

Saint-Elzéar sawmill becomes the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie's newest customer

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NEW RICHMOND – After numerous attempts to get the Association coopérative forestière of Saint-Elzéar to ship lumber by rail, the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie (SCFG) has landed a trial load. On May 5, a car was loaded in New Richmond to be sent to Ontario.

The attempts to attract this new client were made on numerous occasions over the last decade and, at times, even prior to 2013. “We are starting with one car. We would like it to be a regular thing, as in loading two or three cars per week,” says Luc Lévesque, director general of the SCFG.

Back in the 1990s, the Saint-Elzéar sawmill regularly shipped lumber by rail. The owner of the Matapédia-Gaspé line at the time, Canadian National (CN), put much effort in landing new customers before putting the Matapédia-Chandler part of the railroad up for sale in July 1996.



The construction of the new railway bridge at Ruisseau-Leblanc will progress rapidly over the coming weeks.

As a municipal entity, the SCFG, initially called Corporation du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie, acquired the Chandler-Gaspé section in March 1997, after reaching an agreement with CN, which had previously tried to abandon it. The Québec Railway Society, a private company, took over the Matapédia-Chandler stretch in December 1996 and sold it to the SCFG in 2007.

The fact that the Saint-Elzéar Association coopérative forestière quit as a railway

client can be attributed to a number of factors: one being, for many years, the relative proximity of its clients, often based in the Maritimes. Rail is more competitive over longer distances. The lack of trucks and truck drivers, the cost of fuel and environmental advantages have convinced some companies to come back to rail.

In the meantime, a significant portion of the railway upgrading project is progressing very well at the municipal limit of Caplan and Saint-Siméon, as Construction Polaris, in charge of replacing the Ruisseau-Leblanc bridge since the spring of 2022, installed the spans of the new structure on May 4 and 5 after bringing in two heavy duty cranes.

The work associated with the \$7.9 million contract will likely be completed at the end of June, or the beginning of July, which is way before the scheduled resumption of rail traffic between Caplan and Port Daniel which is expected to occur at one point in 2024.



The 73-foot long lumber car was spotted on May 4 by an SCFG employee using a track mobile unit, and it was loaded the following day.

Photo: Douglas Allen Shaw

Photo: G. Gagné