

## MNA Gaétan Lelièvre is concerned with the lack of action in the railway file

Gilles Gagné

NEW RICHMOND: – Considering Transport Québec's slowness in dealing with the railroad's refurbishment, the Gaspé riding Member of the National Assembly, Gaétan Lelièvre, believes that the Quebec government is treating Gaspésians like second-class citizens and lacks interest in their region's economy.

Mr. Lelièvre, who is now sitting as an independent Member of the National Assembly (MNA), and Parti Québécois MNA for the riding of Bonaventure, Sylvain Roy, are so worried about the government's lack of action in the railway file that they both wrote a common letter to Quebec's Transport Minister, André Fortin, on February 16, in order to express their concern and ask him when concrete moves will be made, especially regarding the replacement of the Cascapédia-St-Jules bridges.

"We haven't received an answer. We (he and Minister Fortin) briefly crossed at the National Assembly and he told me that he will consider it a priority. I have also contacted Regional Minister Pierre Moreau. I am asking Premier Philippe Couillard to intervene. It is now close to ten months after his \$100 million



Photo: G. Gagné

*Hauling of windmill blades was the first source of revenue for the Gaspésie Railway Society a year ago and cement will take second place in May. However, those spinoffs could be much higher if the blades and cement could be loaded in Gaspé and Port Daniel respectively.*

for the railway and hardly anything has moved," explains Mr. Lelièvre.

The fact that Philippe Couillard decided to give the control of the railway's upgrading to the *Bureau des grands projets*, the body managing Quebec's main infrastructure initiatives, explains some of the delays.

"Everything converges to the *Bureau des grands projets*'s incapacity to start some movement. It is hard to believe that Transport Québec has no

power over that body," adds Mr. Lelièvre.

He uses the example of a railway bridge that collapsed on January 13 in Brompton, near Sherbrooke, following a sudden rise of the Saint-François River.

"The government reacted immediately. Member of the National Assembly, Karine Vallières, and cabinet members intervened to say that there would be support to solve the problems as soon as possible in order to protect the

economy. They are moving already. Here, we have problems with the railway. We have governmental organizations that have invested \$615 million in the Port Daniel cement plant and the Transport Ministry doesn't move to facilitate the hauling of cement. It looks as if the left hand doesn't know what the right hand is doing. Only \$4 million has been secured since Philippe Couillard's \$100 million commitment. There is a lack of political will to solve our problem," believes Mr. Lelièvre.

Sylvain Roy emphasizes that building a second silo in Nouvelle will considerably increase traffic on Highway 132 between New Richmond and

Nouvelle.

"So instead of repairing the line and the bridges with money that has already been announced, the Quebec government's inaction will only lead to additional damage to Highway 132 and transport inefficiency," he criticizes.

"LM Wind Power and McInnis Cement don't need hurdles that reduce their competitiveness," concludes Gaétan Lelièvre.

The Gaspésie Railway Society could almost double its revenues linked to cement hauling and almost triple its revenues related to hauling windmill blades if that freight could be loaded in the town where it is produced. It represents millions of dollars in transportation revenues annually. The shippers, McInnis Cement and LM Wind Power, would also save millions of dollars in transportation fees if they could load their output in Port Daniel and Gaspé, respectively.

In the case of LM Wind Power, the additional cost of hauling windmill blades by truck between Gaspé and New Richmond amounts to about \$7 million yearly.

The total value of production for LM Wind Power and McInnis Cement hovers around \$600 million a year. In the case of LM Wind Power, the sales are all made in the United States and McInnis Cement sells essentially outside Quebec. LM Wind Power employs 480 people while McInnis Cement provides work to 153 people.