

CASCAPEDIA-ST-JULES RAILWAY BRIDGES: Quebec-based company is lowest bidder for construction

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CASCAPEDIA-ST-JULES: — A Quebec City based firm, Hamel Construction, was the lowest bidder for the construction of two new railway bridges in Cascapedia-St-Jules. Its \$22.4 million bid was the only one to reach the brackets suggested by Transports Québec, the owner of the Matapedia to Gaspé line.

Entreprises PEC, from Bonaventure, submitted the second lowest bid, at \$26.5 million. Two other companies submitted bids for that contract. Their bids were considered to comply by the Quebec Department of Transport despite being higher than the \$25 million suggested in the call for tenders. The minimum suggested cost was \$20 million.

“The contract is not signed yet. I am happy because based on what comes from Transports Québec, the work will start during the summer,” says Éric Dubé, president of the Gaspésie Railway Society, the operator of freight trains on the Matapedia-Caplan portion of the line.

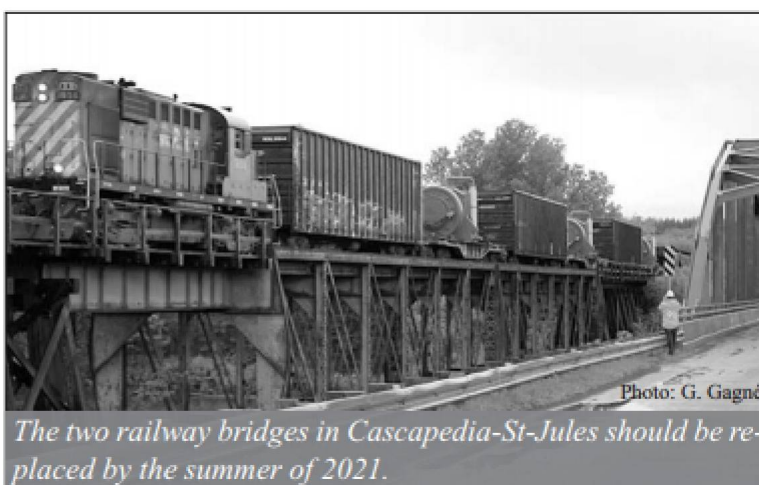
The contract calls for a 30-month construction period. Éric Dubé points out that the two new bridges will likely open before the end of 2021.

“The contract includes tearing down the two old bridges. It will come at the end because trains will pass over them until the new bridges are put in place. Tearing down the old bridges will take some time so if we are lucky, we will roll on the new bridges during the summer of 2021,” he explains.

The two new bridges will be south of the old structures which dates back to the 1890s. Some bush cutting has been carried out over the stretch leading to the new route approved for the new bridges.

Transports Québec also issued in May a call for tenders in order to get plans and specifications for the repairs of eight bridges located between Caplan and Port Daniel.

“It is a pre-project. Engineering firms are asked to draw the plans and specifications of the eight bridges in order to determine the time frame for the realization of the work and the projected cost. Once that step is completed, the ministry will



The two railway bridges in Cascapedia-St-Jules should be replaced by the summer of 2021.

launch a call for tenders for the work itself. The plans and specifications will be provided over the fall and the call for tenders will be published over the winter, for a construction start in the spring,” explains Éric Dubé.

“It will come to what we were expecting, that once the Cascapedia-St-Jules bridges are rebuilt, the other bridges will be fixed between Caplan and Port Daniel. We will then be able to serve McInnis Cement at the plant,” he adds.

Beginning July 2017, cement is trucked to New Richmond in order to be transferred to rail cars. Since July 2018, some cement is trucked to a second terminal in Nouvelle to top off the loads initiated in New Richmond because the needs of McInnis Cement are growing and the Cascapedia-St-Jules bridges were limiting the number of fully loaded cars to 10 weekly. That norm was dictated by the owner, Transports Québec.

The main bridges requiring work east of New Richmond are located in Caplan, Port Daniel, Shigawake and Bonaventure.

“It is clearly not comparable to building new bridges,” points out Éric Dubé, who

doesn't think that the pre-project pertaining to the eight bridges was accelerated because Gaspesian stakeholders complained about the time frame referred to by Quebec premier François Legault during his visit to New Richmond on April 25.

Mr. Legault said that it would take seven years to repair the line between Caplan and Gaspé, the part closed by the former government of Philippe Couillard in 2015.

That seven-year span was judged too long by everyone involved in the railway file, especially in light of the billions of dollars spent in Montreal on new projects carried out in three or four years, like the new Champlain Bridge and the REM train.

About \$85 million is left from the \$100 million envelope announced in May 2017 by former premier Couillard.

The former and the new government have committed to adding money to that envelope if it is needed but regional leaders argue that the sooner the work will be carried out, the better it will be for current and potential users, while saving money at the same time because refurbishment costs increase as years pass.