



Photo: G. Gagné

Some track maintenance equipment is visible along various parts of the line, like here in Matapédia.

Railway repairs are progressing

Gilles Gagné

MATAPEDIA: – Since the start of summer, repairs on the railway and assessment duties for bridge upgrade work have progressed at a faster pace on the line between Matapédia and New Carlisle. Some evaluation work has even been carried out between New Carlisle and Gaspé.

So far since July, 20,000 ties have been replaced between Matapédia and New Richmond, as expected in the information released by the Quebec government over the spring.

“Most of the 20,000 ties were installed between Nouvelle and Saint Jules, barring a few exceptions west of Nouvelle, where some ties were also replaced. The Cascapédia-New Richmond stretch remains to be done,” points out Luc Lévesque, director general of the Gaspésie Railway Society.

That contract was awarded to a Montreal firm, AB Rail, which has a facility in Tide Head, New Brunswick.

Ballast is currently spread between Matapédia and New Richmond. “It has started. The ballast is supplied by Eurovia and we spread it with our work trains,” points out Mr. Lévesque. Eurovia was formerly known as Beau Bassin.

Rails are currently being replaced east of Matapédia, over a stretch of three miles from the beginning of the Cascapédia subdivision. Conventional rails of 78 feet are replaced by continuous welded rails, which go one quarter of a mile without joints.

“The old rails required more maintenance because of their slightly different shape, compared to usual rails,” adds Luc Lévesque.

Work to be carried out east of Caplan

The Quebec government, which acquired the Matapédia to Gaspé line in March 2015, will conduct work east of Caplan for the first time since becoming the owner. Thousands of ties will be replaced between Caplan and New Carlisle this fall. The work is carried out with the Gaspésie Railway Society, the line operator.

“We were supposed to change 20,000 ties there but we will have to settle for fewer because the plants cannot supply enough ties. We expect to change about half of the expected number, so 10,000 this fall,” says Mr. Lévesque.

Transport Quebec had decided to put the line east of Caplan in a dormant state upon the acquisition of the Matapédia to Gaspé line three-and-a-half years ago, a decision that proved to be controversial since most of the traffic development since March 2015 originates from that closed part. In May 2015, the Quebec government decided to reopen the line east of Caplan but that will require time.

The Port Daniel cement plant will likely generate more than 1,500 carloads in 2018, a number that can only grow in future years. The windmill blade traffic, which originates from Gaspé-based LM Wind Power plant, will surpass the 1,500 car mark as well this year.

The cement traffic would be higher if the cars could be loaded in Port Daniel as some volume is lost to trucks, like the output delivered to New Brunswick. Cement and windmill blades are brought by truck to New Richmond at a high cost for the clients. Some of the cement is also brought to Nouvelle before being transferred into railcars.

The resumption date of traffic east of Caplan remains

unknown for now but Luc Lévesque says that a lot of work is carried out this fall to assess the state of bridges in many places.

“Things are moving. We know that the Cascapédia-St-Jules bridges will be replaced by a new structure south of the existing bridge. A call for tenders will eventually be published,” he says. It might take two years before the new bridges are in place but Mr. Lévesque prefers not to speculate on the time frame.

In Caplan, the Ruisselet bridge could be replaced but it is a much shorter structure than the Cascapédia-St-Jules ones and it can be done in a relatively shorter time frame.

Some work is expected on the Ruisseau Leblanc bridge, at the Caplan and Saint-Siméon limit, and two Port Daniel bridges require some work as well.

East of Port Daniel, most of the work carried out this year consists of assessing certain parts of the line that could need some protection, like places prone to rock slides.

“However, we have reached an agreement with Transport Quebec for the upgrading of the four Highway 132 grade crossings located in Chandler and Grand River,” says Luc Lévesque, happy about that outcome.

A financial assessment of all that work will be available at the end of the current year.

The Gaspésie Railway Society is controlled by the municipalities located along the Matapédia to Gaspé line. It lost ownership of the railway following financial difficulties in 2015 but its services were retained as the train operator.

The Gaspésie Railway Society can count on a five-year agreement with Transport Quebec regarding the maintenance of the line, and a \$100M investment program announced in May 2017.