



Photo: G. Gagné

The Quebec budget earmarks money for the maintenance of the railway and for the forestry industry.

Some of the provincial budget measures could affect Gaspesians

Gilles Gagné

NEW RICHMOND: – Several measures in the Quebec government's budget, which was presented on March 27 by Finance minister Carlos Leitao could have an economic impact on the Gaspé Peninsula. The fields most impacted include maritime, forestry, rail and air transportation.

However, very few details are known at the present time, as most budget breakdowns for the regions will only be known at the end of April or the beginning of May.

One program that seems better defined than others deals with the amount of money earmarked for the Gaspésie Railway Society, the operator of the region's rail line. The Society will get \$12.5 million over the next five years for its management and the maintenance of its network and locomotives. It equals the average amount of the last three years, at \$2.5 million yearly.

The Gaspésie Railway was in the middle of negotiations with the Quebec government for the renewal of its agreement as the line operator. Since the Quebec government acquired the line in March 2015, those agreements were renewed annually instead of over a multi-year period.

The amount of \$12.5 million is not part of the \$100 million announced in May 2017 by Premier Philippe Couillard in New Carlisle. That amount is earmarked for repairs on many bridges mainly located between Caspédia-St-Jules and Gaspé.

In regional development, the Quebec government will invest \$80 million in the program supporting regions like the Gaspé Peninsula. The share for our region should hover around \$2.5 million re-

garding the FARR (*Fonds d'aide au rayonnement des régions*). The part earmarked for territories experiencing economic difficulties is not known in detail yet.

The government will allot \$250 million for Quebec's shipyards. A number of pilot projects will be supported. There again, the type of project is not defined at the present time.

Air service

Finance minister Carlos Leitao announced \$173 million to improve air services in Quebec's regions. Of that amount, \$100 million will be allotted to upgrade airports.

Once again, the details pertaining to how those funds will be invested and where it will go remain to be communicated. Several Gaspesian mayors have pushed the need of funding for the betterment of their airport for years, including Daniel Côté in Gaspé and Simon Deschênes in

Sainte-Anne-des-Monts. Those two towns operate their own airports.

Money for forestry

The Quebec government will also invest a \$40 million increment to fight the epidemic of spruce budworm currently affecting public and private forests. That envelope will increase the surface covered by the planes spraying an organic pesticide.

Another amount of \$14 million will be spent to plant trees in areas ravaged by spruce budworm. The epidemic is forcing some forestry companies to harvest trees prematurely, while they still have some lumber value.

The government will also allot \$45 million over the next three years to encourage projects that will develop products made with currently unused wood fiber. The goal of the government is to convince the private sector to invest \$100 million in those ventures.