

Rail line sustains damage on its dormant section

Gilles Gagné

NEW RICHMOND: – The Gaspé Peninsula railway sustained some damage during the December 30 wind storm, mainly in the Chandler area. Six spots were identified by the operator of the line, the Gaspésie Railway Society.

Luc Lévesque, director general of the Gaspésie Railway Society, wrote a report on December 31 and submitted it to Quebec's department of Transport, the owner of the Matapédia to Gaspé line.

"In New Carlisle, the south end of the wye was slightly damaged. In Pabos Mills, two spots were eroded, mainly from under the rails. It is almost in the woods. In Chandler, the line was damaged along Chenal road, west of the train station. In Pabos, actually between Pabos and Grand River, along Highway 132, the line and the rock dyke were moved somewhat. It is near mile 49. In Corner-of-the-Beach, the line was not damaged but it was buried by debris and sand. The little station used by the passengers of the Amiral train was heavily damaged and the wooden wharf was totalled. The line has been also slightly undermined, over a length of about 200 feet maybe, in the Haldimand area," explains Mr. Lévesque.

The rails and the ties are recoverable, even though they have to be put back in place in some cases. The estimate of the damage remains reasonable, according to Mr. Lévesque.

"Putting the ballast, the rails and the ties back in place will



Photo: G. Gagné

The Gaspé Peninsula railway sustained some damage during the December 30 wind storm.

probably cost around \$200,000. Restoring the rock dykes will be more costly. I would say that it will cost between \$600,000 and \$700,000. So the total cost is less than \$1 million, I would say," adds Luc Lévesque.

All the spots that sustained damage on December 30 are located along the dormant section of the line, the stretch that has not been properly maintained since VIA Rail stopped passing there, in December 2010.

"We put between \$50,000 and \$70,000 worth of rock per year on such a section in order to reinforce the protection dykes. I am sure that we could

have avoided these damages had the decision to maintain that stretch sufficiently been made," says Mr. Lévesque, who was hired in 2014.

The Gaspésie Railway Society was the owner of the tracks until the end of 2014 but was deprived of cash flow that year because the Quebec government didn't come up with any infrastructure funding in the budget of the new government, after the April election.

Since then, the Quebec government put the line east of Caplan, which includes the spots damaged by the December 30 storm in a dormant state. No significant maintenance was carried out in 2015 and 2016

on the line east of Caplan. "Maintenance" consists of visual inspections from spring time to the fall. The report sent by Luc Lévesque to Quebec's department of Transport is "under analysis". No further information was available at Transport-Québec as of January 6.

"The dormant state of that stretch of line is a hurdle. Had the line been operational between New Carlisle and Gaspé, we would have received a positive answer right away," says Luc Lévesque.

The Gaspésie Railway Society, politicians and numerous regional organizations have been putting pressure on the

Quebec government to reopen the line between Caplan and Gaspé since November due to a number of business opportunities relying on the freight train to either start or increase their operational efficiency.

The largest of those customers is Gaspé's LM Wind Power, forced to load windmill blades in New Richmond in order to reach its clients in the United States.

A supply contract of 600 blades taking place on 900 flat cars started in December. Loading the blades in Gaspé would allow LM Wind Power's clients to save \$800,000 in transportation costs for a year.