



Photos: G. Gagné

*Despite handling heavy loads such as these grinders for the Port Daniel cement plant in June 2016, the Cascapedia-St-Jules bridges are limited to ten loaded cars of cement per week.*

## Cascapedia-St-Jules railway bridges likely to be completed in early 2020

Gilles Gagné

**CASCAPEDIA-ST- JULES:** – The March 27 Quebec budget contained no information about a time frame for the work that has to be carried out to make the Gaspé Peninsula railway functional over its whole length.

That lack of information seems a bit odd to certain observers of the railway scene, like Bernard Babin, of the Gaspesian Coalition for the return of the train, “considering that Premier Philippe Couillard announced \$100 million for the Gaspé railway 11 months ago. That was a while ago.”

The owner of the Matapedia-Gaspé line, Transport Quebec, remains discrete, mostly silent, about the time frame planned to carry out the railroad repairs.

However, the president of the Gaspésie Railway Society, Éric Dubé, is asking Transport Quebec a lot of questions and he gets some answers, sometimes. He thinks for example that Gaspésians will have to wait until the beginning of 2020 for the replacement of the two Cascapedia-St-Jules railway bridges.

“The government authorities tell us that some details of the project, for example with a central pillar or no central pillar, will be decided by the summer. The plans and specifications will be drawn by the fall and the call for tenders will follow. We can expect the work to take place during 2019 and the bridges to be ready by the beginning of 2020,” explains Mr. Dubé.

The VIA Rail service will not be back as long as the two



*Éric Dubé thinks that Transport Québec will not have replaced the Cascapedia-St-Jules railway bridges within the next year.*

bridges have not been replaced. The capacity to serve McInnis Cement’s plant in Port Daniel will also become increasingly difficult soon.

The Gaspésie Railway Society has already been forced to build a temporary transshipment silo in New Richmond because Transport Quebec put the line east of Caplan in a dormant state three years ago.

Due to the increasing traffic from McInnis Cement and because a limit of ten loaded cement cars was imposed in December on the two Cascapedia-St-Jules bridges by Transport Québec, the Gaspésie Railway Society must now build another temporary transshipment facility west of those structures, in Nouvelle. The weekly rail traffic of McInnis Cement will increase from ten to 40 rail cars in May.

Éric Dubé points out that the inauguration of the two new Cascapedia-St-Jules railway bridges should also be

accompanied by the line re-opening between Caplan and Port Daniel.

“There are only 45 miles between Caplan and Port Daniel. Only three bridges require work on that stretch. Two bridge pillars have to be worked on in Port Daniel. I told Transport Québec people they should get that portion of line ready during the replacement of the Cascapedia-St-Jules bridges. Then when they open, we will be in a position to reach the cement plant at the same time. I think they understand that,” he points out.

However, he can’t say for now if the same principle could apply to the Port Daniel to Gaspé stretch of the railway.

Éric Dubé didn’t get any answer from Transport Québec regarding another plausible scenario, another increase in McInnis Cement’s rail transport needs.

“What will we do if McInnis Cement needs 100 carloads a week and if both our transshipment terminals are congested? So far, they (Transport Quebec) don’t have an answer for that. Truck transport over a long distance is not an option,” he concludes.