

Gaspésie Railway Society will need to build a terminal in Nouvelle

Gilles Gagné

NEW RICHMOND: – The Gaspésie Railway Society will have to build another temporary transshipment terminal for cement, this time in Nouvelle. The reason stems once again from the Quebec department of Transport's inability to promptly repair the two railway bridges located in Cascapedia-St-Jules.

The construction of that second transshipment terminal is the result of Transport Quebec's decision to impose a limit of ten loaded cars of cement per week on the two Cascapedia-St-Jules railway bridges. Each car loaded with Port Daniel's cement weighs 134 tonnes, or 268,000 pounds.

The rail transport needs of McInnis Cement, the owner of the Port Daniel plant, will increase from 10 to 40 cars in May. In order to comply with Transport Quebec's decision of limiting the traffic to 10 carloads per week on the Cascapedia-St-Jules bridges, a terminal has to be built west of that location, and Nouvelle is the choice because there is an industrial park there. That cement is delivered outside Quebec.

"A report from (engineering firm) Norda Stelo recommends not passing with more than ten loaded cars per week on the Cascapedia-St-Jules bridges before other inspections, some monitoring and repairs are completed," explains Luc Lévesque, director general of the Gaspésie Railway Society.

That report was first released at the beginning of December. So far, the ten carload limit has not hurt the Gaspésie Railway Society and McInnis Cement because it corresponds to the Port Daniel company's needs.

Further interpretations of the study, including more details on the work to carry out on the two bridges, were asked for by the Gaspésie Railway Society and led to the confirmation of Transport Quebec's interpretation of the December document.

"Some work will be carried out but won't be finished by the time McInnis Cement increases rail shipments. So we will adjust," adds Mr. Lévesque, obviously disappointed by the slowness of Transport Quebec, without expressing it in words.

The first cement storage

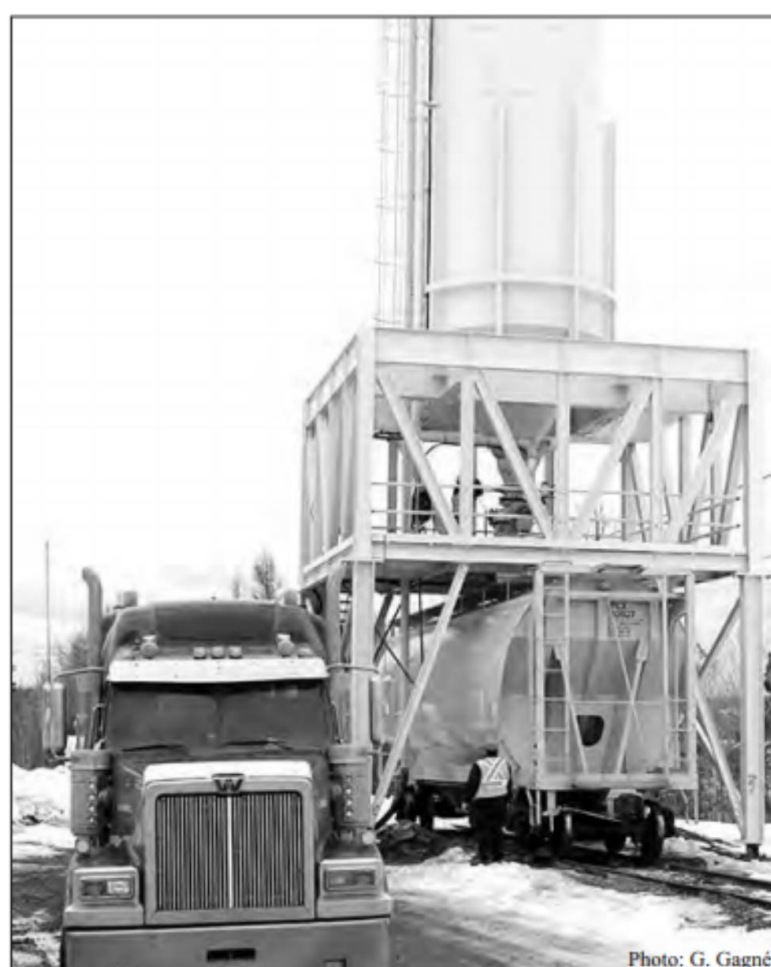


Photo: G. Gagné

The New Richmond silo is equipped with a certified scale, which will help the operations of the Nouvelle transshipment terminal.

silo was installed in New Richmond in June and July 2017 in order to be synchronized with the first shipments of McInnis Cement.

