

Trucks could speed return of freight service by hauling windmill blade cars

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NEW RICHMOND: – The management of the Gaspésie Railway Society has submitted a project to Transport Quebec in order to haul windmill blades between Gaspé and New Richmond on flat cars pulled by trucks.

The trucks are able to roll on rails and already exist. They are manufactured by Brandt Trucks. Some train operators use them to pull ballast cars, for example, or move cars on industrial spurs.

The project was submitted to Transport Quebec because that department owns the Matapédia to Gaspé railway. Some upgrading work would be required to move trucks and flatcars between Caplan and Gaspé.

Luc Lévesque, director general of the Gaspésie Railway Society, explains that the use of trucks to haul windmill blades would be a way to accelerate resumption of freight traffic between Gaspé and New Richmond, since trucks are much lighter than locomotives.

“What we want is pass trains on this portion of the



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According to Luc Lévesque, director general of the Gaspésie Railway Society, using Brandt trucks to haul windmill blades would be a way to accelerate resumption of freight traffic between Gaspé and New Richmond, since trucks are much lighter than locomotives.

line. The goal to have conventional trains pass between Caplan and Gaspé is too far away, if we look at the way the file is progressing right now. If we resume rail traffic with trucks, there will be some positive spiral effects on the whole project of upgrading the track down to Gaspé. We don't want to use trucks over the long term,” says Mr. Lévesque.

Locomotives pose a problem between Caplan, just east

of New Richmond, and Gaspé because of the insufficient bearing capacity of some bridges. A Brandt truck weighs approximately 40 tonnes, much less than the locomotives used by the Gaspésie Railway Society, which have a weight of 125 tonnes. These locomotives are nevertheless considered lightweights in today's railway industry.

The “file” Mr. Lévesque is

referring to is linked to Premier Philippe Couillard's May 5 announcement to the effect that the Quebec government is allotting \$100 million for the betterment of the Matapédia to Gaspé line. So far, not one cent of that budgetary envelope has been spent or even earmarked.

Premier Couillard has put the project under the guidance of Quebec's *Bureau des grands projets*, the major proj-

ects board, which has asked Transport Quebec to take charge of the initiative. However, the upgrading of the Gaspé railway project will need some political push in order to proceed faster.

Luc Lévesque prefers not commenting on the apparent slowness of the railway file. He fears that 2018 might pass without money coming from the \$100 million envelope.

“We have no control over the upgrading work time frame. The only thing the Gaspésie Railway Society can do is work at finding innovative ways to move forward. We did it a year ago by organizing a way to transfer windmill blades from trucks to railcars in New Richmond. We also set up a silo in order to transfer the cement made in Port Daniel from trucks to railcars. Now, we want to make forward steps and the Brandt truck option is a way to do so,” assures Luc Lévesque.

The project he submitted to Transport Québec involves minimal upgrades to some bridges. An engineering firm has already assessed the

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BRANDT TRUCKS:

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bridges that would need a bit of work in order to allow Brandt trucks to use them.

The windmill blades are very light by railway standards, since they weigh around seven tonnes each. Since two blades take up three cars, and through adding the low weight of the blade racks, each flat car carries about five to six tonnes. Each empty flat car weighs about 30 tonnes. The flatcars loaded with blades consequently weigh 36 tonnes at most, which is less than the Brandt trucks.

Loading cement in Port Daniel instead of New Richmond will require full-scale repairs in the short term between the McInnis Cement plant and New Richmond because cement cars weigh 134 tonnes when they are loaded.

Luc Lévesque is not ready

to divulge the investment required for upgrading the track sufficiently and enable the passage of Brandt trucks and flat cars loaded with windmill blades but it would likely cost a few million dollars.

The time frame is unknown. “It all depends on political aspects, on the efforts that can be deployed. We have seen that things can move relatively fast on Highway 132's Cascapédia River bridge,” he simply says.

Meanwhile, the Gaspésie Railway Society has recouped two of the three November-December windmill blade trains that had been postponed until January-February due to the storms and rain falls that had hit Texas in September. One such train will leave before the end of November and another one in December. Texas is the final destination of the blades made in Gaspé by LM Wind Power.