

Coalition of Gaspésians for Return of the Passenger Train meets with VIA Rail

● GILLES GAGNÉ

SAINT-OMER - In hopes of advancing discussions about the resumption of passenger train service in the Gaspé Peninsula, members of the Coalition of the Gaspésians for the Return VIA Rail Passenger Train recently met with two representatives of the public transporter.

The objective of the meeting was to exchange information on developments concerning the gradual return of the passenger train in the Gaspé Peninsula. This meeting was a follow-up to the November 1, 2023, meeting attended by VIA Rail Presi-



VIA Rail's trains have not circulated east of Matapédia on the Gaspé Peninsula network since the summer of 2013.

Photo: G. Gagné

dent, Mario Péroquin.

During the meeting with the VIA Rail representatives,

Denis Boucher, Director, Governmental Affairs, and Ève-Danile Veilleux, Principal

Advisor, Governmental Affairs, the Coalition reiterated its objective of the gradual return of the passenger train as soon as the railway is operational and safe to New Carlisle as a first step and then to Gaspé as soon as possible.

The coalition emphasized the urgent need for resuming the service to meet the needs of Gaspésians, who have been waiting for the return of the passenger train since September of 2013.

The coalition also presented the results of its research and analyzes of last months concerning the four challenges proposed by Mr. Mario Péroquin, president and chief execu-

utive officer of VIA Rail, on November 1 at his office in Montreal.

Those four challenges are the lack of rolling material, the state of the stations, recruiting staff, and holding talks with the owner of the Matapédia-Gaspé railroad, Quebec's Ministry of Transport, so that VIA Rail can inspect it and negotiate access.

"VIA Rail representatives confirmed working on the return of the passengers in the Gaspésie, which is excellent news. We see real effort on their part. We are not ready yet to release the results of

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our research but it will come soon," points out Cynthia Patterson, the main spokesperson of the Coalition.

In its budget of April 16, the federal government has granted new funding to allow VIA Rail to replace its aging rail park on routes outside the Quebec City-Windsor Corridor. The amount reaches \$462.4 million, with \$56 million earmarked for the passenger trains serving First Nation communities.

Mario Péroquin was initially supposed to come to the Gaspé Peninsula at the end of January or early February but is now planning on visiting in July.

The Coalition and VIA Rail intend to meet regularly to monitor the advancements in this file, in the meantime, the Coalition will continue its information campaign with the public.

The Coalition of the Gaspésians for the Return of the VIA Rail Passenger Train is a nonprofit organization founded in 2013. Its mission is the full recovery of the passenger train service between Matapédia and Gaspé.