



## Contract to enlarge Port Daniel tunnel and build nearby retaining wall now awarded

GILLES GAGNÉ

PORT DANIEL – On December 4, Quebec’s Department of Transport awarded the contract to build a retaining wall just west of the Port Daniel railway tunnel to Couillard Construction, a company based in Coaticook, Quebec, in the Eastern Townships. The contract also includes widening and repairing the tunnel.

Couillard Construction presented the lowest bid at \$23,682,014. The contract was awarded exactly five months after the federal government announced a \$10 million grant, especially for the retaining wall initiative, as part of the new Climate Change and Adaptation to Extreme Weather Infrastructure component of the Rail Safety Improvement Program.

The part of the contract specific to the retaining wall will likely amount to \$15 million or something close to that. The federal government will, therefore, pay about two-thirds of that bill. Transports Québec will pay the balance of \$5 million and all the work planned for the tunnel.

“No train has passed in the tunnel since the Amiral tourist train on its way to Gaspé dur-



Photo: G. Gagné

*The contract to expand the tunnel whose west entrance is seen here in the background and the retaining wall needed to stabilize the rail bed on the right, was awarded on December 4, later than expected when that work was announced on July 4.*

ing the summer of 2014. Although at first, cement traffic will pass in the tunnel, which is high and wide enough for the type of cars used to haul part of Port Daniel’s Saint Mary’s Cement output. Higher and longer cars will likely pass in it once the railway is open to Gaspé,” says Luc Lévesque, director general of the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie (SCFG), which is the company carrying out freight traffic on the line

owned by Transports Québec.

“We think that windmill blades will be hauled out of the LM Wind Power Gaspé plant at one point in the future. We will be ready for that traffic if it materializes,” he points out.

While the line between New Richmond and Port Daniel should be functional before the end of 2024, the Port Daniel to Gaspé stretch should be put back in service at the end of 2026.

Between December 2016 and May 2022, the biggest source of revenues for the SCFG was the hauling of windmill blades between New Richmond and Matapédia, where they were transferred to Canadian National for their delivery to the United States. They were produced by LM Wind Power in Gaspé and trucked to New Richmond because the line was not functional between Caplan and Gaspé.

### Two other important calls for tenders between Port Daniel and Gaspé

Also at the beginning of December, Transports Québec issued a second regrouped call for tenders to upgrade the line between Port Daniel and Gaspé.

As was the case on November 17 for the first call for tenders, nine structures will be upgraded or replaced. Geographically, the work is concentrated between the Pabos Mills sector of Chandler and a sector of Sandy Beach located about four miles from the Gaspé train station. The Transports Québec references are in miles, as the railway subdivisions are always divided in miles.

More precisely, upgrading and constructions included in that second call for tenders will take place at a medium-sized bridge in Pabos Mills, on the big bridge spanning over the Grand Pabos River, which is the bridge that led to the closure of the New Carlisle to Gaspé section of the railroad in December 2011, and the construction of a retaining wall between Chandler and Pabos.

Moreover, repairs will be

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carried out on the bridge spanning over the Little Pabos River, between Pabos and Grande-Rivière, while a retaining wall will be built in L’Anse-à-Beaufils and a nearby retaining wall will be upgraded.

Further to the east, the large Barachois bridge, whose repairs were started in 2013 but not finished in 2014 because of a government change, will be upgraded, just like the nearby railway bridge passing over Highway 132. A retaining wall located in Sandy Beach will complete the work tied to that second call for tenders.

On December 11, a third call for tenders was published by Transports Québec, still for the area east of Pabos Mills but not going as far as Gaspé, since the eastern limit is L’Anse-à-Beaufils. This time around, six structures are targeted.

A second medium-sized bridge located in Pabos Mills will be repaired, as well as a small bridge in Pabos. The large trestle located east of the Percé train station in L’Anse-à-Beaufils and three small

bridges located over a short distance from one another, east of the trestle, will also be part of that contract.

The first call for tenders pertaining to infrastructure located between Port Daniel and Gaspé was released on November 17, the day of Premier François Legault’s visit to New Carlisle, where he saw one of the main construction sites of the railway upgrading operation.

That initial call for bids deals with nine structures, including the major trestles of Grande-Rivière and Prevel. The deadline for the submission of tenders is January 17.

In June 2023, Quebec Minister of Transport Geneviève Guilbault announced in Gaspé that the Port Daniel to Gaspé railroad stretch would require works worth \$517.6 million.

One important call for tenders remains to be released for that portion of the region’s railroad. So far, the calls for tenders have not dealt with the line situated between the Port Daniel cement plant and Pabos Mills, which includes two bridges in Port Daniel-Gascons, one in Newport and the Gascons fault.

(With information provided by Anthony Bernard Prince)