

## Minister Julien aware railway issue must still be addressed

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CARLETON — Jonatan Julien, the new minister responsible for the Gaspé Peninsula and the Magdalen Islands, is fully aware that the acceleration of the railway upgrading represents a priority in the region, although he admits the necessity to improve his grasp on the file.

“I know the stakes and I was talking about it with my chief of staff, as we are discussing daily, and I must soon have a meeting with François

Bonnardel (Quebec’s Minister of Transport) in order to talk in much more accurate details about those stakes because, yes, I hear the requests, yes, I see the problems. I must sit with François Bonnardel and his team to study in a detailed manner (...) the most plausible costs and deadlines,” explained Minister Julien in an interview with the SPEC.

Currently, some customers of the railway, General Electric (GE) being one, pay much more than what they should to deliver or take delivery of the

products made in the Gaspé Peninsula. In the case of the LM Wind Power plant in Gaspé, hauling its blades by truck to New Richmond, where they are transferred to rail cars, costs millions of additional dollars per year for its main customer and owner, GE.

The same handicap affects the McInnis Cement plant in Port Daniel, as cement is trucked to New Richmond as well, before being transferred to rail cars. Quite often, that cement stays in trucks until its

final delivery instead of being transferred into rail cars because the profitability would be lost in that transshipment.

McInnis Cement would also save a lot of money if it could take delivery of some input by rail. Dealing with that reality seriously affects the revenues of the Gaspésie Railway Society as well. That regional transporter is losing millions of dollars in revenues to trucks, mainly owned by companies from outside the region.

“I cannot say that I have

the accurate information from the Ministry of Transport regarding those Gaspé Peninsula stakes but I clearly see the preoccupations mentioned by the mayors and prefects and the effects this (situation) can have on the efficiency and the competitiveness of the region,” added Minister Julien.

He has committed to visit the region eight times per year and intends to deliver and make announcements when he comes, including railway announcements, he says.