

Haldimand bridge still needs repairs

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GASPÉ: – The railway bridge between Haldimand and Douglastown still needs repairs valued at \$1.6 million. There's no certainty that the Amiral tourist train will be allowed to cross the bridge before the work is completed.

"We have no guarantee as long as no inspection has been done," says Gaspésie Railway Society President, Éric Dubé, who is also the New Richmond mayor. The bridge can only be inspected after the thaw.

Some of the repairs were done in the summer of 2013. "The work stopped because the agreement with Quebec's Transport Department ended (for financing the railway repairs)," explains Mr. Dubé.

In 2015 a total of six trips are planned for the Amiral, for September and October. The tourist train carries cruise ship passengers between Gaspé and Corner of the Beach, close to Percé.

The management of the Gaspésie Railway Society wants to be ready for these trips, said Mr. Dubé, but the bridge has to be secure first.

"It is the same for any section of the line, we'll never put safety second," says Mr. Dubé. "We'll do everything we can for the trips to be possible, but I won't exert political pressure, I wouldn't like to have an accident on my conscience," he adds.

The work to be done will cost about \$1.6 million, according to the information obtained by Escale Gaspésie coordinator, Stéphane Ste-Croix, who manages the cruise ship visits to the Gaspé and Percé area.

The Amiral ran between Gaspé and Percé last year because the Haldimand bridge had an "under construction" status, which follows special precautions, he explained. This temporary status has since come to an end.

"As things are, it's out of the question for the train to cross the bridge," states Mr. Ste-Croix. Repairs or an exemption from the Quebec Transport Department are now required.

The Escale Gaspésie coordinator is "confident that the Society will reach an agreement with Transport Québec, given that the Quebec government wants to buy the railway and that the development of



Photo: Nelson Sergerie

Work still to be done on the Haldimand-Douglastown railway bridge would total about \$1.6 million.

the Gaspé-L'Anse-à-Beaufils track section depends on the Amiral."

"We've always managed to have trains in the high season for cruise ships," said Mr. Ste-Croix. "We were never able to promote the full po-

tential of the tourist train experience. We have one foot on the gas and the other on the break," he adds.

Quebec's Department of Transport is submitting a bid to buy the Matapédia to Gaspé rail line. The line's

owner, the Gaspésie Railway Society, has been under court protection since November 21. The Society has a debt of

\$3.6 million.

Transport Minister Robert Poëti explained that he wants to refurbish the Matapédia-Caplan and Percé-Gaspé sections. The Caplan to Percé stretch would be put into a dormant state.

The fact that the Quebec government wants to acquire the railway is "excellent news," says Olivier Nolleau, director of the Gaspé Chamber of Commerce and Tourism. However, he worries about the Caplan-Percé dormant state. "Mr. Poëti mentioned the possibility of transforming the railway or its shoulder into a trail for recreotourism, bikes, quads or skidoos. If that is achieved, we'll have no possibility of reaching the Matapédia Valley by train."

Mr. Nolleau hopes the Gaspésie Railway Society makes changes in its management. "I think the civil society and the business community have to be involved, especially the Chaleur Bay (freight) train users."