

Government Orders

Our government has worked to ensure that there has been public participation as this project has advanced. The project has been subjected to a full public environmental review in compliance with the government's guidelines. This included the report of an environmental review panel which held public hearings in the region and a subsequent review by a committee of ice experts. The governments of Canada, New Brunswick and P.E.I. are satisfied that the bridge design now being considered meets the relevant environmental criteria.

I have worked closely with the premiers of both Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick on this matter. Last December we signed an agreement between our government and those provinces covering such areas as compensation for ferry workers displaced by a bridge, a contingency fund to deal with potential negative effects on the fishery, and the level of toll rates to be charged, as well as many other vital considerations.

I would be remiss at this time in not acknowledging the role played by Premier Frank McKenna of New Brunswick and particularly former Premier Joe Ghiz of Prince Edward Island. This project would not have advanced to this stage without their active support. They have realized the tremendous economic benefits that both of their provinces should receive from this bridge if it proceeds. I want to thank them at this time for their fairness and co-operation. In my dealings with them, I was tremendously impressed by their valuable counsel and the thorough way that they approached many of the multi-faceted areas that required consideration in a way that expressed concern for all the parties involved.

The main feature of our proposed development approach is that the private sector will finance, construct, own, operate and maintain the bridge under a 35-year contribution agreement with the Government of Canada. At the end of the term, ownership of the facility will transfer to the government. The developer will assume all normal construction, operation and maintenance risks. In return, it will receive an annual subsidy from the government. Bill C-110 sets out the terms of the proposed subsidy.

The underlying principle is that the cost to Canadian taxpayers should not exceed the operating and capital costs of the Borden and Cape Tormentine Ferry Service

over the next 35 years. The subsidy would be approximately \$42 million based on 1992 constant dollars.

The Northumberland Strait fixed link is clearly an idea whose time has come. We have capable private sector proponents ready and willing to take on the task. We have strong support from the two provinces most directly concerned. The economic benefits to the region and to Canada will be substantial. The environmental concerns have been thoroughly studied and to the best of our ability adequate mitigating measures are being taken.

This is a project that will create jobs and will be of great economic benefit to Atlantic Canada without imposing an undue burden on the public purse. With the passage of Bill C-110, the developer, Strait Crossing Incorporated, will be in a position to complete the financing of the project. I am hopeful that we will then be in a position to sign contracts this spring so that construction may commence before the summer.

I hope that all members of the House will support this bill so that we may then proceed with this important national undertaking which would be extremely beneficial to the economy of Atlantic Canada.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. DeBlois): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier—Auditor General's report; the hon. member for New Westminster—Burnaby—Human rights; the hon. member for North Island—Powell River—Fisheries; the hon. member for Bonavista—Trinity—Conception—Fisheries; the hon. member for Moncton—External Affairs.

• (1630)

Mr. Joe McGuire (Egmont): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to speak today on Bill C-110 which will have such a great impact on my province of Prince Edward Island and will have a great impact on the maritime provinces in general.

The minister said earlier in his remarks that this legislation is no guarantee that the bridge will be built. I wish he told us exactly what he meant by that remark. As the minister indicated, this particular effort to connect Prince Edward Island to the mainland goes back a long way. It was over 100 years ago, in 1885, when it first came up in a serious way since we joined Confederation. It goes back much earlier than that.