



SCFG could move loading ramp to Port Daniel cement plant if silo is not ready

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PORT DANIEL – The Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie (SCFG) may relocate a loading ramp formerly used in Nouvelle and install it next to Saint Mary's Cement plant in Port Daniel as soon as the transporter gets an environmental authorization to do it. This installation will take less time to be ready than the construction of the cement plant's silo dedicated to rail transport.

Saint Mary's Cement also needs an environmental authorization to build its silo, and so far, the company has not received it. The firm's management does not have a tentative date for receiving that authorization, but neither does the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie (SCFG).

The use of the SCFG loading ramp would be temporary, the time for Saint Mary's Cement to get its environmental authorization, if the process is longer than that of the SCFG.

The SCFG management wants to haul more cement plant traffic as soon as possible, in an attempt to boost its overall number of carloads, which has significantly decreased, then stabilized, since the 2021 peak of 4,636 cars. In 2024, the number of carloads was 2,066, a little over the 1,998 cars of 2023 and the



The base of Saint Mary's Cement's silo is laid but an environmental authorization is needed to resume its construction.

Photo: Douglas Allen Shaw

3,190 cars of 2022. This is not just the number of cement cars.

The decline was essentially caused by the May 2022 end of windmill bladed traffic, which had started in December 2016. Adding significant cement traffic would generate a few million dollars in annual revenue for the SCFG and reduce damage on the roads.

One way to achieve the goal of increasing carloads is to serve the cement plant directly and exploit the capacity of a railcar, which can contain between two and two-and-a-half times the load of a truck

trailer. Those trucks have been used between Port Daniel and New Richmond since the 2017 opening of the cement plant because Quebec's ministry of Transport, which had acquired the Matapédia-Gaspé line in 2015, put the section east of Caplan in a dormant state, essentially because of the condition of some bridges. A silo was built in New Richmond for the transshipment of cement from trucks to railcars.

"We want to take advantage of our access to the Moncton market, which is currently served by trucks," points out Luc Lévesque, director general

of the SCFG.

CN has agreed after long discussions to open regularly for freight traffic its line between Bathurst and Miramichi and reinstall a switch and regain the biggest cement customers in Moncton.

"It is the loading ramp we were using at Leclerc," adds Mr. Lévesque, referring to the Nouvelle East track where cement cars were loaded before the complete replacement of the Cascapédia-St-Jules bridges, in December 2020.

Before the two bridges were replaced, Quebec's ministry of Transports was imposing a

limit of ten loaded cars a week on the old bridges because the cement was judged too heavy. It forced the SCFG to load cement cars to two-thirds of their capacity, with the load to be completed at the Leclerc siding in Nouvelle, where trucks were also sent. There were no constraints on the old bridges with cars only two-thirds loaded.

The constraint was lifted by Transports Québec with the replacement of the Cascapédia-Saint-Jules bridges.

Luc Lévesque considered a few spots in Port Daniel to place the temporary ramp.

"The ramp would be on the main line next to the cement plant. Zoning wouldn't allow this project at the station, and the neighbourhood would complain," says Mr. Lévesque, who understands the problem.

Dozens of trucks, either from New Brunswick for the Moncton area, or from the Bay of Chaleur for the New Richmond silo, will be removed from highway 132 traffic once railcars are loaded in Port Daniel.

The line between the west part of Caplan and Port Daniel could be functional in a few weeks, if Transports Québec doesn't find last minute works on it, which has happened a few times over the last years, even in the Black Cape portion of New Richmond.