

# AMT's Rigaud/Dorion line gets funding pittance



**So far so good: The engineer at the throttle of Monday's 6:55 a.m. train is in an upbeat mood after news the AMT will receive substantial funding for infrastructure improvements. (Gazette, Jim Duff)**

**VAUDREUIL-SOULANGES** - After a brutal winter that saw punctuality drop to an historic low, the Metropolitan Transportation Agency is again holding out hope for disgruntled rail commuters on the Rigaud/Dorion line. Of the \$700 million earmarked for improvements to public transit in the Montreal Metropolitan Community (MMC), the AMT will receive \$264 million, including \$88.8 million for new locomotives and passenger cars and \$48.4 to upgrade the maintenance sheds.

But just \$3.1 million has been budgeted for improvements to the Dorion/Rigaud line and AMT spokesperson Marie Gendron said the focus will be on revamping platforms and rails from Montreal West to Lucien L'Allier. Ironically, the two lines with the greatest percentage of breakdowns and delays are the two smallest recipients. The Deux-Montagnes line gets \$3.4 million, compared to \$19 million for Blainville-St. Jerome and, \$7.8 for Saint-Hilaire. Gendron confirmed that this year's punctuality record was even worse than last year's, with one week in January recording a 76-percent punctuality rate, worse than the previous low the second week of January, 2008. Despite the delays and breakdowns, ridership on the Rigaud/Dorion/Montreal line was up 3.34 percent January to

January, with 15,460 people a day taking the train.

AMT president Joël Gauthier has cautioned commuters not to expect miracles with the arrival of 16 new locomotives and 40 new railcars in 2010, since they'll still be running on rails owned by CP and CN and at the mercy of freight schedules. In response to rider complaints that they couldn't take advantage of the 50-percent discount on March passes, the AMT last week announced the ticket windows at Central Station would be open weekends throughout March and April.

To get their cash back, riders may buy their monthly passes at any ticket machine, then show up at the Central Station window before April 30 with a rebate coupon, pass and receipt, or buy their passes at the Central Station, Lucien L'Allier or Vendôme ticket booths and get the rebate on their credit or debit cards.

The flurry of improvement announcements and the rebate extension were prompted by pressure from MMC - which represents 65 Greater Montreal municipalities - to get a handle on this past winter's delays and cancellations.

Also high on the MMC agenda is the threat of a \$65 million class-action lawsuit filed by Pincourt resident Yves Boyer on behalf of some 46,000 users of the AMT's Montreal/Rigaud and Montreal/Two Mountains lines.

Meanwhile, Ottawa has opened its wallet for major mass-transit improvements in both British Columbia and Ontario in recent weeks, including the 11-kilometre Vancouver Evergreen Transit Line connecting Burnaby, Port Moody and Coquitlam.

Using the same technology as the SkyTrain, the \$1.4 billion extension will be fully integrated into the existing fast-rail system and regional bus networks.

In Toronto, a joint federal-provincial announcement in January unveiled a \$500 million investment fund to improve the GO Transit system.

Former CP Rail employee Don Whiting said he was trying to understand how it is possible to spend \$500 million for an already great service, when Montreal is grappling with a failing system.

"Here we are just trying to grapple with what we've got and then you get Harper handing out money for them to make it even better," said Whiting.

"They are getting all this money and here we are not seeing anything being directed at the AMT to improve equipment and the other infrastructure."

Meanwhile, Boyer's class-action lawsuit even has the support of public-transit advocates like Hudson's Timothy Mathieu.

"Go for it," Mathieu said. "I think the problem with Canadians is that we are too passive, we are like sheep, we accept everything the government throws down at us, and we don't say a think, it's about time.

"We shouldn't be putting up with this," Mathieu added. "We have snow in all parts of the world, why doesn't it work here? It's not because of a lack of money for servicing the equipment, that's just a lie, a fabrication. It comes down to where you want to put your money and how you want to manage it, it's all about that.

"The CP never had problems, their machines broke down too, but they never had problems, they fixed it, they would foresee the problems."