

a policy which allows it to offer an abandoned line to municipal or provincial authorities. That is a step forward.

The problem is that municipal or provincial organizations are often not in a position, for one reason or another, to take advantage of such an offer when it is made. The result is that within a few months some private developer or private owner sees this land vacant or hears that it is about to become vacant and gets into the act sooner than one might expect, with the result that the line is cut up. Once that happens, its potential for recreational purposes is decreased. Gradually, various other parts of the line are sold off and the whole thing becomes quite hopeless. There is really no need for this to occur.

I do not pretend that this bill is the absolute answer. I think we should use the discussion today to urge the government to do what should be done. This is the fourth time I have introduced this bill. Like many other decent ideas introduced around here, it takes an awful long time to convince the bureaucracy to act, and unfortunately, there is no exception in this case.

The way I have phrased the bill, "the establishment of an authority", is designed more to follow the rules of the House than anything else because private members cannot propose anything which will cost money when proposing private members' bills. Whether we use this method or another, the basic idea is to set up a system whereby, when the CTC authorizes the abandonment of a railway line, there is some requirement that the railway company which has asked for authorization of abandonment has an obligation to dispose of that abandoned line right away to a public body, either municipal, non-profit or provincial, for a sum related to its book value, not an inflated value, and having regard to the price originally paid by the railway.

● (1610)

These things should be incorporated in whatever eventual arrangement is made and the offer to these various bodies should be publicized in the same way as the CTC publicizes a lot of other things. For example, notices could be posted in local post offices so that the entire local population might be aware of what is going on. A notice should remain for a sufficient length of time to allow the public to get organized and do something about it. If they still do not do anything about it, then that is tough, because we will have done our duty. I would have no sympathy for a public that failed to act after it had received proper notice and had been given plenty of time in which to act.

What is happening now is completely the reverse of that situation. I can cite an example that happened in my constituency within the last year. A bicycle path was made along the embankment on the south shore of the St. Lawrence Seaway. I can claim some credit for encouraging Parks Canada to help with this. It is an excellent site and allows the public a fantastic view of the Montreal panorama and the St. Lawrence River. There is also a fair amount of wildlife in the area. The path leads to a location which is only three miles from a railway museum at De Léry, Quebec, which is the best in the

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world. It is inland from the river, and is reached over a network of road connections. The route is very convenient and we have been asking Parks Canada to link their bicycle paths with the museum. In this way the museum would be made available by bicycle to thousands of people on the south shore of Montreal.

Everyone admits it is a good idea. For three-quarters of a mile of the distance between the dyke and the museum, there is an abandoned railway line. When we got in touch with CPR we were referred to Marathon Realty. The situation was explained to them and their co-operation sought.

To make a long story short, Mr. Speaker, they agreed it was a good idea but—they sold the property to a developer. Now we have to make a bicycle path that will go through the streets instead of on an abandoned right of way, protected from traffic and not interfering with municipal traffic patterns. The proposal made sense, but the CPR felt no obligation to the public nor did its real estate firm. Perhaps the province and the municipality were occupied with other things and did not take action when it might have had some effect, so the project fell through. In my view, the basic responsibility lies with the CPR and Marathon Realty. They should have had the decency to let the others have a chance.

My bill was proposed long before this particular incident but it would prevent such a thing from happening again. I do not really care how we go about this, but I would like the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pepin) and the minister who is responsible for Parks Canada to consider this matter again and see whether they can find a solution. There is no excuse for this sort of thing but it happens all across Canada and recreational sites are lost unnecessarily.

The railways may consider all this as something of a nuisance but I say, that is tough. They should be required to protect the public interest in regard to these routes, not only for recreational purposes. Occasionally in a city, a potential rapid transit route could be developed. Unless we act quickly, that will be lost as well.

I shall not keep talking, Mr. Speaker, as I should like other hon. members to have an opportunity to indicate support for the bill. I realize that it will probably be talked out today but perhaps whoever is here to represent the government House leader would agree to having the subject matter of the bill referred to a committee, at least. I do not know whether that is possible but perhaps some hon. members may indicate their willingness to do so. If that is the case, perhaps we could make such an agreement close to five o'clock. I do not think anyone will quarrel with the objective of the bill so why not get it into committee where we can put a bit more pressure on the government to move in favour of something that makes a lot of sense?

Mr. Nelson A. Riis (Kamloops-Shuswap): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have this opportunity to speak to Bill C-221, an act to provide for the establishment of an authority for public use of abandoned railway lines in Canada.