

Adjournment Debate

It is admitted by both the federal and provincial governments that it is the worst section of Trans-Canada Highway in the country. It has an adverse effect on the economy. The tourism industry and all those things that relate to highway traffic are adversely affected.

The federal government is talking about building the link to Prince Edward Island, so we will build a new superstructure that will connect Prince Edward Island with New Brunswick and there are not going to be the highways upon which to take the cars that come back and forth from the island. It does not really make a whole lot of sense to me.

The appalling thing about this whole situation is that the minister's response is that this is a provincial responsibility and really, the federal government does not have anything to do with it. Well, that is incorrect. It is the Trans-Canada Highway. It was built by a joint agreement between the federal government and the provincial governments of this country and it was to serve as a link between all parts of the country, from sea to sea to sea, and this minister's response that it is purely a provincial government problem is irresponsible in my view.

• (1820)

The provincial government of New Brunswick is exerting some efforts with respect to correcting the Trans-Canada Highway problem in New Brunswick. It was interesting to note that the premier wrote the minister immediately after seeing what the minister's response was to my question. He pointed out just exactly how much money the province put in. It had committed on the basis of the gasoline tax \$32 million a year to help upgrade the Trans-Canada Highway. In addition to that, it has put forward a special fund of \$100 million to be used in the construction of the Trans-Canada Highway for the years 1990, 1991, and 1992.

If you lose perspective, that is a major contribution for any province the size of New Brunswick with a population of roughly 700,000 to make to this particular problem.

In conclusion, I quote from the premier's letter: "Your predecessors in the Department of Transport as well as the Prime Minister have conceded that New Brunswick has the worst stretch of Trans-Canada Highway in the country and that is why we asked for federal government

assistance, and it is not just a provincial responsibility. It is time for the federal government to assume its responsibility".

It is true.

Mr. Lee Richardson (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I am sure that my hon. friend opposite would want to know, and I am sure that the people of New Brunswick would want to know, that since 1977, Transport Canada has contributed nearly \$283 million toward highways in New Brunswick. Indeed, New Brunswick is second only to Newfoundland in the amount of federal funds received. The provinces, which do have responsibilities here, made the decision to spend the bulk of these moneys in the province's northeastern region, on Highways 11 and 8, rather than on the Trans-Canada Highway, for which we sent them the money.

At present, the federal government has a \$145 million highway improvement agreement with New Brunswick. Under this agreement approximately \$67 million, or 46 per cent, will be expended on the Trans-Canada Highway and connecting links, Highways 1 and 7.

The federal government is now being asked to commit funds to upgrade New Brunswick's Trans-Canada Highway to four lanes which incidentally would require over \$2 billion.

Over the past year the federal government has received requests from other provinces and territories for highway contributions totalling \$14 billion. Clearly, these requests cannot be handled in an *ad hoc* manner. Highway transportation problems, whether in New Brunswick or elsewhere in the country, will have to be dealt with in the context of a national highway program.

The federal government, in co-operation with the 12 provincial and territorial governments, is actively examining the magnitude of this problem. No decisions concerning the upgrading of New Brunswick's Trans-Canada Highway, nor any other portion of the national highway system, can be made until this process is complete.

We have a duty, especially in this period of budgetary constraint, to ensure that federal highway funds are spent wisely.