

The loss of the VIA Rail shuttle causes concern

● **NELSON SERGERIE**

GASPÉ - The suspension of the RéGIM's VIA Rail shuttle continues to cause concern among Gaspésians

Solidarité Gaspésie, the Citizens' Committee for the Development of Gaspé and the Côte-de-Gaspé Chamber of Commerce, have added their voices to that of the Coalition of Gaspésians for the Return of the Passenger

Train in order to denounce the loss of the service.

VIA Rail's new reservation platform no longer allows people to buy an intermodal ticket on its network, as has been the case in the Gaspé Peninsula for several years.

"It is a one-way decision by VIA Rail which puts an end to the reservation system that made it possible to buy a train ticket and have access to the shuttle from Campbellton

to Gaspé. This decision penalizes the RéGIM, which had to cancel its shuttle because of the costs of having a second reservation system," explains Solidarité Gaspésie spokes-person Carol Saucier. This news adds to the many transportation challenges of Gaspésians.

"The situation is already not very good. It just adds up. This is an increased deterioration compared to accessibility to transport. Enough is enough!" says Mr. Saucier who asks VIA Rail to propose solutions that won't penalize the population.

He is also asking the Member of Parliament for the Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands, Diane Lebouthillier, to intervene.

"To pressure VIA Rail's board of directors to change this situation, she has the power to do it if she wants to do it," claims Mr. Saucier.

More than 15,000 people have already signed a petition for the return of VIA Rail to the Gaspé Peninsula and the coalition intends to use this

means to request a meeting with Ms. Lebouthillier.

A citizen mobilization isn't out of the question, similar to the one in August 2019 when dozens of people demanded the return of the train to Gaspé.

"We will see if it is possible and it is one of the ways to think about it. It is a possibility, but nothing has been decided," says the spokesperson.

The three organizations are monitoring Quebec's actions regarding the business plan for the repair of section 3 of the railway between Port-Daniel-Gascons and Gaspé.

"We are going to put pressure on the ministry to provide us with the information as quickly as possible," says Mr. Saucier.

The Coalition of Gaspésians for the Return of VIA Rail's passenger train recently claimed that the rail carrier had chosen to put intermodality aside with the redesign of its reservation site.

This decision forced the Gaspé Peninsula-Magdalen Islands Intermunicipal Transportation Board (RéGIM) not to offer the VIA Rail shuttle this summer. This shuttle allowed users to meet the train in Campbellton or vice versa.



Photo: N. Sergerie

It is possible that a mobilization could be organized to criticize the loss of the RéGIM VIA Rail Shuttle. In 2019, a demonstration mobilized the population to repair the rail to Gaspé.