

Disappointment among those working to speed up railway repairs

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GASPÉ: – Even if Quebec Premier François Legault promises to accelerate the refection of the Gaspé Peninsula railway and bring work completion to 2024 or 2025, the stakeholders pushing for a fast return of train services to Gaspé are disappointed because they were expecting a quicker resumption.

The 2022 goal set by the mayor of Gaspé, Daniel Côté, is therefore waved. Following the August 21 meeting with Premier Legault, one gain of significance was made. The fact that the Port Daniel to Gaspé part of the line is now considered a business case instead of an opportunity file.

The previous status meant that only studies could be undertaken between Port Daniel and Gaspé. A business case status signifies that infrastructure investments can be carried out on that stretch.

“We will be able to start di-



Nadia Minassian, Daniel Côté and Éric Dubé met with premier François Legault on August 21

Photo: Courtesy of the Gaspésie Railway Society

rectly next year. It is the biggest opportunity we have to cut the (refection) delay,” states Éric Dubé, president of the Gaspésie Railway Society.

The target to reopen the line to Gaspé is now 2024 or 2025 instead of 2026, the initial target expressed by premier Legault during his visit

to New Richmond on April 25. It represents a slight gain in time.

“The 2022 horizon is becoming non-realistic. Is 2023 realistic? I keep believing in that. There is a sword of Damocles though: what will

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be the results of the studies pertaining to the Gaspé-Port Daniel stretch regarding the engineering stakes,” asks Daniel Côté.

Éric Dubé specifies that the Caplan to Port Daniel line portion and the replacement of the Cascapedia-St-Jules bridges will be completed within 30 months.

On Twitter, François Legault wrote that the Gaspé Peninsula line is a strategic infrastructure in order to attract manufacturing investments and well-paid jobs to Gaspé Peninsula.

Disappointment

The Coalition of Gaspésians for the Future of the Train is of the view that the region has not gained anything from the meeting.

“The period was reduced by a year. At the end of the line, it can come back to seven or eight years. We are very disappointed,” emphasizes Bernard Babin, spokesperson of the coalition.

The coalition says that the Gaspé line has been studied for more than ten years. Mr. Babin is convinced that the line could be repaired within

a year if there was a real political will to achieve that goal.

“During the electoral campaign, Mr. Legault said: ‘we will cut red tape. We will do better, faster.’ Truth be told, he is not living up to his own words,” adds Mr. Babin.

He also gives the example of the Winnipeg to Churchill line, heavily damaged by floods, and repaired in a matter of months.

Gaspé stakeholders are also disappointed, notably the people who organized the August 18 rally to accelerate refection work. They call the meeting with Premier Legault a failure.

Spokespersons for the Liberal Party, of the Parti Québécois and of Québec Solidaire affirm that there is nothing to be happy about, since the refurbishment time was only cut by one year. They argue that if work could be carried out at the two extremities of the Port Daniel to Gaspé stretch, the Amiral tourist train could resume its activities and carry cruise ship passengers instead of staying idle at the Gaspé station.

They add that it is inconceivable to see unreasonable delays for such an important economic development tool for the region.