



## Mayor Côté criticizes Transport-Québec's inaction regarding rail infrastructure

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**GASPÉ:** – Gaspé Mayor, Daniel Côté, is criticizing the slowness of Quebec's department of Transport in the rail infrastructure file for the Gaspé Peninsula. For the second year in a row, Transport-Québec has failed to allot funds to improve or replace some of the bridges on the Gaspesian line, including one in Haldimand, where the work has begun but is not completed.

Mayor Côté is fuming over the effect that the standstill position is having on the Amiral tourist train, blocked in Gaspé since last fall and its potential effect on the cruise ship business.

"The tourist train is profitable. It clears \$10,000 per trip. There was a potential of 20 trips this year, mainly cruise ship passengers. It hurts all the more because we are losing some cruise ship stops

because they were based on the tourist train," states Daniel Côté.

"Three cruise ship stops were lost this year, and five have been lost for 2016 because we cannot guarantee the tourist train. Escal Gaspésie has been selling the tourist train for five years. We had to cancel the season this year and there is uncertainty regarding next year. Each cruise ship stop generates significant revenues, not just for the train but for the whole business community. We are talking about the loss of hundreds of thousands of dollars when several stops are cancelled," says the mayor.

Daniel Côté believes that Transport-Québec could have continued the Haldimand bridge repair soon after purchasing the Matapédia to Gaspé line from the Gaspésie Railway Society in the spring, after the transporter underwent financial problems.

"Work could have resumed based on the first call for tenders. Furthermore, the Gaspésie Railway Society technically went bankrupt because it hadn't received funding from Transport-Québec for two years. Something has to happen. We are scrapping years of effort to develop the cruise ship service. Stop taking us for fools. We are tired of fighting. Get your money out," says Mayor Côté, targeting Quebec Transport Minister, Robert Poëti.

Daniel Côté also challenges the numbers used by Transport Québec in its cost evaluation of the work that has to be carried out. "It is always three to four times higher than the amount in the Gaspésie Railway Society's assessment, as if they want to inflate it to put it out of reach," he adds.

"The Queen Mary 2 is scheduled to come to Gaspé in 2016 and we are in danger of losing it. We have asked for a

guarantee that the track will be repaired and have been told no. Our capacity to transport people to Percé with buses is limited. We have a certain number of coaches (buses) and some customers don't mind taking yellow school buses. Let's face it, cruise ship passengers want to go to Percé. The train alone can take almost 300 people. It is a big part of our greeting capacity," states Mr. Côté.

In a radio interview given on September 18 to Radio-Gaspésie, the community-owned radio station based in Gaspé, Quebec's Transport Minister Robert Poëti said that the government cannot guarantee that the Amiral train will operate next year "for reasons of safety."

Minister Poëti doesn't see the tourist train as a spearhead for the Gaspé area tourist sector, because he is of the view that "the six outings made over the (2014) season re-

sulted in a \$200,000 deficit. If that is a spearhead, we don't see the situation the same way."

He adds that the profitability of the Amiral train must be proven and operational changes must be made before his government invests in the track upgrading between Gaspé and Percé. "For the five or six outings of 2014, the way of functioning didn't work."

Regarding the cost of repairing the line in Haldimand and Douglastown Minister Poëti prefers to stick to Transport-Québec's numbers. "If the people (of the Gaspésie Railway Society) were knowledgeable with numbers, they wouldn't have gone bankrupt."

Contrary to what the minister said, the deficit linked to the operation of the Amiral in 2014 was not \$200,000, an amount composed of a number of long term expenses.