

Heritage Railway Stations

They were the focal point for the departure and arrival of thousands of families on their travels across this vast country they had come to settle. These stations have always brought back memories for those who go back to the places they came from. I imagine many of us in this House have felt the same way.

The Hon. Member for Bow River had a chance to introduce this Bill, and he was right to do so. The purpose of this Bill is to prevent any changes that would diminish the value of these stations. It provides that a station may not be altered without obtaining the authorization of the Governor in Council, an assessment by the Historical Sites and Monuments Board and a joint recommendation by the Minister of the Environment and the Minister of Transport.

This Bill seems to fill a vacuum. It would oblige railway companies to apply for specific authorization before destroying or altering a station. The Governor in Council would in each case be responsible for issuing an appropriate order, on the joint recommendation of the Minister of the Environment and the Minister of Transport, after public hearings by the Historical Sites and Monuments Board of Canada.

Implementation of the legislation would be largely incumbent on the Board, which, however, does not have the basic skills required to carry out such a specialized task. Furthermore, because of its main mandate, the Board might have a conflict of interest, since it would be asked to choose between the operational imperatives of a railway company and those of preserving our cultural and historical heritage.

The same argument is used in reverse by the National Transportation Agency, which would prefer not to see evaluating our railway heritage added to its main mandate. The crux of the problem is the conflict of interest that exists between policies and regulations governing the transport function and those governing the heritage and historical dimension. The federal Government must find a way to reconcile the divergent requirements of these two spheres of activity.

I earnestly hope that this discussion will be instrumental in finding a lasting solution to this problem. I know the Minister of the Environment (Mr. MacMillan) is now looking at other options for protecting our heritage railway stations.

Once again, I would like to thank the Hon. Member for Bow River (Mr. Taylor) for his interest in this subject. I am sure that all Members share my view and will do everything they can to find a way to preserve our stations.

● (1740)

[*English*]

Mr. Lawrence I. O'Neil (Cape Breton Highlands—Canso): Madam Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to speak to Bill C-205. This Bill is designed to provide efficient mechanisms to allow concerned citizens to make timely objections to the alteration, removal or demolition of railway stations that are of

historical or cultural value, and to ensure that their conservation is in the public interest.

First, let me congratulate the Hon. Member for Bow River (Mr. Taylor) who introduced this Bill to the House. As his constituents and Members of the House will know, the Hon. Member has a long history of support for this and other heritage issues.

This is a worth-while goal because the railway has played an important part in Canada's history. It has linked the regions of this country and has carried new citizens of Canada to their ultimate destination.

The railway system opened the West and formed a critical part of our economy. While its importance has declined somewhat, it still remains an integral part of the Canadian way of life and the Canadian economy.

In my riding there are two railway stations that are strongly supported by community groups. In the most recent case, the Orangedale station has begun a process of rehabilitation. The Government of Canada is participating through the Canada Jobs Strategy job development component by providing the community group with funds to assist in the rehabilitation of this facility. As well, VIA Rail has contributed \$20,000 to assist in the process.

It is an example of a tremendous corporate and community effort by the people from Orangedale who have come together to bring to fruition a process which has gone on for a couple of years. While there is a lot more to be done on the Orangedale station, we expect to accomplish the work in the next year or two.

I take personal pleasure from this project because my mother worked at the Orangedale station as a despatcher during the war. Although it was not traditional for women to work for the railroad as despatchers, as a result of the war there were not a lot of men to do this kind of work and women were asked to participate. It is of personal significance to me, therefore, and of great significance to the community that this project is going on. It is a fine example of how the community and corporate sector can work together to preserve part of our history not only for us but for future generations.

● (1750)

Also in my riding we have a station in Antigonish. Just last week I met with the historical society which is interested in working with VIA Rail to ensure that the station remains intact in order to utilize part of the station as a museum. I have sent letters to VIA Rail supporting the request of the historical society. I am hopeful that we will have the same success with the Antigonish railway station as we had with the railway station at Orangedale.

We sometimes drive by these stations and do not fully appreciate their significance. With the passage of time they fall into the ground and are removed. That is not the case with these two stations. I know that there are other facilities which