



Photo: G. Gagné

*Until mid-June, up to 25 loaded cement cars will be allowed to circulate west of New Richmond, which includes passing over the Cascapedia-St-Jules bridges.*

## Transport Quebec increases bridge capacity to 25 cars/week

Gilles Gagné

CASCAPEDIA-ST-JULES – The Gaspésie Railway Society is now authorized to haul up to 25 loaded cars of cement on the two Cascapedia-St-Jules bridges. At the beginning of December, a limit of ten such cars had been allowed due to the alleged uncertainty of those structures' bearing capacity.

Transport Quebec, the owner of the line, imposed criteria involving a limit of ten loaded cars per week, which is a mystery to some in the railroad industry, especially when talking about a risk factor associated to with the number of cars passing in a week.

Last fall, engineering consultant Norda Stelo carried out a study and determined, according to Transport Quebec's specifications, that passing with ten loaded cars on the bridge was less risky than passing with 50.

A second study was carried out early this spring and an increase in the number of loaded cars was allowed after the report was issued.

"A complete inspection was carried out on April 5 and 6. The report was issued on April 12 by Norda Stelo and the risk analysis was released the following day. We received permission to increase the traffic to 25 loaded cars on April 16," explains Luc Lévesque, director general of the Gaspésie Railway Society.

Mr. Lévesque knew that the ten-car limit had been imposed because the conditions

of the Cascapedia-St-Jules bridges remained unknown.

"Those elements were unknown because they couldn't be inspected visually. So they (Norda Stelo's staff) used ultrasounds and issued another report stating that a higher number of loaded cars could pass on the bridge weekly," points out Luc Lévesque.

Other regular inspections will be carried out over the next few months in order to keep an eye on the bridges which were built in the 1890s.

"For example, we will have a regular look at the abutments, the place where the bridges are supported. We will check if the abutments move. So far, they are not. If they do, we will carry out work to stabilize them," further explains Mr. Lévesque.

The limit of 25 loaded cars will likely be valid until mid-June when the Gaspésie Railway Society will have completed its cement transshipment facility in Nouvelle.

That cement originates from the Port Daniel plant. The railway passes through McInnis Cement's facility but that part of the line is in a dormant state.

That situation forced the Gaspésie Railway Society to build a first transshipment terminal in New Richmond, where a portion of McInnis Cement's production is sent by truck and then transferred into rail cars after being stored in a silo.

However, the needs of McInnis Cement are increasing and have now reached about 25 cars per week. They will gradually increase to 40

cars at one point during the summer, which has forced the Gaspésie Railway Society to build a second transshipment terminal in Nouvelle. In that case, no silo is planned.

The cement loading pattern will change when the Nouvelle terminal is functional.

"We will put 56 (metric) tonnes in each of the cars loaded in New Richmond, and we will put a truckload in Nouvelle, as a trailer can haul 39 (metric) tonnes," explains Luc Lévesque.

The Gaspésie Railway Society can circulate with cars weighing up to 268,000 pounds, which is equivalent to 134 short tonnes or 122 metric tonnes. Most empty cement cars weigh around 26 metric tonnes. A short tonne weighs 2,000 pounds while a metric tonne weighs 2,200 pounds or ten percent more.

The current restrictions on the Cascapedia-St-Jules bridges impose a sizeable shunting constraint to the Gaspésie Railway Society. An empty car must alternate with each loaded car in order to reduce the weight concentration on those bridges. This time-consuming practice is also duplicated in Nouvelle, as the empty cars must be taken off the train before their delivery to Canadian National in Matapédia.

Luc Lévesque does not know if using idler cars, or empty cars, between loaded cars will be imposed by Transport Quebec once 56 tonnes will be put in cement cars at the New Richmond terminal.