

Stakeholders convinced that repairs can be done promptly

Gilles Gagné

NEW CARLISLE: – Most people involved in the Gaspé Peninsula railway file are convinced that the line can be put back in working order over its whole length in a relatively short time, way less than what premier Philippe Couillard and Transport Québec officials suggested.

Most people are reluctant at predicting an accurate time frame, because of the uncertainty linked to the new studies that will be carried out.

“We will not wait 10 years. We know that there will be work carried out at Mile 9 this year (the small bridge spanning over the Kempt River will be replaced in Ristigouche South East). We know that the two Cascapédia-St-Jules bridges won’t be replaced this year,” points out Éric Dubé, the president of the Gaspésie Railway Society.

He is glad about the amount announced, \$100 million higher than any sum that had been mentioned so far. He thinks that the two Cascapédia-St-Jules bridges could be replaced in 2018 and be in working order in 2019.

“The follow-up committee, where the Gaspésie Railway Society is an important player, will make sure that work will be accelerated,” he adds.

Those two bridges were originally built in the mid-1890s and while they can still take a standard loaded freight car of 263,000 pounds, a string of such cars often has to be mixed with empty cars, on an alternate basis of one loaded and one empty, be-



Photo: G. Gagné

Percé Rock MRC prefect, Nadia Minassian assures the public that the follow-up committee will ensure that the upgrades to the line are quickly carried out all the way to Gaspé.

cause of the bridge’s limited bearing capacity.

Alexandre Boulay, director

general of the LM Windpower plant in Gaspé, was hoping for a return of the freight train

in Gaspé in 2018 and now accepts that it is unlikely but “honestly, I would be very surprised that it would take more than five years. Hauling our blades by truck has a significant impact on our competitiveness and our economy. We presently have close to 400 employees and we will have 475 next year.”

Sylvain Roy, the Parti Québécois Member of National Assembly for the riding of Bonaventure, was present at the New Carlisle announcement and was relieved to see the announcement made by Premier Couillard.

“That is what we have been advocating for a long time, my Gaspé colleague Gaétan Lelièvre and I.” He wishes that Transports Québec “will trust the experts of the SCFG (the French acronym for the Gaspésie Railway Society) and opt for internal management for some of the work that has to be carried out. It would allow

for reduced costs and faster delivery.”

He fears that Transport Québec will take a lot of time analyzing situations that have already been studied, “a situation that could turn potential customers away from the railway.” He also fears cost overruns if Transport Québec takes the lead of the situation by themselves.

Percé Rock MRC prefect Nadia Minassian is very happy to know, at last, the intentions of the government. “We will make sure that work progresses as fast as possible. The follow-up committee will play an important role,” she explains, referring to a committee bringing together the Gaspésie Railway Society, the elected officials of the region, stakeholders including LM Windpower and Transport Québec.

That group has been asked to work jointly on the upgrading of the Matapédia-Gaspé railway.

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