

Train: Gaspé mayor dreams of its return

NELSON SERGERIE

GILLES GAGNÉ

GASPÉ – After seeing the first train arrive in Port-Daniel-Gascons on the rehabilitated track between New Richmond and the cement plant on January 7, the mayor of Gaspé remains hopeful that rail service will return to his town in the coming years.

"I am absolutely hopeful. It has to happen. We've had two premiers (Liberal Philippe Couillard in 2017 and CAQ's François Legault several times) who have promised it, and a third party is pushing for it. Everyone is pulling in the same direction. I can't believe we won't get it," says Daniel Côté.

The mayor learned before the holidays of a request from the mining company Osisko, which is working on reopening the Gaspé Mines in Murdochville, stating that rail service would be needed to transport copper ore.

"I welcome this move. Until now, they had never really dared to take a strong stance. Now, they are stating it clearly," comments the mayor.

He now hopes that the Quebec government will not miss this opportunity, as was the case when LM Wind Power had blades to transport by rail to the United States be-

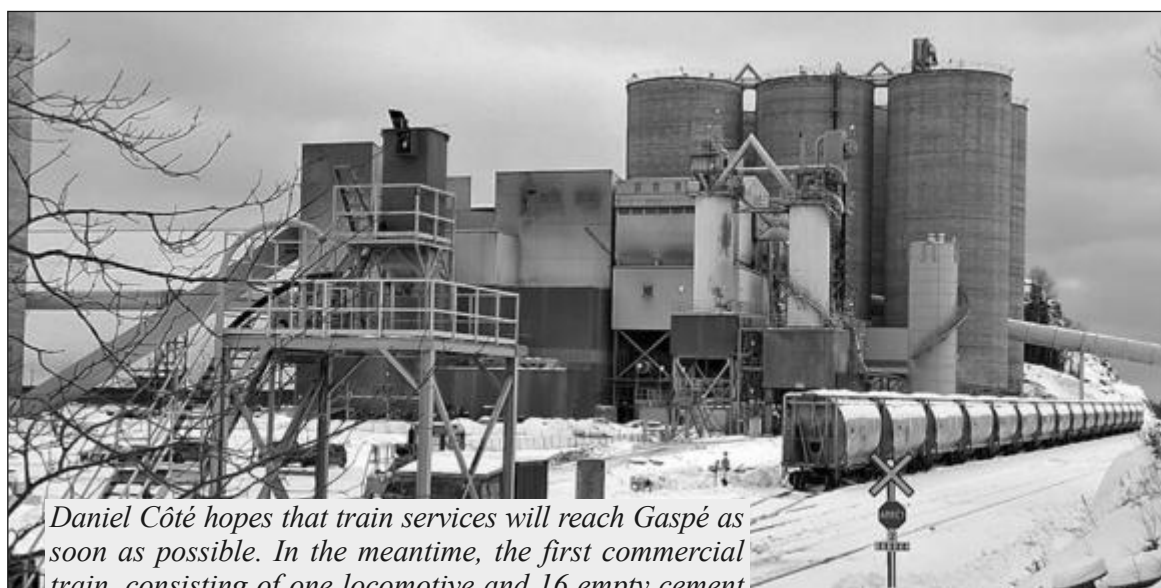
tween 2016 and 2022.

"Let's not wait until the contracts are awarded and everything is running smoothly before starting to work on the refurbishment. We know that sometime between 2030 and 2032, a mine will open in Murdochville and they will need the train to operate. Let's not wait until 2030 to get our act together and move forward. We know it's coming and we know the deadlines for the repairs. Let's start in 2026 to be ready by 2030!" the elected official clearly states.

The Quebec government sent the repairs planned for section 3 back for further analysis last March due to a significant cost overrun.

Even LM Wind Power might need the rail, mentions Daniel Côté. "The company is still winning contracts in the United States and soon, Quebec contracts – I hope – will be awarded. We'll need the railway to avoid clogging the road network. Currently, the blades are shipped by ship to markets with a seaport. In Quebec, (new wind farms) won't always necessarily be near a port on the St. Lawrence River. Sometimes, it will be easier by train. Let's think about the future," he says.

He also adds that the passenger rail service could give a boost to transportation op-



Daniel Côté hopes that train services will reach Gaspé as soon as possible. In the meantime, the first commercial train, consisting of one locomotive and 16 empty cement cars, reached Port Daniel on January 19.

Photo: Anthony Bernard Prince

tions, particularly for seniors.

"We know we need it. Our businesses have been losing competitiveness for years. We need it now," the mayor reiterates.

Commercial service up and running to the cement plant

Following the January 7 test run between New Richmond and Port-Daniel, which brought cement loading equipment, additional trains have since travelled east.

On January 19, a locomotive pulling 16 empty cement cars went to the cement plant, where the cars were left to be loaded. On January 21, a second train pulling 30 empty cement cars traveled between New Richmond and New Carlisle, where the cars were

left in the yard.

On January 23, the cement cars, now loaded, were supposed to be brought back to New Richmond, for their eventual delivery to the customers located between Halifax and Southern Ontario. Cement transportation is gradually transferred from New Richmond to Port Daniel.

Maritime link

Economic studies on the potential maritime link between Gaspé, Anticosti Island and Havre-Saint-Pierre are reportedly conclusive.

The Quebec government has reviewed the documents, but Daniel Côté does not want to reveal details yet, as the results will be presented publicly soon.

"There's very good poten-

tial. We'll release the figures soon. Overall, it's conclusive. There's potential to open up Anticosti Island, create a tourist loop, and even attract more tourists," the mayor cautiously states. The island's recognition as a UNESCO World Heritage Site offers immense potential, but it needs to be addressed.

"We're not going to see a ferry service in 2026 or 2027. It's a longer-term project. We've believed in it for a long time, and we're rowing in the right direction," he says.

A governance study conducted concurrently reveals several options for operation: private, a public-private partnership, or management by the Société des traversiers du Québec (Quebec Ferry Corporation). The municipalities would like to be involved.