

Train petition submitted to the National Assembly; oversized equipment comes in by train

Gilles Gagné

NEW RICHMOND: - On June 7, Member of the National Assembly for the riding of Bonaventure, Sylvain Roy, submitted a petition including 5,174 names of people requesting the return of the passenger train between Matapédia and Gaspé. The petition was presented during the regular session at National Assembly.

The 5,174 signatures were obtained in 50 days, between April 13 and June 2. It means that an average of 103 people signed it daily. The petition mentions that collaboration between the two levels of government is required to bring back the VIA Rail passenger train to the Gaspé Peninsula.

Bonaventure resident, Médor Doiron, made the preliminary steps leading to the creation of the petition, and Sylvain Roy sponsored it.

Sylvain Roy was "very proud to see that Gaspésians, but also Quebecers living outside the region, mobilized to put pressure on the Quebec government in order to do the necessary work and bring back the train, an essential transportation means for the region. The passenger train has not circulated between Matapédia and Gaspé for close to three years. That situation can't last."

Mr. Roy emphasizes that over the last few months, the stars seem to have aligned in favour of the return of VIA Rail east of Matapédia. That is why the federal and provincial governments must deploy concrete actions to make it work.

"In March 2016, VIA Rail expressed an intention to return to the Gaspé Peninsula. The Quebec government bought the Matapédia-Gaspé line in March 2015 and it has the responsibility of maintaining the railway. The Gaspesian population has the right to be served by functional transportation means. The train is fundamental in the development of the



Photo: G. Gagné

The three cars holding the grinder rolls were brought to the Fabrication Delta plant to be unloaded. Brakeman Jeffrey Bourgaize was closely involved in the shunting operation.

region, especially for the tourist industry. It is also a safe way for students and seniors, who must travel outside the region. We are now expecting the Quebec government to take its responsibilities and come back to the citizens through submitting a common strategy with the federal government, including a realistic time frame for the return of the passenger train," adds Mr. Roy.

All those points were presented to the National Assembly. He also asked the Quebec government to develop a valid "integrated transportation policy" for the Gaspé Peninsula, a policy that would take into account all the transportation needs of the area.

Freight news

Regarding the freight service, several new elements have evolved lately. On June 8, the Gaspésie Railway Society hauled three oversized flat cars in order to bring in three heavy rolls, the main components for the grinders of Cement McInnis' plant, currently under construction in Port Daniel.

"There will be a total of six (similar) pieces. They weigh 100 (metric) tonnes each. They

came from Germany and were unloaded in Halifax. They were then hauled by train to New Richmond where they will remain for two months. With escorts, they will be transported to Port Daniel by road when it will be the right time on the construction site (...) We have a 400-tonne crane on site and it is very busy right now," explains Maryse Tremblay, spokesperson for McInnis Cement.

A grinder roll and the special flat car used to haul it weigh a total of 350,000 pounds, 220,000 pounds for the roll and 130,000 pounds for the car. According to Transport-Québec, the bearing capacity of the bridges east of Caplan is not sufficient to

safely support that kind of load.

The three additional grinder rolls were delivered on June 10 to the Gaspésie Railway Society.

Meanwhile, the Gaspésie Railway Society has convinced the Avignon MRC to caution a \$200,000 credit line for the acquisition of woodchip cars.

"We are trying to secure \$400,000 for that purpose. Actually, we might be able to secure more. The other MRCs will be asked to contribute as well and even some municipalities are showing interest in helping us," says Éric Dubé, president of the Gaspésie Railway Society.

The transporter, which is owned by the four MRCs lo-

cated between Matapédia and Gaspé, just missed a deal for the acquisition of 13 woodchip cars in Minnesota because the funding was not authorized fast enough.

"The price was \$325,000 and we had an option for six more cars, for a total price of \$400,000. We missed it by a few days but we will be ready the next time," adds Mr. Dubé.

Woodchip hauling between the Temrex sawmill in Nouvelle and the Rivière-du-Loup paper mill represented 1,100 of the 1,624 cars transported by the Gaspésie Railway Society in 2015.

However, the society doesn't make money with that transport because the supplier of cars, Canadian National, leases them at a prohibitive cost, hence the attempt to acquire woodchip cars.

"We could reimburse a \$400,000 loan for 20 cars within 15 months. After that, it would be net profits for us," emphasizes Mr. Dubé.

A broker is still looking for woodchip cars on behalf of the Gaspésie Railway Society and Éric Dubé is confident that the file could be realized in the months to come.

The Gaspésie Railway Society bought one woodchip car in December, after getting a \$37,000 loan from the Town of New Richmond. The loan will be reimbursed in a year and that car alone is more profitable than the 30 cars leased from Canadian National.