

Railway Lands

significant modifications in our prairie grain handling and transportation systems which have been positive and helpful and which deserve to be recognized in a discussion of this kind. I think, for example, of the construction of more modern elevator facilities and the efforts at consolidation of some elevator facilities on the prairies. There have been agreements between the railways to eliminate what used to be wasteful grain back-hauls in the movement of grain from prairie regions to export positions.

We have seen the development of a new quota system and the block shipping system; the appointment of port co-ordinators for grain operations at Thunder Bay and Vancouver; a special grain boxcar repair program which saved railway rolling stock for the movement of grain; probably most dramatically, the purchase of 8,000 grain hopper cars at a cost to the federal treasury of something in the order of \$255 million; the useful Mants report on grain car allocation procedures; and a special Canadian Wheat Board trucking program to help move tough and damp grain and to ease pressure during times of peak volumes in the rail system.

Also, we have seen recently the Wheat Board's incentive program to encourage construction of new terminal capacity on the west coast; continuing efforts to utilize the port of Prince Rupert better for grain movement; an ongoing federal upgrading program to the tune of \$12.5 million for the port of Churchill, including the installation this year of hopper car unloading facilities; and compulsory railway cost disclosure legislation to open the books of the railway companies for the first time.

That and other developments have brought us most recently to the work of the Snavelly Commission, a commission initiated at the same time and in conjunction with the Hall Commission, to do the job of analyzing and assessing the real costs of transporting grain by rail.

The work of the Snavelly Commission is generally regarded as being very thorough, practical and reliable. It has been well received and widely respected across the prairies, and indeed there has been no serious challenge to the basic analysis offered by the Snavelly Commission. All of those developments, including the Snavelly report and others, have formed the context within which the Hall Commission did its fundamental work to help shape the prairie rail network which we will require for the future.

Mr. Brisco: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I have listened with patience to the hon. member and, quite frankly, I fail to see what the Hall or Snavelly Commission reports have to do with the private member's bill before us. He is talking about the movement of grain, not rail abandonment.

Mr. Goodale: If the hon. member had been in the room and had listened to the hon. member who moved the motion, he would have heard extensive references to the Hall report in the very speech in which the motion was introduced. Indeed, the whole question of the status of roadbeds on the prairies is derived from the work of the Hall report which was fundamental to the grain handling and transportation systems in western

Canada. It is most unfortunate that the representative of the Conservative party fails to recognize that.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Goodale: As I have said many times, there is probably no document of more significance to our future in western Canada in relation to our transportation system than the report of the Hall Commission. It represents the collective judgment and wisdom of five prominent, well respected westerners, who were appointed by the government of Canada in 1975 to undertake a serious investigation of the prairie rail network. The commission took two full years to do its job, and in the process established a solid reputation across the prairies for fairness and thorough, conscientious work.

The report provides us with a good foundation upon which to build as we tackle what has become the very urgent job of revitalizing our grain handling and transportation systems. Reaction to it from most quarters—from farmers, farm organizations, western commodity groups, municipalities, grain companies and co-ops, provincial governments, opposition spokesmen in the House of Commons, and so on—has been generally positive.

As soon as the Hall report was published on May 16, 1977, westerners generally began to demand swift and positive responses to it. The government of Canada agreed, and we have moved quickly to implement the thrust of the Hall proposals. Probably no other report of a federal commission of inquiry has received such prompt, decisive attention as the Hall report.

Some hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Hnatyshyn: That is stretching our credibility too far.

Mr. Goodale: The hon. gentleman across the way wants to see a demonstration of that decisive action and I am quite prepared to give it to him at this moment. As I said, the report was first tabled in the House of Commons on May 16, 1977, and published across western Canada on that same date. Ten days later, on May 26, its central recommendation was passed into law by the federal cabinet when an order in council was adopted transferring more than 1,800 miles of prairie branch lines to the permanent basic rail network, bringing that network to well over 14,000 miles altogether. It is important to note that that is a full three quarters of all the trackage existing on the prairies in 1975 when the Commission began its work.

Furthermore, on that same day, on May 26, another federal order in council extended the existing freeze protection against abandonment for another 2,300 miles of rail line which Hall suggested should be assigned to the jurisdiction of the new body to be created called the Prairie Rail Authority, or PRA as it has come to be known. Significantly, toward the end of last year, the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) announced his intention to present legislation to the House on the PRA concept during 1978.