

VIA Rail passes the buck to Quebec's Ministry of Transport

Gilles Gagné

NEW RICHMOND - In an unsigned written response, VIA Rail makes no mention of the additional \$944 million it will likely receive shortly, nor does it suggest a phased return to service, despite its technical feasibility.

“VIA Rail has always affirmed its commitment to resuming service in the Gaspé Peninsula when the tracks are safe and allow for competitive travel times to Gaspé, and that remains our intention. VIA Rail had begun significant preparatory work based on the announced timeline for the complete rehabilitation of the tracks to Gaspé by 2027,” states the carrier’s media relations department.

“An internal committee had been established to coordinate all aspects of an operational plan for resuming service, including the availability of rolling stock and personnel, as well as the modernization of stations in the region. Furthermore, a joint governance structure with the Quebec Ministry of Transport and Sustainable Mobility was established to ensure close coordination at each stage of the project. However, upon the tabling of the provincial budget on March 25, 2025, VIA Rail learned, along with the residents of the Gaspé Peninsula, that the rehabilitation work on the section between Port-Daniel–Gascons and Gaspé had been sent back to the planning phase, without a new timeline,” the statement adds.

“Faced with this major change, and still firmly committed to restoring full service for the people of the Gaspé Peninsula, VIA Rail must now go back to the drawing board to assess the next steps,” the message concludes.

The Quebec Ministry of Transport, which has owned the Matapédia-Gaspé railway line since spring 2015, has still not commented on the resumption of calls for tenders for the Port-Daniel–Gaspé rail line since the March 2025 budget.

Nine projects have been or are still underway between Port-Daniel and Gaspé, but several other areas requiring improvements are awaiting calls for tenders. The Quebec government cited a \$150 million cost overrun on this section of the network as the reason for suspending these calls for tenders. Begun in 2017, the complete overhaul of the Matapédia-Gaspé network has been granted a budget of \$871.8 million since June 2023.