



Photo: G. Gagné

Finance Minister Carlos Leitao has no plans of investment on the rail line east of Port Daniel, despite windmill blade transport opportunities in Gaspé.

RAILWAY:

Investment will soon be announced in the Bay of Chaleur area but nothing for the eastern portion

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GASPÉ: – The Quebec government will announce an investment to upgrade the rail line between Matapédia and Caplan, indicated Finance Minister Carlos Leitao when he stopped in Gaspé on August 18.

However, the government, which owns the Matapédia-Gaspé line, doesn't plan to repair the Port-Daniel-Gaspé portion of that network, while the Caplan-Port Daniel section depends on an agreement with McInnis Cement.

"The first section (Matapédia-Caplan) will be kept in operation. There are projects to maintain the asset and they will be announced in the very near future," says the minister.

"A second section (Caplan-Port Daniel) could eventually get improvements as far as Port Daniel," says Mr. Leitao. That investment "depends on an agreement with McInnis Cement," adds the minister. He admits that the company has other things to take care of with the \$444 million cost overrun declared in June.

The Quebec government has nothing in its plans to repair the line between Port Daniel and Gaspé. Mr. Leitao just says that the government "will keep the asset," which

means that "we won't dismantle it and we will carry out a minimum of (maintenance) work."

The Amiral tourist train, blocked in Gaspé since the summer of 2014, can only resume its service towards Percé if the Haldimand bridge is repaired.

In May 2015, the Quebec Department of Transportation acquired the 330 kilometres of track between Matapédia and Gaspé. The Gaspésie Railway Society, the former owner, was technically bankrupt at the time. Since then, the government has not made any significant investment to improve the line.

Some of the railway bridges require upgrading work, while the two Cascapédia-St-Jules bridges need to be replaced. The trains passing on that bridge often pull empty cars placed strategically between loaded cars for the purpose of distributing the weight over a longer stretch.

A new transportation minister

Transport Minister, Jacques Daoust, resigned on August 19, due to his role in the selling of the Rona shares owned by *Investissement-Québec* when he was Minister of the Economy. He had succeeded Robert Poëti, ousted from the cabinet in

January. Mr. Poëti had made a number of controversial declarations about rail transportation in the Gaspé Peninsula, notably stating that the Amiral tourist train was not needed by Escale Gaspésie, the organization taking care of cruise ship passengers.

On August 20, Laurent Lessard became the new Minister of Transportation. Gaspé riding Member of the National Assembly Gaétan Lelièvre thinks that his nomination is good news.

"I think Mr. Lessard will have a better idea of regional development. It is a contrast with his predecessors, who were from Montreal and not well-informed in regional matters. Mr. Lessard is from Thetford, a rural area. He has a better and more accurate knowledge of regional stakes," says Mr. Lelièvre.

The rail transportation situation in the Gaspé Peninsula requires an urgent intervention from someone that will understand its importance. The new owner of the railway must take its responsibilities. There are rail transport opportunities at the present time, with LM Wind Power among others, and we must take advantage of them. I am dreaming of the day the transport issues will be solved in the region. We could take advantage of all our development opportunities, especially in tourism," says Mr. Lelièvre.