

*Rural Airport Development Advisory Committee*

amount does not go very far when spread over the multiplicity of municipally operated airports in Canada. As a matter of policy, the department tends to deal with this money in grant form on the basis of an individual airport or airstrip run by the municipality. It has no concept of policy in regional matters, or area or distribution of airport and airstrips that are linked because of the economics or the methods of communication and transport between those communities.

Since the first decision was made to establish such a grant system for municipally operated airports to get them over a hurdle in providing a modicum of facility of air transport to smaller communities, the whole area of transport has changed tremendously. There is a great deal of mobility and an increase in the number of aircraft serving smaller communities for a whole range of purposes, some of them economic such as flights into mining and prospecting areas, lumber areas, railway and road development areas, recreational flights for hunting, fishing and guiding, sight seeing and transport or social community purposes.

In my own province air transportation is common from one community to another, and most people do not think of using any other means of transport than aircraft which carry five or six passengers. Departmental policy has not kept pace with the change in air transport activity in rural areas and thinly populated areas. It is as if we were still relying on the horse and sled rather than on aircraft for transportation between communities. In the development that has taken place there has not been any great demonstration of friendliness by the Department of Transport toward air transportation. Most people think that the facilities available from the Department of Transport are a kind of accidental happening, and we in northern British Columbia do not feel that we get the type of consideration and friendliness from the department that we should.

The bill that I have drafted is not as complete as it would be if it had been introduced by the government. We all know the restrictions of the law and the rules of the House which say that a private member cannot introduce a bill which seeks to spend public funds, so within the bill there is no mechanism to pay expense allowances or to spend public money. To that extent it is not as full as it might have been as a government bill, but the essence is there and the feeling of what I think is needed is there.

The bill seeks to establish a Rural Airport Development Advisory Committee to which would be appointed members from municipalities and regional districts within which the committee is established. It is very loosely worded because, depending on the desire of the people, different things will be required. The purpose and intent of the advisory committee is to advise the minister, as is set out in clause 5 of the bill, on all aspects of airports that are or need to be established within the region for which the committee is established, including:

- (a) improvements, maintenance, or extensions of runways,
- (b) the location of new airports,
- (c) the need for financial support for airports, and . . .

● (1710)

The committee may advise on such things as navigational aids, terminal building facilities and the like, and other facilities which are companion to an airport itself. The

[Mr. Howard.]

committee would have these powers in order that it, as the representative of the region concerned, shall have some input into the decision making process. In this way it might exercise influence before grants are made, as decisions with respect to grants are made on criteria which I have not had a chance to discover. In those cases, the decision is made probably by regional departmental officials of the Department of Transport, or the air section of it. They do not have enough money to operate with, but that is another story. Their decision is not made primarily on the basis of the needs of the community or area.

This bill is designed to counterbalance that lack. It will enable regions, communities and areas to choose people who are to sit on the committee and who can say to the Minister of Transport or his delegated officials, "Look, this is the way it is here; these are the needs, these are the requirements, and here are our recommendations." The committee can look ahead, and say that, in view of economic development that is likely to take place in a certain area or community in several years, we need to develop transport facilities for carrying people and goods in and out. It can say, "Here is a development plan for an airport." Such plans can be integrated with other federal plans.

To be more specific, in northern B.C. we have a vast number of rural airports, airstrips, many of them in farmers' fields. Once I landed at a facility provided by a fellow who ran a small farm. He erected some pilons or beacons; they were not mechanical or electrical, merely enough to guide the pilot and enable him to land in the farmer's field. We landed in the stubble. That was the airstrip available to us. There are many such airstrips in northern B.C. Generally, they are little more than gravel strips, small, short airstrips, and not the traditional level concrete or asphalt runways which most Canadians associate with airports, such as in Montreal or Vancouver. The airfield at Kamloops is a masterpiece of airport development compared with some of our airstrips in northern British Columbia.

These small, minimum facility type of airstrips are not satisfactory, as only a limited number of aircraft types can use them. For instance, an aircraft like the Convair, which can carry between 40 and 50 passengers and a considerable amount of freight, either with or without passengers, cannot use these primitive airstrips. The Convair, to a country boy like myself who is used to travelling in the Norseman, appears to be a pretty big and sophisticated aircraft. Department of Transport restrictions prevent aircraft of the Convair type from landing on these gravel strips, even though the use of that aircraft type would be justified in certain communities which need to move people and freight in and out of the area.

In the eastern portion of the riding of Skeena three communities, Fort St. James, Vanderhoof and Burns Lake thought that it would be advantageous if they could establish an air carrier service between that region and Vancouver. A service like that would allow the people of that community to fly directly to Vancouver without making a long trip by road or using, in some cases, jets operated by CP Air or PWA. On May 18 last year these three municipalities combined together and presented a tri-municipal brief to the minister. They talked about region-