

Adjournment Debate

May I deal for a moment, Madam Speaker, with a cost comparison of rail versus automobile commuting between my home town of Hudson and Montreal. A return trip by rail under the new rates would cost \$2.30. By car the cost of the return trip is between four and five times the amount of the rail fare, when insurance, depreciation and maintenance are apportioned on a mileage basis. Parking costs alone for an automobile can exceed the rail fare.

I could deal at length with the pollution problem of automobiles, but prefer to underline another aspect. The automobile uses subsidized, imported gasoline. The government contributes, through price equalization, about \$10 per month to reduce the gasoline cost of each car commuting from Hudson to Montreal. There is no comparable subsidy with regard to rail fares.

In reply to a question I recently placed on the order paper, the Minister of Transport confirmed that there is no federal financial assistance to the Montreal CP rail commuter routes.

Mr. A. R. Campbell, CP Rail's general manager of passenger services said:

Urban transport systems can no longer be provided in isolation from each other. Moving people in and out of cities has become a special kind of challenge that requires the integration of different modes of travel. The kind of integrated planning necessary is a big and essential job which will help shape the kind of over-all communities we have in the next decades and in the next century.

● (2220)

Mr. Robert Bandeen, president of the government owned Canadian National Railways, says that nationalization of privately owned CP Rail would be disastrous for transportation. It is my firm conviction that an efficiently, economically priced transportation system is an essential service.

I am aware of the examination of public transportation presently being undertaken by the department. Please do not let it take as long as the CTC comprehensive investigation which started in 1970 and still has to be concluded. In the meantime, as a gesture of faith and interest in public transportation, will the minister stop the May 1 implementation date for the major commuter fare increases on CP Rail Montreal lines?

Mr. Joseph-Philippe Guay (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Regional Economic Expansion): Madam Speaker, further to the question asked in the House by the hon. member for Vaudreuil (Mr. Herbert) on April 18 with respect to the increase in commuter fares that has been announced by CP Rail in the Montreal area, the Minister of Transport (Mr. Marchand) has contacted CP Rail to make the necessary inquiries.

As you know, the size of the increase is 26 per cent across-the-board, that is, for all types of fares such as one-way, ten trips, flash-cards, and irrespective of the distance travelled. The commuter routes involved are the following three routes: Montreal to Rigaud, Montreal to Farnham, and Montreal to Ste. Therese.

The principle behind the increase has been well explained. The rapid increases in operating costs for the railways have made it mandatory that an increase in fare be imposed. However, the principle that CP Rail has used in determining the extent of the increase appears to be quite reasonable. What, in fact, has been done is to ensure that the size of the deficit incurred in 1975 will not be greater than the one incurred in 1974. In other words, the increase in revenues provided by the increase in fares should compensate for the increase in costs for 1975. There is no attempt on the part of CP Rail to reduce the existing deficit.

It should be noted that the deficit incurred by CP Rail in 1974 was \$2.6 million. It is hoped by CP that the 1975 deficit will be of the same magnitude because of the fare increase. It should be pointed out that the railway is not compensated for this loss by any government in any way.

It would be good to point out that the federal government has always considered that commuter services are a municipal and provincial responsibility. In the near future it can be expected that the federal government will be providing some help to these levels of government to meet their responsibilities in this respect.

The hon. member said he was aware of the task force study taking place at the present time. It is for that reason it is going on. The federal government is quite aware of it. Many reasons would work in favour of such an action by the federal government; improving the quality of urban environment, energy conservation, and so on.

Motion agreed to and the House adjourned at 10:26 p.m.