

Stakeholders appreciate the respect of a promise

GILLES GAGNÉ

MARIA – Micheline Saint-Onge, spokesperson for the Coalition of Gaspesians for the Return of a Passenger Train for the past three years, and a member of the organization during its 12 years of activism, left her meeting with the VIA Rail delegation satisfied. Until March, VIA Rail had limited itself to promising a return to the Gaspé Peninsula only once the rail network was repaired all the way to Gaspé.

“I’m very, very happy. You wouldn’t believe it! It’s so much better to work collaboratively, rather than constantly

dealing with rejections, as if we didn’t exist. They (VIA Rail people) are asking us to keep hope alive in the Gaspé Peninsula. You have to pinch yourself. Even in my wildest dreams, I never thought I’d see this,” says Ms. Saint-Onge.

She assures that the Coalition will try to bring the train back before the end of 2026.

“We’re going to do what we have to do on our end to reduce the wait. Furthermore, we’re prioritizing a daytime train. It will also meet the needs of the Lower St. Lawrence region, where the Ocean train (Montreal-Halifax) passes through in the

middle of the night. For seniors, traveling at night isn’t easy,” adds Ms. Saint-Onge.

Member of Parliament (MP) Alexis Deschênes, representing the riding of Gaspésie–Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine–Listuguj, also expressed relief at the presence of VIA Rail executives, in connection with the objective of bringing passenger rail service back east of Matapédia, a goal identified during the April 2025 election campaign.

“I think their presence demonstrates VIA Rail’s commitment to returning to the Gaspé Peninsula. They kept their promise. They said they

would come (to the Standing Committee on Transport on March 11) and they came (...) I wanted a change of attitude. We got it,” states Mr. Deschênes, who was also encouraged by the carrier’s openness to suggestions from the region.

As for Éric Dubé, president of the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie, he also confirms that his organization will collaborate with VIA Rail, particularly through repairs to stations and their boarding platforms. However, there is more.

“One of VIA Rail’s major challenges is that passenger trains almost never run on its

tracks. They’re always behind waiting freight trains. We will be able to adapt freight transport so as not to cause problems for VIA Rail. Our objective will always be the development of our region, and the return of VIA Rail is part of that,” assures Mr. Dubé, who is also the prefect of the Bonaventure MRC and mayor of New Richmond.

In the last two budgets, the Quebec government froze the publication of new calls for tenders for the rehabilitation of the Port-Daniel-Gaspé rail line. However on May 6, funding of nearly \$138.7 million was announced (*see other article blow*).