

VIA Rail has a request for the Quebec government

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GASPÉ – VIA Rail is taking a more formal stance on the railway rehabilitation project between Port-Daniel-Gascons and Gaspé by clearly requesting that the provincial government carry out the work.

Interim president and chief executive officer, Mathieu Paquette did not mince words during VIA Rail's annual general meeting, held virtually on August 25. As has become customary, a specific question was raised regarding the future of passenger rail service in the Gaspé Peninsula and the Lower St. Lawrence.

According to Mr. Paquette, the issue continues to generate considerable interest.

"For us, the question isn't whether service will resume, but rather how, when, and under what conditions," Mr. Paquette stated at the outset.

He recalled that immediately after his appointment, he travelled to the Gaspé Peninsula to meet with elected officials, regional



Photo: Nelson Sergerie

VIA Rail's interim president and chief executive officer Mathieu Paquette, during his visit to Gaspé last May.

partners, community representatives and engaged citizens to hear their perspectives and visit train stations.

"I want to be very clear: we believe that a complete return to Gaspé remains the only solution that truly meets the region's needs. It's the option that offers the most potential for resident transportation, tourism development, and regional economic vitality. To achieve this, it's essential to obtain a clear

commitment and a timeline for the rehabilitation of the section between Port-Daniel-Gascons and Gaspé, as this is a determining factor in ensuring the long-term viability of the service," Mr. Paquette added.

Daytime service also being considered

Regarding the Lower St. Lawrence, Mr. Paquette acknowledged that the current overnight schedule does not

align well with the needs of communities along the route.

He points out that the current route – the Ocean train – is designed to serve the two hubs of Montreal and Halifax. The eastbound train leaves Montreal around supper time and arrives in Halifax the following day, shortly before supper time. The westbound train leaves Halifax around lunch time and arrives in Montréal shortly after 10 a.m. the following day.

A daytime train service remains one of the scenarios being considered.

"As we consider the future of service in the Gaspé Peninsula, we are also looking at how the service could meet the needs of the communities in the Lower St. Lawrence region. If we were to reintroduce daytime service, for example, between Quebec City and the Gaspé Peninsula, it would potentially be better suited to the needs of the Lower St. Lawrence," he explains.

The current schedule of the Ocean train is ill-suited for the needs of the Rivière-du-Loup and Rimouski resi-

dents, as it passes there in the middle of the night, never earlier than midnight and never later than 3:30 a.m., no matter the direction. The two towns are the most populated municipalities between Lévis, on the south shore of Quebec City, and Gaspé.

During his visit to the region in early August, Mr. Paquette mentioned early 2028 as the latest target date for a partial return of the train between Quebec City, Matapédia and New Carlisle.

It should be noted that the Coalition for the Return of Passenger Train Service to the Gaspé Peninsula is essentially making the same request as VIA Rail: that candidates in the October 5 Quebec election make a firm commitment to complete the railway rehabilitation all the way to Gaspé.

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