

Oral Questions

I have no doubt—and almost everyone agreed—that additional cars will be needed at some point in the next few years. The question that is at issue at the moment is whether that order needs to be made exactly now. That is a complicated question having regard to the efficiency with which the equipment is used.

In the years between 1974 and 1977, enough improvements were made in the way cars are handled that we achieved 3.3 more turnarounds out of every hopper car and boxcar in the system, and we were able to carry 34 per cent more grain with no increase in equipment. There is under way at present an intensive analysis, on a systems management basis, of whether we can do better with the equipment we have. If we can, we may indeed have enough equipment for the grain which can be hauled and offered to the market next year.

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[Translation]

URBAN AFFAIRS**INQUIRY WHETHER MUNICIPALITIES' REQUESTS FOR ASSISTANCE WILL BE CONSIDERED**

Mr. Adrien Lambert (Bellechasse): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of Public Works. I congratulate him for his appointment because we shall often have to work together and I hope we understand each other. I ask him this question as minister responsible for urban affairs because that department will remain in existence until March 31, 1979 if the right hon. Prime Minister's release is accurate, and I hope so. In an answer he gave on November 14 to an hon. member, the minister said the following:

I understand that municipal incentive grants and sewage treatment programs will continue until December 31, 1978—

Can the minister tell the House whether the applications of municipalities introduced before December 31 will be considered as being part of the program which will not be terminated.

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Urban Affairs): Mr. Speaker, the answer is yes. However, to take advantage of federal funds the municipalities will have to have their projects approved by provincial authorities. I would also like to thank the hon. member for his good wishes.

INQUIRY WHETHER INFORMATION IS AVAILABLE CONCERNING MUNICIPALITIES' ASSISTANCE PROGRAM

Mr. Adrien Lambert (Bellechasse): I have a supplementary question, Mr. Speaker. The minister also made the following statement:

—the decision which was taken was that the community services grants program will commence as of January, 1979.

Could the minister tell the House whether documentation is now available so that we can inform the municipalities which

[Mr. Lang.]

would like to take advantage of this program, and if not, could the minister tell us when such literature will be available?

Hon. André Ouellet (Minister of Public Works and Minister of State for Urban Affairs): Mr. Speaker, we have already sent literature to this effect to hon. members when we announced the program. Now that we know exactly the costs and the content of this program, I will be happy to table an information paper on this program tomorrow, at the committee where my estimates will be studied.

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● (1432)

[English]

AIRPORTS**AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT ON AIRPORT SITE CAPITALIZATION**

Mr. Sinclair Stevens (York-Simcoe): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Transport, who perhaps has received one of the severest reprimands any accountant can give, in the sense that the Auditor General chose to qualify his report respecting the airport revolving fund under the supervision of the minister.

In connection with the comment of the Auditor General on the Pickering airport site capitalization amounting to something over \$54 million, would the minister indicate if the department will accept the advice of the Auditor General and in future cease to capitalize these development costs?

Hon. Otto E. Lang (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I will be reflecting on the correct way to handle the Pickering site as a site in addition to the whole question of it as an item in the accounts. I think hon. members should recognize that it was a somewhat exceptional circumstance, in that we fully intended to move ahead with airport construction, in which case the handling of the amount involved perhaps would have been unexceptional.

As a result of the provincial decision, the province, in effect, selected the site for us: they asked us to build the airport at Pickering. When they disengaged themselves from the exercise and stopped the airport from going ahead, obviously we were left with an investment in land which had been intended for a purpose and which now is not being used for that purpose. This will lead us to reflect on the whole question of how we deal with the land as an item in the accounts.

Mr. Stevens: Mr. Speaker, perhaps the Minister of Transport overlooked the fact the Auditor General, in making his stiff comment concerning this transaction, pointed out that it was a federal cabinet decision to defer indefinitely the Pickering airport development.

In view of the answer which the minister just gave, would he indicate when in fact they intend to charge, as an expense, these capitalized items which have built up? It is a major item. Since they are simply for the development of a site which may or may not be developed, surely there should be a charge