



LOCOMOTION

RailPower says its green technology is on track

BY LAURA BOGOMOLNY

Relaxing at home on his Vancouver Island farm, Jim Maier serves the hungry locals lined up at the organic café he and his wife own. “We think we bake the best organic bread on all of the island,” he boasts. But the 55-year-old Maier, who has attempted retirement on three different occasions, doesn’t spend much time tending his vegetable garden these days.

Instead, the professionally trained engineer, who spent eight years as general manager of GE Transportation Systems, and another four as commercial director at Bombardier, is attempting to revolutionize the railway industry. And as presi-

dent and CEO of RailPower Technologies Corp. (TSX: P), a young Vancouver-based company that has developed the world’s first hybrid-electric switcher locomotive, he seems poised to do it.

Switcher locomotives are critical to the railway industry. When a train rolls into a rail yard, switchers—commonly called “goats” by industry insiders—take over. The goats push and pull train cars from one track to the next, helping to break up rail cars and then connect them to others bound for the same destination. An integral part of rail yard logistics, some 10,000 switchers are in use across North America today. About half are operated by long- and short-haul railroads, while the remaining 5,000 are put to work by port authorities,

oil refineries, chemical plants, grain terminals or the military.

Despite their importance, most switchers are between 40 and 50 years old and are desperately in need of an overhaul. The majority were once mainline locomotives, and travelled hundreds of thousands of miles before being demoted to switcher status. Powered by cranky old diesel engines that can be difficult to start, especially in cold weather, goats tend to spend much of their time idling. An average switcher churns through approximately 1.1 kilolitres of fuel a day, and spews tons of greenhouse gases and particulate matter into the atmosphere. They are also extremely noisy.

Tough new regulations introduced by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency,