

## CN strike affects freight traffic on the Gaspé line

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Gilles Gagné

NEW RICHMOND: – The Canadian National Railway strike that was called during the wee hours of November 19 by the Teamsters Union has affected the traffic on the line operated by the Gaspésie Railway Society. The situation has worsened as days go by.

Initially traffic between Mont-Joli and Rivière-du-Loup wasn't affected much by the strike, however, because of the fact that most products transported by train on the Gaspesian line have to be delivered to Ontario and to the United States. Some operations are now being significantly affected.

"Here, only the woodchip traffic is not affected by the strike because the Mont-Joli workers are not part of the same union," points out Luc Lévesque, director general of the Gaspésie Railway Society. That woodchip traffic continues to be transported between the Temrex sawmill in Nouvelle and the White Birch newsprint mill in Rivière-du-Loup, however, the lumber cars loaded at Temrex are usually bound for Ontario and the United States and they are not going beyond Rivière-du-Loup because of the strike. For the first few days of the strike, they were kept in the Mont-Joli yard but on November 21, CN Rail was no longer accepting loaded cars, except woodchip cars.

The same practice was determined for the McInnis Cement traffic. The empty cars still available were loaded daily in New Richmond and Nouvelle and then delivered to Matapédia for further transporting by CN to Mont-Joli, however, the loaded cars were kept east of Matapédia, effective on November 21. By November 22, McInnis Cement loaded its last empty cars since additional cars were blocked west of Rivière-du-Loup.

The inbound empty windmill blade train scheduled to be loaded November 20 in New Richmond was refused entrance to Canada by CN at the United States interchange point.

"The only traffic that is maintained in the country (by CN) is the intermodal traffic," says Luc Lévesque.

The CN Rail strike was called by the Teamsters Canada Rail Conference because 3,200 members argue that their working conditions are affected by fatigue, ever-changing train



Traffic was reduced in the Gaspé Peninsula between Matapédia and New Richmond because of the CN strike.

Photo: G. Gagné

lineups, long hours, up to 12-hour days, and the unpredictability of when they are going to be called for service. It is essentially a safety matter, they say. The workers are not advocating for an increased pay. The union gave the 72-hour strike notice before the picket lines were put up.

The union and CN are still negotiating during the strike, which convinced Federal Minister of Transport Marc Garneau that a special bill was unnecessary for the moment. The strike nevertheless is causing near-crisis issues all across the country four days after its beginning.

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