

## Petition to pressure Transport-Québec into investing money in the Matapedia-Gaspé railway line

Gilles Gagné

CARLETON: – Médor Doiron from Bonaventure, has initiated a National Assembly petition asking the Quebec government to invest money in the improvement of the Matapedia to Gaspé rail line, so VIA Rail's passenger train can resume operations.

At the beginning of the winter, Mr. Doiron signed the letter distributed by the Gaspésians working together for the return of the train coalition and sent it to Prime Minister Justin Trudeau. The letter is asking him to favour VIA Rail's return between Matapedia and Gaspé.

More recently, Mr. Doiron also sent a more personal letter to Prime Minister Trudeau, who has not yet replied, explaining in ample detail why the train is important for Gaspésians. He also sent the same letter to the Member of National Assembly for Bonaventure, Sylvain Roy,

who replied.

Doiron was a public services employee between 1970 and 2012, working mostly with youth. Mr. Doiron is a regular user of VIA Rail's passenger train.

"I remain a frequent user but I find it tedious to drive to Campbellton. That is why I wanted to make our cause known at the National Assembly. I find it bizarre that our service has been neglected to this point over the years, while the people were really using the train," he states.

The petition enacted by Médor Doiron describes in six points the reasons that prompted him to submit the document to the National Assembly.

He notes that the passenger train has not circulated between Matapedia and Gaspé since August 2015. He also emphasizes that the train has been an essential economic and tourist development tool, since

1890.

Médor Doiron remarks that the Quebec government is now the owner of the Matapedia-Gaspé line and therefore has the responsibility to look after its maintenance and sustainability. He underlines that VIA Rail recently expressed an interest in coming back to the Gaspé Peninsula as soon as the line has been upgraded. He mentions that numerous organizations from different fields are asking for the return of the passenger train.

"One must consider that the train represents a safe way to travel for the elderly requiring health service outside the region and for students, who are studying away, among other things. I also accompanied numerous young people to Quebec City and Montreal when I was working with them and it is the perfect way to travel. I therefore ask, like all the people who will sign the petition, the Quebec government to es-

tablish a common strategy with the federal government to assure the return of VIA Rail's train (east of Matapedia)," states Mr. Doiron.

"We are also asking the Quebec government to give the go ahead for a series of repairs that are necessary to improve our rail network. We are also asking the Quebec government to submit a policy taking into account all transportation means in the Gaspé Peninsula," he adds.

"Our passenger train must be perceived as a public service. If profitability is the only factor, some people might find that it shouldn't be offered in the Gaspé Peninsula but we can only find a number of services that are not profitable in big cities," says Mr. Doiron.

In 2011, the last year VIA Rail reached Gaspé on a regular basis before opting to turn its train in New Carlisle, the Gaspésian passenger train carried 27,991 people, more than

VIA Rail's two other regional trains combined. Those trains service Abitibi and Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean and they carried together 25,870 people in 2011.

The line between Matapedia and Gaspé is punctuated by numerous bridges. Some of them need repairs. The most recent study specifies that \$86 million would be required to fix all the bridges for several decades.

The Quebec government acquired the line 11 months ago since the former owner, the Gaspésie Railway Society, was experiencing financial problems, owing \$3.9 million to its creditors. The Gaspésie Railway Society remains the operator of the freight train and takes care of day-to-day maintenance chores.

The federal government has not invested one cent in the Matapedia-Gaspé line since

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2011. The Quebec government had not handed out infrastructure money to fix the bridges for two years. The only money sent to the Gaspésie Railway Society was basic operational maintenance funding amounting to a tad over \$3 million since 2013.

As of April 18, the National Assembly petition has gathered slightly more than 1057 signatures.

People can see the wording of the petition and sign it by going to: [www.gaspe-train.org/trainreturn](http://www.gaspe-train.org/trainreturn).