

## Return to intense activity for Rail GD

GILLES GAGNÉ

NEW RICHMOND – Following a quiet year in 2023, Rail GD's rail equipment repair shop in New Richmond is bustling once again. This resurgence is attributed to the signing of agreements with new clients and a returning client.

A contract to upgrade five passenger cars recently signed with Tshiuetin Rail Transportation, which connects Sept-Îles and Schefferville, ranks first among the new developments at Rail GD. Although the contract's value remains undisclosed, it amounts to several million dollars.

The first car arrived at the workshop late in the morning of May 15 with a second car arriving the following day.



Photos: G. Gagné

The first Tshiuetin Rail Transportation car arrived late on the morning of May 15 for an in-depth overhaul. The unit was built in 1951.

into service. As the car was not yet officially delivered to the RTM, it was the Chinese

companies with whom we do business. We hope to be able to win a few calls for ten-

dealing with freight transport, has entrusted Rail GD with adjustments on four locomotives leased for five years in the United States, as well as more in-depth repairs on a caboose used for work trains. For cement wagons, Rail GD is handling regular maintenance duties.

### A surprise for Minister of Employment, Kateri Champagne Jourdain

The arrival of the first passenger car of Tshiuetin Rail Transport, a company owned by the Innu of the Duplessis riding at the New Richmond rail shop, coincided with a visit by the Quebec Minister of Employment, Kateri Champagne Jourdain, to Rail GD. She was unaware of this synchronicity. She is Innu and also represents Duplessis in the National Assembly.

"She learned it when she got here. It's really a coinci-

dence. I just made sure the passenger car arrived while the minister was here. It (the unit to be repaired) arrived in New Richmond last night. The car was expected several days ago but the truck that transported it from the North Shore was delayed due to a little excess weight in thawing conditions on the roads," explains Joey Cyr.

Minister Champagne Jourdain, who was touring Gaspé since May 13 on behalf of her ministry, took the opportunity to talk about the importance of Tshiuetin Rail Transportation.

"Tshiuetin means 'north wind' in Innu. It has been the link between the community and the territory since its construction. Our railway also carries a large quantity of iron ore. This is a key link for us. It's a nice coincidence that I'm here for this arrival," said Minister Champagne Jourdain.

The Innu founded Tshiuetin Rail Transport in 2005 to take over from the mining firm IOC (Iron Ore Company of Canada) on part of the Sept-Îles-Schefferville route, precisely between Emeril Jonction and Schefferville, which covers 130 of the 357 miles of that network.

Since 2005, the Innu have ensured the operations of the passenger train service north of Sept-Îles, a responsibility held by IOC since the closure of the Schefferville mine in 1982.

Ore transport resumed from Schefferville in 2011 with the opening of two new iron mines.

The Sept-Îles to Schefferville line was built between 1951 and 1954.



The Member of the National Assembly for Bonaventure, Catherine Blouin; Quebec Minister of Employment, Kateri Champagne Jourdain; Rail GD president, Gilles Babin; and the company's Director General Joey Cyr, welcome the Tshiuetin Rail Transportation car to the New Richmond workshop.

They were both trucked between Sept-Îles and New Richmond, where the cars were put back on their bogies before entering the shop.

"The first car dates from 1951. It was built to last but, after 73 years, it needs to be given a little upgrade so that it is functional for 20 more years," explains Joey Cyr, general manager of Rail GD.

For three months, the New Richmond firm has also been working on the refurbishment of a new car for the Réseau de transport métropolitain (RTM) of Montreal, a first contract with this public company often referred to by its Exo brand.

The passenger car was involved in an incident, a collision with an electrically powered train pantograph damaging one of its upper ends even before it was put

manufacturer CRRC which mandated Rail GD for the repairs. Five workers from CRRC's China manufacturing shop are spending time at Rail GD for that contract.

### Lots of work ahead

The president of Rail GD, Gilles Babin, sees a very busy future for the firm he founded with Joey Cyr in 2011. The year 2023 was quiet because few contracts were awarded during the pandemic. Rail GD completed mandates between 2020 and 2022, notably for VIA Rail, signed before the COVID-19 crisis. Now, calls for tenders are running again, he notes.

"Contracts worth a quarter of a billion dollars (\$250 million) will be awarded between now and 2030 by

ders," states Mr. Babin.

He specified that, before long, Rail GD's staff will increase from 30 employees, its current level, to 50, which constituted the firm's staff during previous busy periods.

"We have a bank of résumés but we anticipate difficult recruitment years due to the labour shortage... We must train all the employees who join Rail GD," specifies Gilles Babin.

In addition to the Tshiuetin and Exo rail transport contracts, there are more modest mandates entrusted by the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie (SCFG) and with the owners of the cement cars used for hauling part of the production of the Port Daniel cement plant.

Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie (SCFG), a municipally controlled entity