

Supply

The Prime Minister is going nowhere and evidently his government is marking time.

• (1720)

Several studies have shown that the HST would create approximately 127,000 work-years of employment. During the construction, with the technological and economical spin-offs of such a project, nearly 40,000 additional work-years would be created in various sectors. The management and maintenance of the network would create another 1,200 permanent jobs. The costs of funds for the HST project in the Quebec—Windsor corridor are estimated at approximately \$7.5 billion over a ten-year period. The private sector would assume 70 per cent of start-up costs, while the remaining costs would be shared by the governments of Quebec, Ontario and Canada.

On April 26, Marc LeFrançois, president of the board of directors of VIA Rail, made an eloquent speech in support of this project. According to Mr. LeFrançois, the survival of passenger railway services in Canada will depend on the high-speed train project. According to the president of VIA Rail, the United States is an accessible market worth many billions of dollars. The high-speed train would give our businesses broad access to the North American market, where the high-speed concept has yet to make its mark.

At a time when draconian budget cutbacks have put what is left of Canada's and Quebec's railway industry at risk, at a time when our major railway companies are becoming less and less viable and thousands of workers in this sector are losing their jobs, I think it is high time the government showed some political and economic leadership by supporting a project that would stimulate and generate employment. The government should realize that this project is not only possible but necessary. As the government keeps pouring millions and millions of dollars into the Hibernia project, whose technology is not very exportable and, from the looks of it, not very profitable and unlikely to generate as many economic spin-offs as the high-speed train project, is it surprising that people get upset about the Liberal government's failure to act?

The government cannot afford to hesitate any longer. History has shown that Canada's present geopolitical entity was shaped by the railway that connected the Atlantic to the Pacific. This episode in Canada's history goes back more than a century. Considering the deterioration of Canada's railway network, a legacy of the negligence of many successive governments in Ottawa, one wonders what the Fathers of Confederation would have had to say. They would undoubtedly condemn this government's apathy. The government must make a decision now about the high-speed train, to prevent inertia from turning into inept policy making. The high-speed train project must be kept on track. Otherwise, the Fathers of Confederation would never forgive them.

[English]

Mr. Dick Harris (Prince George—Bulkley Valley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I listened again with some bewilderment to the comments of the member of the Bloc and there are a few points I would like to make.

She says that the government has been foot dragging on the high speed rail issue. Quite frankly, given the statistics, given the financial prospect, the viability of high speed rail in the Quebec—Windsor corridor if I were having to pay the bill believe me I would be foot dragging as well. I would not want to get into it.

The member talked about the success of high speed rail in European countries. For many years the high speed rail system in Europe has been heavily subsidized by the governments where the trains operate.

This country cannot afford to get into more subsidization of crown corporations or transportation systems. We are subsidized to death. We have VIA Rail being subsidized with hundreds of millions of dollars. It is interesting that the chairman of VIA Rail, a person who is operating a company at a huge loss every year, absolutely dependent on government subsidies to keep his company afloat, is now advocating and promoting a high speed rail system.

• (1725)

At least if we had some sort of track record with the company he operates, his support would at least be somewhat credible. The hon. member has talked about the economic factor of high speed rail. There is no financial data that support the fact that a high speed rail system in Canada, in the Quebec—Windsor corridor, could even begin to be financially viable without continued heavy subsidization from the government.

I would like to talk about one other thing. Where are the customers going to come from? Let us say that they did start to attract a lot of customers. Someone in the transportation industry is going to suffer. Is it going to be the airlines? Are we asking the airlines to lose more customers who would travel on trains?

Statistics and studies have shown that the Canadian people have a tremendous love for their automobiles. We are not going to change this love for the automobile that the Canadian people have simply by putting a high speed rail system in. They are not going to overwhelmingly start getting out of their cars and flocking to a high speed rail system overnight.

If this government were to enter into this thing it would be like going to the store to buy a new television set when you have no food in the cupboard. That is the state of the economy. That is the state of this financial house in Canada. We cannot afford to even think of a high speed rail system at this time.