

Supply

buses. Eighty five per cent of Canadians travel by car. People will say: The Minister could change that. Mr. Speaker, ministers do not create the trends. Ministers manage the trends. The Minister manages what Canadians want to use as a means of transportation. Contrary to what everybody has been saying, and I am not arguing just for the sake of arguing, VIA Rail is not improving. There has been no improvement in 1988 and 1989. The situation is getting worse, Mr. Speaker. In 1988, revenues went up 13 per cent but the government spent \$68 million on subsidies. Mr. Speaker, this is not a fairy tale thought up by the minister. These are figures that cannot be challenged. These are the figures we have produced time and time again, and unfortunately, the report produced yesterday by the Transport Committee says: Figures can be interpreted in many different ways, and we are not sure about the figures that were provided. Not all figures provided by Transport Canada or VIA Rail have been systematically and affectively challenged.

[English]

Prompt action had to be taken to stop this drain on the public purse. The motion before the House today would seek to impose a moratorium, a moratorium which could cost the taxpayer any amount of money because there is no limit. It means it could be \$500 million, it could be \$1 billion; it could be more. We do not know because the committee does not recommend any time limit for the moratorium. As the Premier of Ontario and many others, including mayors of the cities, said this morning a moratorium would cost money. The bottom line is that the committee does not say where we will get the money. I would be interested if the committee had not only proposed a moratorium but stated where we would take the money as well. Almost everybody in this country admits that the deficit is too high, and we have to make cuts. My friends on the other side are totally opposed to the GST or any increase of tax. If you do not increase the tax you have to cut, and you have to cut where people are the least affected by the cuts. In other words, where just 3 per cent of Canadians are using the service.

We would have expected the committee to say, if it is against the tax: "We are for the cuts, but we don't want to cut VIA Rail, so we will go elsewhere." Where, Mr. Speaker? That is the question. Neither the mayors nor the premiers this morning, nor anybody on the other

side, said where we should cut. There is no miracle to get money for the deficit.

I can only assume that Canadians would be expected to pay the bill again. And I don't believe that this government could accept that. That is why I say I am sorry but I could not agree with any moratorium. We will not provide the millions of dollars needed to subsidize VIA Rail again.

I believe that the committee should have taken the opportunity in this report to look at the future of rail passenger transportation in the long run, not in the short term, on the verge of the premiers' conference. The committee's timing in terms of the report is interesting. It is very strange that the last witnesses appeared at noon, Mr. Speaker, Tuesday. Yesterday morning the report was ready. The timing is good. I expected the committee to give me a perspective of the future of transportation and on the way the government and the Canadian taxpayer could have a more affordable alternative to what we have today.

We hear references to Amtrak. Of course many other countries are making decisions concerning rail passenger services based on their own demographic and geographic reality. When we talk about Amtrak I am amazed that the report does not say that Amtrak has the ability to abandon any route when it wants. That is not the case in Canada, Mr. Speaker. When they use an example like Amtrak they should say also that in 1971 it cut 75 per cent of the network. We want to cut 40 per cent and we are accused of being unCanadian and not having in mind the spirit of Canada. I believe we must always be consistent. When we do something, we live with the consequences. I will give an example. We cannot have the tax system in the United States along with the services in Sweden. We would sometime have to consider using a system with all it represents.

The decision has been made in light of the fact that Canada is the second largest country in the world while, at the same time, we have a population of 25 million people. VIA service must be consistent with the reality of the country and the density of the Quebec-Windsor corridor. At the same time we have different needs. In Saskatchewan it is not like Toronto or Montreal and we have to provide service in the best way that we can afford. At the same time the mayors of cities along the corridor say "We have 60 per cent of Canadians living here and we want all the services here". I believe the government has been wise in its decision that, in the perspective of the reality of Canada, it should share the