

Gaspésians for the return of the train: Almost 800 people have sent letters to Trudeau

● Gilles Gagné

NEW RICHMOND: – Help Save the train on the Gaspé Coast, the coalition advocating for the return of the passenger train between Matapédia and Gaspé, has now convinced at least 763 citizens to sign letters and send them to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, so he can involve the federal government in the necessary steps leading to service resumption.

Those 763 signatures represent an increase of almost 200 compared to the 576 letters sent a week earlier. All those letters have been mailed in less than a month, without publicity other than social media and limited media coverage during the Christmas break.

Since the end of the holidays, a few organizations have started initiatives to spread the word about the letter and have made it available to their clientele. CASA, the Committee for Anglophone Social Action is one of those organizations.

“The train is important for our youth when they come back from studying, for our seniors when they want to see members of their family, people who have medical appointments outside the region and so on. It keeps our families close together. There is not one reason more important than the others. It depends on the individuals. It is vital for the Gaspé,” says Cathy Brown, director of CASA.

She has not counted the number of letters that have been distributed from the CASA office in New Carlisle. She had made the letter available to those attending CASA’s activities outside the office.

Meanwhile, Anthony Bernard Prince, one of the three main organizers of the Help Save the train coalition, is looking for additional support, regionally.

“Is there anybody in the Chandler, Grand River, Percé, or Gaspé area that would be interested in helping us spread the word about our letter to the Prime Minister of Canada? Our support is very strong in the Bay of Chaleur area! We need more support from the eastern part of the Gaspé Coast. We are asking VIA Rail to resume its train service with Budd cars as a first step. Only small repairs are needed,” he is noted saying on facebook.

Budd cars are self-propelled diesel cars with a capacity of 50 to 60 passengers.

The federal government has not allotted money for the maintenance of the Gaspé Peninsula line since 2011. Important repairs are needed on some bridges to facilitate the return of a conventional passenger train. Budd cars are much lighter and their use could speed up the resumption of service.

Mr. Prince is also asking those who wish to send the letter to make sure that post masters know the rules applying to letters sent to Members of Par-

liament.

“Several letters that we sent to the Prime Minister were returned to us by the post office. Feel free to tell your post office (that) you can write to your MP in Ottawa without having to pay for postage,” he says.

He suggests two web sites, <https://www.canadapost.ca/tools/PG/manual/PGgovtmail-e.asp> and <http://www.parl.gc.ca/senatorsmembers.aspx?Language=E> to those who would like to read the rules regarding that kind of mail.

Mr. Prince is also asking people to help the coalition keep a reasonably accurate count of the letters sent to Justin Trudeau when they are copied. “Each time a letter is downloaded and printed off our website, our counter marks it as 1. If you get more copies of the letter made and signed we are not counting them. If you are able to get many letters signed and sent in, please tell us approximately how many. So we can add it to our overall number,” states Mr. Prince.

There are also copies of the letter available at the Spec office. Please stop by to pick up a copy.