



## Philip Toone submits bill to protect VIA Rail

— Gilles Gagné

NEW RICHMOND: — The Gaspésie-Magdalen Islands Member of Parliament Philip Toone has recently submitted a bill to the House of Commons in order to protect VIA Rail from cuts that would not have been discussed publicly before their implementation.

Mr. Toone prepared the bill after witnessing a number of VIA Rail service reductions since 2011, the year he was elected. Some of the cuts hit his riding, where the Federal transporter's services have been suspended since the fall of 2013.

"For the first time, VIA Rail would be protected through a legislative framework. In the United States, Amtrak has been

embedded in a legal framework since the beginning and it is growing. VIA Rail is experiencing the opposite. Every year, its services are cut here and there and the ridership is decreasing. With a good legislative framework, the transporter would be endowed with tools that would lead to the implementation of better services," explains Philip Toone.

Cuts couldn't be applied without a process including public hearings and a debate at the House of Commons.

"I understand that in the Gaspé Peninsula, services were cut mainly because of the state of the network but VIA Rail closed stations without a real debate, without taking into account the needs of the clientele," he states.

"One of the main problems with railway services in the country comes from the fact that we leave important decisions to railway companies like CN (Canadian National, the main owner of rail lines). VIA Rail uses lines it doesn't own. The interests of CN are not the interests of Canadians. The decisions of CN and VIA Rail are made behind closed doors, far from the public eye. I wonder how much thought public interests are given in that situation," also explains Mr. Toone.

"The Conservative government argues that it doesn't want to stick its nose in the affairs of an administrative board. The government makes plenty of negative interventions affecting VIA Rail," he states.