

for the hon. member for London East, this visit by the committee would never have taken place.

Responsibility for providing travel facilities to the people of Canada is shared by all levels of government though, no doubt, the greatest over-all responsibility rests with the federal government. Historically, the railway system, from the date of its construction through to the 1940's, provided the principal means of intercity transportation in Canada. From the 'fifties onward, with the advent of improved facilities by road and air, the attention of the various levels of government was focussed on the creation of a first-class network of highway and air routes. The redirection of national transportation expenditures came in response to the public preference for the convenience and flexibility of the private automobile and the bus lines, when shorter distances were involved, and for the advantages of airspeed for longer trips. While the public in general benefitted from the changing pattern of passenger services, the impact on the rail passenger system was adverse, leading to a widespread decrease in patronage. Railway deficits increased in the light of competition with highway and air modes which received the major benefits of public financing.

The federal government, recognizing that provision for rail passengers now involved burdens which were not normally assumed by commercial firms, moved to relieve the rail carriers from the financial losses incurred in the operation of passenger trains. In 1967, the National Transportation Act established a mechanism whereby the government could order the continued operation of uneconomic passenger services if those services were judged to be in the public interest. Having done so, it would absorb the bulk of losses associated with each particular operation. The federal government ensured that the broad transportation needs of the public would be considered when a decision was made as to whether an uneconomic passenger service should be continued or not.

The act required the Transport Commission to fully evaluate all available and projected competing modes of travel in each case brought before it so that the need for passenger train service would be judged in the context of the total facilities available to those directly affected. As well, this process was initiated as part of the major aim of federal government policy to ensure that the best allocation of resources in the passenger field was accomplished.

● (1720)

In the case of train service abandonment, specifically in southwestern Ontario, it is useful to recall that all steps prescribed by the Canadian Transport Commission have been followed and there was no other recourse than to abandon this service after exhaustive hearings on the part of the commission.

In its capacity of rationalizing passenger services and protecting the public interest, the railway transport committee of the Canadian Transport Commission carried out a full investigation. No less than six days of public hearings in different cities were held at which no less than 70 government organizations and individuals attended. The purpose of these hearings was to examine the economic viability of, and the public need for, the railway passenger

Rail Transport

services in southwestern Ontario, commonly referred to as the Bruce peninsula services.

During that hearing it was shown in particular that the lines abandoned since then had incurred losses in the neighbourhood of \$600,000 in 1968. It was also proven that alternative public transportation existed in the area and that extensive bus service was available. It was demonstrated that revenue increases between 2.4 to 7.8 times the actual 1968 revenues would have to be obtained to make the services profitable.

Mr. Lundrigan: A point of order, Mr. Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Order, please. The hon. member for Gander-Twillingate is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Lundrigan: Mr. Speaker, I think I have a legitimate point of order when I suggest that it is perhaps wise for the members of the House to recall a fundamental rule of the House in order to preserve this chamber as a debating forum, the purpose for which it was intended. The hon. member is reading a statement prepared by officials of the department or some other section of the government. The hon. member for Fort William has a pile of papers on his desk as well, from which he is ready to read. Even if Your Honour does not accept my point of order, I suggest it is wise for members to remember this is a debating forum, not a place in which to read statements prepared by departmental officials.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Laniel): Order. The point raised by the hon. member is one that is raised on many occasions and I think is well taken. The Chair appreciates the hon. member's intervention, but I suggest the rules are not strictly applied. They do authorize hon. members to refer to notes, and in special cases, such as budgets or very important political matters, the Chair has a tendency to allow leeway. In view of all these variations in the application of the rules, it is not easy for the Chair to decide on a strict application of the rules. But I think the fact that, on occasion, members do suggest to the Chair that there should be a stricter application of the rules is helpful to the operation of the House.

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): It so happens, Mr. Speaker, that I did this research myself through our research bureau. Hon. members opposite also have a research bureau. In this instance, I would have accepted nothing less. I suggest the hon. member for Gander-Twillingate is prejudging the conclusion of my speech; I am more favourable to the motion than he thinks. I might also say that the other member who will speak on our side has no departmental notes, and I say that in all truthfulness because he would not accept them. So, the hon. member should not make statements that he cannot substantiate.

Mr. Lundrigan: Since you are a rookie, we will accept that.

Mr. Guay (St. Boniface): The hon. member is known for making rash statements, but half the time he does not know what he is saying.

Mr. Baker: At least he does not read from a text.