

*Trans-Canada Highway*

entry at Coutts, Alberta, is about 820 miles. That means that nearly all the traffic that moves over the Alaska highway must of necessity travel over 820 miles of provincial highways in order to get to the Alaska highway.

During some seasons of the year large convoys of heavy trucks and transports carrying great tonnages of materials and supplies move over Alberta roads. It is only natural that those heavy convoys which are accustomed to travelling on the armour-coated highways of the United States should cut the Alberta roads to pieces; and this they have done. No system of licensing or of gas taxation could possibly bring in sufficient revenues to pay for the damage done to a highway by such heavy traffic, much of which is incidental to the United States army and the United States supply depots in the great northland. Thus far Alberta has had to pay the full cost of maintaining, and repairing, and the rebuilding necessitated by this heavy traffic from the United States, and this has run into hundreds of thousands of dollars every year.

The Alaska highway is important to the United States and Canada. We do not begin to understand how important it is now; but we should be thankful that it has been constructed. I think we should pay tribute to the foresight of our neighbouring country, the United States, for building this highway even at the tremendous cost involved. This highway was turned over to Canada by the United States and Canada is maintaining it. I understand from the hon. member for Cariboo (Mr. Murray) that they are doing a good job, and for this the government should be commended. However, the full potential of that highway cannot be realized until it is extended to the south and connected up with the great industrial centres of the midwest United States. It will have to go through Alberta before that can happen.

It is clearly the duty and responsibility of the federal government to do three things in order to relieve the province of Alberta of the heavy responsibility it has today in providing feeder roads to the Alaska highway and in order to make the Alaska highway of real value. It is their responsibility to share the cost of maintaining these feeder roads to the Alaska highway so that they may be kept up to standard and make it possible for traffic to move over them at all seasons of the year. Possibly these supply convoys bound for Alaska are going to be tremendously important from a security point of view sooner than anyone expects.

The second thing I think the Canadian government should do, and it is clearly their responsibility, is to negotiate with the United

States government with a view to getting that government to share the costs of maintenance of feeder roads to the Alaska highway, and perhaps to share the cost of rebuilding where that becomes necessary as a result of the wear and tear from the heavy convoys travelling over the roads.

The third thing which I think is a federal government responsibility is to construct, or share with the province in the construction of, a more direct route from the southern part of the province of Alberta to the Alaska highway. I am told that surveys already made indicate that it would be possible to save up to seventy-five miles between the port of entry at Coutts, Alberta, and Dawson Creek by surveying and building a cut-off between Whitecourt, west of Edmonton, and Valleyview in the Peace river country. Certainly it is only reasonable to suppose that if a road is to be of military and security value then the most direct route is the most feasible one.

I suggest with all respect these three important things should be followed up by the government of Canada. They are the only ones in a position to negotiate and to arrange for an agreement between ourselves and the United States to the effect I have mentioned. I do not need to deal with the precedent established by the United States. My colleague, the hon. member for Lethbridge (Mr. Blackmore), undoubtedly will go into that to some degree, and will show the contrast between the way we have undertaken the building of an important highway link between eastern Canada and western Canada, and the way the United States has acted over the years. I suggest that feeder roads, or an inter-regional system of highways, ought to be considered also as a part of any trans-Canada highway project.

I should like to say a word about routes before I close. A good deal has been heard, especially during the past year, about what route the proposed trans-Canada highway should follow. I am critical of the government in this respect. I think the situation has been allowed to drift along with no leadership until it has become terribly confused. Nobody seems to know just where to start. I did not hear the interpolation of my hon. friend over there. I would be very happy to have him speak right out so that I can deal with him. There is no question about the fact that much of the existing confusion with respect to a route, and how to select a route, is the result of the lack of leadership on the part of this government that is supposed to initiate such things. There have sprung into existence in Canada trans-Canada highway route associations. I know we have at least three of them in the province