

Coalition demands timeline for railway rehabilitation to Gaspé

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CARLETON - The Coalition for the Return of Passenger Train Service to the Gaspé Peninsula is asking the main political parties, their leaders, and their candidates in Bonaventure and Gaspé to make a firm commitment to complete the rehabilitation of the railway to Gaspé during the first part of their mandate.

"We have sent our official request to all known candidates so far, to all party leaders, and to the parties themselves. As candidates are nominated, we will send the same request and will challenge them during the campaign," says Coalition spokesperson Micheline Saint-Onge.

"It's more than a promise; we want a commitment," she states firmly.

The Coalition points out that the Gaspé Peninsula, particularly the eastern part of the region, has been waiting for the return of passenger rail service since December 2011



Photo: Nelson Sergerie

Coalition spokesperson Micheline Saint-Onge.

for the New Carlisle-Gaspé section of the line, and since September 2013 for the Matapédia to New Carlisle stretch.

The complete rehabilitation of the railway to Gaspé has faced a series of setbacks since Philippe Couillard's Liberal government announced the project in New Carlisle on May 5, 2017, with an initial investment of \$100 million.

With VIA Rail's stated in-

tention to return to the Gaspé Peninsula as far as New Carlisle by early 2028 at the latest, the train service must extend to Gaspé.

Until March 2026, VIA Rail had been requesting the complete rehabilitation of the Matapédia-Gaspé line before returning. Its new interim chief executive officer, Mathieu Paquette, is open to a gradual return of service, but

requires a commitment that the entire line will eventually be rehabilitated.

"From a freight perspective, it's also important, and it's a vital line for the Gaspé Peninsula. VIA Rail also needs the rail line to Gaspé. For the past two years, we've been in discussions with both levels of government, and there were people in Quebec City saying that if we repair the line and VIA Rail doesn't come, it won't be a good deal, while VIA Rail said we can't commit to the Gaspé line if the rail isn't repaired," explains Ms. Saint-Onge.

The Coalition says conditional commitments are no longer sufficient. "We've had commitments. But they were conditional. This time, we need a firm commitment and for the work to be done," she stresses.

For VIA Rail, not knowing what will happen to the Gaspé line will have an impact.

The Coalition acknowledges that expecting the railway to be completely

rehabilitated to Gaspé by 2028 would be unrealistic.

"If everyone did their part, if Ottawa paid a portion and Quebec contributed, the work could be done fairly quickly," she believes, noting that the rehabilitation project began eight years ago.

Work is currently underway on section 3 between Port-Daniel-Gascons and Gaspé.

"We're not starting from scratch, but we need a decision and a work plan," she insists.

In 2023, the Quebec government announced \$871.8 million for the rehabilitation of the entire railway line. However, faced with higher-than-expected costs, the government returned the project to the planning phase in March 2025.

The Coalition is making three specific requests: that the project be returned to the implementation phase, that a firm timeline be established and that political leaders publicly defend the project.