

Gaspésie Railway Society invests \$300,000 to lay new track for windmill blade train loading

Gilles Gagné

NEW RICHMOND – The Gaspésie Railway Society invests \$300,000 to build a new track just north of its New Richmond yard in order to be ready by the beginning of January to facilitate the loading of windmill blade trains there instead of on the property of Fabrication Delta. By doing so, the Gaspésie Railway protects its biggest source of revenues, as windmill blade trains represent about 40% of its annual income.

Fabrication Delta had been loading windmill blade trains since that traffic was secured by the Gaspésie Railway Society in October 2016. The first train was loaded in November and left on December 3 of the same year.

However, Northern Crane Services, the General Electric subcontractor, charged to settle arrangements for all its crane needs across Canada, and Fabrication Delta failed to reach an agreement pertaining to the renewal of the contract that would have covered the year 2021.

“Northern Crane had other options. They could have gone



Photo: G. Gagné

About 15 workers work together to lay the new spur that will be used in January in order to continue loading windmill blade trains in New Richmond. On November 24, six of those workers installed the new switch.

to Matane to load the blades. They could have gone where they wanted elsewhere. We wanted to keep the windmill blade trains, so we offered to build that track. That will allow us to save our most important source of income and it also allows us to renew the contract of windmill blade transport for the next two years,” explains Éric Dubé, president of the Gaspésie Railway Society.

Work started on November

17 when the regional transporter was informed that there would be no agreement between Fabrication Delta and Northern Crane Services. The new track will measure close to 2,000 feet in length, or 600 me-

tres. It is located on a piece of land already owned by the Gaspésie Railway Society but the blades will be stored on an adjacent lot that was rented by the transporter on November 16. The windmill blades are produced in Gaspé by LM Wind Power. They are trucked between the plant, located in the York Industrial Park, and New Richmond because the railway is under repairs between Caplan and Gaspé. The whole length of the line between Caplan and Gaspé will likely not be functional before 2025.

The Gaspésie Railway Society is a municipal entity owned by the four MRCs on the southern side of the Gaspé Coast, namely Avignon, Bonaventure, Percé Rock and Côte-de-Gaspé. It acts as the operator of the line owner by Quebec’s Department of Transport.

The expansion of the New Richmond yard is funded en-

tirely by the Gaspésie Railway Society, without any grant, because the transporter owns the land. The renewal of the windmill blade hauling contract between New Richmond and Matapédia, where the Gaspésie Railway Society’s line interconnects with Canadian National’s network, will bring in several millions of dollars annually to the regional transporter. Its annual revenues hover around \$9.5 million.

General Electric has been buying the whole production of LM Wind Power’s Gaspé plant since the summer of 2016. Those blades, 1,200 per year since the expansion of the plant between November 2016 and the spring of 2017, are all exported to the southern part of the United States, essentially to Texas. Those blades are used to repower existing windfarms. The models exported range between 42 and 46 metres in length.