

Rehabilitation of the railway derailed

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GASPÉ – Bad news for the repair of the railway in the Gaspé Peninsula. Quebec is adding another two years to the 2022 deadline announced by the Legault government for the rehabilitation of the line between Caplan and Port-Daniel-Gascons. Even worse, no service resumption date remains for Gaspé, which is of concern to the elected officials in the region.

“I’m really not in a good mood,” says the mayor of Gaspé, Daniel Côté, as he responded to the announcement made to elected officials during a meeting of the Monitoring Committee between the Ministère des Transports du Québec (MTQ) and regional elected officials.

“On May 5, 2017, Premier Couillard promised that it would be done by 2022. On August 21, 2019, Premier Legault promised us 2025 and today, we don’t even have a deadline anymore,” added Mr. Côté.

New challenges

To justify this delay, the ministry says the preliminary studies of 2019 updated last summer have raised other issues. The track must be moved over 1.4 kilometres in Port-Daniel-Gascons. Bridges such as the Leblanc Brook in Caplan, which was to be rehabilitated, must be rebuilt instead. Ten retaining walls must be set up on this section and beach replenishment must also be carried out.

“The set of structures on which we must intervene explains the two-year delay,” says MTQ spokesperson Nicolas Vigneault.

Calls for tenders will be published by the end of winter, including four in the coming weeks, according to Mr. Vigneault.

The projects target the re-

construction of the Ruisseau-Leblanc bridge in Caplan-Saint-Siméon and rehabilitation work on the Bonaventure, Shigawake and Petite Rivière Port-Daniel bridges.

In total, nine infrastructures will be targeted by calls for tenders by the summer on the Caplan-Port-Daniel-Gascons section.

A surprise that isn’t much of a surprise

For the past few months, observers of the rail repairs have been wondering about the delay of the deadlines for launching calls for tenders.

“Everything happened. Between the labour shortage, the greater than expected technical and environmental challenges and we add the pandemic,” says the president of the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie (SCFG), Éric Dubé, at the end of the virtual meeting.

“It will have an impact on our operations. We have an agreement that allows us to operate on the schedules planned in time which means that we would be in Port-Daniel in 2023 to transport cement. Our operational structure was made in that sense. It will bring about a challenge that we have shared with the ministry,” adds Mr. Dubé who says Quebec seems to understand and the subject will be discussed, which Quebec confirms.

The SCFG managed this contract as if the train was already going to Cement McInnis, assumed the cost of the transshipment and was reimbursed later. It is this component that will be negotiated with Quebec because of the delay.

The mayor of Gaspé suggests that the SCFG can carry out some of the work. The repair of culverts could be done by the region.

“We have expertise in the region via the Société du

chemin de fer de la Gaspésie that could be put to use. To do so, the Ministry of Transport would have to let go of its pride and let society do the work,” says Mr. Côté.

This component will also be part of the exchanges with the company, specifies the

MTQ.

Economic losses

The impact will be felt on economic development. “We lose opportunities because we don’t have the railway and, in addition, we can’t even give an overview of a timetable,” continues the mayor.

The schedule and costs for the entire project up to Gaspé are under review.

Quebec has already released \$235 million and Ottawa \$45.8 million.

Some now suggest that the overall project could exceed \$400 million.



Photo: N. Sergerie