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TRANSPORT—INQUIRY AS TO ACTION TO PREVENT CLOSING OF RAILWAY STATIONS IN WESTERN CANADA

Mr. Bill Knight (Assiniboia): Mr. Speaker, on January 8 I raised a question with the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand) and was appalled to find that he did not have an answer, and even seemed to lack any knowledge of the subject. In the interests of the House, I wish to raise the question again tonight. Mine was a supplementary question and appears at page 41 of *Hansard* as follows:

Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Minister of Transport. Can the minister inform the House whether his department is looking into the possibility of postponing the 1975 date for rail line abandonment, in conjunction with the problem raised by the hon. member for Mackenzie?

Mr. Speaker, may I inform the Minister of Transport that in western Canada there are thousands of miles of rail lines for which in the 1960s both the publicly-owned and the privately-owned Canadian railways applied for abandonment. In 1965 a moratorium was placed on those applications to abandon rail lines and branch lines. That moratorium runs out on January 1, 1975, and the applications are still with the Canadian Transport Commission. That is a fundamental question faced by western producers in terms of transport. We do not need more statements.

The Speech from the Throne outlines the idea of a conference on western Canadian problems. We need a clear statement as to whether the government contemplates an alternative for those farmers who, if the lines are abandoned, will have to haul their commodities farther if they are to meet the demand of international markets for their goods.

May I point a few things out to the minister and to the new parliamentary secretary, whom I congratulate on his appointment. I am sure he will attempt to do a good job. May I point out some facts relating to my constituency, Assiniboia. The two railways have applied to abandon 650 miles of track. The abandonment can become effective after 1975 when the moratorium is lifted and the Canadian Transport Commission allows it.

During the past ten years, on average more than 22.5 million bushels of grain each year have been carried over these tracks. That amount of grain would have to be trucked. If that were to happen, about 11.7 million bushels of elevator capacity would be closed down. As elevators close, other farm services will disappear such as fertilizer and lumber supplies, and so on. Other farm services would be curtailed. You would see fewer stores, service stations, recreational facilities, and so on. Fewer amenities will be provided in small communities.

More than 5,100 farmers in Assiniboia alone would be forced to haul their grain over longer distances in larger trucks. Coupled with that would be extra wear and tear on the grid road and municipal road systems resulting from the use of larger trucks and higher taxes would result. On top of that, municipalities would lose between 50 and 60 per cent of their total tax revenue. Those losses would need to be made up by local residents.

Adjournment Debate

This is the major question which the west faces. Not one branch line ought to be abandoned until the national government outlines a national transport policy which will ensure that the kind of service provided by the railways, whether by the profit-oriented one or otherwise, is adequate for producers to get their commodities to market. That must be the essential ingredient in any new transportation policy and it ought not to be forgotten. You cannot abandon rail lines wholesale, as was suggested by the MacPherson royal commission that was appointed by a former Conservative government.

Whichever of the two old line parties sits to the right of Mr. Speaker, it ought to know that the kind of action I have mentioned is necessary on the Prairies. Do not give us another conference. By the way, such a conference could be of great benefit in outlining some of our problems. If we are to assuage the fears of small communities, 650 miles of branch line in Assiniboia, for example, must be protected. Until there is a clear decision as to services for producers, those producers must be protected so that they will not need to bear the extra cost of grain trucking over great distances.

On the one hand, federal local initiatives grants are pouring money into the small communities; they are trying to establish recreational facilities. Provincial governments apply those grants to the building of swimming pools, curling rinks, and so on. On the other hand, the national government countenances the policy of rail line abandonment, a policy which is killing small towns. This question needs to be considered. Surely we need not wait until the turn of the century or until the 1980s to get an answer. This question needs to be answered by the government in the next year and a half. I look forward to hearing the hon. member for St. Boniface (Mr. Guay) on this matter.

Mr. Joseph-Philippe Guay (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, the minister has already indicated his interest in meeting with the provinces on the matter of freight rates and other problems, including rail line abandonment.

TRANSPORT—AIRPORT—VANCOUVER INTERNATIONAL—RUNWAY EXPANSION—REQUEST THAT ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STUDY BE PROVIDED TO EXPROPRIATION HEARINGS

Mr. John A. Fraser (Vancouver South): Mr. Speaker, yesterday morning I asked the following question of the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand):

• (2210)

Has the minister prepared any environmental impact study relating to the effects of the proposed new runway at Vancouver International Airport and, if so, will it be filed with the hearing officer and the objectors in time for consideration at the expropriation hearings which commence next Wednesday, January 17, 1973, in Vancouver?

The minister's reply was curious, because he seemed to think that these things were always done. He said, as recorded at page 276 of *Hansard*:

Mr. Speaker, we are making an inquiry about expropriations, which has nothing to do with the environment.