

## NDP condemns the decision to refuse support to VIA Rail

Gilles Gagné

NEW RICHMOND: – The New Democratic Party has condemned the rejection by the Conservative Party of a bill that would have secured the services of VIA Rail throughout the country. Bill C-640 was originally written in 2014 by former Member of Parliament for the Ontarian riding of Trinity-Spadina, Olivia Chow, and was unsuccessfully submitted to the vote on April 29th.

The bill was to determine a national network for VIA Rail services. Any route abandonment would have led to a debate at the House of Commons or at a parliamentary commission.

“At the present time, VIA Rail can cut or suspend a service at will and there is no offi-

cial debate. We would need a nation-wide transportation policy in that country. The bill could have been a building block towards such policy. It would force the country to adopt a real transportation policy. Canada is the only industrialized country without a true transportation policy,” comments Philip Toone, Member of Parliament for the Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands riding.

“We see at home how we are affected by the lack of transportation policy. VIA Rail is ready to come back but the state of our railway is not satisfactory. We must invest in the network. Otherwise, we will only manage crisis after crisis and when we reach a crisis status, it costs three times more to repair an infrastructure,” analyzes Mr. Toone.

The federal government has not invested anything in the Matapedia to Gaspé rail line since 2011. Recently, Transport-Québec acquired the line but announced that the stretch between Caplan and Percé will be put in a dormant state.

“We need to put VIA Rail back in our region. The United States example is clear. For every dollar invested in the railway, \$4 comes back in economic activity.

It is written by the Department of Commerce, in the Amtrak report. We need to improve transportation in our region. The federal government could use leadership by investing in VIA Rail, not only here but all over Canada. The government must use its tools,” underlines Philip Toone.