



## Work well underway in Cascapedia-St-Jules for railway bridges replacement

Gilles Gagné

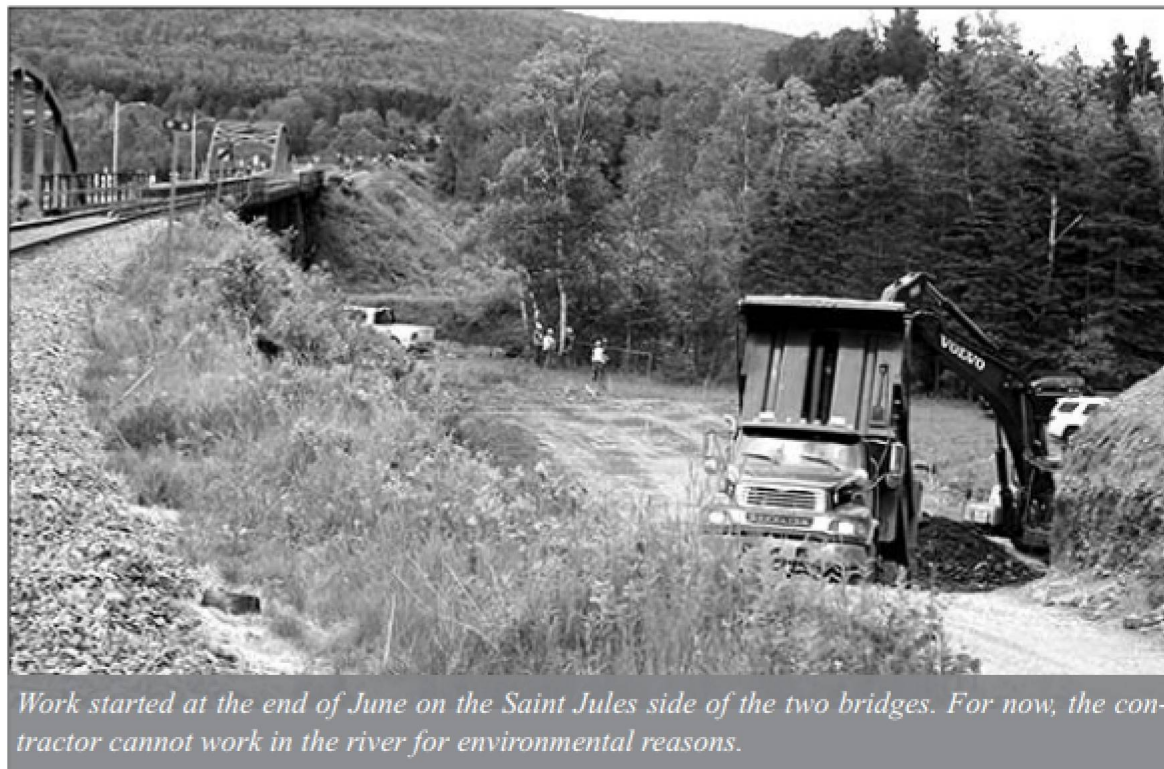
CASCAPEDIA-ST-JULES – At the end of June, Hamel Construction started the \$22.4 million contract awarded by Transport Quebec to replace the two railway bridges located in Cascapedia-St-Jules. The contractor is currently building the approaches of the two bridges.

Built in 1891, those bridges are limited to 10 fully loaded freight cars passing on them. The number of cars partly loaded is not limited.

Cement cars loaded in New Richmond usually weigh around 200,000 pounds instead of the limit of 268,000 pounds permitted in limited numbers on those bridges. The rest of the cement loading takes place in Nouvelle.

The state of the Cascapedia-St-Jules bridges was also instrumental in VIA Rail's decision in September 2013 to suspend its service east of Matapedia.

"For now, the contractor is concentrating on the approaches leading to the future bridges. It is not permitted to step in the river prior to August 15 for environmental reasons. The pillar that will be built in the middle of the river will have to be finished be-



Work started at the end of June on the Saint Jules side of the two bridges. For now, the contractor cannot work in the river for environmental reasons.

Photo: G. Gagné

fore the end of March," explains Éric Dubé, president of the Gaspésie Railway Society.

The line is owned by Quebec's Department of Transport since the spring of 2015. The Gaspésie Railway Society, which has owned the Matapedia to Gaspé railroad since 2007, remained the train operator after 2015.

The new bridges will have four spans and five pillars. Two pillars will be situated on the extremities of the structures, one on the Saint Jules side and one on the Cascapedia side. Two more pillars will be located on the island situated between the two parts

of the river. The last pillar will be located in the middle of the river, on the Cascapedia side.

"The Cascapedia side of the river is wider. That's why a pillar is needed there. The spans will be 130 feet in length," points out Éric Dubé. The opening date of the two new bridges remains unknown for now. It will be in the spring of 2021 at the latest but it could be a bit before.

"The steel sections of the bridges have to be made. It could be a relatively long process. We will know more in August," says Mr. Dubé.

By the spring of 2021, the

old bridges must be torn down as well. Eight other bridges located between Caplan and Port Daniel must also be upgraded.

"Transport Quebec is now working on plans and specifications with engineering firms with regards to those eight bridges. Two calls for tenders will be issued over the fall, each one dealing with four bridges. We are now quite certain that when the two Cascapedia-St-Jules bridges will be replaced, the line will be open to the Port Daniel cement plant, which was our initial goal," explains Éric Dubé.

The Gaspésie Railway Society has hired two more employees to work in collaboration with Hamel Construction during the replacement of the two bridges.

The Port Daniel cement plant is the second most important source of revenue for the Gaspésie Railway Society but that revenue will increase significantly once cement is loaded directly at McInnis Cement's facility.

At the beginning of May, Quebec Premier François Legault committed to holding a meeting with stakeholders of the Gaspé Peninsula railway file when he realized that they were disappointed by his April 25 statement. He had said that it would take seven more years to repair the line to Gaspé.

At the time, Mr. Legault initially thought that he was bringing good news to Gaspésians, but some of them, including the mayor of Gaspé Daniel Côté, made him realize that the population has already been waiting for years. Plus the 2019 technologies allow for much faster upgrading.

"The meeting at the Premier's Office should take place on August 21st, if everything goes as planned," says Éric Dubé.