

Considering the tremendous length of highways everywhere throughout the province of Quebec, on account of the increasing needs in the field of transportation and the development of technology, the development of modern techniques in highway construction has become necessary.

It is obvious that provincial budgets cannot sustain the exorbitant costs of highway construction. This is why it was with satisfaction that the provinces welcomed the federal Trans-Canada Highway project although our province—mine and yours, Mr. Speaker,—under the aegis of the then Union Nationale government and saddled for too long with duplessism, had refused to subscribe to the agreement for the construction of the Trans-Canada Highway until another Quebec government was fortunately elected which practiced autonomy otherwise than in name, which practiced “totonomy”, the Liberal government of Mr. Lesage.

**An hon. Member:** This is an old story.

**Mr. Béchard:** Maybe, but it turned nevertheless to our advantage.

Since the agreement of the Trans-Canada Highway, technology has evolved and traffic has considerably increased.

The motion tabled by the hon. member for Halifax-East Hants (Mr. McCleave) refers however to a specific project involving federal financial assistance. As the mover of the motion and other hon. members have pointed out, it is not the first time that such a motion is placed before the House, since not later than last year, in February 1971, the same hon. member expressed an identical wish in a resolution which reproduces verbatim the one that is now before us.

I believe that this clearly shows, Mr. Speaker, how important the project is, not only for the hon. member who moved the motion, but especially for the people of his province and that part of Nova Scotia which he represents in the House. The rather hefty and compelling file which he disclosed on this question during the 1971 debate, clearly detailed the numerous representations he had made to several federal and provincial authorities.

The review, though cursory I admit, Mr. Speaker, I have made of the subject under debate, that is the Fundy Trail project and the construction of a bridge over the Shubenacadie River, has revealed to me the great importance of these two projects.

Mr. Speaker, however important this project may be, the hon. member will readily admit that provincial roads, including bridges, unless they connect two provinces, are exclusively under provincial jurisdiction. Therefore, the wish expressed by the hon. member for Halifax-East Hants in his resolution raises this question of the federal government's financial contribution to the building of highways.

As I said in my opening remarks, Mr. Speaker, I represent an area which badly lacks highways that meet the modern needs of 1972, and I completely agree with this principle of federal aid to highway construction. The agreement on the construction of the Trans-Canada highway having now expired, another tool is left to the prov-

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inces for obtaining the federal government's financial participation, which is, the Department of Regional Economic Expansion, which, incidentally, is being strongly criticized by members from the Atlantic provinces, and especially from Newfoundland. Fortunately, some provinces benefit from the funds made available to them by the Department of Regional Economic Expansion for the development of certain areas, and not all of those regions are represented by members who are over-critical.

In the kind of agreements which exist, incidentally, with all provinces, including those mentioned by my hon. colleague, and particularly his own province of Nova Scotia, the priority and importance of projects is first established by the provinces themselves, which decide to have them included in the development agreement. Thus, the area of the lower St. Lawrence, the Gaspé peninsula and the Îles-de-la-Madeleine presently enjoys the benefits of the 1968 agreement for development of that area, an agreement which was negotiated again by the Ottawa and Quebec governments in September 1971.

As the project mentioned by the hon. member for Halifax-East Hants is very important and deals with a matter falling under the exclusive responsibility of the province of Nova Scotia, I suggest that provincial authorities might include the Fundy Trail project as well as the river Shubenacadie bridge project in the preparation of a possible agreement with the government of Canada under the ARDA legislation or in new negotiations. The hon. member will understand that problems of this kind are more familiar to local governments than to the government of Canada. This is why this area falls under the provincial jurisdiction only.

The hon. member was reminded, in 1971, during a debate on a similar resolution put forward by the hon. member for Northumberland-Miramichi (Mr. Smith) that no priority had been given to the 1969 brief, to which the hon. member, as well as the hon. member for Saint-Jean-Lancaster (Mr. Bell), referred a moment ago. In fact, in the premiers' brief presented to the Minister of Transport (Mr. Jamieson) by the four Atlantic provinces, no priority has been given to the Fundy Trail project, nor to the development of the river Shubenacadie bridge. And this brief, called “Transportation Modes-Highways”, did not hold the attention of the last governments of Nova Scotia, which had, if I recall correctly, the same political affiliation as the hon. member who presents this motion today.

As a conclusion, I shall recall that the province of Nova Scotia has derived great benefits, as did other provinces, from federal-provincial agreements, for the development of highways; indeed, under the agreement concerning the development of the Trans-Canada Highway, this province has received \$78,354,422. Mr. Speaker, we heard a great deal during certain election campaigns in the province of Nova Scotia, not of the federal contribution, but of the way this money could profit the provincial government which was under the leader of the official opposition (Mr. Stanfield) who is now a member of this House.

So, Mr. Speaker, I entirely support the resolution of the hon. member for Halifax-East Hants, but I ask him to use the normal procedure. As this comes under the jurisdiction of the province of Nova Scotia, this province would first have to submit its priorities to the Department of