



No worries for the railway traffic, assures Frédéric Lebel

Gilles Gagné

The *Produits forestiers Temrex* sawmill in Nouvelle is one of the three main customers of the Gaspésie Railway Society. In 2020, a year marked by the COVID crisis and the Listuguj railway blockade, traffic was down to 768 carloads. The 1,230 carloads of 2019 show a more accurate profile of the last few years. The peak year was 2016 with 1,629 carloads.

However, while the woodchip traffic is relatively stable, with between 900 and 1,100 yearly carloads, the lumber traffic has been going down steadily since 2017. For example, the lumber traffic went from 321 to 139 carloads be-

tween 2019 and 2020. It is an odd situation because the addition of new kilns in 2019 was supposed to increase sharply lumber shipments by rail.

Frédéric Lebel wants to be reassuring about maintaining the railway service at the Nouvelle plant, even if Groupe Lebel doesn't use rail transport dominantly in its facilities.

"There are two things here. We will keep honouring the woodchip contract we have with White Birch Paper in Rivière-du-Loup (where Temrex sends its woodchips). It is a 25,000-tonne per year contract. We have talked to White Birch and it will stay. It is true that the Nouvelle plant is the only plant we have that is directly con-

nected to the railway apart from our Maine sawmill. The sales team of each mill will communicate between them and we will see how we reorganize the operations and where we send our products. In time, the flow of lumber coming out of Nouvelle by rail should at least be maintained. In fact, it should increase. I gather that there is a shortage of equipment (lumber cars coming from Canadian National)," explains Mr. Lebel.

The two major sawmills of Groupe Lebel in Saint-Pamphile and Daaquam use the railway indirectly, at a lumber transfer facility located along Canadian National's mainline in Saint-Jean-Port-Joli.