

## Progress made in awarding contract for railway bridges between Caplan and Port Daniel

Gilles Gagné

**BONAVENTURE** – Three of the most important railway bridges located between Caplan and Port Daniel are on the verge of being repaired, according to information released on the Transports Québec call for tenders website.

In fact, they are the three main bridges left to complete that kind of work between Caplan and Port Daniel. The building of retaining walls and minor repairs on much smaller bridges now remain to be awarded.

On August 10, the contract to repair the Bonaventure River bridge was awarded to Groupe SEMA Structures Ferroviaires Inc. for \$6,539,854. That contractor is based in Sainte-Flavie and also operates a shop in nearby Mont-Joli.

Later that same day, Transports Québec published a notice stating that Groupe SEMA Structures Ferroviaires has also won the bid that will lead to the refurbishment of the Shigawake trestle. In that case, the value of the contract reaches \$8,975,100.

Moreover, bidding closed

on August 9 for the repairs that must be carried out on the small Port Daniel River bridge. The contract has not been awarded yet. A company that has so far been quite active along the Gaspé Peninsula line, Hamel Construction, submitted the lowest bid, at \$12,790,000. The two other bidders presented much higher tenders, in the vicinity of \$19 million.

In its call for tenders, the Transports Québec planning team was expecting bids to be in the \$5 million to \$10 million range. The contract doesn't only include repairs to the bridge but corrective measures to straighten up the curve around the structure.

In the call for tenders, the Bonaventure and Shigawake bridges have to be delivered within 21 months by the contractor, Groupe SEMA, in those cases. The two bridges must therefore be ready around the beginning of May 2024.

Since major bridge contracts started to be awarded in the Gaspé Peninsula by Transports Québec at the end of 2018, all the contractors selected by the ministry deliv-



*The Bonaventure River bridge will be repaired by Groupe SEMA, following a bid of \$6,539,854.*

Photo: Gilles Gagné

ered the work several months ahead of time. Such was the case for Hamel Construction or its subsidiary in Cascapédia-Saint-Jules, at the Ruisselet bridge in Caplan and on the main Port Daniel bridge.

In August and September 2008, Groupe SEMA rebuilt, in 40 days, the Stewart River bridge in Saint-Omer, a structure that had completely collapsed due to a huge rainfall.

Transports Québec, the owner of the Gaspé Peninsula line since 2015, had committed to reopening the Caplan to Port Daniel section before the end of 2022. However, at one point

between June 2020 and February 2022, the ministry went 20 months without issuing a bridge call for tenders pertaining to a structure located between the two villages.

Transports Québec former Minister Robert Poëti decided to put the line east of Caplan in a dormant state in 2015 despite the fact that the Port Daniel cement plant had been under construction since May 2014. Saint Mary's Cement ships between 1,500 and 1,900 rail cars per year but the cement has to be trucked to a terminal located in New Richmond in order to reach the open part of the rail-

way.

The transshipment cost is considerable and currently lowers the potential of the transporter, the Gaspésie Railway Society, to increase its cement traffic. All cement that is transported by land leaves Port Daniel in a tractor trailer. When the destination is relatively close like Matane or New Brunswick the cement is often transported entirely by tractor trailer, without switching to another means of land transport.

Transports Québec invoked the complexity of the work on the bridges to justify the two-year delay that will occur before the reopening of the Caplan to Port Daniel line. However, most of the bridges were built at least 115 years ago, with the technical means of the time. The ministry also blamed the delay on the retaining walls that will have to be installed in some spots which were prone to erosion.

Transports Québec has not revealed so far how and when it intends to deal with the 'call for tenders' process regarding the retaining walls. (with information forwarded by Anthony Bernard Prince)