



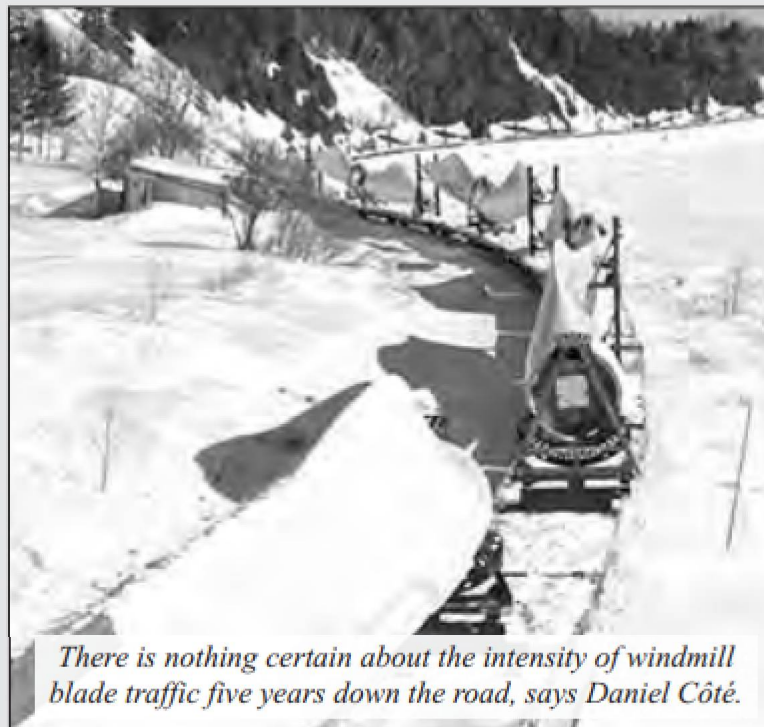
Daniel Côté hopes the train returns to Gaspé sooner than planned

Gilles Gagné

GASPÉ: - The mayor of Gaspé, Daniel Côté, still hopes, and thinks, that it is possible to bring back freight trains and VIA Rail's passenger service to Gaspé before 2025. The current conditions imposed by the way the *Bureau Québécois de l'infrastructure*, also called *Bureau des grands projets*, conducts business is a limiting factor, he remarks.

"The *Bureau des grands projets* is a slow machine. The way it processes is heavy. It will be safe, for sure, and we know that it will be done, but we also know that it will take the slow way," emphasis Mayor Côté.

"When Premier François Legault announced in April



There is nothing certain about the intensity of windmill blade traffic five years down the road, says Daniel Côté.

Photo: G. Gagné

that it would take until 2026 to regain the service in Gaspé, we used political meetings at the end of August to urge Mr. Legault to accelerate the pace.

He came up with a commitment to take a shortcut and convince the ministry (Transports Québec) to bring the service resumption down to

2025. At the present time, we have no control on one main aspect, the engineering assessment that will take place this year between Port Daniel and Gaspé. We will see what we can do there when we get the results of the studies pertaining to the bridges," he adds.

A way to accelerate things and reduce the repair cost of the railway upgrading between Matapédia and Gaspé "would have been to give the line back to the Gaspésie Railway Society in 2017 and ask the private sector to manage that upgrading process. It didn't happen, however," points out Mr. Côté.

He says the industries that pushed for a faster service resumption in 2017 will still be around in 2024, if Transports Québec succeeds in cutting

another year to the current schedule, or in 2025.

"They say that they will be able to deal with the projected year of traffic resumption, 2025, however, we don't know what kind of traffic will come out of LM Wind Power in Gaspé by then. The current contract of blade exports will end in 2021 or 2022. Will the company still send blades to the United States after that? It is early to say but other types of traffic will hopefully emerge," says Daniel Côté.

LM Wind Power is the biggest customer of the Gaspésie Railway Society, money-wise. The hauling revenues linked to the windmill blade traffic would more than double if those blades were loaded in Gaspé instead of New Richmond.