



Gaspésie Railway Society delivers 100th windmill blade train

Gilles Gagné

SAINT-OMER — The Gaspésie Railway Society delivered its 100th windmill blade train to CN Rail on June 16. Initiated in December 2016, that traffic started with a contract of 600 blades signed in October of the same year and since then, 4,800 blades have been delivered to the main client of Gaspé's LM Windpower plant, General Electric, which supplies those blades to customers mainly based in Texas.

The blades are made in Gaspé but are trucked to New Richmond because the railway between Caplan and Gaspé, currently under repair, is not ready for traffic. The blades are put on flat rail cars in New Richmond. CN Rail takes the blades in Matapédia and delivers them to another American railway that makes the last leg of transport. In November 2020, General Electric, which owns LM Windpower, and the Gaspésie Railway Society



Photo: G. Gagné

The June 16 windmill blade train that rolled between New Richmond and Matapédia was the 100th for the Gaspésie Railway Society since that type of traffic started in December 2016.

reached another agreement to extend the windmill blade traffic for two additional years, so until the end of 2022.

Éric Dubé, president of the Gaspésie Railway Society, explains that the windmill blade

traffic was instrumental in the transporter's bargaining power when it came time to convince the Quebec government to invest in the line east of Caplan.

"That windmill blade traffic allowed us to become what

we are today. Everything we put on the line helps and in that case, it was a major addition. That is how we were able to convince the Quebec government to invest close to \$250 million in the refurbishment of

the line, in fact \$280 million when we add the federal funds to that. All that windmill blade hauling contributed," explains Mr. Dubé.

Without getting into many details, Éric Dubé says that the windmill blade traffic brings in close to 50% of the annual revenues of the Gaspésie Railway Society. Those revenues total almost \$10 million yearly.

Éric Dubé doesn't know for now what the windmill blade traffic by rail will look like after 2022.

"We have no clue. It is a \$10 million question. I can't say that it is a worry but we sure think of it," he says.

The transporter's results for the financial year that ended on March 31 should be known at the end of June.

"In 2019-2020, we finished with a loss of half-a-million dollars because of the CN strike and the (Listuguj) blockade. It went better this year. We are very busy," concludes Éric Dubé.