



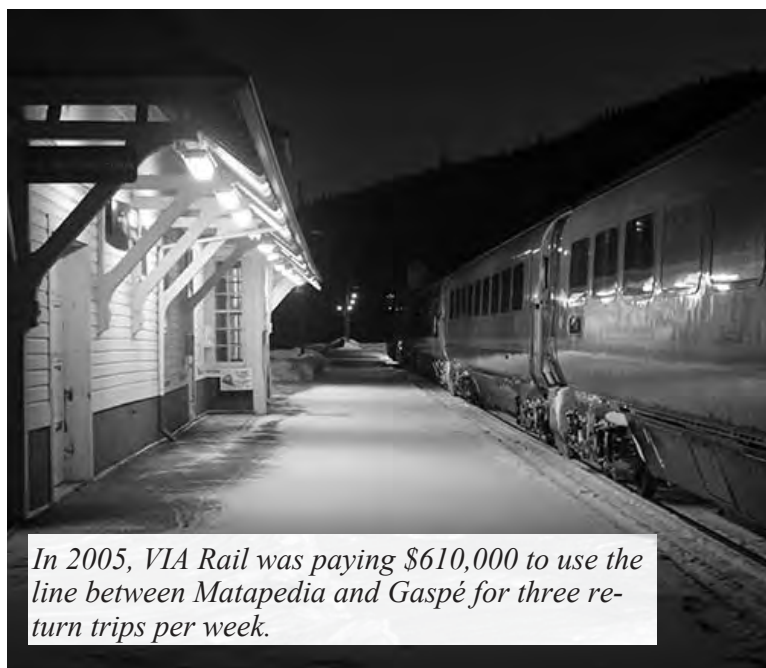
Could the passenger train return before the end of 2022?

Gilles Gagné

NEW RICHMOND – Can the passenger train return before the end of 2022 in the Gaspé Peninsula, east of Matapédia?

According to Luc Lévesque, director general of the Gaspésie Railway Society, chances are that by the fall of 2022, the freight traffic will be re-established to Port Daniel. Technically, the passenger train can also come back then. “It is possible to be in Port Daniel by the fall of 2022, according to the call for tenders schedule planned by Transports Québec. It is feasible if everything goes as it is currently expected,” he underlines.

Presently, the Ruisseau Bridge in Caplan is under con-



In 2005, VIA Rail was paying \$610,000 to use the line between Matapédia and Gaspé for three return trips per week.

Photo: G. Gagné

struction by Hamel Construction, the contractor that delivered, way ahead of schedule, the two railway bridges of Cascapédia-Saint-Jules. Work

is also progressing quickly in Caplan.

The next bridge to the east, located at Ruisseau-Leblanc, at the municipal limit of Ca-

plan and Saint-Siméon, will also be replaced. Luc Lévesque points out that even if it looks like a much bigger bridge, “the Ruisseau-Leblanc Bridge is just slightly longer than the Ruisseau Bridge.”

So replacing it, if work starts during the first half of 2021, should not take longer than a year. It could be finished by the summer of 2022.

Work also has to be undertaken on two major bridges, located over the Bonaventure River and in Shigawake, however, those two bridges need repairs, not reconstruction.

The big bridge currently under repair in the centre of Port Daniel will also be completed before or around the summer of 2022, says Luc Lévesque.

“There is also the bridge situated just west of the Port Daniel station that needs to be fixed, and realigned in order to correct a problem that has been dragging for decades. That bridge is not on the right axis, considering the way the railroad is built on each side. It is not a long remediation work though,” he specifies.

VIA Rail’s service has been suspended between Matapédia and New Carlisle since the end of September 2013. The last train circulated between New Carlisle and Gaspé in December 2011.

VIA Rail’s management has repeatedly expressed an interest in coming back between Matapédia and Gaspé,

PASSENGER RAIL:

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and it could take place in two stages, so between Matapédia and New Carlisle as long as a return date is set for the New Carlisle to Gaspé stretch. The line must also be safe, and reasonable train speed must be reachable, considering that the Matapédia to Gaspé return trip must be made the same day and in accordance with a schedule made to connect with the Halifax train.

A comeback between Matapédia and New Carlisle during the fall of 2022 is foreseeable if the freight train is back by the same time in Port Daniel.

Transports Québec owns the Matapédia to Gaspé line since the spring of 2015 but the Gaspésie Railway Society, the former proprietor, remained the operator of freight trains on that line.

Since May 2017, an important line remediation budget has been earmarked for that line. A first installment of \$100 million was announced back then by Transports Québec, followed by \$45.8 million coming from the federal government in August 2019. In March 2020, Transports Québec added \$135 million to the line refurbishment budget, for a total of \$280.8 million.

In 2020, the Gaspé Railway Society generated revenues of

\$10 million. Those revenues will increase significantly once the transporter can get a direct access to its most important customers, LM Windpower in Gaspé and McInnis Cement in Port Daniel. Revenues depend heavily on the distance covered by freight cars and that distance is quite limited at the present time.

In 2005, VIA Rail was paying \$610,000 to pass on the line between Matapédia and Gaspé.

“We will also be able to connect to other potential users once the bridges are repaired east of Caplan. Some projects will take off once we can assure a service along the whole line,” stresses Luc Lévesque.

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