

Statements by Ministers

mendations made in the many studies that have been carried out in the past. It is now time to act.

Last June, my predecessor set up a committee to advise the Government on what can be done to make our transportation system accessible. Our objective is, first of all, to eliminate physical barriers and to help change people's attitudes to the problems facing disabled persons when they want to travel from one place to another.

[English]

This Government recognizes that our Charter of Rights and Freedoms promises equal protection and equal benefit under the law and protects disabled persons from systemic discrimination. To comply with the Charter's requirement and ensure reasonable access to Canada's transportation system for disabled persons, our Government is finalizing accessibility standards and guidelines for the air, rail and marine modes.

[Translation]

Furthermore, research and pilot projects are being developed to reduce physical barriers to travelling by the disabled. In terms of accessibility, VIA Rail is proceeding with a retrofit of its cars, while the retrofit of ferry terminals is continuing.

Together with the provinces, we have set up a standing committee on the transportation of disabled persons, and its terms of reference include examining complex issues such as national reciprocity in paratransit services and land transportation to and from airports.

The Canadian Transport Commission is developing a multi-mode card to identify disabled persons who must travel accompanied.

A new, fully accessible bus, the first in North America, has been put into service as part of a three-year pilot project in Newfoundland. Accessibility Guidelines for travel by interprovincial bus lines have been developed by the Minister of Transport and his provincial counterparts. Their collaboration and support have been invaluable. We believe that carriers will conform with these guidelines, and we hope that specific accessibility standards will be set in the months to come.

During Expo 86, our Department will host an international conference to be attended by experts from the public, private and academic sectors. The purpose of this conference is to create an international forum for the exchange of information on questions concerning the disabled.

Furthermore, in response to a recommendation made at the first meeting of my action committee last August, we have set up four task forces whose members include disabled persons and representatives from the transportation sector, industry and government. They are being asked to submit proposals for dealing with the problems facing the disabled in the following areas: standards of access to national air services, airport services and facilities, communications, and finally, bus services.

[English]

The Department has initiated work to complete an inventory of existing equipment available in terminals and on board vehicles for visual, hearing and developmentally-impaired travellers so as to identify areas which need further improvement. We are carefully reviewing the report of the parliamentary committee on equality of rights recently tabled before the House. Their praise for the establishment of our implementation committee is very encouraging.

[Translation]

Thanks to a multi-million dollar program, we intend to improve technology for vehicles and other transport modes and show how facilities and services can be made more accessible. We hope that in this way, we can help people acquire a better understanding of the needs of the disabled.

[English]

Today I am also pleased to announce that this Government has selected over 25 communities across Canada which will be receiving grants to acquire much needed specially equipped vehicles. Specific details will be announced in the near future.

[Translation]

This Government is anxious to work together with Canadians in order to bring about the desired changes, and it has therefore set up a program to assist small communities where operating a mini bus service might not be feasible. The program is intended to improve the mobility of the disabled by helping set up a volunteer service.

[English]

Two demonstration projects testing this new mobility concept are being staged in New Brunswick. Along with the capital grants mentioned previously, they will combine to significantly improve personal mobility and reduce the isolation of disabled Canadians who reside in small communities across this country. All these initiatives and activities have been accomplished through the co-operation and support of many individuals, groups and organizations. Their diligence and thoughtful advice, coupled with this Government's firm commitment, will result in greater accessibility to our transportation system for disabled Canadians.

[Translation]

I know that all the Members of this House support these measures. In the months to come, I expect to see a host of new initiatives and policies that will help us move ahead towards achieving our objective: a transportation system that is safe, reliable and equitable—in other words, accessible to all Canadians.

[English]

Mr. Roland de Corneille (Eglinton—Lawrence): Mr. Speaker, as the Official Opposition critic dealing with policies and regulations regarding the handicapped, it is my privilege to comment on the statement just made by the Minister of State for Transport (Mrs. Blais-Grenier). Along with other Members of the House, I congratulate her on any new steps she