former Minister of Transport identified specific steps to improve the safety of railway operations.

These steps included a safety blitz of operating personnel to ensure that safety practices were understood, stepped up supervision and monitoring of operations, increased Canadian Transport Commission inspection and verification, medical check-ups for operating personnel, performance audits of supervisors, a maintenance review, and accelerated government and railway initiatives to develop the advanced train control system.

The Minister also initiated inquiries into accidents and accelerated work on a new railway safety Act to modernize and improve regulation of railway safety. At the Minister's direction, the Canadian Transport Commission carried out an examination of Canadian railway derailments and collisions in recent years. The review indicated that the number of accidents had declined during the last five years in relation to the traffic handled.

Derailments have been declining in spite of an increase in the volume of traffic moved. Approximately a third of all derailments occur in yard operations, and these are generally of a minor nature. More than 80 per cent of the collisions reported to the CTC also take place in yards. The majority of these collisions are minor side-swipes which occur during switching operations and result in superficial damage to freight cars. Fortunately head-on train collisions are rare.

Perhaps I should say at this time that no matter what safety precautions are taken, there are always the elements of human error and mechanical failure. I doubt very much that we will ever eliminate accidents.

On the basis of the CTC report and the latest information available for 1986, there do not appear to be any identifiable trends signifying deterioration in railway safety performance in Canada.

A special task force was formed to examine the flow of dangerous commodities through the rail network in the Toronto area and to report to the Minister on options to improve safety. One must agree that the Minister is certainly monitoring and taking precautions to eliminate the possibility of accidents wherever possible.

An early result of this initiative was an offer by CP Rail to reduce the speed of operation of trains carrying dangerous goods across the Metropolitan Toronto area. This voluntary offer was accepted by the Minister and now is in effect.

Canada's railway industry, through the Railway Association of Canada, has been instrumental in sponsoring a program to develop a major technological advance in train control systems. Working in co-operation with the Association of American Railroads, the railways have initiated a program known as the advanced control system, which would use advanced computer and satellite communications technology to achieve substantial improvements in productivity and safety. At the direction of the Minister, Transport Canada is working with industry on means to accelerate prototype development. The advanced train control system will help to make Canadian railways even safer and thus help them to build upon their already enviable safety record.

As I said at the outset, we as Canadians should be proud of the fact that one of our major Canadian railways has achieved the best safety record of all class one railways in North America and that our other major Canadian railway ranked sixth among them.

• (1740)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Darryl L. Gray (Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine): Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity this afternoon to say a few words about the motion moved by the Hon. Member for Humboldt—Lake Centre (Mr. Althouse).

Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to summarize the events that led up to what is now happening in the transportation sector, and by this I mean the railways or any other form of transportation.

[*English*]

As you are well aware, Mr. Speaker, it is important that the present Government, with our new Transport Act, with our Railway Act and with all of the implications, take into account what has been done and what has to be done. I beg your indulgence, Sir, to make several points.

[*Translation*]

Railway safety has become a major concern not only as a result of increased highway trafic but especially since the advent of the petrochemical industry and synthetic products. The companies have been marketing a slew of new products which are often very dangerous and harmful and which are transported mostly by railways.

Sixty-two per cent of all railway accidents occur at level crossings. As I said earlier, our Government has taken steps to improve safety at level crossings and on rails as well. Mr. Speaker, this is a long-term project which calls for the active participation of other governments, the railway industry, and the chemical industry.

From 1978 to 1985 the number of accidents at the 27,200-odd level crossings declined from 871 to 602. This is not good enough, and I am sure you will agree that the number of accidents is still too high. Here are a few of the initiatives which have been taken, and other immediate projects related to railway crossings. Here are some of the recommendations we are making and which will be implemented in the near future.

1. Light-reflecting grade crossing St. Andrew's crosses;

2. Larger flashing light lenses whose red shade is more easily spotted:

Mr. Speaker, when I say "a red shade more easily spotted" I refer exclusively to railways.