

Maritime Highways

Regional Economic Expansion, which could include it in an agreement between the two governments.

• (1740)

[English]

Mr. G. A. Percy Smith (Northumberland-Miramichi): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to take part in this debate on the motion introduced by the hon. member for Halifax-East Hants (Mr. McCleave) on February 23 this year. As has been said, a similar motion was introduced on a previous occasion by this hon. member. I congratulate him for his persistence in bringing this important subject to the attention of the House.

I shall be very brief because I spoke on this subject about 14 months ago and my remarks today will be somewhat in the same vein. The motion introduced by the hon. member contains two parts; one part relates to the Fundy trail and the other to a crossing of the Shubenacadie River by a bridge or, as he says, possibly a causeway that would link the two communities of South Maitland and Princeport. I have not yet heard any estimate of the cost of such a crossing. However, since bridges and highways normally are the responsibility of the provincial government, I am assuming the cost is very great and is beyond the financial ability of the province of Nova Scotia.

If this is the case—I do not wish to be facetious, because I could list other bridges in New Brunswick, in my constituency, and even in Nova Scotia which seriously require attention—the fact is that in our Atlantic provinces, where the population in most areas is sparse and where very extensive networks of highways and bridges are required, it is practically beyond the ability of the provinces to finance the necessary construction. It is a very important part of the effort to elevate or improve the economy of the Atlantic provinces to have an adequate transportation system, which certainly includes roads and bridges.

The Trans-Canada Highway has been completed through the Atlantic provinces. This, however, is only one highway. I agree with the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie (Mr. Murphy) that the government of Canada should take a hard look at developing a policy to assist the development of secondary roads, especially in sparsely populated areas which are unable to finance the construction of highways and bridges.

As I have said, bridges are a provincial responsibility. Nevertheless, the government of Canada, through the Department of Regional Economic Expansion, and New Brunswick, for example, entered into a special highways agreement in respect of a secondary road. The road covered by this agreement runs between the cities of Moncton and Campbellton and traverses the entire east coast of New Brunswick. Rather than the 90-10 formula of cost-sharing mentioned by the hon. member for Halifax-East Hants, under this agreement the government of Canada will pay 110 per cent of the cost of this very important highway, the additional 10 per cent being for engineering and incidental costs of that nature. The province itself is faced only with the responsibility of providing the land for the roadbed.

Work on this highway is proceeding, although rather slowly; in fact, the portion in my constituency between Chatham and St. Margarets, which is in extremely poor

[Mr. Béchard.]

condition, I am advised will not be proceeded with this year because the province has not yet completed the necessary engineering work to enable contracts to be let. The government of Canada, as I believe all members will agree, has conceded the fact that we have serious transportation difficulties in the Atlantic provinces. Recently the Department of Transport granted a 17 per cent subsidy on trucking with the idea that a viable trucking industry should be built up in those provinces.

The government of Canada also appreciates the necessity of our having an adequate transportation system and is carrying out an extensive transportation study in many areas including northeastern New Brunswick. This will relate not only to highways and bridges but to transportation by water. Hopefully, it will lead to a long awaited project, namely, the dredging of the Miramichi River to a depth of 36 feet. This dredging would connect the highway leading to Renous, Plaster Rock and would give direct access from the eastern part of New Brunswick to Montreal, thus cutting down the distance by about 100 miles.

• (1750)

I said I would be brief. I know that other speakers wish to take part in this debate. However, I recall that when this motion was debated about a year ago it was stated—and I have not heard of any change made since—that no request had been made by the province of Nova Scotia for a Shubenacadie River bridge or causeway. The hon. member for Halifax-East Hants mentioned the many groups directly affected in the vicinity who have gone on record as supporting such a crossing.

I suggest that if neither the previous nor the present government of Nova Scotia requested this crossing—normally they would do so through the joint planning committee under the Department of Regional Economic Expansion—then it would appear that they have not placed on it as high a priority as the hon. member who introduced the motion. Normally, if the government of Canada wished to build a bridge or highway in the province it could not be done without the consent and agreement of the provincial government. As I said before, last year when we spoke on this subject such a request had not been made to Ottawa and as far as I know the situation has not changed and the request has not yet been made.

I know the importance of the Fundy trail. The supper hour is fast-approaching and I will not make any further comments on this matter, but basically I support anything that will improve transportation in the Atlantic provinces. However, I realize, as I believe the hon. member does who introduced the motion, that this must be part of an overall scheme developed by the government of Canada to assist all the provinces in the construction of secondary highways.

Hon. Hugh John Flemming (Carleton-Charlotte): Mr. Speaker, I will take only a moment or two of the time of the House to make some observations relative to the motion presented with conviction and eloquence by my friend the hon. member for Halifax-East Hants (Mr. McCleave). I associate myself with the supporting remarks which have been made from all quarters of the