

Western Grain Transportation Act

statistical justification that the railways are always looking for excuses to seek abandonment of their branch lines.

Who loses in that kind of situation, Mr. Speaker? The community itself loses. Most of our prairie communities are dependent for their very survival on these branch lines, but when it comes to a situation where the railways are able to argue that the line is no longer economical, then it is only a matter of time before the CTC gives its okay to abandon it. Once that happens there is no reason for the country elevator to continue operation, so it goes and takes a handful of jobs with it. After that there is no grain traffic to the elevators. Then the implement dealer, the grocery store and cafes see their business dry up. Once the decline starts there is not much to stop it. But that is not where it ends. It is common sense that if you increase the heavy truck traffic on a road, you are going to increase the maintenance costs of that road as well. Who is going to pay for that road maintenance? Not the railways, not the federal Government. It is the rural municipalities and the provinces that end up paying for it.

Mr. Speaker, I have been working for the people in the Fisher Branch, Broad Valley area of my constituency to save the CN branch line from Grosse Isle to Fisher Branch. The hearings were held last October. Then on March 17 of this year, the Canadian Transport Commission ruled in favour of CN's bid to abandon the line. We appealed that decision to the review committee of the CTC, but on August 22 of this year, we learned that the review committee too had decided in favour of CN. We are now at the last stage open to us to stop this abandonment; we have appealed the decision to the Privy Council.

One of the important points we raised with the CTC, Mr. Speaker, was the highway construction and maintenance costs that would have to be picked up by the Province and the rural municipalities. The Province of Manitoba estimated that if that branch line were abandoned, an additional \$8 million in costs would accrue to the Province alone as a result of the increased traffic on the highway system. Eight million dollars, Mr. Speaker, and that is only one branch line.

In the State of Iowa, grain used to be shipped primarily by rail, as it is shipped in our own prairie Provinces. But then the railways started to abandon the branch lines in Iowa, and grain transportation moved from rail to road. The result of that, Mr. Speaker, was that the State of Iowa found its roads and highways deteriorating under the traffic of heavy trucks at a rate two to three times faster than the State could afford to repair them. What did they do? Did they encourage more branch line abandonment? No, they did not. They decided to introduce a program to subsidize existing railway branch lines in order to keep as much of the grain as possible moving by rail. And you know, Mr. Speaker, they found that to be less expensive than paying for the extra highway maintenance and road repair. Iowa State learned its lesson, Mr. Speaker. It is now warning other jurisdictions not to permit branch lines to be abandoned and grain traffic transferred from rail to road.

The other big loser in this kind of situation, Mr. Speaker, is the prairie Wheat Pools. The pools, owned by farmers them-

selves, now own most of the existing country elevator system. When branch lines are abandoned and grain delivery is consolidated into large inland grain terminals, the pools will lose the capital they have invested in the country elevators. They do not stand to gain very much at all from selling the elevators or from scrapping them. At the same time, they will have to invest incredible amounts to construct inland grain terminals themselves if they hope to be able to carry on competing with the prairie grain companies.

Let me wrap up, Mr. Speaker, by saying that without this amendment, the Bill we are debating will do much to encourage branch line abandonment and, as a result, the deterioration of our grain delivery system. Railways are the most efficient way to move heavy loading bulk goods like grain. Without this amendment, this Bill will undoubtedly lead to more branch line abandonment and elevator consolidation. Rather than saving money or providing for a more efficient delivery system, it could very well increase the total cost of getting grain from the field to port. The losers there would be the producers, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Bert Hargrave (Medicine Hat): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in this trucking amendment, and I do so with considerable pleasure in that I follow the last three speakers from the Conservative Party, the Hon. Member for Provencher (Mr. Epp), the Hon. Member for Lisgar (Mr. Murta) and the Hon. Member for Red Deer (Mr. Towers). Those three Members are very knowledgeable about the importance of the trucking of grain throughout the western Prairies. As far as I am concerned, they are exceedingly knowledgeable about its special importance to the livestock sector and that of feed grains for cattle and hogs. That is an enormously important industry in western Canada. That has been overlooked to a great extent in this legislation.

I am speaking in total opposition to Motion No. 34 in the name of the Hon. Member for Regina West (Mr. Benjamin). While I have great respect for his tenacity and the service he has given to the committee, especially when we were travelling, on this particular amendment he is way out to lunch. He is talking nonsense. I have to say it as bluntly as that. It is regrettable that this amendment would negate our, and I emphasize "our", Conservative committee stage amendment, already agreed to, which would allow the Administrator to enter into agreements to provide for the movement of grain by motor vehicle transport where in his opinion such agreements would be in the best interests of grain producers. That is nothing but plain common sense. It will certainly improve the Bill, in fact it already has in that it is now part of the Bill. We should never, never take it out.

The thrust of Bill C-155 is to facilitate the transportation, shipping and handling of western grain. That is the purpose, and surely our amendment goes right to the heart of fulfilling that purpose. Our amendment simply says that, where appropriate, trucks be used in the best interests of grain producers. It allows the natural and most efficient use of a grain transportation system which is most efficient, especially for the short haul. Surely that is where trucking comes into its own. I would