

(iv) Implementation and Expansion of LRC Train Services

The Committee is aware of the fact that a great deal of emphasis is being placed upon the introduction of the "light, rapid comfortable" (LRC) trains into the VIA system. These trains are already in regular service in the Quebec-Windsor corridor, and VIA has just committed itself to purchase an additional ten train sets from the manufacturer, Bombardier Ltd.

It is presumed that a great deal of the money supposed to become available as a result of last fall's service cuts will be directed towards the purchase of this new equipment. While the Committee welcomes the integration of this modern equipment into VIA service, it also notes with some concern that some initial difficulties have become apparent in this system. It is, of course, to be hoped that these are nothing more than "teething" problems. The Committee has been repeatedly assured by representatives of VIA that no serious or major problems have been encountered thus far in the introduction of these trains into service.

These LRC trains represent a significant technological improvement over the current equipment in use in the VIA system. The Committee has been assured that these trains provide a comfortable and modern environment for their passengers. However, the Committee notes that great savings in time are not likely to result from the introduction of these trains into service because of the fact that they cannot operate at their maximum or optimum speed because they have to travel over track and roadbeds that are used by freight trains and are poorly suited for high speed passenger train travel. The LRC trains can operate over such roadbeds, in a quiet, comfortable and efficient manner. However, in order to have them function at speeds of which they are capable, the roadbed would have to be improved and a so-called "dedicated corridor", namely a roadbed that would handle high speed passenger traffic only, might be required. This would be a very costly undertaking.

The concept of dedicated corridors, and possibly the electrification of these corridors to provide for still more advanced technology trains was raised before the Committee. Again, the costs involved in such an undertaking appear to be formidable. However, the Committee feels that the attractions and advantages of such a concept should be more thoroughly investigated in the course of a policy review.

Notwithstanding any of the reservations mentioned above, the Committee earnestly hopes that the LRC trains will indeed operate in an efficient and profitable manner. The Committee also notes with great interest that both the Minister of Transport and the President of VIA Rail Canada Inc. stated in the course of their testimony that they intend to see the LRC equipment introduced into routes beyond the Quebec-Windsor corridor in the near future. The Atlantic and Western provinces were specifically mentioned. A target date of 1984 has been mentioned. The Committee feels that it is essential that this commitment be implemented at the earliest possible moment.

12. The Committee recommends that LRC train equipment be introduced in regular service on routes in the Atlantic provinces and in Western Canada as soon as is practicable. This should take place no later than 1984, barring unforeseen technological impediments.