



Photo: G. Gagné

*Cement traffic is supposed to increase significantly once the train reaches Port Daniel's plant because the transfer from trucks to railcars in New Richmond has a cost that currently affects the competitiveness of rail over short to medium size distances.*

## Timeline of the last 12 years in the Gaspé Peninsula railway file

● GILLES GAGNÉ

**December 2011:** VIA Rail suspends passenger train service between New Carlisle and Gaspé due to bridge repairs in Chandler.

**September 2013:** VIA Rail suspends service between Matapédia and New Carlisle due to the condition of other bridges.

**November 2014:** The Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie (SCFG), a municipal entity providing freight service and owning the Matapédia-Gaspé railway line, is placed under court protection due to debts of \$3.5 million.

**March 2015:** Transports Québec announces the acquisition of the Matapédia-Gaspé railway line for the value of the SCFG's receivables. The ministry puts the railway between Caplan and Gaspé on hold, even though a \$1.5 billion cement plant is under construction in Port-Daniel. McInnis Cement refuses to confirm that it will need rail services despite the fact that every cement plant of that size uses the railway.

**December 2016:** SCFG begins transporting windmill blades from New Richmond because the railroad is dormant on 60% of the network. McInnis Cement signs a contract with the SCFG to haul cement from New Richmond instead of Port Daniel.

**May 2017:** Transports Québec announces \$100 mil-

lion for the repair of the Matapédia-Gaspé railway. The transport of cement produced in Port-Daniel begins in July, but out of New Richmond because the line is not safe east of Caplan.

**Early 2019:** The first major contract is awarded to repair a railway bridge in Cascapédia-Saint Jules. In August, on the eve of the federal election, Ottawa announced \$45.8 million for repairs to the Gaspé network, money that will be used mainly to counter erosion. So far, almost \$8 million of that federal money has been used, according to Minister Geneviève Guilbault.

**February 2020:** Transports Québec announces an additional \$135 million for the upgrade of the Gaspé railway.

**June 2020 to February 2022:** Transports Québec goes 20 months without issuing a single call for tenders for the repair of railway bridges in the region. Transports Québec also announces that the reopening of the Caplan-Port-Daniel stretch, scheduled at first for 2020, then for 2022,

will not take place until 2024.

**April 2022:** The SCFG learns that windmill blade traffic will cease in May, six months before it was planned to cease. It is a major loss of revenue for the transporter, given that the railroad is not upgraded yet to Port Daniel. The cement plant was supposed to provide additional traffic in 2022, on the condition that the train could reach the facility.

**May 2022:** VIA Rail confirms once more that it will not return between Matapédia and Gaspé until the entire network has been repaired. The Coalition of Gaspésians for the return of the train asks the public carrier to return when the network will be operational to New Carlisle, therefore, in two stages. In May 2023, more than 16,000 people signed a petition supporting this coalition in its process of returning to phases. In October 2018, the former president of VIA Rail, Yves Desjardins-Siciliano, had expressed openness to a return in phases in the region but his successors changed direction to this day.