



Rails now installed in Port Daniel tunnel

GILLES GAGNÉ

PORT DANIEL – An important step towards the resumption of railroad traffic east of New Richmond was made during the second week of September, when rails were re-installed in Port Daniel’s tunnel, located about a mile away from the Saint Mary’s Cement plant in the same town.

The last train to pass in the tunnel was the Amiral tourist train at the beginning of the summer of 2014. From the spring of 2015 and on, the railroad was put in a dormant state, a decision made by former Transports Québec minister Robert Poëti, when his ministry acquired the line from Matapedia to Gaspé.

That Liberal Party government decision was controversial considering that the Port Daniel cement plant was under construction at the time and was expected to become an important shipper for the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie (SCFG).

The SCFG is a municipal entity that remained the freight transporter east of Matapedia after losing the property of the railroad due to financial problems that were made public at the end of November 2014.

When asked when traffic resumption will occur east of New Richmond, and specifically as far east as Port Daniel, the main source of freight between the two points, the director general of the SCFG, Luc Lévesque, stresses that a few steps must still be carried out.

“We have to make an inspection of all the structures repaired or rebuilt, the bridges and culverts for sure. We will also have a look at the stretches where the track was moved,” points out Mr. Lévesque.

The SCFG staff is waiting for the transfer of plans for all of the modified structures used by contractors selected by Transports Québec, most of the time following calls for tenders.

“We have not received those plans yet from Transports Québec, as far as I know,” adds Mr. Lévesque.



Photo: Gilles Gagné

Rails are now installed in the Port Daniel tunnel.

Most grade crossings located between New Richmond and Port Daniel have been inspected by Xrail, a firm that has been working in that field for years in the Gaspé Peninsula.

Luc Lévesque is uncertain about a date for traffic resumption between New Richmond and Port Daniel’s cement plant because he doesn’t control many factors, including the delivery of plans by Transports Québec. “It looks like November now,” he simply says.

Recently, Member of the National Assembly for the riding of Bonaventure, Catherine Blouin, stated that her government’s target was the end of October.

Missed targets for eight years

All the targets have been missed since Quebec’s former Liberal Party premier, Philippe Couillard, committed to refurbishing the railroad between Matapedia and Gaspé, on May 5, 2017.

At the time, Mr. Couillard was talking about traffic resumption between Caplan and Port Daniel by 2020.

In April 2019, current premier François Legault said that it would take seven years to upgrade the line between Matapedia and Gaspé. In August of the same year, after repeating 2026 for the delivery of a refurbished railroad, he cut a year to the deadline when pressured by Gaspesian leaders refusing to accept

such a distant year.

However, Transports Québec has since repeatedly pushed the delivery date of the works allowing traffic resumption to Port Daniel, invoking all kinds of reasons, from coastal erosion to the complexity of certain calls for tenders.

As for the Port Daniel to Gaspé stretch of railway, some thorough repairs are underway from contracts signed in 2024, but other calls for tenders were simply cancelled due to their costs. Quebec’s Infrastructure Bureau, managing the province’s major infrastructure projects, decided following a provincial government decision, to go back to the drawing board in order to find ways to respect the \$872 million railway refurbishment budget announced in June 2023.

Increasing cement traffic

Cement is currently loaded in ships and trucks at Saint Mary’s plant. Some of the cement loaded in trucks is transshipped to rail cars in New Richmond, thanks to the presence of an SCFG silo there.

In July, Canadian National Rail reconnected a huge silo located in Moncton to the railway, which led to an increase in cement loaded in New Richmond. The loading of cement in rail cars directly at the Port Daniel plant will also increase railway traffic at the cement plant as it will

Luc Lévesque expects to install a temporary pumping system at the Port Daniel cement plant in order to initiate the loading of cars before Saint Mary’s Cement’s new silo is ready.

“It is the system that used to be installed at Leclerc (Nouvelle) to complete loading cement cars before the replacement of the two Cascapedia-St. Jules bridges. It can be moved to Port Daniel and we will use it there. It can be connected to the plant’s silos,” he indicates.

Transports Québec had imposed a limit of ten loaded cement cars per week between 2017 and the end of 2020 on the old Cascapedia-St. Jules railway bridges due to their age.