

Government of Canada to invest \$45.6M to protect the railway against coastal erosion

Gilles Gagné

PABOS MILLS: – The Government of Canada will invest \$45.6 million over the next six years to protect the Gaspé Peninsula railway against coastal erosion. The money will be used between Port Daniel and Gaspé. The decision pertaining to where it will go will be made by Quebec's Department of Transport, which owns the line.

The announcement was made on August 26 by Member of Parliament for the riding of Gaspé Peninsula-Magdalen Islands and Canada Revenue minister Diane Lebouthillier. The money comes from an envelope earmarked to attenuate the impact of coastal erosion and help people adapt to climate change.

In certain spots, the line will be moved laterally in order to increase its distance from the sea and be better protected. In other locations, added protection will be given to the line.

Until now, Minister Lebouthillier had refused to consider the possibility of helping Transport Quebec in financing the line rehabilitation, based on the assumption that the federal government was not going to intervene in a railway owned by another jurisdiction, a provincial one.

"The provincial government solicited the help of the federal government," she explained, emphasizing that the collaboration between the two levels of government is frequent in infrastructure stakes. "For the federal government, it was important to be a partner in that project."

The context of an upcoming federal election is "not at all," related to the \$45.6 million announcement, she added.

During the 2015 electoral campaign, Ms. Lebouthillier affirmed that bus service would be prioritized, air transport would come next and then train service.

That year, Transport Quebec became the owner of the Matapédia to Gaspé line, after the Gaspésie Railway Society, a municipal entity that operates the freight train there, experienced financial difficulty, however, 60% of the line, the stretch between Caplan and Gaspé, was put in a dormant state by the ministry that year.

In May 2017, after intense pressure applied by the elected people and the users of the railway, the Quebec government contributed \$100 million



The administrators of the Gaspésie Railway Society are of the view that federal funding could accelerate the line rehabilitation between Port Daniel and Gaspé.

Photo: G. Gagné

for the rehabilitation of the line, but the money was put under the responsibility of the *Bureau Québécois des infrastructures*, a body that is generally using a step-by-step and slow procedure in the realization of projects.

In April, Quebec premier François Legault affirmed that seven additional years would be needed to reopen the line to Gaspé, a period judged way too long by the region's stakeholders. An August 21 meeting between Mr. Legault and those stakeholders allowed for a one-year reduction in the realization of line repairs, which could now end in 2025.

The mayor of Gaspé, Daniel Côté, assures that more efforts will be made to shorten the time required to upgrade the line. The \$45.6 million amount announced by the fed-

eral government "is a forward step. (...) There are additional ways to accelerate that work."

Gaspésie Railway Society president Éric Dubé points out that "as soon as we will have in hand the reports on the studies that will accurately give us all the information pertaining to the work to be carried out on that (Port Daniel-Gaspé) stretch, we will be in a position to determine how long it will take. Before that, it will be difficult to predict."

LM Wind Power in Gaspé has to truck its production to New Richmond in order to export its windmill blades to Texas. McInnis Cement in Port Daniel must send its cement to New Richmond and Nouvelle where it is transferred to rail cars, because the line is not serviceable east of Caplan.