

The Address—Mr. Basford

and Vancouver to deal with specific urban issues that are of particular concern to particular areas; issues such as housing, community rehabilitation, federal buildings and land use, transportation, harbour and airport activities. The many strands of federal urban concern include transportation—airports, harbours, urban transportation systems and, in a program to be introduced into this House shortly, the relocation of railway tracks away from downtown areas except for tracks and facilities which can be used for new or improved modes of urban transportation.

The Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand) and I jointly announced the federal intention for this new program and we saw it as a major contribution to the rebirth and revitalization of cities and towns alike. The legislation in essence, Mr. Speaker, will enable the federal government to come to the assistance of local governments and provinces by requiring—and up until now we have had no power to so require—the railways to move their yards, tracks, stations, etc. if that is in the best over-all urban interests of the city or area concerned. There is no federal or any other power at the moment to require anything of the railroads in this respect. The preparation, introduction and passage of such legislation is, in my view, a matter of urgency and priority. Since our announcement, widespread interest has been expressed in cities from one end of Canada to the other, in letters to me and applications to the Canadian Transport Commission in Edmonton, Calgary, Winnipeg, St. Thomas, Ontario, White Rock, Moncton, Montreal and many others.

The amendments to the Railway Act which parliament will be asked to approve with regard to railroad relocation will also provide for expenditures on building and improving grade crossings across the country to be almost doubled. From my experience in this House, I know that many hon. members worry about this both from the point of view of urban development and safety. The strands of urban concern include housing and community planning programs of this government, administered through Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

I should like now to devote the rest of my remarks to the programs of that corporation. Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation has been one of the great institutions of the federal government since the Second World War; it has been the builder, the facilitator, the catalyst and often the goad in assuring for Canada a supply of housing that has put this country in a far better position regarding homes for its citizens than most other countries. It is moving now onto new ground and, as I have made very clear to the corporation, it cannot any longer be simply a banking institution or a lending institution for the building industry. It has moved far from concentrating on supporting the building of middle class housing. In recent years, it has moved from having to treat housing as an economic commodity and housing policy as an economic stimulus to be turned up or turned down according to prevailing economic winds in the country.

The corporation, under this government, is the instrument of federal social policy in the field of housing and community planning. This changing role—the process of adapting itself to the changing needs of the country—has not been an easy one. A major reorganization of the corporation's management structure, which will involve

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the appointment of new senior personnel, is now well under way. In terms of the activity of the corporation, its outlook, and its views, it must as a matter of social policy, be on the lead edge of development.

The new direction of the corporation—and of federal policy—puts housing within its community context and that community context within a philosophy that says adequate homes in a good environment are a social right of Canadians. We have adopted a basic principle that says it is a fundamental right of Canadians, regardless of where they live or their economic circumstances, to enjoy adequate shelter at reasonable cost.

This fundamental right may be self-evident to some, but no Canadian government has yet explicitly and publicly accepted it, with all that it implies, as the cornerstone of federal housing policy. I have said this since I have been minister and I repeat it now because I think it is important. I must add that the realization of that right—the enforcement of that right—cannot be achieved by the federal government alone or any local government alone; to assure the enforceability of that right will require the combined resources of all governments in Canada working in concert with the industry and with individual Canadians.

The new amendments to the National Housing Act, which I shall be introducing in this House very shortly, are an affirmation of this principle. Our first goal is that there be enough new units and improved and repaired units, in sufficient variety, for Canadians. Toward that end, we are building houses in record numbers of units. In 1971, more than 233,000 units were started in Canada, a record to that time. For 1972, the number will leap to about 250,000 and we foresee a strong pace of construction through 1973.

The unprecedented volume of house construction in the past two years assures that we will far exceed the target of one million new units set for the five-year period ending in 1974. Related to the matter of availability of housing is the question of land prices and planned urban development. It is apparent that the private market does not always function well in the development and opening up of new land. The federal government will provide the initiative and assistance to allow all levels of government to participate in the land market in a concerted way. Through the public assembly of land and the development of new communities, pressure will be exerted to reduce the cost of residential land. For this purpose the federal government, and I will be setting this out at the federal-provincial conference in a few days time, under agreed guidelines for urban development will make a commitment at that conference to make available to provinces and municipalities not less than \$100 million a year for at least the next five years for purposes of land assembly and new communities.

• (1420)

Before I leave the subject of the availability of housing, I ought to mention that it is our intention to re-introduce the new financial mechanisms legislation that was introduced in the previous parliament. Hon. members who were here are familiar with that legislation. There will be some minor amendments to it. The original provisions