



## Budget reactions: Clarification needed regarding the railway and airports

Gilles Gagné

NEW RICHMOND – The Quebec governments budget is perceived somewhat favourably by Éric Dubé, president of the Gaspésie Railway Society, but a number of clarifications remain to be made in order to fully reassure him.

The Gaspésie Railway Society will receive \$12.5 million over the next five years to secure track maintenance and acquire new equipment, according to Quebec budget documents.

“We expect to sign a five-year agreement with the government in June. It gives us more possibilities to plan things over the long term. That was not really possible as long as we signed one year agreements, which was the case since 2015,” points out Éric Dubé.

The agreement with the Quebec government remains to be fine-tuned, regarding points like the inclusion of certain types of expenditures in the \$12.5 million envelope. The temporary cement transshipment terminal for Nouvelle is one example.

“I would say that the Nouvelle terminal will be included in the \$12.5 million amount. I would rather use the \$100 million (announced 11 months ago by Premier Philippe Couillard) for building the Nouvelle terminal, which will cost \$600,000 to \$700,000, I would say (in-



Photo: G. Gagné

*Gaspésie Railway Society president Éric Dubé says the company needs additional equipment to be more efficient.*

cluding the tracks). We will accept what government authorities say. We can try to influence them on some issues but the final decision is theirs,” says Mr. Dubé.

While the Gaspésie Rail-

way Society is covering its operation costs with the revenues generated by freight traffic, some equipment has to be replaced or upgraded.

“Our fleet of maintenance vehicles cannot fill our needs.

A pickup truck equipped to go on the rails costs \$160,000. We also need an extra locomotive. We brought one from Gaspé but there is always one locomotive requiring repairs, sometimes two, out of the four we have. With two setups in Nouvelle (Temrex sawmill and McInnis Cement), one setup in New Richmond (McInnis Cement), with the windmill blade traffic, we need one more locomotive. We will also need two additional tracks in Nouvelle and two in New Richmond. We currently have two windmill blade trains on the line and we are congested. It is a good problem to have but we have to improve our operational conditions,” explains Mr. Dubé.

In Gaspé, independent Member of the National Assembly (MNA) Gaétan Lelièvre remarks that projects planned for big cities benefit from well-defined time frames, which is not the case for regional ventures.

“I find it unbelievable that in the 2018-2019 budget, the government plans the realiza-

tion of the Réseau Express Métropolitain (a light train initiative) between April 2018 and the summer of 2021, a \$6.3 billion project. While on the Gaspé Peninsula, almost one year after the \$100 million announcement by the Quebec premier for the rehabilitation of the rail line, only \$4 million has been invested and they are unable to confirm an accurate schedule to repair existing bridges. Is the technology so different between Montreal and the Gaspé Peninsula or is it that the political will differs a lot between the two places?” wonders Gaétan Lelièvre.

Regarding air transport, the Gaspé riding MNA doubts that there will be a lot of money for the four Gaspé Peninsula airports in the budget, despite the \$173 million announcement by Finance Minister Carlos Leitaó.

“The 2018-2019 budget is endowed with \$53.8 million for the airports. Five years ago, that amount was \$61.1 million,” he says, pointing at a loss over the years.