

Provincial cutbacks: Rail budget secured, according to the Minister of Transport

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GASPÉ - The \$871 million set aside to refurbish the rail between Matapédia and Gaspé are protected despite the budget cuts underway with the Quebec government to address the \$11 billion deficit in government coffers.

This is what assured the Minister of Transport, Geneviève Guilbault, who was in Gaspé on December 10 as part of the announcement of the new version of the Regional Air Access Program (PAAR).

“The money is there. The announcements have been made. We are working on it,” replied the minister (of Transport) when asked about the potential impact the tightening of public finances could have on the railway refurbishment.

“We are currently working on the last section between Port-Daniel-Gascons and Gaspé. There have been calls for tenders that were made recently, that are much higher than what we thought. We will have to redo the process, but yes, things are moving forward,” says Ms. Guilbault.

The minister is referring to two of the four calls for tenders for the last section, which are still being analyzed despite the envelopes being opened at the end of the summer.

The firm Pomerleau is asking for \$258 million, and Partenariat Ferroviaire Gaspésie is suggesting \$286 million to carry out the projects within the estimate.

The work involves repairing two bridges in Gascons, one between Gascons and Newport, another in Newport, as well as one in Douglstown. In addition, one of the two bridges between Grande-Rivière and Sainte-Thérèse-de-Gaspé must be replaced.

A retaining wall in Pabos Mills is also part of the bid. The contract for the other revised call for tenders to repair various railway structures has still not been awarded either, even though the tender envelopes were opened on September 18.

The sites targeted are a small bridge in Pabos Mills, the Grand Pabos River bridge, the Pabos River bridge, the Barachois bridge and the Route 132 road bridge in Barachois.

The ministry indicated that the contract was estimated at more than \$50 million. Pomerleau submitted the lowest proposal on August 28, in the amount of \$79 million. Hamel Construction, the only other bidder, is asking for \$83.8 million instead.

Section two, between Caplan and Port-Daniel-Gascons, is expected to be put into service in the spring.