

*Atlantic Region Transport Policy*

ment, through the Department of Regional Economic Expansion, to build once and for all a modern road around the Gaspé peninsula which would enable people not only to travel our region, but also to communicate easily with central Canada.

However, I think it would be good to remind hon. members that in the area of concern to the hon. member for Moncton, this government has already done quite a lot so far and we trust it will pursue this activity. I will mention the history of transportation in the Maritime provinces, that is the national transportation policy, and more specifically the Atlantic transportation policy. There is no need to go back very far. One merely has to remember that in 1967 the federal Minister of Transport had asked the premiers of the four Maritime provinces to express their views concerning transportation in their respective provinces and to bring these views to the attention of the federal government.

In my opinion, this, to start with, is at least evidence of the good intentions of the federal government and I appreciate this method since this government is giving not only the premiers but also the taxpayers of the Maritimes provinces through their premiers, the opportunity to state readily and with authority what they actually want.

In 1969, the premiers submitted a joint report and that very same year the Atlantic Region Freight Assistance Act was passed by Parliament.

The act included several principles brought forward by the Atlantic region's first ministers. That is why a federal-provincial commission to deal exclusively with Atlantic region transportation was implemented.

The commission has since remained active, carrying out the responsibilities conferred upon it and the Maritime Freight Rates Act, based on its recommendations, produced good results by way of rail transportation subsidies, later extended to road transportation.

An over-all look at national transportation policy inevitably brings to mind the 1967 National Transportation Act which, as I understand it, is based on the principle that to the extent possible transportation organizations in Canada should be able to avail themselves of certain rates in order to finance their operations.

This policy is, so to speak, meant to be an incentive for transportation companies to meet public demand, not only for quantity but also for quality of transportation in the areas involved. In this way, it is to be hoped that those organizations will be able to ensure in the long run the best health possible, if I may use the word, to our national transportation system.

As for a transport policy for the Atlantic region, it is obvious that there must be very close links between the national and regional policies.

The latter can only be an extension of the former and must be based on the same principles, but only when and where the national policy is applicable, bearing in mind regional conditions.

In the report they submitted in 1969, the premiers of the Atlantic provinces stated that they supported a general national policy but that, on the other hand—as the

hon. member for Moncton said a moment ago, and I agree with him—in the Atlantic provinces, because of a general lack of facilities and material and owing to light traffic and great distances between towns, it was difficult to fully apply the economic principle outlined in the National Transportation Act. The member for Moncton agrees with the premiers when he discusses a transport policy based on modern solutions to present and future problems.

The goal seems to be to modify the national transportation policy for the Atlantic region so that transportation would serve as an instrument for stimulating economic growth in our areas. According to certain statistics that I will not quote, economists may say that the Atlantic provinces, as a region, are not neglected and this is generally true if we consider current federal spending in respect of transportation particularly. The Fifth Annual Review of the Economic Council of Canada indicated that the four Atlantic provinces received more per capita in 1964-65, in respect of federal spending on transportation, than any other economic region of Canada.

It seems that the Atlantic region has somewhat more transportation facilities than would be justified by the importance of the market, if we take into account the general principle spelled out in the National Transportation Act. In spite of that, this region has so far failed to obviate this handicap, when we consider the enormous distances which separate it from central Canada markets. It prevented it from developing its economy as much as it wanted to. Finally, some regional analysts proclaim that it was instrumental in the national economic integration, at the expense of the more industrialized regions of central Canada.

We agree that transportation must play an important part in the development of the Maritimes. But even if it is very important, it is not the only instrument in the necessary infrastructure for the development of these areas. It must be part of an overall program of development. Indeed, for the past few years, the citizens of these areas have prepared development programs.

This system must be fully integrated in a comprehensive plan. But if we conceive the transportation policy as separate from the national policy, this could have disadvantages.

Thus, I think that in considering what the government has done so far, as well as the economic general principle on which the national transportation policy is based, considering what has been done up to now with regard to the transportation policy in the Maritimes, we think that we should continue to ask the federal government and other governments to modernize increasingly the means of transportation in the Maritimes consistently with the development in other fields. However, we must always avoid what we often call "balkanization". It is good to think in regional terms but we must also do so in Canadian terms and draw up plans for the general progress and development of our country.

However, I am pleased to have heard the hon. member for Moncton who is greatly interested in transportation

[Mr. LeBlanc (Rimouski).]