It had to be built to make up for the fact that Transport Quebec has not repaired three bridges located between New Richmond and Port Daniel despite owning the railroad since 2015. In Port Daniel, the line passes a few metres away from McInnis Cement's facility.

New Richmond is located east of Cascapedia-St-Jules while Nouvelle is situated west of that village. Cement is handed over to Canadian National in Matapédia for the final delivery to McInnis Cement customers.

"In Nouvelle, we will start with direct truck to railcar transshipment, without a silo. We will bring all the cement cars to New Richmond anyway, and start loading them with 15 tonnes. We have a certified scale in New Richmond. The quantities put in cement cars and the trucks can be weighed precisely. We probably won't have any choice but to build a second silo in Nouvelle, but not at the beginning," further explains Mr. Lévesque.

The cost of building and installing a silo in Nouvelle will likely reach \$450,000. The extra cost of sending cement there by truck will also amount to about \$1,000 per equivalent of a loaded railcar.

Transport Quebec will pay for those costs.

Éric Dubé, president of the Gaspésie Railway Society, reiterates what he said in February, that "it is a lot of money for a temporary solution." The Gaspésie Railway Society also loses revenues in the process. Mr. Dubé doesn't understand the principle defended by Transport Quebec to the effect that the bridge needs several days of rest during a week.

Without criticizing Transport Québec, Luc Lévesque, an engineer by trade, states that "imposing a frequency limit of loaded cars passing on a bridge is a first in North America's railway transport." Other railway people he has talked with or who have contacted him can hardly believe that scenario.

Cement is not the only type of freight that has to be hauled by trucks over an unnecessary distance imposed by the state of some of the Gaspé Peninsula railway bridges. The Gaspé plant of LM Wind Power has to truck its blades to New Richmond, where they are transferred to flat cars for their delivery to the southern part of the United States.

The railroad is located about four kilometres away from the Gaspé plant. Using trucks between the facility and New Richmond generates an additional transportation cost

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of about \$7 million yearly for LM Wind Power and its customers.

Moreover, the construction of the Port Daniel cement plant was well underway when then Transport minister Robert Poëti decided to put the line between Caplan and Gaspé in a dormant state in 2015.

LM Wind Power and McInnis Cement receive no compensation from Transports Québec because their commodities are transferred to railcars in New Richmond at a higher cost.

The Gaspésie Railway Society is an entity controlled by the four MRCs covering the railway between Matapédia and Gaspé. The society was the owner of the line until March 2015, when debts totalling close to \$3.9 million forced its management to cede ownership to Transports Québec, after filing for court protection. The transporter remained the operator of the line.

Transports Québec's au-

thorities favour the replacement of the Cascapedia-St-Jules bridges. The time frame of that operation remains to be defined. Plans and specifications could be released over the summer and a call for tenders could be issued during the fall.

Despite the administrative and technical hurdles coming from Transports Québec, traffic is rising for the Gaspésie Railway Society, which is coming off three consecutive record years.

The number of carloads went from 1,624 in 2015 to 1,741 in 2016, and then to 2,786 last year. The biggest factor explaining the 2016 and 2017 situation is the emergence of windmill blades trains, with just over 1,000 carloads last year, and 111 cement cars.

The number of cement cars could surpass 1,000 in 2018 whilst the number of windmill blade flats cars could near 1,500 for a total traffic of 4,000 carloads. Temrex, the Nouvelle sawmill, generates about 1,500 carloads annually.