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Coalition welcomes appointment of VIA Rail president

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CARLETON-SUR-MER – The Coalition for the Return of Passenger Rail Service is pleased with the October 7 appointment of Mathieu Paquette as president and chief executive officer of VIA Rail.

Mr. Paquette had been serving in an interim capacity since February and has been deeply involved in efforts to restore passenger rail service back to the Gaspé Peninsula.

"This is excellent news. We are very happy. We have been working with VIA Rail on the return of passenger rail service. It is news we had really hoped for," explains coalition spokesperson Micheline Saint-Onge, highlighting her commitment to restoring service to the region.



Photo: Nelson Sergerie

Mathieu Paquette during his visit to Gaspé on May 6.

"It is very important to work on a file with people who collaborate and listen to what we have to say," Ms. Saint-Onge adds.

Discussions between the coalition and VIA Rail are ongoing as preparations continue for the return of service.

"They are working on the operational logistics for a return no later than February 2028. I spoke with a project lead, and they are exploring every possibility to make it happen as quickly as possible. Hopefully, (it will be) before the spring of 2028," the spokesperson hopes.

In the meantime, discussions are taking place with various partners on the ground, and information is being exchanged between the parties. At VIA Rail's annual public meeting in August, Mr. Paquette made his position clear. "For us, the question is not whether service will resume, but rather how, when, and under what conditions," stated the chief executive officer right from the start, reiterating his belief that a full restoration of service—extending all the way to Gaspé—remains the only solution.

"To achieve this, it is essential to secure a clear commitment and a timeline for the rehabilitation of the section between Port-Daniel-Gascons and Gaspé, as this is a decisive factor in ensuring the service's long-term viability," urged Mr. Paquette, whose appointment has been confirmed for a five-year term.

The Quebec government had announced $871.8 million in 2023 for the entire Matapedia-Gaspé line. However, higher-than-expected costs prompted the government to return the project to the planning phase in March 2025.

In March 2026, the government announced a sum of 138.6 million for the next two years. However, details on how the funding will be allocated over that period remain unknown.