



A CN train en route to Quebec

Photo: N. Sergerie

## End of the conflict at CN: The Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie is relieved

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NEW RICHMOND - The president of the Société du chemin de fer de la Gaspésie (SCFG) expressed relief that the Canadian National (CN) labour dispute was short-lived.

CN declared a lockout at midnight on August 22, which was lifted about 18 hours later following the federal government's intervention in the conflict.

"It's a great relief for all of our customers, our employees, and for us since our operations were not disrupted," says SCFG president Éric Dubé.

On August 22, cars were still being transported to Matapédia, awaiting pickup by CN to be taken west. "I imagine that today (August 23), we will know exactly when CN will come. Will there be a pickup at the end of the day in Matapédia? I hope so. We will know during the day. By tomorrow (August 24), everything will be back to normal," Mr. Dubé hopes.

Since August 15, the company has accelerated operations to ship as many cars as possible to Matapédia so that they could be picked up by CN before rail traffic was interrupted.

"Will there be a day or two delay for the cars stuck in Matapédia or Mont-Joli? It's a lesser evil," he says.

The impacts for the SCFG will be minimal. "It will just have thrown our operating structure out of balance. Last

weekend, we had people work overtime in anticipation of the conflict but, no, we are very happy that it only lasted one day," Mr. Dubé says with relief.

Several economic and political players are now questioning whether railways should be declared an essential service. Mr. Dubé remains cautious on that point.

"Today, when it takes the economy of an entire country – and I do not want to get involved in negotiations between unions and employers – but in cases like that, there are things that are essential for the country. We were talking about \$350 million in losses per day of the strike. Taking the economy of an entire country... Yes, there may be things that should be reviewed," analyzes the president.

The company had planned to reassign its train personnel to maintenance activities on the railway during the lockout.

The two main railway companies in the country, CN and CPKC, transport \$1 billion worth of goods every day. Ottawa's intervention, which on August 23 was about to impose binding arbitration on the parties and the request to the Canada Industrial Relations Board to order the two railways to resume operations under expired collective agreements until new agreements are reached, led CN to backtrack and launch a back-to-work plan.