

• (1040)

Mr. Tobin: This is the fundamental problem with the thinking opposite. The Member wants to know when did it become a fundamental tenet that every single Canadian ought to have the main line running by his front door. There never was that tenet.

This is how the Government operates. It sets up a ridiculous argument, a nonsensical statement, and then shoots it down. No one is suggesting that every single Canadian ought to have the mail rail line running by his front door. What we are saying is that all of Canada's regions ought to be served, can be served, and should be served. If we are forward looking and believe in this country and our ability to repeat the success of high speed trains, we should at least look at the systems elsewhere in the world. There is no reason that all of Canada's regions cannot have a reasonable level of rail passenger service.

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I could reconsider everything that has been said by my friend, but I would need more than 20 minutes and that would not necessarily answer the issue before us today.

When the Hon. Member referred to Newfoundland, I know in the bottom of his heart that my friend is very happy with what we did. For example, there is \$800 million in Newfoundland for roads. I suggest to my friend that he make the same proposal to his neighbours in P.E.I., Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick. He will see what type of reaction he will have.

The Hon. Member was referring to Europe and Japan. In terms of transportation, the worst we can do is compare Canada with a smaller country such as Japan with 100 million people. There is no comparison. Canada is a very large country with 26 million people. There is no profitable rail passenger service in the world.

Mr. Keyes: Amtrak is close.

Mr. Tobin: The TGV.

Mr. Bouchard (Roberval): It is not a network. The TGV in France is one of the components of the network.

Mr. Tobin: That component is profitable.

Mr. Bouchard (Roberval): The network is not working in terms of profits. One only needs to talk to people in France and West Germany.

Supply

Mr. Tobin: You are saying that the high speed train is not profitable? Stick to your facts. It is very profitable.

Mr. Bouchard (Roberval): I did not interrupt the Hon. Member. I was very quiet when he spoke.

Mr. Tobin: I will be as well.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bouchard (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, I think it is good that my colleague presented this motion today because, basically, our discussions of transportation choices must be based on realities. I said many times that I am not fundamentally or viscerally opposed to the rail passenger transportation system. We belong to the same country, we have lived in the same country for 120 years, and I think it is essential to understand that rail passenger service met some needs, particularly in the 19th century, and even until the 1950s or 1960s, essential needs that successive governments of whatever party respected. Nevertheless, people try to forget, or get away from, the reality of the situation the country is in now.

But sooner or later, this reality catches up with us. I refer, of course, Mr. Speaker, to Canada's financial situation. VIA Rail received \$641 million (in subsidies) last year: that is \$100 for every passenger who took the train. Every time someone boards a train for \$20 or \$25, it costs the government \$100. This transportation system is changing considerably today. Air and road transportation in particular account for 85 per cent of all inter-city travel. Marine transportation, in provinces where this is justified, is developing and subsidies are also growing at the same time, especially for rail transport, again.

Mr. Speaker, this trend with VIA Rail—I shall speak of VIA Rail although it did not exist until 12 years ago, but today it is VIA Rail—began in the 1950s and '60s, when the use of rail passenger services started a two-third decline after reaching a peak just after the war, when highway transportation was much less developed and obviously air transportation was not as big as it is today.

In 1961—not many people know and I think the information would be useful to Hon. Members opposite—a commission of inquiry recommended exactly what we intend to do today, in other words, rationalization of rail passenger service. It was not done at the time, for political reasons. However, it is clear that if that was the situation was like that in 1961, and now, twenty-eight