



Photo: G. Gagné

LM Wind Power plant expanding

Gilles Gagné

GASPÉ - LM Wind Power has begun a significant expansion of its Gaspé plant. There has been heavy machinery working on the north side of the facility since November 22, even though the company has not yet announced anything and will not confirm details about an expansion.

The management of the company confirms the evidence, “that there is machinery” working on the plant’s premises. The SPEC saw a fair number of workers operating that machinery to excavate and prepare the foundation of a new building. Some workers were also installing fences to mark off the construction zone.

“LM has always said that the growth of the Gaspé plant was a priority for the business. It is definite that some growth projects are planned by the management of LM but we can’t divulge the details,” specifies Alexandre Boulay, the plant’s director general.

The dimensions of the new building, the amount invested and the number of new jobs created have not been revealed by the company. Alexandre Boulay admits that the company is currently hiring. In August the firm had announced the addition of 85 positions to the 200 the Gaspé plant already employed.

“We have surpassed 285 jobs. We presently have 300 people employed at the plant. We hired people as recently as Monday (November 21). We are always looking for new workers to support the development of the plant,” he says.

He adds that 800 people sent their resumes after the August message that the company was hiring 85 people.

The SPEC gathered a few

details about the project. The expansion evidently is aiming at increasing the blade manufacturing capacity of the plant. Since September 19, the Gaspé employees have been working at full capacity to fill a giant export order for turbine builder General Electric. That contract occupies the whole plant. The blades are replacing units that were installed in wind mills mainly located in Texas.

LM Wind Power is negotiating another significant blade supply contract, also for export purposes. Alexandre Boulay hasn’t confirmed those details but he points out that “we still have elements to secure.” The company will be ready for an announcement “in a matter of weeks or months,” he adds cautiously.

On November 18, Gaspé riding Member of the National Assembly Gaétan Lelièvre said during a press conference on the necessary improvement of rail services, that an expansion of the Gaspé plant was a short term possibility. He was talking about the possible creation of 100 jobs.

On November 23, Mr. Lelièvre said that he didn’t know much more about LM’s project. “I can see the construction site when I pass there; I notice that there is foundation work.”

Regarding rail services, Alexandre Boulay hopes for a return of the freight service to Gaspé as soon as possible. “It is certainly an element that would support our competitiveness. Rail transport (between New Richmond and Gaspé) would diminish the cost for our clients.”

Gaétan Lelièvre points out that the use of trucks to haul the LM blades between Gaspé and New Richmond increases the yearly transportation cost

paid by General Electric (GE) and its customers by close to \$800,000.

The Matapédia-Gaspé line has belonged to Quebec’s department of Transport since the spring of 2015. It is only functional between Matapédia and Caplan, a tad more than one third of its whole length.

The Caplan-Gaspé stretch was put in a dormant state by Transport-Québec in 2015 because some repairs are needed. The last amount earmarked for the line infrastructure was announced by the Quebec government in 2013. The total cost of putting the line back in a fine state varies according to the scenario chosen but it will amount to tens of millions of dollars.

In the meantime, all the transportation requests sent to the operator of the line, the Gaspésie Railway Society, are related to the dormant portion of the line. They total thousands of carloads annually. A number of organizations tied to the economic development of the Gaspé Peninsula are asking the Quebec government to allot the money required to repair the line. Most of the work would be concentrated on reinforcing some bridges.

The export contract signed so far by LM Wind Power will be valid for at least three years, quite possibly more. The first blade transportation contract awarded to the Gaspésie Railway Society calls for the hauling of 600 blades to Matapédia, where other railways, Canadian National among them, will take the unit train and deliver it down south.

Because of their length of 42 metres, the 600 blades will require the use of 900 flat cars

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over the coming year. The first train is currently loaded in New Richmond and is expected to leave on December 3.

On October 11 General Electric announced that it will acquire LM Wind Power over the first quarter of 2017. LM is a Danish company that was bought in recent years with a trust fund through Doughty Hanson and Company, based in England.