

*Bridge Construction*

project may go forward with the least possible delay and a remedy be found as quickly as possible for the deplorable transport facilities outlined by the two hon. members who have spoken this afternoon.

I am interested in the suggestion that this bridge would be a possible link in an international crossing. I refer to this only to suggest that since this project is related to international waters it is an area within which the federal government has authority in some measure at least. I rise as one member who represents in this parliament a large number of the Indian people of Canada and who for this reason has some knowledge of the transportation problems with which many of the Indian people are faced. I do so to give full and wholehearted support to those who urge the speedy passage of this resolution and I trust that speedy construction of the bridge will be possible.

• (7:00 p.m.)

**Mr. Stanley Haidasz (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to make a few remarks on the motion of the hon. member for Lambton-Kent (Mr. McCutcheon), which has been supported by the hon. member for Lambton West (Mr. Foy). Their contribution was an eloquent plea for a bridge across the Chenal Ecarte from Walpole Island to the approaches of highway 40, which leads into Wallaceburg.

I first wish to say that we on this side of the house are well aware of our responsibilities for the welfare of the inhabitants on Walpole Island. We are aware of the economic studies that have been made by the St. Clair area development board, and I can assure hon. members that the officials of the Indian affairs branch here in Ottawa have been studying that report, as well as the reports made on the self-government experiment on Walpole Island.

I agree with the previous speakers that a bridge of this type would be an important factor in the provision of better movement between the main island and the neighbouring mainland. Construction of this bridge would, no doubt, be an important project. Besides the consideration of local needs and demand, important factors such as divided jurisdiction of the different levels of government, the feasibility of building such a bridge, other engineering studies, and the costs of construction should be carefully taken into account.

[Mr. Barnett.]

I would like to commend the local Indian band authorities for taking the initiative in this matter. Having taken on the responsibility of carrying out the project, I hope that liaison with local, municipal, provincial and federal agencies will be smooth and fruitful. At this time I would like to acknowledge a letter, dated February 16, 1966, which I received from Chief Burton Jacobs of the Walpole Island council, which I read with great interest and immediately referred to the Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources (Mr. Laing), who is the Superintendent General of Indians.

In noting the remarks in this letter about the need for a bridge I also welcomed news of the successful development of the experiment in self-government on the island. I regard this experiment in self-government on Walpole Island as an important move. This event has evoked much interest among many Indian leaders across the nation who share the philosophy that enlightened band administration is the spark plug of community development. The opportunity to participate fully in determining their own destiny should be the goal of all Indian people as Canada approaches the centennial of confederation.

We are grateful to the hon. member for Lambton-Kent and the hon. member for Lambton West for their assurances that the provincial authorities are ready to discuss the project of constructing a bridge across the Chenal Ecarte. I am informed that the Indian affairs branch is well aware of the desire of the inhabitants of the island for such a bridge to replace the ferry service. The open deck, flat-bottomed barge operated by an engine driven cable is not the best form of vehicle to cross the 300 foot channel of water, especially in adverse weather and under the conditions experienced at certain times, as explained by the hon. member for Lambton West.

The department is aware of its responsibilities for the welfare and education of the 300 odd students who cross the channel by this ferry to reach the secondary school at Wallaceburg. So far as the further negotiations that should be carried on between the band council, the provincial government, the local authorities and the Indian affairs branch are concerned, I would like to say that these are already in progress. This morning the representatives of the people on Walpole Island met with the Minister of Northern Affairs and National Resources (Mr. Laing) and have scheduled a meeting next month with the