

After the Tragedy: The Lac-Mégantic Rail Bypass Project



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The Tragedy

Aerial view of Lac-Mégantic, a few days after the railway tragedy of July 6, 2013

Research Mandate and Objectives

Regional public health support project

Document the psychological and social impacts associated with rail transportation ten years after the Lac-Mégantic rail disaster:

- Document perceptions regarding the living environment, safety, and technological and environmental risks;
- Document psychological and social health of the population;
- Identify emerging issues affecting specific population groups.

Mixed-methods research design

Quantitative data:

- Web survey – Le Granit Regional County Municipality (RCM) and the city of Farnham (control group)
- January to March 2024
- 1951 completed surveys

Qualitative data:

- Semi-structured interviews – Le Granit Regional County Municipality (RCM)
- December 2023 to May 2024
- 68 interviews

Impact assessment of the bypass rail project

2014: Feasibility study

2016: Project notice to the Quebec Ministry of Environment

2017: Public consultation on five railway redevelopment scenarios, including *statu quo* and enhanced *status quo* (First BAPE)

2018: Identification of the route alignment – impact assessment

2019: Public consultation on the railway route (Second BAPE)



Credit: BAPE, 2019

Two overlapping assessment processes

2019: Beginning of the Federal impact assessment process

2020: Authorization of the projet by the Government of Quebec

2021: Negotiations with property owners affected by expropriation

2022: Hydrogeological study

2026: Assessment by the Federal authority to come in June

Citizen participation in a post-disaster context

Perceived lack of transparency

- Limited access to critical information and clear explanations

Shortcomings in the modalities of public participation

- Meaningful dialogue no longer possible
- Language barriers

Consequences:

- Misinformation
- Sense of powerlessness
- Distrust
- Lack of sensitivity

Conclusion

- Post-disaster context required communication strategies that are frequent, proactive, and transparent.
- Dedicated spaces for dialogue should have been maintained within the Federal process.
- Feeling of insecurity that affects about half (50.3%) of the population of Lac-Mégantic shapes the social and psychological impacts of the project.

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