

Trans-Canada Highway Act

I would ask the minister also how many provinces have shown an interest in an expanded highway program in Canada. I am wondering whether the four western provinces, for example, have had any communication with the minister as to the desirability of proceeding with a second trans-Canada highway in that area. I know that the Saskatchewan government on previous occasions has asked the federal government to embark on a second trans-Canada highway and in particular to provide on a co-operative basis for a joint program of highway construction within that province. I think the minister is well aware of the position that has been taken by the Saskatchewan government. I think it is a fair position. The Saskatchewan government points out the great advantages that have accrued to that province from the trans-Canada highway.

I have in my hand a file of correspondence between provincial governments and the federal government dealing with this subject. In it there is a letter addressed to Hon. Howard Green, Minister of Public Works, Ottawa, Ontario; dated Regina, May 27, 1958; and signed by J. T. Douglas, Saskatchewan minister of highways. In that letter on page two, Mr. Douglas has this to say:

The trans-Canada highway is an outstanding example of the effect of high class highway construction as a stimulant to the economy. The 406 miles of this road in Saskatchewan carry an annual total of approximately 200 million vehicle miles, or nearly nine per cent of total travel in Saskatchewan. Maximum average traffic reaches volumes of approximately 5,000 vehicles per day, and the average annual daily traffic is approximately 1,340 vehicles. These figures are rather surprising when the sparse settlement of certain sections of the route is considered, and this high degree of use can be contributed chiefly to the existence of a consistently high standard road.

That emphasizes the fact that the building of such highways attracts a high level of automobile use which means, of course, increased use by Canadians and by tourists. Mr. Douglas goes on to state as follows:

We have noted a steady and high rate of increase in total travel in Saskatchewan in recent years. This improves the revenues of both provincial and federal governments but carries with it a responsibility to provide adequate facilities for this increasing volume of traffic. According to the Gordon commission report direct costs associated with the motor vehicle accounted for nearly 22 per cent of the gross national product in 1953. It has been estimated that one person in seven makes his living directly as a result of the motor vehicle.

Main highway construction is a leading type of public work with respect to the alleviation of unemployment problems.

I point out that this letter was addressed to the minister on May 27, 1958. Mr. Douglas continues:

It has been estimated that the labour content of road construction is in the order of 27 per cent of

total expenditure. This is on site labour and the indirect effects are, of course, substantially greater.

The Saskatchewan government has also played a co-operative role in building the trans-Canada highway section within that province. The government of Saskatchewan is anxious to co-operate with the federal government now in the provision of additional highway facilities within that province. The Saskatchewan government, in the light of the unemployment situation in Canada, is most anxious that the federal government adopt a program of expanded highway construction in order to deal with the unemployment crisis in this country.

I therefore make a plea to the minister that he use his influence in the cabinet to have this present program greatly expanded to include a second trans-Canada highway, north and south roads and the main roads now being used by the people of this country. I believe that is the kind of program for which the federal government, in the interests of Canada, might well consider borrowing in order to defray the cost. This is not an investment that is lost or an expenditure that does not result in long term good. As Mr. Douglas has so well pointed out, investment in highways in this country not only provides additional services for Canada but in fact increases the revenues accruing to governments at all levels. These highways will be used by Canadians in the main but they will be used by tourists and the increased revenues developed from the use of those highways, I submit, for the life of the highways will make this investment self-liquidating for the Canadian nation. I ask the minister what consideration has been given to adopting the suggestion made by the Saskatchewan government and others that the present trans-Canada highway program be greatly expanded at this time.

(Translation):

Mr. Boulanger: Mr. Chairman, I should like to take but a few minutes of the committee's time to say that I endorse this resolution because it will not only contribute to the progress of Canada, but also to the solution of unemployment.

At the present time, nine out of ten provinces have agreed to take advantage of this legislation. The province of Quebec alone has refused. I was figuring a moment ago what would have been the individual share if the province of Quebec had accepted the \$35 million that the federal government was putting at its disposal and which would have benefited the whole population. My figures show \$7 per capita, or \$35 per family of five persons. You might say that such an amount