

Railways

second federal department, two or three years can be used up very quickly.

If we cannot pass a bill like this quickly what should be done in the interval is for the government to initiate a new procedure for dealing with abandonment of railway lines or rights of way with the railway committee of the Canadian Transport Commission.

Without being totally specific with my recommendation as to what they should do, the principle would be that they make sure no section is alienated or sold, or in any way disposed of without allowing for an exhaustive examination of alternative public uses. I have already gone over these alternative uses. Whether it is rapid transit or various forms of imaginative recreational uses, and more and more of them are being suggested all the time, we should give the public—whether it is through the provincial government, through the federal government, through the municipal governments or through local societies or clubs—plenty of time to decide what they can do with this land usefully and inexpensively.

I would hope that if we cannot come to any conclusion on this bill today, at the very least the member of parliament who will be responding on behalf of the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) will be able to indicate in a positive way that the government will give consideration to making such a suggestion to the railway committee of the Canadian Transport Commission.

● (1640)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Ostiguy (Saint-Hyacinthe): Mr. Speaker, I should like also to contribute a few remarks concerning Bill C-221, an Act to provide for the establishment of an authority to conserve abandoned railway lines in Canada. This bill suggests a number of objectives which are indeed commendable and worthwhile, but I am not sure that the means it proposes to reach them are the most effective.

In a number of cases, I am sure that the rights-of-way of railway lines which will be abandoned have great potential as rapid transit or recreational areas. I am sure also that other railway lines would not be appropriate at all. In my opinion, many different groups should look into alternative uses for the rights-of-way of railway lines which will be abandoned. Mr. Speaker, I feel any organization would have difficulty dealing with all the groups which would like to buy these tracts of land made available through the suspension of railway service.

Think about who should have priority on the choice, who should get that land? Should it go to recreational agencies in rural municipalities, to service clubs? For example, one could think that an optimist club might want to acquire land, one could think about any organization except municipalities which would want to acquire land. I think it would be very difficult for the Authority, as is being suggested in this bill, to make a decision on applications that would be made. It seems, Mr. Speaker, the advisory authority set up under this bill

[Mr. Watson.]

would be dealing with this problem but with no indication as to how it should weigh the various interests. Nothing provides for the participation of the provinces or municipalities in the decision-making process. Nor is there any list of criteria to assess the proposed uses. The bill does not even recognize that it might be necessary to treat railway lines differently whether they are located in town or in the country.

I wonder whether, instead of dealing in this bill with abandoned railway lines, it would not be more desirable or more useful to think about further improving the commuter train system even if for some reason railway companies should abandon certain routes. I think that in a bill like this we should rather be urging the railways to maintain the services they are now providing in terms of commuter trains. And I might also point out that many projects have been considered on the south shore of Montreal as well as in the area of Deux-Montagnes and the area of Valleyfield with respect to providing fast commuter trains. Among those projects, one went from the city of St. Hyacinthe, the riding I have the honour to represent in the House of Commons, and one which called upon the government to pay some \$62 million, of course, under agreements with the government of the province of Quebec.

I quote a resolution from the city council of Mont-Saint-Hilaire asking the government of Quebec whether it intends to join the commuter trains with the public transit system of the Montreal area, second, asking for an immediate meeting between the provincial and federal departments concerned by that problem to discuss and solve as rapidly as possible the jurisdictional problem facing them; and third, asking the railway company to maintain commuter trains and to suspend or to defer the 50 per cent increase in its rates until such a meeting has taken place between the various levels of government.

Mr. Speaker, I shall deal a moment with the problems faced by towns and municipalities on the south shore in the suburbs of Montreal. Of course, there are dormitory towns such as Mont Saint-Bruno, Belœil, Mont Saint-Hilaire, Otterburn Park and I go as far as the town of Saint-Hyacinthe, with a population of close to 200,000, half of which must go to Montreal each morning and come back each evening, and where it has become almost unthinkable to go by normal ways, namely the road network, given the bridge system we have to cross over to Montreal island. I think it would be really time to establish a rapid transit system.

I listened recently to a report on the operations of the GO Transit train in the Toronto suburbs. In passing, the Quebec government and its transport minister should note that it would be a good idea for them to go and see what is going on in Toronto and the suburbs. It would be a good idea for them to send a team of experts to study the services available to those who want to travel to the Queen City. According to this report, the federal government does not subsidize the deficits of Toronto commuter trains. They are financed by the Ontario