

## SCFG tourist train put on hold for now

NELSON SERGERIE  
LOCAL JOURNALISM INITIATIVE

NEW RICHMOND - Still waiting for a response to a funding request from the Quebec government, the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie has temporarily put its tourist train project with automotive passenger cars on hold.

The Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie (SCFG) had a purchase option that cost it \$12,000 per month, with a Vermont company, to acquire 12 automotive cars to develop a multi-purpose tourist train, a project valued at nearly \$15 million, including equipment modernization.

“We are forced to put the project on hold, which we had submitted following a market study in the spring. Unfortunately, we were unable to secure the financial package to



The Vermont automotive cars were initially slated for a commuter service that never panned out.

Photo: Green Energy Times

make the acquisition before the end of the purchase option, which terminated at the end of September and which we had extended by one month to give the two levels of government time to analyze our project,” says SCFG president Éric

Dubé.

The transporter could have borrowed the amount to proceed with the purchase but, without financial assistance, it was too risky.

“We haven’t had a negative response even though they are

analyzing it and seeing how to secure something because there is no regular program for our project. It required a longer ordeal to secure the financing. I understand that the economic context of the Quebec government meant that it didn’t move quickly to say ‘yes,’” explains Mr. Dubé.

However, the project is not dead. “We’re going to work on something else this winter. We still have the Amiral train and, if we can secure funding, will we have the opportunity to find automotive cars? The project remains on the drawing board. After investing so much money to rehabilitate the rail between Matapédia and Gaspé, I don’t see why we couldn’t land a tourist train project,” he says.

The automotive cars required a year of work before being operational, including adding toilets in the cars. They

were originally used on a Texas commuter service before being acquired by Vermont-based AllEarth Rail.

The SCFG market study that was tabled over the spring was linked to Percé. It would be difficult to run a tourist train in 2025 between Port-Daniel-Gascons and Matapédia.

“Would there be tourism potential between Matapédia and Port-Daniel-Gascons? The study didn’t confirm it for the first year,” Mr. Dubé points out. The Amiral train could be an option, but it hasn’t been operational for a decade. It was essentially used between Gaspé and Percé in 2013 and 2014, except for a few excursions in the Bay of Chaleur area.

“We were banking a lot on our project then (over the spring) so, we haven’t invested

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a lot of money to re-evaluate this (Amiral) equipment. It’s going to be part of the scenarios we’re going to study this winter. We’re lucky, it (the Amiral train) is in New Richmond. We have a company that’s capable of doing that (repairing it, Rail GD). When we know more about what needs to be done on it and the direction we’re going to take with the project, we’ll be able to come back and explain it further,” stresses Éric Dubé.

“We’re giving ourselves time,” he concludes.

### AllEarth Rail equipment in good shape

The AllEarth Rail automotive cars were refurbished in Montreal at the beginning of the 2000s and have been kept inside a warehouse since that time.

Luc Lévesque, the SCFG’s director general, saw the machines in 2023 and affirmed that the equipment is in a very good state. Their refurbishment at the beginning of the 2000s was thorough, as the wiring and the mechanics were upgraded.

The purchase option involves 12 Budd cars.

The Amiral train consists of four passenger cars and two power-generating cars. The locomotive of that train was returned to New Richmond seven years ago and assigned to the SCFG freight trains.

Having been vandalized on occasion, the five units, namely four passenger cars and one of the power generating cars, were transported from Gaspé to New Richmond at the end of May 2024. They had remained stranded in Gaspé since 2014, when the line was put in a dormant state in March 2015 by then Quebec Transport Minister Robert Poëti. A rockslide between Port Daniel and Gascons also contributed to leaving the cars in Gaspé.

Transports Québec, which acquired the Matapédia to Gaspé line between March and May 2015, waited until May 2017 before announcing that the whole line would be upgraded.

In March 2015, Minister Poëti offered the mayors of Rocher-Percé MRC the possibility of dismantling the line and turning it into a cycling trail, which was refused.

(With contribution from Gilles Gagné)

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