

MNAs criticize the Quebec government's refusal to study train petition

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NEW RICHMOND: – Members of National Assembly for the ridings of Bonaventure and Gaspé, Sylvain Roy and Gaétan Lelièvre, criticize the Quebec government's decision not to study the arguments behind a petition signed by 5,174 citizens requesting the return of the passenger train in the Gaspé Peninsula.

The petition was submitted to the National Assembly in June by Sylvain Roy. He and Gaétan Lelièvre were hoping that the Liberal government would be open enough to hear the reasons behind a mobilization of 5,174 citizens. All those signatures were gathered in only one month.

"It is a government that has little or no respect for democratic values. The passenger train issue is important for the citizens that have signed the petition. The government is deaf to their plea. A parliamentary commission would have provided a good occasion to hear why the people and the groups care about the return of the train," says Mr. Roy.

VIA Rail's service between Matapédia and Gaspé was suspended at the end of September 2013 because of the state of the line, mainly the bridges. Since accessing power in 2014, the government of Philippe Couillard has not announced any budget for significant bridge repairs along the line.

After the acquisition of the line by Quebec's Department of Transport in May 2015, former Minister Robert Poëti announced that the Caplan to Percé stretch would be put in a dormant state. In September 2015, he announced that too much repair was required to open the line between Gaspé and Percé for the Amiral tourist train, which was serv-

ing the cruise ships' clientele.

"People's mobility is a vital condition for development. The World Health Organization states that access to transport is a determining factor of health. Some people are moving out of the region because they don't have access to decent transportation means to reach health services. Transport is like health and education: it is a must," adds the Bonaventure Member of the National Assembly.

The day the parliamentary commission was refused to Sylvain Roy and Gaétan Lelièvre, Quebec's Premier Philippe Couillard expressed his support for a third link between Lévis and Quebec City, where the Pierre-Laporte and Québec bridges don't have the capacity to handle all the traffic between the two shores of the St. Lawrence River.

"That third link is a project worth \$4 billion and it would be used by 100,000 people. We need \$80 million to upgrade a railway servicing 80,000 people. It would also serve all the Quebecers who come to the Gaspé Peninsula. The whole Quebec would benefit from a decent railway link in the Gaspé Peninsula. One must wonder if we are only second-class citizens," adds Mr. Roy.

He criticizes the situation at the helm of Quebec's Department of Transport, considering that three men had filled that position in 2016. "The instability doesn't help. It is like a revolving door," he points out, referring to former Minister Robert Poëti being ousted from the cabinet in January, and Jacques Daoûst's resignation from politics in August as part of the Rona controversy.

The situation of current Minister Laurent Lessard seems rather shaky for the moment, as he is suspected of being involved in several

cases of conflict of interests.

The current government refused to hold a parliamentary commission about the Gaspé Peninsula train petition, alleging that Transport Québec retains the necessary information to make the right decisions.

"We think that they don't

possess that information. They have had two-and-a-half years to announce budgetary envelopes for the railway and they have failed to do so," argues Sylvain Roy, a Parti Québécois Member of National Assembly like Gaétan Lelièvre.

In a press release, Mr.

Lelièvre states that the Quebec government must take its responsibilities in the railway file and propose a strategy for the return of the passenger train in the Gaspé Peninsula.

Mr. Lelièvre also stresses the importance of the freight train for the economy of the region.