

Railway Society looks for ways to benefit from new federal program

— Gilles Gagné

NEW RICHMOND: — The president of the Gaspésie Railway Society, Éric Dubé, and his director general, Luc Lévesque, are considering ways to take advantage of the new transport infrastructure program announced on July 4 by Canada's Transport Minister, Marc Garneau.

The federal government plans to invest \$2 billion over the next decade into trade and transport infrastructure, including trade routes along the Canada-United States border. Parts of that border have become clogged and are in urgent need of expansion.

Indirectly, that issue might affect some of the Gaspésie Railway Society customers, including its biggest client, revenue-wise, General Electric, which is likely to export close to 1,000 blades to the United States in 2017 alone. The blades are produced by the LM Windpower plant in Gaspé. LM Windpower is now wholly owned by General Electric.

"We are looking at the new program. We are weighing opportunities and we are trying to learn if the program applies to us. We are not the owners of the line. We are the operators

of the line. The Quebec government owns it. Will the Quebec government embark on that kind of partnership with the federal government? I don't know," says Mr. Dubé.

Another side of the federal program could be relevant for the Gaspésie Railway Society, as Minister Garneau stated that other projects the government will consider funding are those that reduce the effects climate change and severe weather might have on transportation routes.

Currently, the Gaspésie Railway Society direction wants to load LM Windpower's blades in Gaspé but the line east of Caplan was put in a dormant state by Quebec's Department of Transport in 2015.

The blades are consequently hauled by truck between Gaspé and New Richmond where they are transferred to railcars. That stretch represents two-thirds of the line. Up to five vehicles, including police cars and escort pickup trucks, are required for each blade. The cost per blade is considerably increased because of that factor, and so are polluting emissions.

"Like Gaspé, we want to reach Port Daniel as soon as

possible because traffic destined to the United States could originate from there as well. Smaller quantities of cement are likely to be exported by train instead of by ship. So it (the federal program) could be a factor there as well," adds Mr. Dubé.

Before the line is repaired between New Richmond and Port Daniel, some of the McInnis Cement output will be trucked to New Richmond and transferred to railcars, again with an impact on gas emissions.

The management of the Gaspésie Railway Society is even considering investing in the line repairs despite not owning it anymore. This could be a way to get federal funding.

"We just invested \$20,000 in Chandler to partially fix the damage caused by last winter's storms. It will happen again, I guess. We just need permission from Transports Québec. We are now profitable and we will do two things with our profits: invest money in our equipment and invest money on the line," explains Éric Dubé.

Minister Garneau specifically mentioned railways when he announced the new program.