

LORAM rail grinding train spends two weeks improving tracks

Gilles Gagné

MATAPEDIA: – On November 12, a LORAM train, a rail grinder composed of two units started a series of maintenance tasks on the railway between Matapedia and New Richmond. The grinders remove irregularities on rails in order to improve their durability.

LORAM is a company based in the United States that operates many rail grinding units. Some LORAM trains are made of up to ten units, sometimes more. It is a technique that has been used since the beginning of the 20th century.

However, it is the first time rail grinding has been used in the Gaspé Peninsula in at least 35 years, maybe the first time ever.

“I have asked all our experienced track guys if they remember seeing it on our line and they are adamant that they have not (witnessed its presence). However, they have seen it occasionally on CN’s Mont-Joli subdivision,” points out Luc Lévesque, director general of the Gaspésie Railway Society, referring to the railroad linking Campbellton to Mont-Joli.

The presence of the LORAM train will cost in the vicinity of \$300,000 to the transporter but it is worth the amount, he says. It will be paid by the \$2.5 million annual envelope the Gaspésie Railway Society receives from Transport Quebec for the maintenance of the Matapedia to Gaspé line.

“It is a good example of the use of that money for a type of intervention that allows us to make corrections on the line and take preventive measures that will reduce future corrections,” explains Luc Lévesque.

“Rail grinding allows the interaction between the wheel and the rail to take place as it is designed for. The wheels are always supposed to roll on the rails with a very slight left to



Photo: G. Gagné

The LORAM rail grinding train was active in the Thibodeau curve in Carleton on the early morning of November 24. The sparks are visible under the first unit of the train.

right movement. The wheel is not supposed to pass constantly at the place on the rail. After a while, it does pass at the same place though and it creates small bumps on the inside part of the rail. It is called corrugation. Those little bumps spread along the length of the rail if they are not corrected. We have to change rails more often because of corrugation. If we correct corrugation with rail grinding, we diminish wear and maintenance costs. Rail grinding is the heart of a good preventive program for a railway,” explains Luc Lévesque.

“We could apply that prin-

ciple to automobiles. When a car is not properly aligned, the tires get worn out very fast,” he adds.

The layer of steel taken off by the LORAM train rail grinders is very thin. “In some of the Pointe-à-la-Garde curves for example, the train’s grinders are supposed to pass between 30 to 40 times to take a couple of millimetres off. Once the LORAM train has worked on a line, the noise and friction are reduced,” says Mr. Lévesque.

The LORAM train had filled a contract in another part of Quebec before being sent to the Gaspé Peninsula.

“They don’t fill calls for tenders. You take it when you hear that they are passing somewhere near your line. We would sure take it again when the line will be open east of Caplan, in 2020-2021,” says Luc Lévesque.

The line east of Caplan has not been in operation since 2015 by Transport Quebec, after acquiring the Matapedia to Gaspé line that year.

Transport Quebec had likely decided to eventually tear up the tracks but foreseeable sources of freight traffic materialized in 2016 as Gaspé’s LM Wind Power started using the railway to

ship all of its windmill blade production to the United States. McInnis Cement also signed its first transportation agreement in December of that year with the Gaspésie Railway Society for the hauling of cement produced at the Port Daniel plant.

For now, the windmill blades are trucked to New Richmond, where they are transferred to rail cars. In the case of cement, the loads transferred to railcars have to be divided between New Richmond and Nouvelle in order to deal with the bearing capacity of two bridges located in Cascadepedia-St-Jules.

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