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Keeping Gaspesians Informed

Budget: The rail line to Gaspé is still not in the plans

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GASPÉ – The absence of funding to complete the rail line extension to Gaspé has coloured reactions following the Quebec government's budget tabled on March 18 at the National Assembly.

Although the project remains listed in the 2026–2036 Quebec Infrastructure Plan (PQI), it is still in the planning stage, with no funding allocated in the document.

"We're going to pick up where Pellerin left off. We're going to re-document the case once again, and we'll eventually convince them that this is a much wiser investment than many others," comments Gaspé Mayor Daniel Côté, who recently expressed frustration at having to convince the Quebec government for several years of the need to complete the rail line to Gaspé.

The president of the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie (SCFG) is not surprised by the status quo. Éric Dubé said there had been concern the project might disappear entirely from the infrastructure plan.

"Last year, it was a big surprise to see the funding disappear. We feared the project would vanish completely from the Quebec Infrastructure Plan. That would have been a complete rejection by the Quebec government," he says.

Photo: Facebook

Finance Minister Éric Girard tabled the budget on March 18 at the National Assembly.

Mr. Dubé noted that at least the project has not been pushed back further. The organization will now prepare a new business plan.

"We're going to conduct a market study. That's pretty much what the minister wanted: to have the facts before investing any funds," continues Mr. Dubé, who is also mayor of New Richmond.

With a new premier expected to take office soon and an election scheduled for the fall, Mr. Dubé fears the region could lose another year. If work does not begin in 2027, the rail line will not reach Gaspé by 2030.

The October election will be used to question candidates on their intentions regarding completion of the project.

The Baie-des-Chaleurs Chamber of Commerce and Industry also notes the lack of funds set aside for the rehabilitation of the railway line between Port-Daniel-Gascons and Gaspé.

Maria Hospital

Another major element of the budget is the official inclusion of a new emergency and intensive care unit at Maria Hospital in the Quebec Infrastructure Plan.

The feasibility study is the only health-care project added to the PQI, along with a project at Sainte-Croix Hospital in Drummondville.

The Quebec government recently authorized the CISSS de la Gaspésie to begin the design and specifications phase, which could take up to two years and cost several million dollars.

Other Issues

While the federal government has just confirmed the proposed renewal of the Fisheries Fund, the mayor of Gaspé notes that the Quebec government has not set aside any funds for the program.

Negotiations must take place between the two levels of government to establish the terms and funding.

The current program expires on March 31 and had a budget of $42 million, 70% of which was funded by the federal government and 30% by the province.

Daniel Côté does, however, note some progress in the Girard budget.

"Quebec is correcting some of the mistakes of the past by putting a little money back into Réno Région, housing, air travel, tourism infrastructure, local investment funds, and the Départ program. These are small amounts, but they help 'patch up' the gaps," comments the mayor of Gaspé.

Nothing is allocated for public transit, which impacts the Gaspésie-Îles-de-la-Madeleine Intermunicipal Transit Authority—a fact that comes as no surprise to the mayor, who also serves as the organization's president.

Funding has been added to PAFIRSPA—the sports and recreation infrastructure program—and funds are allocated for forestry without specifics; no measures are included for the PEQ program.

The Baie-des-Chaleurs Chamber of Commerce and Industry also raised concerns.

"There was a section confirming that the planned reduction in immigration would cause and even exacerbate the labour shortage," notes director general Valentine Palma in an interview with CHNC.

However, the two candidates for the Coalition Avenir Québec (CAQ) leadership race indicated that the program would be extended, without specifying the terms that Bernard Drainville and Christine Fréchette would implement.

Among the positive measures noted by the Chamber is the renewal of the Gaspé Peninsula tax credit for five years, as well as funding for tourism, the bio-food sector and forestry.

The investment tax credit is also welcomed, but businesses remain concerned about labour shortages.

"We want businesses to modernize and invest, but they're asking us, 'How are we supposed to grow when we're short on labour?'" says Ms. Palma.

Mixed Reactions from Museums

Regional museums are

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