

Many calls for tenders are about to turn into work contracts on the railway

Gilles Gagné

NEW RICHMOND – Several calls for tenders are currently or will soon be released by Quebec's Department of Transport for the refurbishment of the Matapédia to Gaspé railway, mainly the part situated east of Caplan, a part of which has been inactive since 2014.

Most of the calls for tender will have to do with the refurbishment and the construction of new bridges between Caplan and Port Daniel. Although work will also be carried out between Port Daniel and Gaspé.

For now, the complete re-opening of the line to Gaspé remains scheduled for 2025.

One of the new calls for tenders pertains to the repairs of the bridge spanning over the Port Daniel River, the structure that passes in the middle of the village. It will be a major contract, as the sum earmarked by Transports Québec for that bridge ranges between \$15 million and \$19,999,999. Certain elements of the structure have insufficient bearing capacity and the foundations must also be significantly upgraded, stated a document released on June 25 by Transports Québec.

Calls for tenders are also under analysis for works that must be carried out on the Ruisselet Bridge in Caplan. The amount earmarked for that project ranges between \$5 million and \$10 million. Another call for tenders should be released soon for the upgrading of the Little Port Daniel River bridge, located just west of the Port Daniel train station.

The same Transports Québec document specifies that geotechnical and hydraulic studies are ongoing in order to identify the spots that are prone to coastal erosion and submersion. The calls for tenders related to some of these works will be issued in



Engineering work must be done to determine if bridges will be replaced or upgraded. The Brèche à Manon bridge in the east part of Grand River will be replaced, according to Transports Québec documents. It was built 111 years ago.

Photo: Gilles Gagné

2020. It is the case for a rockslide located in the Douglstown area.

This year as well, a significant number of plans and specifications will be prepared so to put back in working order 20 structures requiring repairs or reconstruction between Port Daniel and Gaspé. Four consulting firms are sharing the engineering work that must be carried out before physical work begins.

The situation is more advanced between Caplan and Port Daniel-Gascons. The next months will be spent in preparatory works required to undertake the construction and repairs of eight structures.

One specialized crew is studying how the rockslide located just east of the Port Daniel cement plant will be repaired. That rockslide took place in 2014. As in the case of Douglstown, the track will likely be moved sideways over a certain distance.

Started in 2016, some more trackwork will also take place this year. A contract was awarded to a firm that will change 15,000 ties and 2,000 tie plates between Port Daniel and Gaspé. That contract also includes surfacing work over 29.2 miles along the same

stretch.

Ballast was also spread recently between New Richmond and Caplan and, more recently between Caplan and New Carlisle. The contractors whose services have been retained by Transports Québec have made two large piles of ballast in Saint-Siméon and New Carlisle.

Since standard trains cannot use the track east of Caplan, two small ballast cars pulled by a truck equipped to circulate on the tracks are spreading the ballast between Saint-Siméon and New Carlisle.

Since May 11, a thorough rail anchor job was also carried out east of Matapédia and almost to New Richmond.

Many grade crossings have also been changed along the line.

The president of the Gaspésie Railway Society, Éric Dubé, wants to know if Transports Québec will be able to speed up the traffic resumption schedule, which calls for full service resumption between Matapédia and Gaspé in 2025.

"I am glad to see that it is moving faster now. They are working on the bridges. They are changing ties and engi-

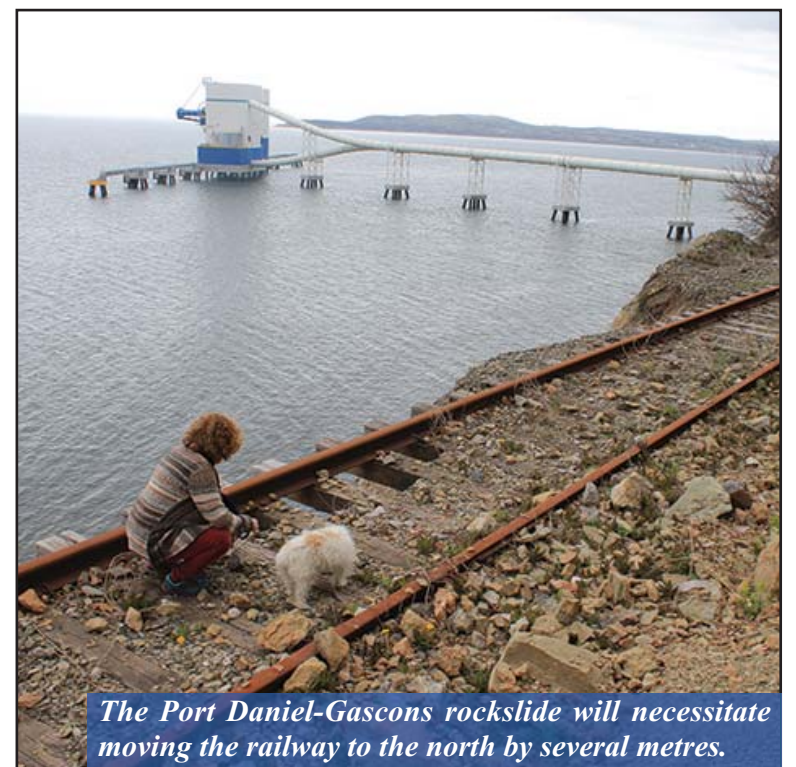
the New Richmond terminal and the load is completed at a second terminal in Nouvelle.

Thirteen structures need work between Caplan and Port-Daniel and their refurbishment or reconstruction should be completed by 2022, which will at last allow the McInnis Cement plant to have direct access to the railway.

Transports Québec expects to open the Percé to Gaspé stretch of the line in 2024, which would include the service resumption of the Amiral tourist train. The full service over the entire Matapédia-Gaspé line remains scheduled for 2025.

SPEC has asked Transports Québec authorities to specify if an acceleration of the work can be applied to the Gaspé Peninsula railway, as mentioned when the CAQ government Bill 61 was tabled before the end of the National Assembly session, only to be postponed until the fall. So far, Transports Québec has been unable to answer that question.

Transports Québec has an envelope of \$235 million for the upgrading of the Gaspé Peninsula railway. The federal government added \$45.8 million in August 2019, just before the electoral campaign.



The Port Daniel-Gascons rockslide will necessitate moving the railway to the north by several metres.

Photo: Gilles Gagné