

LM Wind Power: A missed opportunity for rail

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GASPÉ - The Augustines industrial park in Gaspé could have been served by rail following the expansion of the LM Wind Power blade plant.

While General Electric, owner of LM Wind Power, has been working on this file to build 107-metre blades for two years, the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie (SCFG) invested some \$100,000 to find a route to link the plant to the rail at the rue de la Plage sector in Haldimand. Field surveys were carried out and Quebec, with the Ministry of the Environment in mind, viewed this project very positively.

Estimated at some \$15 million, it is equivalent to the Industrial Road project favoured by Gaspé. Additional sums would have been required for the purchase of flat cars to transport the blades between the plant and port, and additional equipment. On the other hand, Ottawa funds railroads, which is not the case for industrial roads.

It would have taken 18 months to build such a rail spur that would have run along behind the automobile dealers on Boulevard Yord Sud and required the relocation of a house. According to preliminary plans, the developed route required virtually no excavation.

This delay was a hindrance to the project. "One of our constraints was that we had to go through a BAPE (environmental assessment). We were not able to guarantee that we would be able to service the plant by January 2023," explains SCFG president Éric Dubé.

A source familiar with the

matter tells us, however, that this constraint could have been ironed out because of the strong support shown by Quebec for such a project.

The mayor of Gaspé and director of the company, Daniel Côté, justifies the road.

"There was a big risk in terms of the deadlines and LM didn't want to take the risk. The company has favoured the main road, explains the mayor. I wanted both projects and I still want both," claims Mr. Côté, while the railway spur has been in the Town's plans since 2010.

A source confirms Daniel Côté's assertion on the choice of the highway.

According to our information, this connection could have ultimately generated revenues of \$3 million for the railway company because the inputs used by LM Wind Power could have arrived by rail, which would have removed dozens of trucks from the roads.

Once in place, rail could have been a powerful lever for the development of the industrial park.

The work is not wasted and the expertise developed in the study of this project could be used elsewhere in the Gaspé.

Coalition is disappointed

The Coalition of Gaspésians for the Future of the Train is sorry for this turn of events. "We've been talking about having access to the park for a while. Not having taken that into account, I think it was a missed opportunity," comments the director of the Coalition, Bernard Babin.

LM still needs the rail

Even though the railway spur has been put on hold, the wind turbine blade manufacturer will still need the rail in the future.

According to reliable information obtained by The Gaspé SPEC, the signal given to re-equip existing wind farms in Quebec by the Legault government this summer and the American demand pave the way for the manufacture of blades that would leave by rail directly from the plant, rather than being transported by truck.

Those involved in the matter remain confident, recalling the importance of returning the rail to Gaspé and the need for this railway spur to ship the blades.