

*The Budget—Mr. Watson*

the eastern provinces and, as a matter of fact, everyone outside of Alberta.

Who will pay for this subsidy deficit? We say that not everyone will pay for it, certainly not the people who will need to pay for heating oil. We say that the people who will have to pay for it are those driving automobiles. I quite agree that this will still result in a number of inequities, and some of those inequities hit people in my constituency in particular very hard indeed, because many of them belong to the category of people who have no alternative but to use automobiles in order to get to work because we do not have the kind of public transit systems in this country we should have.

● (1630)

I now come to the real disappointment for me in this budget, or in the matters related to the budget, and that is that a few days before it the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand) announced his new transportation policy reflections, and there was no mention whatsoever of the vital question of urban transit. I find it very hard to justify this in my own mind. I find it impossible to justify the lack of action on the question of urban transit when we are paying an oil subsidy, which amounts to approximately \$1.5 billion per year. If on reasonable grounds we brought in an excise tax on gasoline, why in doing these things did we not at the same time,—when we had the opportunity—announce a clear cut program for urban transit?

On June 17, 1974 the Prime Minister (Mr. Trudeau) indicated that we would institute a program in which we would pay 100 per cent of the cost of new commuter vehicles manufactured in Canada, and 50 per cent of the cost of new stations and platforms forming part of that system. We also agreed to bring in a program which would pay 25 per cent of the capital cost of all vehicles purchased each year for public transit and suburban transit vehicles, systems, machinery and equipment. We indicated that we would encourage urban transit system innovations with demonstration projects financed by the federal government. We also indicated that the government and its departments would try to make the best use of existing railway rights of way and track in urban suburban areas for new commuter and urban transit lines with a view to reducing the high initial cost of such systems to Canadian municipalities. These were some of the promises made during the last election campaign. I say to the Prime Minister that not only the Canadian public but also the members of the Liberal caucus hold him to these promises, not four years from now, but within a very short time. We are expecting action on urban transit, and there is no way hon. members on this side will accept long delay, and I am sure the public will not either.

**Some hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr. Baker (Grenville-Carleton):** That is a good streak of independence.

**Mr. Watson:** In my own area there is a particular example of how urban transit has become the focal issue of people's concern.

[Mr. Watson.]

[Translation]

I would like to show, Mr. Speaker, how public opinion in my constituency is several years ahead of government action. In 1971, for instance, when the traffic on one of the bridges, the Mercier bridge, became very difficult, the public started to make increasing use of the railway system of the area. In the fall of 1973, when the oil crisis was at its worst, the public concentrated on the issues of energy conservation, pollution, and the growth concept which, until then, had been translated into building larger roads, more powerful cars, and so on.

An increasing number of Canadians from all parts of the country started to think about public transportation, which saved energy and reduced pollution, as a solution to the growth problem. The population of areas like the south shore, and Châteauguay was no exception, joined in this great national movement. Because of the energy crisis which had begun in 1973, the public began considering public transportation systems as desirable solutions, and we must give the public credit for urging the federal and provincial governments to review their respective transportation policies. At that time, the Châteauguay population was fed up with the pitiful traffic conditions on the Mercier bridge at rush hour. During the rush hour, this is the most congested of all roadways giving access to the island of Montreal. I started to receive many letters and phone calls from unhappy people. In February, the decision made by the Canadian Transport Commission in the Barry case in Ontario made the public hope that it might be possible to reinstate passenger rail service in the area. These problems show clearly that we do not have any other alternative at least in the area I represent. For instance, on April 11, 1974, Paul Berthiaume, State Minister for Transport in the province of Quebec announced and I quote:

No new bridge will be built on the St. Lawrence River until the south shore obtains a fully integrated public transport system.

The fact is that there are only two lanes in each direction on Mercier bridge and that the access to that bridge is so difficult that it is almost impossible to create lanes for buses and cars with no more than three passengers.

The access to Mercier bridge is so difficult that the highway department cannot reverse the traffic flow in the third lane at peak hours. The fact is that the bridge is the only access to southwestern Quebec and the other region. Mercier bridge opens on the Indian reserve that is absolutely opposed to the construction of other bridges or highways crossing the reserve. For all the reasons I just mentioned, a public transportation system is essential but buses or cars cannot use that bridge for the reason I gave. And the only alternative for public transportation is to use the existing railways. The federal government has jurisdiction over railways and I am very disappointed that a few days before the budget, this government did not choose to announce a final program on public transportation. We should put as much pressure as possible on this government to convince it that such a program is needed now and not later.