

Rail Service

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): Mr. Speaker, bearing in mind the minister's personal affection for the Edmonton area, and bearing in mind the effect of the decision on VIA Rail to eliminate the direct transcontinental run from the main population area in the province of Alberta which is concentrated on the Edmonton side rather than that of Calgary, how does the minister rationalize this hope for increase in business of VIA Rail Canada and the decision that was taken by the government, through Treasury Board, the other day to eliminate or reject the proposals with regard to the necessary expansion and amelioration of the Edmonton international airport? Frankly, the airport cannot cope with the volume of traffic, yet one can foresee that as a result of this move for VIA Rail there will be an increase in demand on the airport's facilities, bearing in mind the Commonwealth Games and all the traffic which will be generated as a result.

Mr. Lang: No such cut in service for Edmonton is contemplated at this time. Of course, the best possible passenger service to Edmonton and to other areas will certainly be provided. I suppose that would answer the question as posed. However, I would like to reassure the hon. member that the unavailability of funds for the expansion of the Edmonton airport of the full type with which we wanted to go ahead at this time does not indicate a long-term situation, but only a very short-term one. We will be watching very closely the opportunity to find the money and to make it available in some fashion, so that changes in the air terminal service can go forward as quickly as possible.

An hon. Member: Just before the next election.

Mr. Lambert (Edmonton West): Can the minister tell us what sort of a lay-over is proposed in Winnipeg in the projected changes, the proposed plans for VIA Rail and for the modal points for persons wanting to use the service to eastern Canada, because if there is a 12-hour lay-over, or anything more than an hour or two, it becomes a grave inconvenience to people who want to use the train when they have to connect with the so called CPR route? Second, the traffic will be affected now or in the very near future, both rail and air traffic. It is not a question of 1981 or 1982 with regard to airport facilities, but 1978.

What are we going to do with those people? The immigration quarters are like cattle-pens and the modern aircraft and immigration facilities are greatly overtaxed. Also, people are paying the user tax, which is the minister's favourite.

Mr. Lang: On page 4 of the Canadian Transport Commission's preferred plan there is an example of a possible service which would indicate a 40-minute lay-over in Winnipeg for one of the services and a 30-minute lay-over for the other. Of course, the CTC has emphasized that VIA Rail must have flexibility, and one of the things which will concern the management of VIA Rail is the ability to maintain services which coincide effectively with the higher speeds required to make that happen. I will be expecting the management of VIA Rail to look at this matter carefully in order to seek ways of

ensuring the best possible service, and discussing with the CTC such variations as may be required to ensure that service. But I do not see any diminution in the passenger rail service for Edmonton.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I still have eight more questioners on my list. Perhaps I should name them in the order in which they appear on my list, to see if this satisfies the House. I might conclude, then, that this should complete the questioning and we should go on to government orders.

I have on my list the hon. member for Battle River, the hon. member for Pembina, the hon. member for Vegreville, the hon. member for Winnipeg North, the hon. member for Hastings, the hon. member for South Shore, the hon. member for Dauphin, and the hon. member for Brant.

Mr. Malone: Mr. Speaker, all of us in the House, I am sure, applaud the intentions in the minister's statement today. One idea with which I am sure we all agree is the one to speed up passenger service. But coming down to the question of methods, one of the concerns that I have is with regard to the method of speeding up the passenger service. Will it be done by increasing the speed at which the train travels, or will there also be a designation of the towns which will be provided with passenger train service?

If that is the case, can the minister tell us at this time the formula for designating certain towns? Will only the distance between certain major centres be taken into account, or will there be a guarantee that a town with a certain size of population, irrespective of its location relative to Edmonton, Saskatoon or Winnipeg, will be provided with that service? I have a couple of other questions, but perhaps the minister could answer that one, following which I will put my other questions to him.

Mr. Lang: I hope that VIA Rail will look at the various means of speeding up the service. Certainly they will have to look at the question of through service, or express service, and what local services are required in preparing the final plan which CTC indicates is a major question for the northern Ontario route.

I expect VIA Rail to be in close consultation with many people, including the users and associations interested in rail passenger service, as well as the provinces and ourselves. CTC, of course, will have a role to play in ensuring that the necessary services are maintained. Beyond saying that I hope the best passenger service will be provided, I would not want to predict precisely what the solutions will be.

Mr. Malone: I would ask the minister if, at an early date, he would let us know by mail what towns are scheduled for designation, because I assume from his answer that in all likelihood that will be forthcoming. The other question I have for him is whether it will not simply be a case, as I am sure the minister realizes, of improving rail equipment so as to encourage people to travel by rail, and also the improvement of the service provided in terms of station buildings, food on the trains, personnel, and so forth. What are the government's