

Quick facts about the Gaspé Peninsula Railway

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The line between Matapedia and Gaspé was opened to traffic over its full length in 1911. Its construction started on June 8, 1888. It took 23 years to build, after 27 years of talks.

In 1911, New Carlisle was the head office of the companies operating their half of the network, the Quebec Oriental Railway and the Quebec Atlantic and Occidental Railway.

In 1929, the government owned Canadian National Railways, now CN Rail, and acquired the whole line between Matapedia and Gaspé, following public requests for service improvements regarding passenger and freight traffic.

In 1977, VIA Rail was founded to take over CN's and Canadian Pacific's passenger services.

In 1986 and again in 1990, CN Rail applied for the abandonment of the Chandler to Gaspé section of the railway. The 1990 attempt was granted but overturned in 1991 by a decision of the Minister of Transport, Jean Corbeil.

On January 15, 1990, VIA Rail reduced its train frequency between Montreal and Gaspé to three weekly trains instead of a daily one.

In July, 1996, CN Rail, privatized the previous year, formally expressed its decision to sell the Matapedia to Chandler portion of the network. It mate-

rialized over the fall of the same year and the Quebec Railway Society took over the operation of the line on December 1, 1996.

In March, 1997, the federal government handed out \$3.6 million to the newly-formed Gaspésie Railway Corporation (Corporation du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie), later renamed Gaspésie Railway Society (the current Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie). It is now owned by the four MRCs located along the line. The amount of \$3.6 million was divided, \$3 million for the acquisition of the Chandler to Gaspé stretch from CN Rail, and \$600,000 for its commercialization.

On July 5, 1998, freight traffic resumed between Chandler and Gaspé as Noranda Mines signed an agreement with the Gaspésie Railway Corporation to haul 400 cars loaded with copper anodes yearly. The deal ended with the closure of the Murdochville smelter at the end of April, 2002.

On October 28, 1999, Abitibi-Consolidated announced the closure of the Gaspesia newsprint mill in Chandler. On August 4, 2005, Smurfit-Stone announced the closure of the New Richmond linerboard plant. The Baie-des-Chaleurs Railway Society, the regional subsidiary of the Quebec Railway Society, therefore, lost its two main customers and

put the line up for sale.

On June 28, 2007, the Quebec and Canadian governments announced in New Carlisle a grant of \$35 million to allow the Gaspésie Railway Society to acquire the line between Matapedia and Chandler and repair some bridges.

In November, 2009, woodchip traffic generated by the Temrex sawmill in Nouvelle was added to the Gaspésie Railway Society business. The plant is now owned by Groupe Lebel.

In December, 2011, VIA Rail ceased its train service east of New Carlisle because of bridge repairs needed in Chandler. In September 2013, the public transporter also suspended the service between Matapedia and New Carlisle due to problems with some bridges.

In November, 2014, the Gaspésie Railway Society filed for the protection of the court, notably because of the burden created by the line maintenance.

In March, 2015, Transports Québec announced its decision to acquire the whole line between Matapedia and Gaspé for the value of Gaspésie Railway Society's debt, about \$3.5 million. The section between Caplan and Percé was immediately put in a dormant state despite the construction of the Port Daniel cement plant, started in May, 2014. In Sep-

tember, 2015, the ministry also put the Percé to Gaspé section in a dormant state, thus forcing a halt in the operations of the Amiral tourist train, whose service had started in 2013.

On December 3, 2016, the Gaspésie Railway Society sent its first windmill blade train from New Richmond to Matapedia. From there it was delivered to its final destination, Texas, by CN Rail and other transporters. Loading in New Richmond instead of Gaspé, where the blades are made, was imposed by the 2015 decision to stop the maintenance and repairs east of Caplan.

In July 2017, the cement cars were loaded in New Richmond, a situation again attributable to the dormant state of the line east of Caplan. It is now estimated that 5,000 truckloads are necessary yearly to haul cement between Port Daniel and New Richmond. That is not counting the traffic lost because customers located relatively, like in New Brunswick or Matane, are affected by the cost of transshipment in New Richmond and keep being served by trucks.

The last windmill blade train for a while was loaded at the beginning of May 2022, because the manufacturer, LM Wind Power, will soon switch to giant 107-metre-long blades that will be installed in offshore wind farms. Those blades must be exported by ship. Between

December, 2016, and May, 2022, 118 windmill blade trains were loaded in New Richmond. Loading them in Gaspé would have generated tens of millions of dollars in additional revenues for the Gaspésie Railway Society.

The Gaspésie Railway Society is now counting on a variety of possibilities to replace the windmill blade traffic until its possible resumption, a few years down the road. Traffic will surely increase at the Votorantim cement plant in Port Daniel once rail service is available there.

New ventures are also expected to materialize east of Caplan, in the Bonaventure or New Carlisle area, with the eventual return of the Saint-Elzéar sawmill among the railway customers. The Gaspésie Railway Society is even considering the construction of a spur to Saint-Elzéar and another spur to Gaspé, to LM Wind Power's plant, once the line is reopened there. Bringing LM Wind Power's input by rail would generate close to 1,000 carloads annually.

In 2007, the Gaspésie Railway Society hauled 426 carloads of freight and, in 2021, it hauled 4636 carloads, eleven times as much. The municipal entity declared revenues of close to \$10 million, including an operational grant of \$2.5 million coming from Transports Québec.