



Photo: G. Gagné

The Gaspésie Railway Society attempted to haul a 37-metre blade in 2012 but the system used then will not be used this time around.

Gaspésie Railway Society gets largest transport contract in its history

Blades to be loaded in New Richmond but transporter targets Gaspé

Gilles Gagné

NEW RICHMOND – The Gaspésie Railway Society has just signed the largest annual transport contract of its history.

The company will haul 600 windmill blades between New Richmond and Matapedia. The blades are made by LM Wind Power in Gaspé and will ultimately be delivered in the United States.

The contract was awarded to the Gaspésie Railway Society by Canadian National, which will haul the blades from Matapedia and supervise their final destination, in the central part of the United States. Other American railways will be involved in the process.

The contract stems directly from the agreement announced on August 23 by LM Wind Power, to the effect that the Gaspé plant will supply a large number of blades to General Electric (GE) for a period ranging between three and five years.

Some of the wind farms are located in Texas. GE an-

nounced on October 11 the acquisition of LM Wind Power and its 13 plants worldwide.

The president of the Gaspésie Railway Society, Éric Dubé, will not divulge the value of the contract awarded by CN, as he wants to keep a competitive edge regarding other transporters and means of transportation.

“I can only say that for the moment, this agreement is worth more money than all our other current contracts combined,” he concludes.

Nine-hundred cars will be required to haul the 600 blades. The components measure 42 metres in length, with the flatcars only being 29 metres. A single blade therefore needs some space on a second car. According to the arrangement set up by CN, two blades will need three cars to be hauled.

The blades will leave in unit trains of 72 cars. Each train will carry 48 blades.

“Canadian National wants to ship these trains straight to their United States destination without integrating them with other trains. The trains leaving

New Richmond will be delivered “untouched” down there,” explains Éric Dubé.

The blades will be trucked from Gaspé to New Richmond even though the Gaspesian Railway goes as far as Gaspé. The situation stems from the fact that Quebec’s department of Transport, when it acquired the Matapedia to Gaspé line in May 2015, put the stretch between Caplan and Gaspé in a dormant state, due to a need for bridge repairs and low traffic.

Caplan is located just east of New Richmond. Quebec’s department of Transport has not invested any money in infrastructure on the Gaspé Peninsula line since 2014.

The new contract prompts Éric Dubé and his team to try and convince Quebec’s department of Transport to upgrade the rail line between Caplan and Gaspé. The problem consists mainly of increasing the bearing capacity of some bridges.

“We have other hauling requests from clients located along the dormant section. We

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GASPESIE RAILWAY

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are working on hauling some cement that will be produced by McInnis Cement. The windmill blades are light. Little work would be required to allow us to load windmill blades in Gaspé. By and large, we would triple the (blade transport) revenues this way,” explains Mr. Dubé.

Éric Dubé and his management team also want to get the federal government involved in the funding of the Gaspé Peninsula rail line’s upgrad-

ing.

“The current contract is valid for a year but LM will deliver blades to the United States over the long term. We are working very hard to haul the blades for five years,” he notes.

The first unit train will be loaded in November in New Richmond. The Gaspésie Railway Society will have to regularly leave flat cars on the main line due to the length of the train and the manoeuvres required to load the blades. The second train will be scheduled for January. One unit train per month will be re-

quired to fulfil the contract in 2017.

In 2015, the Gaspésie Railway Society, a firm under municipal control that is the line’s operator, hauled 1,624 carloads. The biggest customer is, by far, Temrex, the Nouvelle-based sawmill, where 1,500 cars carrying lumber and woodchips were loaded.

Even though they represent a lesser number of carloads, at 900, LM Wind Power’s blades will bring in more revenue than Temrex’s 1,500 cars because they will cover a longer distance, being loaded in New Richmond.