



Rail GD expands its facilities thanks to a \$2 million investment

GILLES GAGNÉ

NEW RICHMOND — The railway equipment repair company, Rail GD, will soon benefit from an expansion of its New Richmond shop. The \$2 million expansion will give the firm's 50 employees more room to maneuver, especially when the workshop is full, which is regularly the case.

Rail GD's chief executive officer, Gabriel Bélanger, explains that construction began on September 15 and that the local contractor, Construction LFG, is expected to deliver the 7,000-square-foot building in December.

"The decision was made in early August. It had been brewing since this spring. I am the first to be surprised to see that it's moving so quickly. We wanted to optimize the six spaces available to park a rail car," says Mr. Bélanger.

"Working outside the cars requires space. If someone wants to work on a door, they need a table. We wanted to work on subassemblies that wouldn't encroach on a space to park a car. If I want to work on a (railcar) truck, it doesn't necessarily take up a car's space. If I have six cars in the shop, I can't work on a truck. We'll be doing work outside the cars in the new space," he adds.

Rail GD won its first repair contract in the fall of 2010.



Gabriel Bélanger, chief executive officer of Rail GD, states that the expansion will be completed in December.

Photo: G. Gagné

The project involved restoring an accident-damaged VIA Rail passenger car in a rented space. It was a trial run for a firm, Gaspésie Diesel, which specialized in truck repairs that still operates today. The management at the time saw potential in the rail sector. The trial was successful and Rail GD was founded in 2011. The firm's workshop was built between the end of 2011 and May of 2012.

A diversified clientele

Currently, the workshop is full with six passenger cars. Two spaces will become available in the spring, and Rail GD management intends to fill them.

Two of the passenger cars belong to Transport Tshiuetin,

an Innu company operating the Sept-Îles-Schefferville train in the North Shore region. These cars, dating from the early 1950s, have been undergoing major overhaul since May 2024. Additional Tshiuetin units will eventually pass through the New Richmond shop.

Two other passenger cars belong to VIA Rail. These are also units built in the 1950s. In this case, the complexity of the work is significantly less, and the turnover of units sent to New Richmond by this public transporter is higher.

Rocky Mountaineer, a Canadian company offering luxury travel in British Columbia, Alberta, Colorado, and Utah, has two units undergoing major overhaul at Rail GD. They are generator cars.

This also involves equipment that is over 70 years old.

"One of the contracts will end this spring. We'll then have room for two units," explains Gabriel Bélanger.

Could Rail GD one day build passenger or freight cars?

"We don't want to close the door, depending on future opportunities. The current market is promising. These units, which we repair, will be replaced with new ones. In the meantime, companies need refurbishments. The cars need to be updated. The question is when they will do it, and will they do it?" analyzes Gabriel Bélanger.

"The TGV (fast train project spearheaded by the federal government) is coming. Extending the life of passenger

cars is what creates the current market, because the equipment requires it. The good news is that operators are starting to buy new equipment. We're seeing it with Exo, with VIA Rail. There will be a need for repairs. So, this isn't the end of rail operations. There will be continuity. Canada is lagging behind the rest of the world, but there is an awareness of the importance of the rail sector. It seems to be going in the right direction," he explains.

A new generation takes over from Rail GD

Gabriel Bélanger has been chief executive officer of Rail GD for a few weeks, taking over from the founder, Gilles Babin. He is part of a group of five shareholders who have gradually acquired ownership of the company, which has been held from the beginning by Mr. Babin and the original director general, Joey Cyr.

"The transition is nearing completion. We must thank Gilles, who is taking a well-deserved retirement and who has been a source of inspiration for the team. He has had a remarkable career. The transition was planned and thought out well in advance. The five people taking over are shareholders, employed in strategic positions within the company," assures Gabriel Bélanger.