

The arrival of the first train in Gaspé might only happen in early 2027

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GASPÉ - The Gaspé riding Member of the National Assembly (MNA), Stéphane Sainte-Croix, makes no secret of the fact that the first train may not arrive at the Gaspé station in December 2026, as previously announced in June 2023.

The last of the four major calls for tenders for the railway refurbishment between Port Daniel-Gascons and Gaspé, which were launched in March, opened on September 18. The announcement for that stretch was first made in November 2023, by Premier François Legault during his visit to the Gaspé Peninsula.

However, according to the Quebec government's electronic tendering site the contract has not yet been awarded.

The estimate indicates that the expected duration of the contract without options is 28 months, which means the deadline is February 2027.

"Following the opening, we are faced with the possibility that we will push back the agreed schedule. We will see with the selected bidders the state of play along the way but, indeed, we may have a challenge in terms of the schedule for the rest of things," says Stéphane Sainte-Croix. "It is hasty to agree on the schedule, considering the discussions that will take place



Photo: N. Sergerie

with the selected company, but it (a delay) is a possibility," he adds.

The commitment to refurbish the railroad to Gaspé remains strong. "Our objective has not changed: ensuring the complete connection of the Gaspé Peninsula railway to Gaspé remains a priority for all elected officials in the region and for mobilizing the government. That has not changed," assures the MNA.

His colleague from Bonaventure is a little more optimistic. "When I ask questions (to the Ministry of Transport), they tell me it's possible," affirms Catherine Blouin.

After nine deadlines for the opening of bids for the call for tenders launched on March 21, the envelopes for two proposals received by the Ministry of

Transport were opened on September 18. Pomerleau is requesting \$258 million, while Partenariat Ferroviaire Gaspésie is proposing \$286 million to carry out the projects in the plans and specifications.

The work involves repairing two bridges in Gascons, the long bridge between Gascons and Newport, and another such structure in Newport, as well as the one in Douglstown at the mouth of the Saint-Jean River. Additionally, one of the two bridges between Grande-Rivière and Sainte-Thérèse-de-Gaspé must be replaced and a retaining wall in Pabos Mills is part of the bid.

Quebec announced \$872 million to rehabilitate the rail between Matapédia and Gaspé on June 27, 2023. The section between Caplan and Port-Daniel-Gascons must be func-

tional at the end of the current year.

Exploramer's expansion still assessed by the Quebec government

Meanwhile, despite comments on social media to the effect that the additional aid requested to build the shark pool at the Exploramer museum in Sainte-Anne-des-Monts had been rejected, the MNA for Gaspé says that is not the case.

"The file remains at the same level. We are still waiting for the update of the reviewed and corrected project in terms of the business plan and new financial assistance to be received," mentions Mr. Sainte-Croix.

According to him, communications are still happening, and the documents are pend-

ing.

The MNA hopes that this matter will be resolved quickly in order to not compromise the 2025 tourist season.

"Haute-Gaspésie cannot afford to lose its economic assets. This is an important one for the tourism industry. We hope to reach an agreement soon on the revision or maintenance of the assistance already granted. That is our wish," he adds.

Quebec had already granted \$11 million of the initial \$18 million for the renovation and construction of a pavilion dedicated to the museum's St. Lawrence sharks.

In March, after a meeting with stakeholders from Haute-Gaspésie, Stéphane Sainte-Croix mentioned that the project had changed significantly, as the aquarium expanded substantially without having previously notified the ministerial authorities, increasing the cost of the aquarium from \$2.7 million to \$12.7 million, "an increase of 370%, this is not normal," adds the MNA.

In this context, the MNA added that the Quebec government could not assume the new project alone.

Exploramer is facing cost overruns of around \$6.8 million. The museum has indicated it is prepared to make an additional effort by borrowing an extra \$1 million.