



Traffic ramps up with adjustments made to cement plant system

GILLES GAGNÉ

NEW CARLISLE – The Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie (SCFG) is now regularly bringing loaded cement cars from the Port Daniel cement plant to the New Carlisle yard.

The first loaded train was sent west on January 27 with six cars, followed by a second train that reached New Carlisle on February 3 carrying 12 loaded cars. On February 5, eight additional cars were sent to New Carlisle for later delivery to customers.

Luc Lévesque, director general of the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie, says adjustments were required during the first loading days following the arrival of the first train carrying empty cars to the cement plant on January 19. Since then, the loading operation has ramped up over the following weeks.

“It's going well. We're loading at a better pace now. There were some things to adjust. One factor for now is that we are limited in our operating hours. The ramp we use was based in Nouvelle and in the original (environment certificate) request for Nouvelle, we were only operating during the day. We didn't notice that our authorization was valid from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. We have asked for a change regarding operating hours and we should get it at one point,” explains Mr.



Photo: Gilles Gagné

The first train hauling loaded cement cars between Port-Daniel and New Carlisle circulated on January 27.

Lévesque.

That ramp was used in Nouvelle when the owner of the line, Quebec's ministry of Transport, imposed a cap of 10 loaded cars per week for the old Cascapédia-St. Jules bridges before they were replaced in December 2020. There was no limit if the cars were loaded at two-thirds of their capacity, with a top-off load added in Nouvelle using the temporary system now installed in Port Daniel.

That system will no longer be needed once Saint Mary's Cement's new silo is up and running later in 2026.

In the meantime, the SCFG continues to use its own silo in

New Richmond as a back up for Port Daniel during the transition, and for a specific type of cement car, gravity cars, for which the negative-pressure system poses a challenge.

“Nevertheless, we can now load 10 cars a day in Port Daniel under the current temporary system,” adds Luc Lévesque, who is glad to be able to count on the reopening of the New Carlisle yard.

“It's a real rail yard. It's a big plus for us in terms of space and capacity,” he stresses.

Mr. Lévesque expressed concern about reports that Glencore, the owner of the Rouyn-Noranda copper

smelter and potential buyer of copper concentrate of Osisko Metals, the firm working for the reopening of the Murdochville mine, has issued ultimatums to the Quebec government that could lead to the closure of its Abitibi facility due to environmental constraints. Rail transport would be used to ship the copper ore between the Gaspé Peninsula and Rouyn-Noranda.

“It is not good news but it will be okay, I think. Besides, we have other potential customers for the Gaspé town area,” comments Mr. Lévesque.

Meanwhile, the SCFG is asking drone operators to stay outside the rail corridor and respect the regulation in place for such flying devices.

“Some of our train crews have seen drones 20 feet from them. They don't need this distraction,” sums up Mr. Lévesque.

Freight trains currently circulate at 10 miles per hour between New Richmond and Port Daniel for safety reasons, as work remains to be completed at many grade crossing signals. When grade crossing signals are not functional, trains have to stop, while the crossings are protected by an SCFG employee.

Alexis Deschênes tables a petition of 3,437 names

On February 4, Alexis De-

schênes, Member of Parliament (MP) for Gaspésie-Les Îles-de-la-Madeleine-Listuguj and deputy leader of the Bloc Québécois, tabled an e-petition e-6922 in the House of Commons.

Signed by 3,437 citizens, the petition calls on the federal government to contact VIA Rail to immediately reinstate passenger rail service between Matapédia and Port Daniel-Gascons, and to gradually restore passenger rail service to Gaspé as soon as possible.

“The government must respond and take a position within 45 days. In the meantime, we will question a senior VIA Rail executive at the Standing Committee on Transport on February 11. It is time for VIA Rail to be held accountable. Above all, it is time for them to commit to resuming passenger train service in the Gaspé Peninsula as soon as possible,” states Alexis Deschênes.

Federal Transport Minister Steven Mackinnon and Micheline St-Onge of the Coalition for the Return of Passenger Train Service to the Gaspé Peninsula will also testify before the transport committee.

Residents of the Gaspé Peninsula have been without this essential service for over 12 years, a service that would boost the regional economy, reduce greenhouse gas emissions and improve mobility.