

Rail GD receives contract to refurbish 12 VIA Rail cars

Gilles Gagné

CASCAPEDIA-ST-JULES: – VIA Rail recently awarded an important contract to Rail GD, the New Richmond rail car repair shop. The contract began the second week of May and will continue to the end of the year. 12 LRC passenger cars will be sent to the Rail GD for sizeable repairs.

The value of the contract is undisclosed for now. The public transporter has imposed a confidentiality agreement with Rail GD. Company management refused to respond to an information request filed by SPEC.

“The contract was awarded following a rigorous call for tender process. The work will be spread between May and December 2016. Following the attribution of that contract to Rail GD, some jobs will be created in the Gaspé Peninsula region,” wrote VIA Rail spokesperson, Mylène Bélanger.

SPEC sent many messages to VIA Rail management before receiving partial answers.

“On top of the 12 cars sent



Photo: G. Gagné

Gaspésie Railway Society locomotive 1856 pulled the VIA Rail LRC car 3367 between Matapédia and New Richmond on May 12. Here, the train passes over one of the two bridges spanning over the Grand Cascapédia River.

to Rail GD, other cars will be repaired at CAD Railway Industries in Lachine and at our maintenance centre in Montreal. This will allow a faster completion of the refurbishment and maintenance of our 97 LRC passenger cars,” states Ms. Bélanger.

VIA Rail is allotting \$28.2 million this year for the renovation and maintenance of its rolling material. The contracts awarded from that amount are confidential, insists Ms.

Bélanger.

The number of jobs preserved or created at Rail GD is not known. Between October 2015 and March 2016, the New Richmond shop hired close to 40 people for the thorough refurbishment of two Rocky Mountaineer double-decker passenger cars. Those units are more sophisticated than the LRC cars.

The LRC cars nevertheless represent a success story in the history of Canada’s rail

passenger service. Their conception started in 1968 by a consortium formed by Alcan, Dofasco, then known as Dominion Foundries and Steel; and Montreal Locomotive Works, later acquired by Bombardier.

The idea was to develop the most profitable strategy in order to adopt a train maximizing the potential of existing railway facilities through the introduction of new vehicle technology.

After running tests on prototypes and leasing a few units to United States’ Amtrak, Bombardier built LRC cars for VIA Rail after receiving a significant first order in 1978, and a second one in 1981 totalling 100 cars and 31 locomotives. The cars were built at the Bombardier factory in La Pocatière. The locomotives were built by the Bombardier factory in Montreal. The success rate of those locomotives was lower, as they are no longer in service for VIA Rail. All but two have been scrapped.

The LRC cars weigh about one third less than other standard passenger cars. Part of

their structure is made of aluminum. They were expected to last 20 years and they have far exceeded that life expectancy, as they have now up to 35 years of service under their belt. Their current refurbishment will lengthen that life expectancy.

Seven years ago, the announcement of an imminent contract to refurbish the then 98 LRC cars still in service prompted Gilles Babin and Joey Cyr to consider the possibility of starting Rail GD and obtain that contract.

They didn’t win the call for tenders, awarded to Industrial Rail Services in Moncton. That company went bankrupt four years ago without completing the VIA Rail contract. The Moncton shop was taken over by CAD Railway Industries in 2012.

It is the third contract awarded by VIA Rail to Rail GD. The first two contracts were significantly smaller. A dome car previously involved in a crash was refurbished in 2010-2011, and a rail diesel car, also known as Budd car, was overhauled between February and April 2015.