

*Abandoned Rights of Way***PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS***[English]*

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Public bill No. 6, the hon. member for Regina West (Mr. Benjamin). Shall the item stand?

Some hon. Members: Stand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Stand by unanimous consent. Public bill No. 10, the hon. member for Wetaskiwin (Mr. Schellenberger). Shall the item stand?

Some hon. Members: Stand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Stand by unanimous consent. Public bill No. 11, the hon. member for Algoma (Mr. Foster). Shall the item stand?

Some hon. Members: Stand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Stand by unanimous consent. Public bill No. 12, the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce (Mr. Allmand). Shall the item stand?

Some hon. Members: Stand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Stand by unanimous consent. Public bill No. 16, the hon. member for Kindersley-Lloydminster (Mr. McKnight). Shall the item stand?

Some hon. Members: Stand.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Item No. 17, the hon. member for Annapolis-Valley-Hants (Mr. Nowlan). Shall the item stand?

Some hon. Members: Stand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Item No. 18, the hon. member for Bruce-Grey (Mr. Gurbin). Shall the item stand?

Some hon. Members: Stand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Item No. 19, the hon. member for Surrey-White Rock-North Delta (Mr. Friesen). Shall the item stand?

Some hon. Members: Stand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Item No. 21.

ABANDONED RAILWAY LINES ACT

ESTABLISHMENT OF CONSERVATION ADVISORY AUTHORITY

Mr. Ian Watson (Châteauguay) moved that Bill C-221, to provide for the establishment of an authority for public use of abandoned railway lines in Canada, be now read a second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Transport.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to be able to reintroduce this bill which has been discussed during the last sessions since my election to this House. Unfortunately, the problem addressed by this bill shows a tendency to worsen. I have myself sponsored this bill, which may be cited as the Abandoned Railway Lines Act, not because the means provided in this bill are the best possible to solve the problem or to achieve the desired goal, but because I wanted to urge the government and the two or three commissions acting for the government to proceed in a direction where there could be more protection for the public interest when the railways relinquish their rights of way. The Canadian public is becoming more and more aware of the potential of abandoned railway lines and unused tracks for rapid transit systems and recreation. Too often in the past buildings have been erected on sections that the railroads had sold, which has made it virtually impossible to use them eventually for urban transport, for walkways, or for cycle, snowmobile, ski and nature paths, and so on.

This bill will protect the long-term interests of the public as concerns rapid transit systems and recreation by reserving the use of abandoned railway lines and rights of way.

In a few moments, I shall give a few examples of cases in my constituency where the lack of a bill or a system such as the one I am suggesting has resulted in the loss to the public of any opportunity to use these areas for recreation purposes. In Saint-Lambert, for example, a school was built on an abandoned railway line, which made it impossible to use that right of way in the future for a rapid transit system. Even in the electoral district that you represent, in eastern Ontario, Mr. Speaker, there are some abandoned railway lines that could have been used for snowmobile, cross country skiing or even horseback riding or hiking trails. But instead, the rights of way often went back to the farmers who owned them originally, but also, in some instances, to foreigners, which prevented the public from using these trails which are often in very scenic countryside, behind farms, villages, in nature, and that is what is sad. Up until now we have missed all those opportunities.

[English]

Constituencies that combine cities with countryside, have probably encountered at one time or another lost opportunities that are the direct result of a lack of a set of rules to oblige the railway companies at least to make these abandoned lines available to the general public. I understand that CN now has