



Photo: G. Gagné

Group to keep Tourist Train if proposal accepted by Transport-Québec

Gilles Gagné

NEW RICHMOND: - Gilles Babin, the New Richmond businessman, who on behalf of a Bay of Chaleur group, submitted a proposition to purchase the Matapédia to Caplan portion of track, wants to keep the Amiral Tourist Train. The bid he submitted to Transport-Québec includes the acquisition of the tourist train but the group doesn't want to operate it.

"If our proposal is accepted we would acquire all the liabilities and all the components of assets, the locomotives, ballast cars and passenger cars. We are not going to operate the tourist train. People from down the coast will take care of that. If they can't, the Amiral's locomotive is in pretty good shape and we will use it. The plan nevertheless calls for a Gaspé-Percé group to head the tourist train operation and for us to provide a crew," explains Gilles Babin.

The proposal submitted to Transport-Québec would take care of the Gaspésie Railway Society's \$3.6 million in payables, the current owner of the Matapédia-Gaspé line. The proposal includes funding for future operations. The Gaspésie Railway Society filed for the court protection on November 21 because a creditor was on the verge of seizing the transporter's locomotives.

The Gaspésie Railway Society owes \$145,000 to Rail GD, the company headed by

Gilles Babin. He stated clearly that the car repair shop based in New Richmond isn't investing in the acquisition of the section of track from Matapédia-Caplan.

"Other business people and I are investing personally in the acquisition of the section of line. Our companies aren't linked to the potential transaction," he points out.

Gilles Babin and his group submitted their proposal on January 22 to Transport-Québec. He had a long conversation with that ministry's civil servants on January 27.

"I don't know what to expect. They asked a lot of questions. It was a good conversation but I have no idea as to how my proposition was received," Mr. Babin pointed out. He isn't in a position to

determine a time frame for Transport-Québec assessment.

The president of the Gaspésie Railway Society, Éric Dubé, is glad that the business group is interested in keeping the tourist train.

"I understand that they don't want to commercialize the tourist train, look for personnel and food needs. They first want to operate the freight train and take care of the track inspections. The tourist train will have to be profitable, which it was, based on the clients from the cruise ships," says Mr. Dubé.

On February 4 the Gaspésie Railway Society will ask for an extension of the court protection period, based on the proposal submitted by Gilles Babin's group.

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