

Rail: a date again requested for Gaspé

Nelson Sergerie

GASPÉ – Solidarité Gaspésie and the Gaspé Citizens Committee for Development have joined forces to demand from Quebec a date for the complete repair of the railway line between Matapédia and Gaspé.

With a 60-page document from Gaétan Lelièvre, former Member of the National Assembly for Gaspé, which provides an enlightened assessment of what has been done and the impacts of the absence of rail in the region, the groups want action.

Currently, freight trains can only run between Matapédia and Caplan. The impact is considerable as McInnis Cement in Port-Daniel-Gascons has to transport its product by truck to a terminal in New Richmond to then transport it by rail from there.

Until recently, the LM Wind Power plant in Gaspé was sending 50-metre long blades over more than 200 kilometres of road before they were loaded on a train to the United States.

In addition, VIA Rail passenger trains have not been running for almost a decade. Transport Québec, the owner of the railway since 2015, announced in February new deadlines for the repair: from 2022 to 2024 for the Caplan to Port-Daniel-Gascons section. The ministry can no longer provide a deadline for Gaspé when the target previously was 2025, due to several technical issues.

"We managed to invest \$7 billion in the REM project in Montreal in three years and we did not manage to spend \$200 million in seven years on the Gaspé train," says Mr. Lelièvre, who questions the real political willingness of Quebec to act promptly in this file.

The stakeholders aren't forgetting the fact that it will take longer to renovate the rail than its construction at the turn of the 1900s when there wasn't the technological means that are available today.

"We demand a precise and firm timetable from the gov-



About forty people attended the release of Gaétan Lelièvre's study.

Photos: N. Sergerie

ernment," says Solidarité Gaspésie spokesperson Carol Saucier, applauded by the forty people who attended the public presentation of the report at the Gaspé intermodal station on June 15.

"The absence of satisfactory results in the Gaspé railway file raises the important question of the place of the regions versus that of the major centres in terms of government vision and priorities," suggests Mr. Lelièvre, who remembers in particular a declaration of the Member of Parliament for the Gaspé Peninsula and Magdalen Islands to CHNC on May 30. Ms. Lebouthillier said that she was going to be-



Gaétan Lelièvre has prepared a 60-page document reporting on the Gaspé rail file.



A portion of the dormant railway east of Port Daniel.

lieve it when she saw the train arrive at the station in Gaspé.

The document addresses development and environmental issues.

We can read in the report that a train of 50 railcars with a crew of two people would re-

place 100 trucks "while the train generates on average six times less of a carbon footprint than trucking," says Solidarité Gaspésie.

On May 5, 2017, the (Quebec) Liberals released the first \$100 million for its repairs.

In August 2019, Premier François Legault had targeted 2025 for Gaspé and the envelope was increased to \$235 million in 2020.

In order to speed up the pace, the group is asking that the management of the project

be brought back from the Société québécoise des infrastructures to the regional branch of Transports Québec and the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie, which managed certain aspects of the repairs between Matapédia and Caplan.

Pending a completely renewed rail, the coalition is at the very least asking for a repair of the track between Gaspé and Percé in order to allow the Amiral tourist train to circulate, especially for international cruise customers.

The Table of Prefects had adopted a resolution in February to have a specific date for the end of the work to Gaspé.

Reactions

This release from this new coalition has sparked several comments, including those of the Member of the National Assembly for Gaspé, Méganne Perry Mélançon, who mentions that the region has been in nothingness since February when Quebec erased Gaspé from the work schedule.

She is making demands: "To have more transparency, to create sub-committees which will follow up on the completion of the work and to have a fixed deadline for Gaspé," says the outgoing MNA.

Entrepreneur Claudine Roy often commutes between Gaspé and major centres.

Her conclusion is without appeal. "I have always promoted the Gaspésie, developed our tourism. I have never seen our transport system so weakened as it is currently in 2022," she says, adding the situation of air transport, the bus and the poor condition of the road network between Sainte-Anne-des-Monts and Gaspé.

The train is the best solution for the environment according to the group, Together for the Sustainable Future of Greater Gaspé.

"In all greenhouse gas emissions, we are talking about emissions of 3 to 4% for rail, while for other modes of transport, it is between 45 and 47%," underlines its president, Lisa Chartrand.