

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

**Mrs. Lebouthillier, we request that your government take immediate action** and work with VIA Rail to set up a plan to resume passenger train services in stages on the Gaspé Peninsula as soon as possible. Currently our railroad is fully repaired and safe for passenger trains between Matapédia – New Richmond – Caplan.

Technically, VIA Rail could resume passenger train service to New Richmond or Caplan now. We strongly urge that the service should be resumed to New Carlisle as soon as the tracks are ready and the next step would be Chandler which is an important city and has a hospital. Next step would be Percé (tourist capital of Quebec) and finally Gaspé as a last step.

Proposed stages for resuming service

- New Richmond or Caplan: now (August 2021) – the tracks are ready and safe;
- New Carlisle: Fall 2022;
- Chandler: as soon as the tracks are available and safe;
- Percé: as soon as the tracks are available and safe;
- Gaspé: summer of 2025 or before.

Major track maintenance work has been done, the two railroad bridges in Cascapédia-Saint-Jules have been replaced at a cost of \$22.5 million and Caplan bridge fully replaced at cost of \$6 million. MTQ has invested \$80 million so far in repairs.

We have the official confirmation from the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie that the tracks are fully safe for immediate return of VIA Rail passenger service from Matapédia to New Richmond.

Since May 2017 the Quebec government (MTQ) has set aside \$235 million to repair the entire Matapédia to Gaspé railroad. The federal government also contributed \$45.8 million to help repair and protect our railroad from coastal erosion.

Climate change and the actions that need to be taken can no longer be delayed. The latest report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)<sup>1</sup> sounds the alarm for

everyone and Canada is among the top three per capita emitters of carbon dioxide in the world.

There are no small gains and the use of the VIA Rail passenger train in the Gaspé Peninsula will contribute to the reduction of greenhouse gases.

The people on the Gaspé Coast are impatiently awaiting the return of the VIA Rail passenger train (which has been missing for eight years). VIA Rail stated at the 2021 annual public meeting that they will return when the railway is fully repaired and safe to Gaspé in 2025.

This is an insult and clearly unacceptable. All Gaspésians needing the train and cannot wait until 2025. The service has to be restored as soon as possible in stages. In 2018, during a visit to New Richmond, former VIA Rail president Yves Desjardins-Siciliano was open to returning in stages, like to New Carlisle first.

With a return of the passenger train service in stages, a RÉGÎM shuttle bus service could provide connecting service to Gaspé, ensuring full service between Montreal and Gaspé.

The people on the Gaspé Coast need VIA Rail passenger train service to travel outside the region for healthcare, visit family, and for people to visit this beautiful region. Traveling by bus or plane is not an option for most people. The bus is uncomfortable with no place especially for seniors to rest. Traveling by plane is far too expensive for most people. The train is the most comfortable and affordable way for most people to travel.

A sum of \$415.8 million has been required by VIA Rail to supplement its funding and its lack of revenue for the fiscal year ending on December 31, 2020, from the Government of Canada. We as taxpayers cannot accept that we have to pay more and have less train service (no service at all in the case of the Gaspé Peninsula).

We need your strong support for the return of the VIA Rail passenger train as soon as possible on the Gaspé Coast. We ask you to contact and plan a face-to-face meeting with your colleague,

Omar Alghabra, Minister of Transport of Canada, in order to find solutions and actions to quickly restore the service in stages and to transmit them to the senior management of VIA Rail which does not seem to be able to find solutions for the fast return of the train to the Gaspé Coast. There are 3,427 people on social media who ask you to act now.

We are asking you to publicly declare, with a written response to the signatory of this letter by August 27, your support for the return of the train to the Gaspé and the actions you are taking to bring back the service. We look forward to hearing from you.

*Anthony Bernard Prince  
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**Co-signed:** Judith Bélanger, Barry Brake and Bernard Babin, Directors on the Coalition of Gaspésians for the future of the train, Louis-François Garceau, President Le Groupe TRAQ