

## Does VIA Rail have available Budd cars?

— Gilles Gagné

NEW RICHMOND: – The project spearheaded by a group interested in bringing back VIA Rail services along the Gaspé Peninsula coast may depend over the short term on the availability of automotive cars, often called Budd cars.

One of the group members, Bernard Babin, has been checking the availability of those diesel rail cars.

“There are six Budd cars. They are all based in Capreol, where VIA Rail operates a service between Sudbury and White River, Northern Ontario. Two of them are supposedly slated for Vancouver Island but that service has been suspended for several years, due to the state of the tracks,” states Bernard Babin.

The resumption of the Vancouver Island service has not yet been determined, time-wise. It has been suspended since 2010. One of the Capreol units, VIA 6208, underwent repairs at New Richmond’s Rail GD between February and April.

On VIA Rail’s rolling stock list, it is mentioned that the public transporter owns a total of six serviceable Budd cars but there is no reference to their current use. Spokesperson Maxime Dupont-Demers doesn’t know the details of that file.

Bernard Babin presumes that two of the Capreol-based Budd cars are “available” at the present time, pending service resumption on Vancouver Island. Through some research, he has learned more about VIA Rail’s other possessions.

“VIA Rail actually owns 10 Budd cars. Besides the six units in Capreol, four are stored in Toronto. One is kept for parts but we know little about the other three units, except that one has “no interior”; the interior has been stripped. Are the motors in working order? I don’t know,” says Mr. Babin.

There are more Budd cars in Canada at the present time. Earl Roberts, a railway acquaintance of Bernard Babin, says that a Moncton shop, IRSI, has a demonstrator in working order, and about 25 other units that are stored there, that haven’t been used in many years.

Another company, Farm-rail, keeps five units in

Toronto, all VIA Rail former diesel rail cars, and two units at IRSI in Moncton. Of the two units in Moncton, one was leased to VIA Rail about 12 years ago, says Mr. Roberts.

“We are progressing. We want to use Budd cars over the short term between Matapedia and Gaspé because the state of some bridges poses a problem for VIA Rail at the present time. Budd cars are significantly lighter than the locomotives of a conventional train,” says Bernard Babin.

Depending on the list consulted, Budd cars are reported to weigh between 113,000 and 117,000 pounds. VIA Rail’s locomotives used in the Gaspé over the last 25 years weigh 260,000 pounds.

Former VIA Rail and Canadian National employee Gilles Lamy, of Paspébiac, Bernard Babin, Cynthia Patterson and Member of Parliament Philip Toone are pushing to get VIA Rail back to the Gaspé Peninsula east of Matapedia. They have a strong support group working with them, doing tasks such as distributing petitions to pres-

sure Federal Minister of Transport Lisa Raitt. Over two days, on May 23 and 24, Anthony Bernard Prince, of Port Daniel had 75 citizens sign the petition.

Mr. Lamy, Babin and Toone, as well as Mrs. Patterson could meet with Quebec Transport Minister Robert Poëti at the end of June in order to convince him to upgrade the track sufficiently to have the Budd cars pass between Matapedia and Gaspé. In a second phase, the group wants to reinstate a conventional train between Matapedia and New Carlisle.

Transport-Québec acquired the Gaspé Peninsula line earlier this spring, after the former owner, the Gaspésie Railway Society, controlled by the four MRCs covering the territory between Matapedia and Gaspé, ran into financial problems.

The Gaspésie Railway Society remains the operator of the freight train. The freight trains currently circulating between Matapedia and Caplan are significantly heavier than VIA Rail’s conventional trains.