operational expenses. Every week I negotiate for an infrastructure budget. However that work will be taken care of by Transport-Québec, as the owner of the line," explains Mr. Dubé.

The \$2.2 million amount will cover the period between May and March 31, 2016.

The Quebec government has only guaranteed the maintenance of the two stretches of line between Matapédia and Gaspé, the Matapédia to Caplan section for freight, and the Percé to Gaspé section, for the Amiral tourist train. The line between Caplan and Percé will stay dormant for an undetermined period of time.

Between Matapédia and Caplan, two bridges, the ones spanning over the Grand Caspédia river, require thorough repairs or complete replacements.

"Currently, the government has committed to do what is necessary for the two



Photo: G. Gagné

Temrex is by far the largest source of revenue for the Gaspésie Rail Society.

bridges," says Éric Dubé. He refuses to say what "necessary" could mean, between repairs or replacement.

The bearing capacity of the two bridges has been a handicap on several occasions, especially for Rail GD, a repair shop located in New Richmond. GD Rail has refused contracts to repair locomotives, that are too heavy to pass on the bridges.

Meanwhile, the Gaspésie Railway Society, which has been under court protection since November 21 in order to submit a restructuring plan, will hold its creditors meeting on April 9 at 11 a.m., at the New Richmond town hall.

The debt of the transporter is \$4.1 million, including all the legal fees and the cost

linked with the intervention of a trustee.

On top of the \$3.9 million allotted by Transport-Québec to clear that debt, which also allows the ministry to acquire the line, the four MRCs located between Matapédia and Gaspé have committed a total of \$200,000 as contributions to the restructuring plan. The MRCs will remain owners of the Gaspésie Railway Society's other assets, namely most of the train stations, several pieces of land, the locomotives, the Amiral train and a certain number of railroad maintenance cars.

The revenue of the Gaspésie Railway Society reached \$700,000 in 2014, mainly generated by the Temrex sawmill in Nouvelle.