

Railway rehabilitation paid through road budget cuts, says Lelièvre

Geneviève Gélinas

GASPÉ: – The Gaspé riding Member of the National Assembly, Gaétan Lelièvre, is asking Premier Philippe Couillard to take responsibility for the Gaspesian railway in order to undertake its rehabilitation as soon as possible. According to Mr. Lelièvre, Gaspesians have already paid for the repairs of their railway through regional cuts in road budgets over recent years.

Mr. Lelièvre estimates the cuts made by the Liberals in the Gaspé Peninsula and the Magdalen Islands at \$118 million since they were elected in 2014. To get that figure, he took 2013-2014 as a reference year, when the Parti québécois government of Pauline Marois invested \$84 million on the region's roads.

Since then, the annual investments have decreased, and range between \$48 and \$60 million per year, for a total of \$218 million expected from 2014 to 2018. If the Government had continued to invest \$84 million per year, this total would have been \$336 million, that is to say \$118 million more.

The complete rehabilitation of the railway from Matapédia to Gaspé would cost between \$86 million and \$122 million, according to studies completed respectively for the Gaspésie Railway Society and Quebec's Department of Transport.

"Only with the government cuts at the Transport Ministry, we could pay cash for the railway refection from Matapédia to Gaspé, and that doesn't include the cuts made in education, health and regional

development," Mr. Lelièvre states.

"What I say is that we've already paid for the repairs of our railway. It's not a budget reason anymore. It has to be announced as soon as possible," the Member of the National Assembly (MNA) adds.

Since 2015, the Gaspesian railway has belonged to the Québec government. It's used only from Matapédia to Caplan, on 130 kilometers. The 190-kilometer-long eastern part, from Caplan to Gaspé, is in a dormant state.

Mr. Lelièvre criticizes the government's "numerous hesitations" in the railway file. "The contradictory ministerial statements, the silence of the actual Transport Ministry and the lack of leadership of the minister responsible for the region, Sébastien Proulx, are no longer acceptable," he states through a press release.

Meanwhile, the Parti québécois MNA Martin Ouellet was in the Gaspé Peninsula



Photo: G. Gélinas

According to Parti québécois Members of the National Assembly, Martin Ouellet and Gaétan Lelièvre, Gaspesian companies struggle with transport issues.

last week to consult with small and medium-sized companies about their needs. "We talked a lot about transportation. We have to address that problem:

planes, trains and automobiles," Mr. Ouellet says.

"To supervise the progress of a construction site can cost \$100,000 for a Gaspesian busi-

ness, but only \$25,000 for a Montréal or Toronto business," illustrates Mr. Lelièvre. The expensive plane tickets are part of the problem, he added.