

## Kristina Michaud deplores federal government lack of support for VIA Rail's regional services

GILLES GAGNÉ

CARLETON – In her 2023 wrap up, Member of Parliament for the Avignon-La Mitis-Matane-Matapédia riding, Kristina Michaud, highlights the federal government's apparent apathy in the problems plaguing national transporter VIA Rail, especially regarding its regional services.

In addition to departure and arrival delays that have now become the rule instead of the exception, the shortage of rolling stock material and trained employees are issues mentioned by VIA Rail's new president, Mario Pélouin. These issues could potentially impact the eventual return of the Montreal-Gaspé train, whether it occurs in 2024, 2025, or 2026.

"I am glad that he will meet with the Coalition (of Gaspésians for the return of VIA Rail's passenger train) in



Photo: G. Gagné

*The Montreal-Gaspé train saw good attendance not only in the summer but also in the winter, as it represented a safe transportation option during more difficult driving conditions.*

January. There is obviously a mentality switch at the helm of the transporter. Our last meeting at VIA Rail was not providing us with much hope of getting the regional preoccupations listened to," says Ms. Michaud.

She is referring to a meeting initiated by her staff in 2022, in which VIA Rail's representatives quickly ruled

out any possibility of service resumption to the Gaspé Peninsula before the refurbishment of the line as far east as Gaspé. Mario Pélouin expressed more openness to the Coalition's members during a November 1, 2023 meeting, though he admitted that the availability of rolling material and trained employees are areas of concern.

Kristina Michaud is ready to give Mr. Pélouin a chance to prove his good faith, but overall, she is worried about the lack of action from both the provincial and federal governments in transportation files.

Transportation generates 22% of all the greenhouse gas emissions in the world, and the figure is even higher in Canada.

"We are clearly not doing enough to reduce our gas emissions in the country. You don't need to travel for a long time before understanding the reality lag in Canada and Quebec compared to similar countries. (...) In our region, it is still impossible to count on a reliable system for people, whether we talk about the railway or aerial services," she deplores.

"It is difficult to determine the federal government's share of fault. Regarding the VIA Rail service problem, one can wonder why it takes so

long for the Quebec government to put the (Matapédia-Gaspé) network back in a good state and why the federal government doesn't give VIA Rail the means to come back to the region as soon as possible. There are economic repercussions stemming from that context at the end of the day," underlines Ms. Michaud.

After the major budgetary cuts on January 15, 1990, VIA Rail continued to carry between 25,000 and 29,000 people yearly with its Montreal to Gaspé train while it served the entire stretch between Matapédia and Gaspé, so until the end of 2011. The service between New Carlisle and Gaspé was suspended in December 2011 due to the condition of a bridge located in Chandler, and the rest of the service was halted in August 2013 with the VIA train and in September of the same year with the bus leased by VIA, due to the overall state of the line