



For now, Transports Québec is maintaining its schedule for the return of the train

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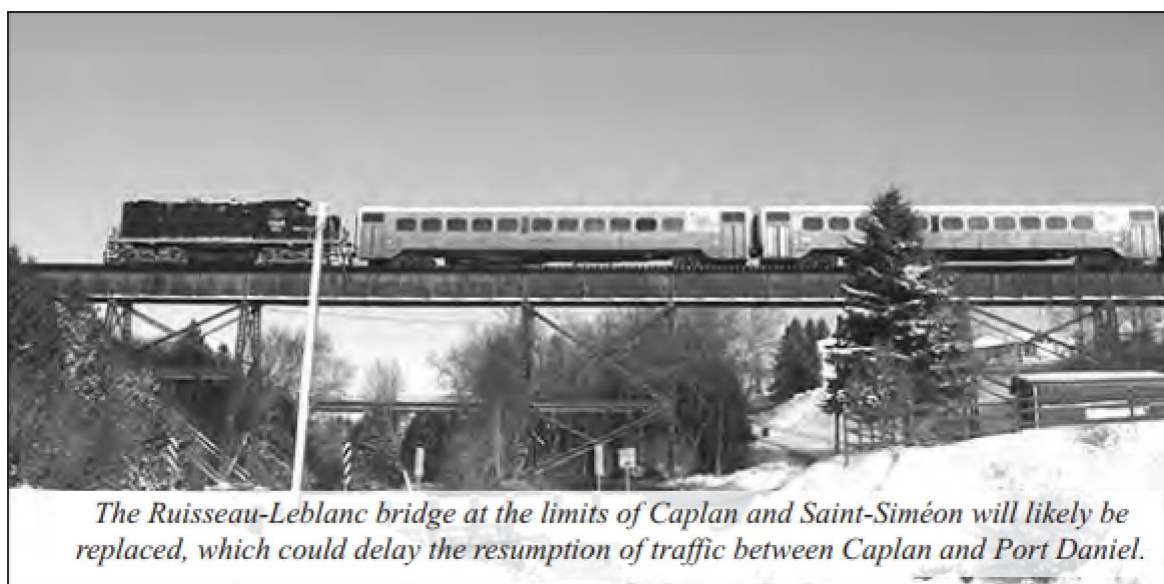
NEW RICHMOND — Transports Québec is for now maintaining that 2025 will be the year of return for railway services in Gaspé, but the schedule which was released on January 17 by the ministry indicates that the Amiral tourist train could be reinstated in 2024.

The document also indicates that significant repair work between Caplan and Port Daniel will start in 2020 but doesn't specify when the service will be restored to Port Daniel.

The documents mention that 10 structures will be repaired by 2022 but it also specifies that 11 structures must be repaired between Caplan and Port Daniel.

In another part of the documents, Transports Québec mentions that the engineering assessment of 21 structures located between Port Daniel and Gaspé will be carried out in 2020 as well, which leads to believe that real repair work will not start before 2021 on that stretch.

"The return to Port Daniel depends on one main element, how long it will take to repair the eleven structures situated between Caplan and the (Port Daniel) cement plant. We were under the impression until recently that eight structures were to be repaired and we now see eleven. I know that some of them are quite short.



The Ruisseau-Leblanc bridge at the limits of Caplan and Saint-Siméon will likely be replaced, which could delay the resumption of traffic between Caplan and Port Daniel.

Photo: G. Gagné

There is a bridge of about 15 feet in those structures. We also initially thought that none of the bridges had to be replaced and we now learn that there are two," explains Éric Dubé, president of the Gaspésie Railway Society.

The Ruisseau-Leblanc bridge at the town limits of Caplan and Saint-Siméon.

The engineering studies on the Caplan to Port Daniel stretch have already been carried out. The call for tenders for the repairs is supposed to be released very soon.

"Transports Québec was supposed to divide the work in two contracts when there were eight structures. Now that there are eleven, I don't know if it will still be divided in two contracts or if it will be three," says Éric Dubé.

The Port Daniel to Gaspé stretch

The return year of the train between Port Daniel and Gaspé will also be heavily influenced by the results of the engineering assessment carried out this year, points out Éric Dubé.

"There are 21 structures that must be assessed. We know that at least two bridges will be replaced in the east part of Grand River and in Sainte-Thérèse-de-Gaspé area. One of them is short and the other one is relatively long. The amount of time will be determined by what we will learn at the end of the year," adds Mr. Dubé.

One positive point that came out of Transports Québec in December is that the Port Daniel to Gaspé stretch is now endowed with a business case status, instead of

an opportunity study case. It means that real investment can take place on some of the parts of that stretch.

As for the return of the Amiral tourist train, the documents reveal that it will come back in 2024 between Gaspé and Percé. Éric Dubé explains that certain conditions must be met then.

"The Amiral cars must be sent to the shop before traffic resumption. It means that we must be able to send a locomotive there to bring them back to New Richmond. In such a case, we will then be in a position to bring (windmill) blade cars from Gaspé. I am anxious to know more about that," says Mr. Dubé.

The windmill blades are light and the combined weight of an empty car supporting a portion of a blade (three cars are used for two blades) is about the same weight as a

passenger car.

Mr. Dubé also emphasizes that while the Amiral locomotive was shipped in three parts on truck trailers between Gaspé and New Richmond in 2017 so to be used on freight trains, the reverse scenario is ruled out for technical and funding reasons. "We will not do that again," he says.

In the schedule issued by Transports Québec, the work on the Cascapédia-Saint-Jules new railway bridges will be completed in the fall of 2021. Éric Dubé thinks that it might come earlier.

"We know that the contractor, Construction Hamel, is clearly ahead of schedule. They were not supposed to work during the winter and they are. They found a way. I think it will go faster by several months. It would be a good thing. We could fully load our cement cars in New Richmond instead of loading them partially and topping them off in Nouvelle. We would save a lot of time and could increase the number of carloads," says Mr. Dubé.

The Transports Québec documents says that the Quebec government is committed to increasing its effort to optimize the delivery schedule of railway repairs between Mata-pédia and Gaspé. "Work is underway in order to evaluate the other gains that are possible in that time frame," mentions one document.