

Rush to open railway bridges proves successful as first freight train passes before Christmas

Gilles Gagné

CASCAPEDIA - SAINT JULES – The combined effort of Hamel Construction's employees and the Gaspésie Railway Society's staff led to the opening of the new Cascapedia-Saint-Jules bridges, on the morning of December 24. A welcomed Christmas surprise.

The first train was a wind-mill blade train that consisted of 72 flat cars carrying 48 blades made by Gaspé's LM Wind Power plant. That passage came 22 days after the December 2 flood that led to the December 6 closure of the two old railway bridges, built between 1891 and 1893.

When the contract was awarded to Hamel Construction, at the beginning of 2019, the delivery of the new bridges was scheduled for the fall of 2021, but the contractor had taken such a lead in the erection of the structure, that opening them far ahead of schedule was feasible when the old structures were officially sidelined on December 6.

Two days later, Transports



The Gaspésie Railway Society employees gathered for the passage of the first freight train that passed on the new Cascapedia-St-Jules bridges, at the end of the morning on December 24.

Photo: G. Gagné

Québec, which owns the Matapédia to Gaspé line, agreed to accelerate the construction, with a new deadline of December 30 now in the plans. In fact, a test was carried out at 4:50 p.m. on December 23 when four locomotives of the Gaspésie Railway Society circulated on the new bridges while going east to reach the 72 cars that had been loaded

since the first days of the month.

The director general of the Gaspésie Railway Society, Luc Lévesque, and the president, Éric Dubé, underlined the constant effort of their staff during the 17-day rush.

On the afternoon of Sunday, December 20, Luc Lévesque was installing tie-plates alone, on the east ap-

proach of the bridge located at mile 60.3. "Some of the guys have been working every day since December 6 to help the Hamel workers. That's 14 days. If I can help them in some ways, I will do it, and I like that kind of work," he explained to the SPEC.

A few minutes before the passage of the first train, one of the Gaspésie Railway Soci-

ety workers told the SPEC that "at first, we were looking at the work to do (to open the bridge before the end of the year) and we were finding it difficult to believe that we would be able to finish before Christmas but as we were moving ahead, we told ourselves that it was feasible."

Gaspésie Railway Society president Éric Dubé points out that the opening of the new bridges will allow the transporter to concentrate cement loading operations in New Richmond, because the cement cars will be permitted to pass on the new bridges fully loaded, no matter the number, like before. Since the opening of the Port Daniel cement plant in 2017, those cars had to be loaded at two-thirds of their capacity in New Richmond, while the other third was added at another terminal in Nouvelle. Otherwise, the number of fully-loaded cars was limited to ten per week, as ordered by Transports Québec.

"The other bridge currently

Cont'd on page 5



Photo: Gilles Gagné

Gaspésie Railway Society's director general Luc Lévesque and train crew members Andrew Gallon and Jeffrey Bourgaize stood in front of the first train, minutes before the leading locomotive cut the red ribbon.

RAILWAY BRIDGES:

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replaced in Caplan is also progressing ahead of schedule. If we can keep opening bridges ahead of schedule between here and Port Daniel and then between Port Daniel and

Gaspé, we might reach Gaspé before 2025," he says.

The original contract for the replacement of the Cascapedia-Saint-Jules bridges was awarded to Hamel Construction for a sum of \$22.4 million. The amount includes the dismantling of the old bridges, which is partially done. The December 8 decision to accelerate the completion of their construction added \$1.5 million to the final tab, \$800,000 to repair damage caused to a pile by the December 2 flood and \$700,000 for the work acceleration.