

Trans-Canada Highway

approaches the building of this most important trans-Canada highway with diffident reluctance. That is the only way one can express it.

We criticize the failure of the government to take proper leadership in this most important matter. To begin with, as I have already said, we have drifted along for 25 or 30 years without a route by which our own Canadian people, to say nothing of the tourists, could motor or haul by truck from eastern Canada to the west, or vice versa. All this time we have forced Canadians to spend a good many millions of scarce American dollars in the United States simply because they had no alternative to the use of the highways south of the 49th parallel. I have had to use those highways on many occasions when it has been necessary for me to travel west by automobile. We have lost untold millions of those same scarce American dollars through tourist travel which undoubtedly would have passed over a trans-Canada highway, if one had been in existence.

I am not going to cover the ground already so well covered by the two preceding speakers. In much of what they have said I concur. A number of good suggestions were made by the leader of the official opposition (Mr. Drew), in which I concur. I should like however to say something about financing the road. I said earlier that we were disappointed, keenly disappointed, with the government's announcement that it would share to the extent of only 50 per cent. I believe the trans-Canada highway should be financed entirely by the federal government.

I propose to cite to the house a number of good reasons in support of my claim. Obviously because of the shortage of time I cannot discuss all of them; but there are a number of good reasons why at least the first trans-Canada highway should be financed entirely from the federal treasury.

The first of these reasons is that the trans-Canada highway would be a national asset, because it would be national in scope. It would serve the interests of Canadians as a whole rather than the interests of only those people in one province or the people in a small group of provinces. My second reason is that the governments in the provinces, and of the municipalities in the provinces, are already faced with excessive expenditures for roads and other public works, in some cases away beyond their ability to pay without going further into debt.

At the present time the provinces and municipalities have to construct and maintain practically all the highways and roads, without any financial assistance from the

federal government. I submit that in no federal country in the world outside Canada is that true to the extent that it is true in this country. At the present time many of the highways in the provinces which serve the Canadian people as a whole are in the nature of a trans-Canada highway. No part of the cost of either building or maintaining those highways has been borne by the federal treasury.

Just let me give my own province as an example. I refer to Alberta only because I am more familiar with it than with any other province. I feel sure however that what I say about Alberta will hold more or less true with respect to all other provinces in Canada. In the first place according to 1947 figures Alberta had a population of roughly 822,000 people and an area of 255,285 square miles. In the second place, the total miles reserved for roadway amounts to 143,805. This simply means, by ordinary calculation, that five Albertans would have to carry the cost of building and maintaining each mile of highway, if it were possible to do the building all at once.

Mr. Blackmore: That figure includes men, women and children.

Mr. Low: Yes, including babies. This is a heavy burden for any group of people to bear. At present out of the 143,805 miles of potential roadways that will have to be built in time, a grand total of 80,742 miles have been built. In the third place there are in Alberta 76,140 miles of rural, municipal and improved district roads; and of this huge total 42,684 miles are earth roads, 24,790 are graded and 8,666 are gravel.

One gets some idea of the heavy financial burden to be borne by a province like Alberta when it is realized that it is impossible to maintain a mile of gravel highway for less than \$1,000 per year, if normal traffic is to be continued. Let that sink in: for less than \$1,000 per mile per year it is impossible to maintain a gravel road in passable condition.

In Alberta there have been built 3,258 miles of main gravel highway. It is not difficult therefore for hon. members to measure the kind of maintenance bill this mileage requires every year at \$1,000 a mile. And when we remember that a province with not many more than 800,000 people has to lay out over \$3 million a year merely to keep up its gravel roads, then I ask the house what chance it has to build hard-surfaced roads with the restricted resources falling within the scope of its own tax revenues. That is a serious question which it seems to me hon. members