

REFURBISHMENT OF THE RAILWAY:

Legault will be personally involved in the file

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GASPÉ: – Quebec Premier François Legault will personally get involved in the file pertaining to the refurbishment of the Gaspé Peninsula railway, which needs to speed up, according to all the people involved in this matter.

That guarantee was obtained by Bonaventure Member of the National Assembly Sylvain Roy hours after he requested such intervention and days after a stern battle launched by Gaspé Mayor Daniel Côté who is trying to convince the Legault government to cut the refurbishment time of the repairs.

During their April 25 visit to New Richmond, Premier Legault and Transport Minister François Bonnardel said that it will take seven years before completing the Mata-pedia-Gaspé line repairs, a delay that is unanimously considered too long by the region's stakeholders. In that context, the line would only reopen to Gaspé in 2026.

Daniel Côté asked at least 50 municipalities in the Gaspé Peninsula and Lower Saint Lawrence for support



Photo: N. Sergerie

Premier François Legault is ready to get involved personally in the railway file.

by adopting a resolution requesting the reduction from 2026 to 2022 - the time required to restore rail services to Gaspé.

“What I want is a large mass movement from Eastern Quebec that comes to tell the government that enough is enough! At one point, equity between what is going on in the city and what is going on in regions (must occur). That is what we wish,” states Mr. Côté.

Parti Québécois MNAs get involved

Following a press statement made at the National Assembly on the morning of May 9 with his Rimouski riding colleague Harold Lebel, Sylvain Roy received a call from the Premier's office to the effect that he and his staff were accepting a meeting with the railway stakeholders of the Gaspé Peninsula.

The two Parti Québécois Members of the National As-

sembly had requested such a meeting a few hours earlier.

“There are people who will go elsewhere in order to set up enterprises because we don't have access to rail services,” pointed out the Bonaventure riding Member of the National Assembly during that press conference. The call from the Premier's office came about four hours after that.

“I received confirmation that the premier will personally work on the file and do a follow up on our request,” summed up Mr. Roy after the call. There is no date set for the meeting, however, and Mr. Roy just hopes that it will be held before the end of June.

To support his viewpoint that the refurbishment can go faster, Daniel Côté uses the example of the REM, Montreal's *Réseau express métropolitain*, the huge commuting project currently underway which requires an investment of \$6.3 billion. It will be completed in three years. That image was also used by Sylvain Roy.

Daniel Côté gets support

Many of the towns of the Gaspé Peninsula are already

supporting Daniel Côté's request to speed up the refurbishment of the railway. Bonaventure, Carleton, Chandler and New Richmond have adopted motions, as well as Lower Saint Lawrence's major towns like Rimouski and Mont-Joli.

The mayor of New Richmond and president of the Gaspésie Railway Society Éric Dubé points out that the quest initiated by Daniel Côté and the preliminary results obtained quickly are a testimony of the railway's importance in the region.

“We are sending a message that, yes, it is important. We must find solutions so that the refurbishment process must be carried out as soon as possible” says Mr. Dubé.

Daniel Côté initiated his quest for wide support on May 3. Minister of Transport François Bonnardel's staff then communicated with the mayor of Gaspé in order to understand what was going on, convinced that the April 25 announcement had satisfied Gaspésians.

“They explained to us that there are regulatory and legal processes to follow. What I will accept is a reasonable delay. For me, a reasonable delay is 2022,” says Mr. Côté.