

Local aggregate traffic to relieve pressure on highway

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MARIA - The SCFG is partnering with a contractor, Construction Béluga, to transport aggregates for beach replenishment in Maria. This transport began on July 10 with two test runs.

The volume is extremely important, at a range of 500,000 to 550,000 tons, and the distance covered by the trains will be very short by usual railway standards, between 15 and 16 miles, from Nouvelle to Maria's Hironnelles street, where the cars are unloaded.

Luc Lévesque, director general of the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie, specifies that although this traffic makes total sense, he didn't have to go far to land



Photo: G. Gagné

The first air dump car has just emptied its load, the first of about 7,000 for the coming months in Maria.

the contract. It came from the contractor.

"On Thursday, June 19, I received a call from Béluga.

We started looking into it seriously the following Monday morning. The quarry is in Nouvelle. The route is 15

miles (25 kilometers). I managed to find some cars. It will generate 7,000 cars of traffic for us, and everyone will benefit from it. That's what a regional railway is supposed to be for. Not many people could have managed to do that. We did it without cutting prices, at a decent rate, and with a profit," explains Luc Lévesque.

In 2021, the SCFG had its best year in its 18-year history, transporting 4,636 railcars outside the region. In 2024, this traffic was reduced to 2,066 railcars. The loss of the windmill blade trains in 2022 largely explains the decline.

Maria Mayor Jean-Claude Landry says that beach replenishment would have resulted in "40 trucks per hour from 7 a.m. to 6:30 p.m.,

maybe 7 p.m. That's practically 12 hours, between 400 and 500 trucks per day, during the peak tourist season, between Nouvelle and Maria. Rail is really the preferred option. One railcar can carry 100 tons of material. That's 8 to 10 trucks with 10 wheels. The total tonnage of beach replenishment will be between 500,000 and 550,000 tons," he explains.

"There will be noise and dust for people living on Rue des Hironnelles, where the trains will be unloaded. I met with them. They certainly see the inconveniences. If there is damage, the street will be resurfaced. There will be alternative routes for people living north of Rue des

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Chardonnerets. This work is urgent. We are on the verge of losing our supermarket due to erosion, and the hospital will eventually be threatened. The railcar solution is a good use of the railway. For transporting heavy equipment, the railway is the way of the future," assures Mr. Landry.

The SCFG acted quickly to find and adapt cars

The first test run was conducted with six "air dump" cars full of aggregates, with about 160,000 pounds, or 80 tons, per car. The air dump system makes one side of the car falling over. At the same time, the floor of the car lists to favour the emptying operation. Air is pumped into cylinders to facilitate the operation. The air comes from



Photo: G. Gagné

The SCFG crew reached the unloading spot in Maria at the end of the July 10 morning.

the locomotive or locomotives.

The SCFG rented five air dump cars from Chemin de fer de Charlevoix (CFC) over the previous days in order to

add them to its two similar cars. Four CFC cars were used for the first test train, and the two SCFG cars.

"We had a little problem with the hoses of the

Charlevoix cars during the first test run but we found a way around the problem. It took a while (about 45-50 minutes) to empty the first train but on the second test run, the six cars were emptied fast, like 1-2-3-4-5-6. Altogether, with the switch of locomotives from the rear engine becoming the front one for the return trip, and a few operational manoeuvres, we stayed only 20 minutes in Maria," says Luc Lévesque.

The SCFG had bought 23 covered cement hoppers in 2024, cars that function according to gravity. There were put to good use during the third week of July. By July 15-16, the tops of those cars had been removed to facilitate their loading.

"With the seven air dump cars, the 23 hoppers and five ballast cars, we are able to make four loaded trains per day. I am not excluding six

daily trains. They will meet in Carleton, the only siding track left between Nouvelle and Maria. I thought at one point of rebuilding a siding in Maria but I decided not too. Our plan is feasible as it stands," concludes Mr. Lévesque.

A storage space was laid out on the east side of Hironnelles street for the loading of trucks from the piles created for railcars' unloading.

The financial terms of the agreement between Béluga Construction and the SCFG are not revealed for now.

The agreement is deplored by independent truckers of the area but the tourism industry leaders, who feared the consequences of traffic jams between Nouvelle and Maria, are discretely expressing relief, as 40 loaded trucks per hour translate into 80, because they must come back to the quarry.

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