

MNA continues to ask questions about rail service *Government fails to provide concrete answers*

Gilles Gagné

NEW RICHMOND: – The independent member of the National Assembly (MNA) for the riding of Gaspé, Gaétan Lelièvre, is asking the provincial government to divulge a schedule of work in order to ensure the return of train services along the full length of the Matapedia to Gaspé line.

Mr. Lelièvre first asked to receive a time frame for the work through a motion based on the fact that it will soon be a year since Quebec's Premier Philippe Couillard announced \$100 million for the refurbishment of the railway. That was on May 5, 2017, in New Carlisle. Most of the work must be carried out on the bridges between Cascapedia-St-Jules and Percé.

The notice-less motion was presented on April 25 at the National Assembly and was supported by all the opposition parties, however, the Liberal government did not support the Gaspé riding representative's motion.

Mr. Lelièvre changed his strategy the following day by asking questions directly to premier Couillard. In addition to a working schedule, the Gaspé riding Member of National Assembly also asked to obtain details about where the work will be carried out and about the type of work.

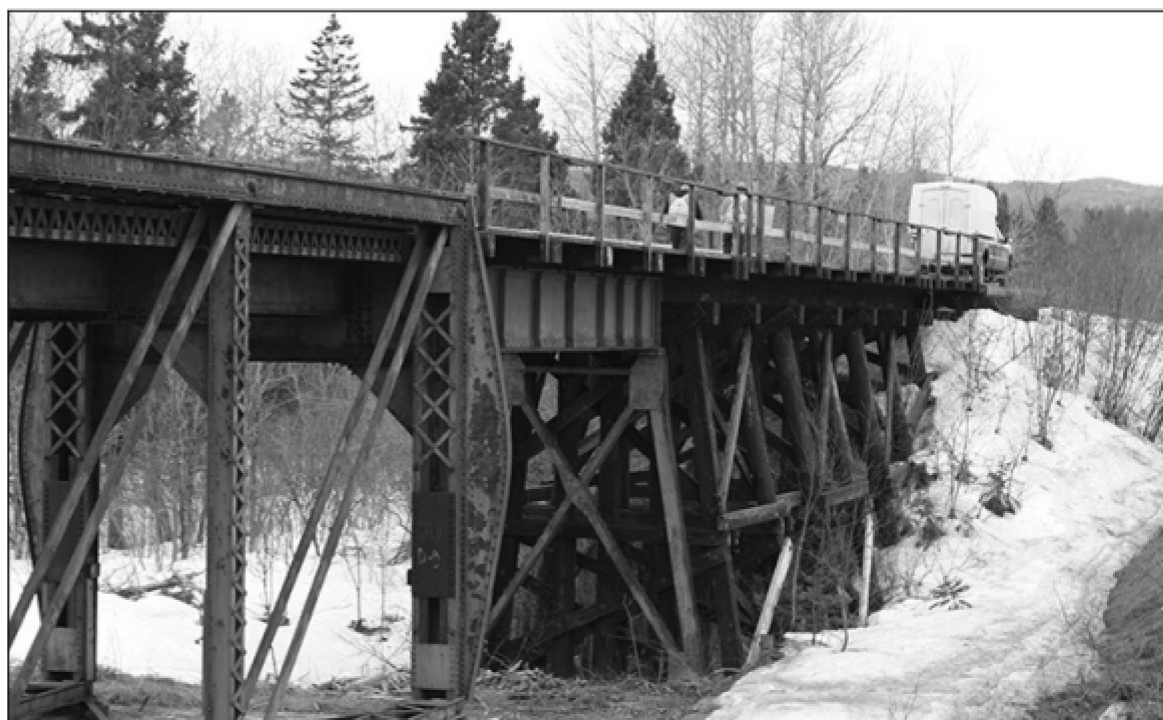


Photo: G. Gagné

Regular inspections will be conducted on the Cascapedia-St-Jules bridges.

In his introduction, Mr. Lelièvre reminded government officials that Transport Quebec has been the owner of the line for three years, that a plane ticket to get to Montreal costs \$1,500 and that Gaspésians have lost 50 percent of their bus services in recent years.

Mr. Lelièvre also mentioned that the 500 employees of LM Windpower in Gaspé are waiting for the return of rail service closer to their Gaspé plant. McInnis Cement also requires it in Port Daniel.

At first, he was answered by Natural Resources minister Pierre Moreau, who is also

minister responsible for the Gaspé Peninsula. Mr. Moreau first said that a recent report was allowing McInnis Cement "to move more equipment out."

Mr. Moreau later added that the line is divided in three sections and that "work will be carried out along the Matapedia to Caplan line." The two other sections are "studied as opportunity files."

Gaétan Lelièvre came back with two complementary questions, and asked them specifically to Transport Minister André Fortin, who had remained quiet on the railway issue at that point.

"How can you explain that

the \$6.4 billion REM project (commuter light train for Montreal) will be realized in three years while a schedule of delivery cannot be obtained for a \$100 million line refurbishment project?" asked Mr. Lelièvre.

Minister Fortin didn't reply to those points. He just mentioned that premier Couillard was right in announcing \$100 million last year. He added the project "must pass through steps and that a solution was found for McInnis Cement."

Gaétan Lelièvre came back with a second complementary question. "A year after Premier Couillard's an-

nouncement, can you explain why there is no schedule a year after the premier's announcement. There is no work done, no cost breakdown, no details about what will happen?"

Again, Minister Fortin only provided vague answers, saying that Premier Couillard, Minister Moreau and himself headed the file and that the project must go through steps. He also mentioned that the unemployment rate has gone from 17.5% to 11.1% in the Gaspé Peninsula in recent years.

In a press release issued shortly after those exchanges, Gaétan Lelièvre once more questioned the will of the Quebec government to restore passenger and freight rail services along the whole line.

He wonders why the Quebec government is waiting to get some repair work started and asks if that government is interested in the fate of LM Windpower, McInnis Cement and many more potential shippers that have not talked about the situation.

He fears that the Gaspé Peninsula rail file will be an electoral stake during the next campaign.

"It is a blatant example of unfairness and lack of leadership of that government regarding the support of regions like the Gaspé," he concludes.