

Rail Service

intentions in this regard? In view of the fact that he spoke about the VIA Rail service between Quebec City and Montreal being provided by 1980, when does he anticipate that we will have a rapid transcontinental VIA Rail service from one end of the country to the other?

Mr. Lang: The balance of the new equipment will be arriving in two or three years. I would not want to predict the speed at which trains will be travelling at that time. We are very conscious of the fact that all these factors lead to better rail passenger service. Of course, the improved design of the interior of trains is an example of that.

● (1602)

I also believe that the creation of VIA Rail and the dedication to rail passenger service will have an important impact upon the morale of those who are engaged in providing services, the men and women on the trains, because they will no longer be part of an operation which was getting little attention and looking as though it was the neglected child in the family of rail services. In this way, I believe the whole group will work together to provide better service and to make sure that the way of providing this service is best suited to the needs of travellers.

Mr. Elzinga: Mr. Speaker, my question is supplementary to the one put to the minister by the hon. member for Edmonton West. As are all my colleagues from the Edmonton area, I am concerned about the facilities at the airport at Edmonton. The minister stated that it is going to be only a short-term delay. Would the minister be kind enough to give us a hopeful date as to when the upgrading of the facilities at the Edmonton international airport will take place, in view of the fact that we will be hosting the Commonwealth Games in 1978?

Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, I would not want to speculate upon a date, but I can assure the hon. member that as soon as I have a definite date, it will be given.

Mr. Mazankowski: Mr. Speaker, I have two brief questions for the minister. Is the \$24 million, which has been announced today for the purpose of purchasing equipment, a portion of the \$30 million grant which was originally announced? Can the minister explain to the House, or elaborate as to how VIA Rail will be financing the balance of \$66 million? Will it be a loan obtained from the private sector, a loan from the government, or will a portion of it be generated from within?

Mr. Lang: I believe that when the original \$30 million figure was quoted, the intention was to allocate approximately \$9 million of that toward equipment, and the balance toward other improvements. Therefore, the amount which will be spent in fact will be much larger than originally contemplated, as this approximately \$90 million indicates. The \$24 million from the government will be going indirectly through an estimates vote. The balance and many other improvements which will go on will, indeed, be self-financing over the long term, and we will be acting to give VIA Rail Canada Limited the capability, either with CN or government guarantees, to

[Mr. Malone.]

raise the necessary funds for capital purchases. The over-all cost of servicing that capital will, of course, be included in later votes in this House.

Mr. Orlikow: Mr. Speaker, I should like to ask the minister if there are any early plans for upgrading the track between Ottawa and Montreal, and the elimination of the remaining level crossings. I should like to ask the same about the Toronto to Montreal line, so that people, including members of parliament and ministers, will be persuaded by the much shorter trip to take the train instead of the bus, driving in their own cars or flying, as they now do?

Mr. Lang: Mr. Speaker, a variety of routes will be getting attention, but I know that one in particular that is seen as deserving early attention is the Ottawa to Montreal route, because of the distance and therefore the possibility of attracting more passengers to the rail mode and away, perhaps, from their automobiles.

Mr. Orlikow: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the minister can tell us whether there are similar plans to upgrade the line between Regina and Saskatoon and between Calgary and Edmonton. Both trips are now being made by a large number of private passenger cars or by aircraft, and both would be much more efficient and cheaper if they were made by a rail service which had the kind of speed which these new engines and rail cars the minister announced today could maintain if they were given the tracks upon which to operate.

Mr. Lang: VIA Rail will be giving consideration to the question of a variety of intercity services, particularly the Bud car type of service where an individual unit provides the service. But we will have to look at this question very carefully in order to determine whether the frequency and quality of the bus services which exist in some of the intercity links are, indeed, the better way to go, and whether they can in fact fulfil the service. So the extra cost of railway upgrading may be uneconomic compared with using that money for other good transportation services.

That is the kind of question we will be looking at progressively in order to provide the best transportation services, but certainly we will be looking at all modes and, very clearly, the bus mode as well as the rail mode.

Mr. Ellis: Mr. Speaker, I will try to combine my questions into one. Perhaps the minister will answer all of them at once. As the minister well knows, the city of Belleville, which I represent, is the Rideau area headquarters and has been the home of CN for many years. Recently, CN has obviously adopted a policy of reducing the work force in this area and the schedule of trains in and out of Belleville has been a deterrent to travellers to the point where people in the area who would normally use rail have been calling me frequently and complaining. Will the minister and his department have any input into the type of employment and the type of schedules in and out of that area?