

Rail Service

equipment, the construction of which will create approximately 1,500 man-years of work spread out over a three-year period.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Lang: Therefore, Mr. Speaker, this initiative by the federal government is not just of benefit to the future of railway passenger transportation in this country, but will have a positive effect on employment as well. This is but one of a number of steps which have been taken since the announcement in January, 1976, of our new rail passenger policy, and certainly the new equipment, efficient and attractive, will help VIA in the improvement of rail passenger service in this country. The creation of VIA itself was a major step in this regard and, of course, the final plan of the CTC which was one of the ongoing steps outlining the kinds of rail passenger service which should exist in Canada over time.

This announcement carries out the fifth recommendation of ten of the Canadian Transport Commission in their report, in that it will be providing the new equipment which will be efficient and attractive and allow for better service in this country. I believe the Canadian Transport Commission did a very good job in this report. With its flexibility and the scheme it has laid out, it will allow VIA to get on with the vigorous job of improving rail passenger service in this country. I very much believe, as does the government, in the future of rail passenger service and the need to attract passengers to the trains, as well as the complementary use of buses and the fact that trains must be run sensibly and efficiently and not in a way to interfere with the development of better bus service.

I am delighted that in the House today, watching these proceedings, is Mr. Frank Roberts, the new president of VIA Rail Canada. He is vigorous and enthusiastic, and I am sure he will lead VIA Rail in the development of a better rail passenger service in this country. I would ask that all members join me in wishing him well in this great work.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Don Mazankowski (Vegreville): Mr. Speaker, naturally we on this side of the House welcome the statement made by the minister this afternoon. If we are going to upgrade and rejuvenate rail passenger service in this country, we certainly require suitable and satisfactory equipment. The minister indicated this new equipment is designed to achieve potential speeds of up to 125 miles an hour. While that is not quite as fast as government jets, we hope that cabinet ministers will seize upon the opportunity to use this high-speed ground transportation when it becomes effective to replace some of the inordinate use of government jets which has plagued this country. I am sure that would meet the approval of many members of the House and, indeed, the public at large.

This is another in a series of announcements of intent by the government. We have had many. The minister seems to seize very readily upon these announcements in an attempt to achieve maximum political benefit. These many statements of intent really amount to a stalling procedure in the expeditious

[Mr. Lang.]

development of the Windsor-Quebec corridor. When speaking of intent, we on this side of the House, and Canadians in general, are well aware of the lofty promises made in the 1974 election campaign with regard to the expenditure of vast amounts of money, particularly on the urban transportation system. I believe something in the order of \$290 million was promised at that time for urban transportation.

● (1532)

When I speak of attempts by the minister to maximize political benefit from these announcements, I am reminded of the fact that almost every time the minister goes out west for a meeting he talks about the \$100 million he has announced on a dozen occasions for the purpose of upgrading western rail services. It is not that we do not appreciate it, but there are limitations upon the number of times we should be hearing these words. I was talking about the western rail system. I realize most of the money is being spent on upgrading the transportation system for the movement of grain, but it is still all part of the western rail transportation system. It is interesting that Mr. Hall should have recommended expenditures in the order of \$450 million.

We also remember the 1975 announcement, repeated and reaffirmed in 1976, which called for the expenditure of \$100 million over five years to purchase rail commuter equipment. Just last week it seemed this program had been scuttled. It had never really been implemented. The minister talked about the reorganization of this program. He hijacked \$130 million from the railway relocation and crossings program and another \$100 million from the commuter services program, and all this has not gone down well into the provinces. The fact is that no new funds have really been made available for the program. Yet the original announcement was greeted with much fanfare, although it has turned out to be, once again, merely an announcement of intent not followed by action.

When we review the history of the commitments made in connection with the Quebec-Windsor corridor, we find that the first announcement was made back in May of 1976. At that time some \$30 million was to be provided by way of a grant. By December of 1976 it was elicited, in reply to questions in the House, that construction was to begin by the spring of 1977. By that time no action had been taken.

On May 25, in response to the hon. member for Dartmouth-Halifax East, the minister stated that decisions on tenders would be taken by the end of the summer, but up to that time nothing had been done. Now comes the announcement that the government is committing \$24 million toward the purchase of \$90 million worth of equipment. I am not sure whether this \$24 million is part of the original \$30 million which was allocated, nor am I sure where the other \$66 million will come from. Will VIA Canada have to generate that sum from its own resources, or will it be provided in the estimates? The minister may be able to clear up this question later.

Our party is naturally committed to supporting and improving rail passenger service in this country. It is timely to take such an approach, and there is no question there is wide public