

Kristina Michaud once again advocates for the return of VIA Rail's passenger train service

GILLES GAGNÉ

CARLETON — Kristina Michaud, Member of Parliament for Avignon-La Mitis-Matane-Matapédia continues to advocate for the reinstatement of VIA Rail passenger train services in the Gaspé Peninsula.

Additional cuts in the region's aerial services and nationwide reductions in bus services have convinced Ms. Michaud that VIA Rail, as a public corporation, must increase its efforts to resume the Montreal to Gaspé Peninsula train, even if the return is done in phases.

On February 6, she met with the new president of VIA Rail, Mario Pélouquin, as part of a transpartisan caucus meeting in Ottawa focused on nationwide rail services.

"I felt Mr. Pélouquin's interest in regional passenger services, in the betterment of services provided to rural regions. I saw there was a good opportunity to further discuss the matter. Mr. Pélouquin says that VIA Rail wants to inspect the line between Matapédia and New Carlisle, which is supposed to be ready later this year. In fact, it was supposed to be ready in 2023 but after talking to representatives of the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie, I understand that there is a little part of work still underway (in the Black Cape area of New Richmond). Mr. Pélouquin says that he has not received permission from the Quebec government to inspect that part of the line," explains Kristina Michaud.

"I invite the Quebec government to give access to VIA Rail for a track inspection. (...) At the same time, Mr. Pélouquin expressed the fact that besides the state of



Photo: Office of Kristina Michaud

Member of Parliament for Avignon-La Mitis-Matane-Matapédia, Kristina Michaud, urges the federal government to allocate sufficient resources to support VIA Rail.

the railroad, VIA Rail must make sure that the stations are in good condition and that there is enough staff and enough rolling material to offer the service. I understand from that statement that there are other variables to consider. I just hope that VIA Rail is not trying to find excuses to delay its return to the Gaspé Peninsula," sums up Ms. Michaud.

"Canada is the weakest of the G7 countries when one looks at the quality of passenger rail transport. In Europe, it is possible to easily get across all the countries, while here, the service is deficient," she deplures.

During the 2021 electoral campaign, Kristina Michaud added her voice to that of the Coalition of Gaspésians for the Return of the VIA Rail Passenger Train.

In a recent letter sent to federal departments of Transport and Finance, VIA Rail stated that "at a time when airlines and bus carriers are increasingly deserting rural regions, passenger trans-

portation by train is more relevant than ever. What's more, these connections play a significant role in the development of the tourism offer in these regions. The VIA Rail fleet is part of the Canadian landscape, acting as a vital link for remote and Indigenous communities, thereby contributing to regional economies."

Through that statement, VIA Rail demands significant funding to modernize its railway equipment used along long-distance and regional routes.

The Coalition of Gaspésians for the Return of the VIA Rail Passenger Train and Kristina Michaud are calling for a gradual return from VIA and they believe that the section between Matapédia and New Carlisle can allow this resumption, even if the work is not complete to Gaspé.

In November, Mario Pélouquin met with representatives

of the Coalition and although the details of the discussion remained limited, the two parties are supposed to meet again early in 2024. VIA Rail's president adopted a tone that sounded more promising than that of his predecessors.

"If the service can be offered to New Carlisle before 2026, this would already be an important step forward for the people here who are massively demanding the return of the train. I also invite the federal government to take out the cheque book and give the resources necessary for VIA to renew its fleet. Canada must stop being the poor relation of the industrialized world in terms of passenger transport by train and the Gaspésie has just as much right to this service as other regions have never ceased to have," insists Ms. Michaud.