

Québec Solidaire supports the movement for the faster return of train services

Gilles Gagné

CARLETON: – The Québec Solidaire party is enthusiastically supporting the movement initiated over recent weeks to promptly return train services for the entire Gaspé Peninsula line.

Movement organizers will hold a rally on August 18 at 11:30 a.m. at the intermodal station in Gaspé.

The rail line covers the Matapédia to Gaspé stretch but currently trains only circulate on 40% of the line, the distance between Matapédia and Caplan. Significant repairs are currently being carried out between Cascapédia-St-Jules and Port Daniel. The freight service should return between Caplan and Port Daniel by 2021.

Quebec Premier François Legault said on April 25 that seven more years are required in order to bring the train back to Gaspé, a time frame judged unacceptable by opposition parties, including Québec Solidaire.

“In the context of a huge government budget surplus, the remarkable slowness of the implementation of the Ministry of Transport’s plan for the refection of the Gaspé train line appears to reflect the low priority accorded to the region, in spite of the economic benefits and job creation that would ensue. This contrasts with the massive investment in maintaining and building highways and with major government aid to the aviation industry centered mainly on the construction of very expensive private jets destined for billionaires,” points out Geoff Clayden of the Gaspé riding association of Québec Solidaire.

Mr. Clayden and other Québec Solidaire members perceives the current movement as an opportunity to demand better public transportation.

“Québec Solidaire is participating in the initiative of



Photo: G. Gagné

Many groups believe that complete train services can be brought back to Gaspé before 2026.

the major political parties in the provincial riding of Gaspé to accelerate the reintroduction of train service to the whole Gaspé region as well as demanding the reestablishment of regional bus service to its status prior to major cuts of recent years, to be followed by the improvement of bus service,” he points out.

The current situation is sufficiently serious to justify a multi-partite intervention. “The return of the train is a trans-partisan issue, one that calls for uniting the voices of all political parties in order to support the efforts of political representatives of the region in their upcoming meetings with the provincial government around this issue,” says Geoff Clayden.

He says that bringing back the passenger service is as important as freight trains.

“For QS, the relevance of the train should not only nor mainly be considered as facilitating the transport of merchandise of major industries in the region, but also as being a means to revitalizing the train as a form of passenger and public transport. Passenger transport is a major

stimulant to the economic importance of tourism in the region at the same time as enabling transport for workers, families, professionals, entrepreneurs, travellers, sports enthusiasts and persons requiring specialized health care in larger urban centres. The train links people with each other in the Gaspé and with the rest of Quebec,” insists Mr. Clayden.

“Adequate train service requires its status to be upgraded and promoted as a form of public transport. Its potential was largely underutilised in the Gaspé long before the interruption of service six years ago, due largely to the historic domination of the automobile and petroleum industry lobbies and disproportionate government investment in the highway network. The modern train can be efficient, rapid, ecological and easily electrified, and Quebec has a vast reserve of electricity,” he stresses.

According to Mr. Clayden, public transportation would be in a better state if the government would nationalize some parts of it.

“For QS, passenger train

service needs to be considered conjointly with bus service in terms of the development of an adequate public transport system in the region. The north coast of the Gaspé has no train connection. The regional bus service has been severely reduced in recent years, justified by the belief that it should be profitable, even though this same logic is not applied to automobile transport requiring massive ongoing state investment. Bus service existing prior to downsizing needs to be re-established and improved upon. The QS program calls for nationalizing bus service in order to guarantee adequate public transport throughout the province,” he states.

Unlike other political parties, Québec Solidaire suggests that some companies should contribute to the betterment of train services.

“Given the wish of industries such as McInnis Cement and LM Glass Fiber to see the government accelerate the repair of the Gaspesian train line for their own benefit, it would be reasonable to expect that these same companies contribute to the fi-

nancing required for this project since they themselves have received generous subsidies from public funds,” adds Geoff Clayden.

Gaspé riding Member of the National Assembly Mélançon explains that the movement leading to the August 18 event materialized “after several weeks of discussions. The executive members of the Parti Québécois Association proposed it to the other parties and everybody was really satisfied with the idea.”

The previous Liberal Party government of Philippe Couillard was often criticized heavily for not moving fast enough in the Gaspé Peninsula railway file but Parti Québécois officials emphasize that the Gaspé riding Liberal Party Association shares their view to the effect that railway repairs must proceed faster.

A meeting between the Gaspesian stakeholders urging the Quebec government to move faster in the train file and the Office of Premier François Legault could be held on August 22, four days after the Gaspé rally.