

## Proulx evasive about railway issue but assures “follow-up”

Gilles Gagné

NEW RICHMOND: — Sébastien Proulx, the new Minister responsible for the Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands, was evasive about what the Quebec government will do to develop the region’s rail line but he committed to a follow up.

Mr. Proulx, who is also Minister of Education and Minister of Family, came to the region on March 29, 30 and 31 for the first time since the January 28 cabinet shuffle, when he was nominated Minister responsible for the Gaspé Peninsula.

During a media question period that followed a presentation of the provincial budget in front of Baie des Chaleurs Chamber of commerce members, Mr. Proulx explained that his government is “pushing to make things happen” in the railway file and that he is “following it regularly. It is a complicated file. Along the line, there are different prob-



Photo: G. Gagné

*Minister Sébastien Proulx commits to doing a follow-up on the railway, but remains vague about the form it will take.*

lems, as if we have several lines. However, we must be able to transport goods and people in a region,” he said.

SPEC asked the minister if his government intends to make a move regarding a study that is needed to assess the bearing capacity of the bridges between Matapédia and Gaspé. The study was first approved, at the end of June

2015, by Quebec’s department of Transport, then cancelled due to an alleged lack of funding. The department of the Economy also looked at the possibility of funding the study, then forfeited at the end of the year.

The study would determine the kind of work necessary to

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**PROULX:**

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resume VIA Rail’s service using Budd cars, automotive passenger cars that are individually much lighter than the locomotive of a conventional passenger train. That option was suggested a year ago by Gaspésians working for the future of the train coalition.

“I am having discussions with my Transport colleague,” replied Sébastien Proulx.

“We acquired the line,” he added to express that his government moved in the railway file. Transport-Québec in fact officially bought the line in May 2015, two months after announcing that decision. Prior to that, the Gaspésie Railway Society was the owner but had filed for court protection in November 2014, when facing a \$3.9 million deficit.

However, Transport-Québec has not made any investment in the infrastructure of the line since the end of 2013, despite urgent needs in that regard. A recent study indicated that investments of \$86 million would be required to repair all the bridges and culverts between Matapédia and Gaspé. The repairs would last over a period exceeding 25 years for the bridges.

Sébastien Proulx added that “there are sections of the line where even a light train (like Budd cars) couldn’t pass. We will do a follow up,” he concluded.

The president of VIA Rail, Yves Desjardins-Siciliano, recently said to the SPEC that the public transporter would now be ready to resume its service in the Gaspé Peninsula by stages, and that coming back to New Carlisle could be such a stage.



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