

## CASCAPEDIA-ST-JULES:

# Construction of new railway bridges to be accelerated

## *Temporary bridge on Road 299 to be ready within five weeks*

Gilles Gagné

CASCAPEDIA-ST-JULES – Quebec's Department of Transport announced on December 9 that the construction of the two new railway bridges in Cascapedia-St-Jules will be accelerated so that they will be completed by December 30 at the latest.

The acceleration of the bridges' construction was necessitated by the December 6 permanent closure of the two old railway bridges, which had been constructed between 1890 and 1894.

The east bridge was damaged slightly by the flooding that occurred on December 1 and 2, but as a result of that, a more serious problem involving structural damage was discovered.

Preliminary tests and inspections on the old bridges took place on December 5 and at that time the structural damage was not apparent.

On the morning of December 6 during the passage of three locomotives, a test before the expected circulation of a windmill blade train, a structural beam moved side-



Workers of the Gaspésie Railway Society are giving a hand to Hamel Construction in the rush undertaken to finish the two new bridges before the end of December.

Photo: G. Gagné

ways.

After that the Gaspésie Railway Society made the decision to permanently close the two old bridges, and contacted Transports Québec to advocate expediting the completion of the two new bridges.

While announcing the positive decision about the new railway bridges, Transports Québec also stated that the Kilometre 12.5 bridge at White Brook, heavily damaged by the same Grand Cas-

capedia River flood, will be replaced within four to six weeks. Considering that the announcement was made on December 9, it will be less than five weeks, by mid-December.

As for the two railway bridges, they were supposed to be open to traffic for the summer of 2021. Since undertaking the \$22.4 million job in July 2019, the contractor, Hamel Construction, was able to carry out their construction faster than expected.

“We were expecting a delivery of the bridges over the spring. The fact that they are delivered at the end of the month is really ideal,” reacted Éric Dubé, president of the Gaspésie Railway Society, the transporter in charge of operating freight trains between Matapédia and New Richmond.

Freight trains cannot circulate between New Richmond and Nouvelle since December 1 because the flood created such a log jam that hundreds

of trees piled up and touched parts of the new and old bridges. The logs had to be cleared before carrying out an inspection on the bridges. That operation took three full days.

This is when the Gaspésie Railway Society consulted Transports Québec to accelerate the completion of the new bridges, due to the pointlessness of putting efforts into refurbishing bridges that will be replaced.

The windmill blade train supposed to pass on December 6 will remain in New Richmond until the end of the month. An empty windmill blade train scheduled to arrive on December 12 or 13 will be loaded in Nouvelle just west of the Leclerc siding which is the terminal where cement cars initially loaded in New Richmond, are filled to capacity.

Until the new bridges in Cascapedia-St-Jules are functional, all the cement is and will be loaded in Nouvelle.

“In January, there will be no limitation of loads on the

### FLOOD:

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Cascapedia-St-Jules bridges. We will pass on new bridges. We will be able to load all the cement in New Richmond,” points out Éric Dubé.

Since 2017, because of the limited bearing capacity of the Cascapedia-St-Jules old railway bridges, the Gaspésie Railway Society was forced to share cement car loading between two terminals, in New Richmond and Nouvelle.

Transports Québec, the owner of the line since 2015, imposed a restriction of 10 fully loaded cars per week on those structures, but no weekly limit if the cars were just partially loaded in New Richmond, at two-thirds of their capacity. The traffic created by McInnis Cement in New Richmond and Nouvelle often reaches 40 cars per week.

Claire Pouliot, spokesperson of Transports Québec, points out that the acceleration of the railway bridges' construction will cost \$1.5M more than the projected tag of \$22.4M “as \$800,000 will go to damage repairs and \$700,000 for work acceleration.”

She stresses that it will not be necessary for the contractor to work around the clock, seven days a week, to deliver the bridges on or before December 30, since the closure of the old bridges will facilitate the contractor's task “they had to stop work when a train was passing, for safety reasons.”

Since December 7, workers of the Gaspésie Railway Society have been helping Hamel Construction in the rush to finish the two new bridges before the end of December. Those workers started removing the rails for the eventual installa-

tion of the new railbed, a few metres to the south.

### A temporary bridge at White Brook soon

As for the Road 299 bridge at White Brook, it will be replaced by a temporary structure before the end of January, adds Ms. Pouliot.

“The work is already started,” she says. The remains of the former bridge have been used since the day following the flood as a passerelle for the 11 people residing between Kilometre 12.5 and 17.

A better passerelle was installed and was functional as of December 12.

Claire Pouliot says that the floods of December 1 and 2 caused damage amounting to \$11M to the Gaspé Peninsula road network under the responsibility of Transports Québec.

The mayor of Cascapedia-St-Jules, Gaétan Boudreau, who had promised to keep a close eye on the situation in the aftermath of the flood, expressed relief upon reading the message he received from Transports Québec.

“The lack of a bridge prevents the municipality from properly serving the citizens living on the other side of White Brook. Our fire truck can't go to the other side, or an ambulance or any emergency vehicle. The new passerelle allows us to give certain services, like running errands. The Cascapedia River Society leaves a vehicle there for that purpose. Transports Québec will then put a used bridge bought in 2018 when Trout Brook destroyed the Road 299 bridge. They had bought two used bridges. The first one was well installed. We call it our temporary-permanent bridge now. It was supposed to be replaced this year but the COVID crisis Mayor Boudreau.

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