

After the responsibility for the highway was transferred from the United States army to the Royal Canadian Engineers, the terms of reference under which they operated did not permit major road relocations. Temporary bridges were replaced by permanent structures at many locations and some exceptionally hazardous areas were reconstructed, but the alignment of the highway is essentially that of 1943.

In 1959-1961 the highway was paved to RAU 50 standard from mile zero to 84. This standard provided two 12-foot traffic lanes and 5-foot shoulders. The British Columbia department of highways has been responsible for the maintenance of the paved section since 1962. The other portions of the highway are still a responsibility of the Department of Public Works and they are having their difficulties with the contractors who have to maintain this road. Certain other commitments have also been made to reconstruct certain sections, particularly in the lower end of the highway.

Over the years the government has studied the possibility of doing major work on the highway and upgrading it to a national highway standard. A report was commissioned. In 1966 the Stanford report was prepared for the government. It recommended that any further action in respect of the highway be shelved for at least ten years. It is now 1976 and that ten year period has expired. That again is the reason why the bill before us is timely.

It was also recommended to the government that it should not be concerned about the development of our northland and the development of our resources since the highway is an outdated mode of transportation for the movement of goods and people today, when we have jet airplanes and other more up to date modes of transportation. The report said that the highway is old fashioned. I wonder who the consultants were who worked on that report. I am sure they must have been those consultants to whom we pay one billion a year.

● (1610)

I am not in conflict with that statement made in the report, particularly when one considers only the need to find, extract and exploit our natural resources, and does not consider the human factor, the people who live there, our first citizens and early settlers, and does not consider that even in that region, with all the modern facilities of transportation, people would be required to develop and to populate that area.

Let us look at the highway of today. It is a road link. Mile zero is at Dawson Creek, and it goes all the way through the great territory of the Yukon and into Alaska. There are stretches of 200 to 300 miles where there are no facilities of any kind. No one ever planned or considered that there would have to be service stations to help people in distress or to supply such amenities as gasoline, tire and vehicle repairs.

No one has ever considered that accidents can happen when people travel, particularly with the climatic conditions which exist in that part of our great country. No one has ever considered that we might have to evacuate injured people involved in accidents, and there is no provision for aircraft to land to evacuate people, or for first aid posts. There are no provisions to help people who travel

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this highway to meet with the natives who have lived there all their lives. No provisions were made for rest stops, parks, tourist amenities or anything else.

My bill proposes to establish an authority which would consider all these things, not only on the Alaska highway but also along all the other roads which are planned in the north as we are opening up this great northern hinterland. The hon. member for Skeena will understand very well what I am talking about because just a year ago the first vehicle went through yet another great north-south connection on the Stewart Cassiar highway, and there are no facilities for anyone travelling that road. It seems just to be an access to exploit the natural resources and the people who have pioneered and lived there and carved out an existence for generations.

I am also concerned about industries already located in northern British Columbia and the Yukon territory as well as the plight of these industries through not having a proper means of transportation for the shipment of their products and for the maintenance of the work force in their plants. All the resources of the great region of the Yukon must be shipped, or are presently being shipped, by our outmoded transportation system to a port linked to Alaska, and they end up in ports strange to our land. I am very excited about the plans announced for the northern part of British Columbia with respect to the transportation network, and I am hopeful that the government will seriously consider helping industries located in northern British Columbia and the Yukon territory by providing proper transportation facilities.

As hon. members know, the government has never been too excited about doing anything about regional economic expansion in the province of British Columbia. The reason for that has been, unlike other parts of the country, that industry in British Columbia has never asked for any help.

However, it is entitled to expect from provincial, federal and municipal governments that access is provided to the areas in which industry locates, that the infrastructure is considered by these governments, and that a quality of life is established in these northern areas which is in some ways comparable to the quality of life which other Canadians enjoy. That means many things. That means that we will have to look seriously at not just transportation facilities but also the establishment of proper towns, however small they may be.

We must provide communications systems which are much different from the ones which are being extended into these areas now. We have to make it possible for people in those areas to have access to the electronic media. Of course in many of those areas that is not possible today. We must be able to provide them with the communication facilities, telephone and radio facilities which people in other parts of the country enjoy.

I am encouraged by the plans of British Columbia railways. The line has now been extended to Fort Nelson and is enjoying the harvest of that area. It is a paying proposition. Also, the BCR has extended, or is in the process of extending, the rail link to Dease Lake, again in the constituency of Skeena, driving into the resource areas. The great mineral reserves and the great wood fibre reserves in these areas are being opened up, and nobody is giving