

Is it feasible to bring the train back to New Carlisle before the end of 2023?

Gilles Gagné

NEW CARLISLE – The president of the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie, Éric Dubé, can't say for now if the railway will be functional between Caplan and New Carlisle before the end of 2023 but that should be known before the end of March.

The Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie (SCFG) owned the Matapedia to Gaspé line until March 2015, when the burden of maintenance and the lack of funding between the spring of 2014 and the following winter proved too costly. However, the transporter under municipal control still operates the freight train between Matapedia and New Richmond, and is still very active in the maintenance of the stretch currently being used.

The SCFG is also increas-

ingly involved in the renewal of the portion of the line that is under repair.

“Honestly, I will soon be in a position to answer questions regarding the feasibility of reopening the line to New Carlisle. We have a liaison committee meeting in March and I will ask questions about it,” says Mr. Dubé.

He noticed an acceleration of the call for tenders process from the line owner, Quebec's Department of Transport. “All the structures that have to be replaced or repaired between Caplan and New Carlisle have gone through calls for tenders. Most major contracts are already awarded and the others are either awarded or in the middle of the call for bids,” he adds.

Only two major bridges between New Richmond and New Carlisle remain to be repaired or replaced. In both cases, work is underway.

Work has been underway on the Ruisseau-Leblanc bridge at the municipal limit of Caplan and Saint-Siméon since the summer. The bridge that spans over the Bonaventure River has been under construction since the fall. In both cases, work will be completed this summer.

Two small bridges, one in Saint-Siméon and one near the golf course in the Fauvel sector of Bonaventure, must be replaced. A few retaining walls must also be built, but most of them are located east of New Carlisle.

“Everything can be carried out before the end of the year. In one case, the deadline is in 2024 but it doesn't mean that a train cannot pass on that bridge. There might be only some landscaping work to do after the winter,” says Éric Dubé.

Since former Quebec Premier Philippe Couillard an-



Photo: G. Gagné

The president of the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie, Éric Dubé, says that we will know more about the possibility of reopening the line to New Carlisle before April.

announced the full refurbishment of the line on May 5, 2017, not a single kilometre

of track has been reopened east of Caplan, despite an investment of close to \$120 million so far. Some of that money was invested between Matapedia and Caplan, the section that was never closed to traffic.

Between June 2020 and February 2022, Transports Québec went 20 months without posting a call for tenders pertaining to the bridges in the region. The ministry has so far failed twice to fulfill its commitments related to the resumption of rail traffic to Port Daniel. The initial goal was 2020, then 2022. Now, it is 2024. The acceleration of the call for tenders process since the end of February 2022 makes it possible to reach that latest commitment.

All the contractors selected since 2018 to repair railway bridges have delivered ahead of schedule.