

QUEBEC BUDGET: Good news for the railway

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NEW RICHMOND – The Government of Quebec budget confirms the renewal of the five-year agreement conferred to the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie. The amount slated for 2023 to 2028 increases to \$21 million, from the \$12.5 million the transporter had received for the 2018-2023 period.

The money is used to support some operational costs of the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie (SCFG), as well as some basic maintenance chores. It can also be used in certain cases to buy equipment.

It will also pay some transportation costs deriving from cement hauling between the Port Daniel cement plant and the New Richmond transshipment terminal. That cement should be loaded into rail cars in Port Daniel by 2024.

“It is contained in the 400-page budget document. The agreement is renewed. We were expecting it but it is always nice to see it officialized,” points out Éric Dubé, president of the SCFG, mayor of New Richmond and prefect of the Bonaventure MRC.

He is glad that the \$21 million breakdown is budgeted according to the needs of the SCFG.

“It will be \$6 million for the first year, which is this year, then \$6.5 million, followed by \$4 million, \$2 million and \$2.5 million. It was designed with a prevision view regarding the rehabilitation work we will have to carry out. We will have to clear snow over a longer distance once we reach Port Daniel. We will need additional equipment,” explains Mr. Dubé.

He underlines the fact that, since the fall, the SCFG has received a total of \$40 million, including an amount of \$19 million for the next three years, announced in November to increase the participation of the transporter in the rehabilitation process of the line. That recognition of expertise was much



More track upgrading work will revert to the SCFG in the coming years.

Photo: G. Gagné

appreciated by Éric Dubé and the staff of the SCFG, a corporation under the municipal control of the four MRCs covering the stretch between Matapédia and Gaspé.

“I can say that the next three years will be very busy, to sum up the situation,” he adds.

He hesitates before predicting a date for the termination of the line rehabilitation work between Caplan and New Carlisle, and then New Carlisle and Port Daniel.

“Work on the bridges located in Caplan-Saint-Siméon (Ruisseau-Leblanc), Bonaventure River and Port Daniel will likely be over by the fall. The work that has to be done on three small bridges will be handed out through the call for tenders process but the three contracts are supposed to last less than 26 weeks. Those calls for tenders should be awarded soon. The picture of the situation at the end of October might show that there is not a lot of work to do between Caplan and Port Daniel,” analyzes Éric Dubé.

The budgetary provision for 2024 and 2025 regarding the rehabilitation of the railway owned by Quebec’s Department of Transport calls for \$16 million of work yearly.

Éric Dubé is also confident to get an update before the end of the current spring about a

time frame for the return of rail services to Gaspé and a budgetary figure to carry out the work between Port Daniel and Gaspé.

Disappointed with housing and leisure envelopes

Meanwhile, Éric Dubé is disappointed by the Quebec government announcement re-

garding housing, as 5,300 affordable units will receive public support over the next five years. Most experts agree on the fact that Quebec needs more than 5,300 such units annually.

“We are anxious to see the details. We have a 15-unit housing project in New Richmond and we need \$3 million from the Quebec government,

\$1.2 million locally through a tax credit and \$2 million are awaited from the federal government. We hope our project will qualify. We need it,” he says.

The leisure infrastructure program was an equal disappointment, to say the least. During the fall electoral campaign, the Coalition avenir Québec incumbent government committed to investing \$1.5 billion over 10 years for arenas and other major leisure facilities.

“According to the budget, it is now \$150 million over five years. It is five times less than the electoral campaign commitment. It leaves \$30 million per year for all the leisure infrastructure of the province. It only covers a handful of projects annually,” says Éric Dubé.

The New Richmond municipal council opted for phases in the refurbishment of the local arena, hoping that public money would be available annually. Mayor Dubé now sees “hundreds of municipalities fighting for paltry sums.”