

Adjournment Debate

Highway. This highway, although recognized by many travellers as one of the foremost major methods of road transportation in western Canada, is not officially designated for federal assistance. For that reason, there has not been a commitment by the federal Government in the past to provide funding to build twin lanes on this very important highway.

In my community of The Battlefords, which is a major stopping point on the Yellowhead Highway, an average of 5,750 vehicles travelled through it in 1983 when the last statistics were taken. This made our community the second most travelled community behind Saskatoon on the Yellowhead Highway. It gives great credence to the claim by many of us that the Yellowhead Highway for western Canadian travel is now surpassing the Trans-Canada. The Trans-Canada, of course, is recognized presently by federal initiatives and federal funding.

There is an organization called the Yellowhead Highway Association that represents over 100 rural municipalities and counties and towns and cities that lie along the Yellowhead Highway. The Yellowhead Highway Association has been very actively involved in recent years—with the Progressive Conservative Government of 1979, with the Liberal Government thereafter, and now with our new Government—in talking with Members of Parliament and Ministers of Transport about the importance of the Yellowhead Highway to the economy, tourism and growth of western Canada.

● (1800)

I would like to put forth, with the strongest degree of conviction, my belief in why the Government must see to it that the Yellowhead Highway is designated as a national highway and, further, that there is some funding committed for the twin-laning of this highway. I recognize, along with many good and concerned Canadians in the Yellowhead Highway Association, that the degree of federal involvement, given limited financial resources, is something that will not happen tomorrow or the day after. However, I would like to request of the Government that every serious consideration be given to designating the Yellowhead Highway as a national highway and to securing the much needed funding.

When one looks at the Yellowhead Highway and the service it has provided to the people of western Canada, one discovers that the Yellowhead Highway Association goes back to 1921. Over 60 years ago people recognized this highway for the good means of transportation that it was, and it has been for over 60 years that people of the western Canadian towns and villages have asked the federal Government to do something about it. The Yellowhead Highway, among many other gains and benefits which it provides to road travellers in western Canada, also provides a very good means of transportation through the Rocky Mountains. Having travelled this road many times, I can attest for those who have not had the opportunity to travel it that it is indeed one of the most scenic routes through western Canada. The Trans-Canada Highway in the 12 years from 1970 to 1982 was closed for a total of over 2,000 hours because of snowslides and snowfalls, whereas the Yellowhead

Highway was closed for 50 hours. Obviously we see the benefit of mountain travel and regular, consistent travel which adds to the movement of goods and services, to tourism and to the basic link of communication, people being able to see one another throughout western Canada and taking advantage of one another's offerings, lifestyles, businesses and communities.

I ask the Government to give very serious consideration to the designation of the Yellowhead Highway as a national highway and to give every consideration to the much needed funding.

Mrs. Gabrielle Bertrand (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of National Health and Welfare): Mr. Speaker, I will answer the Hon. Member for The Battlefords-Meadow Lake (Mr. Gormley) in the name of the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport (Mr. Forrestall).

The Yellowhead Highway is a link of the primary highway network and is becoming increasingly important to economic development in the western provinces. The highway runs from Portage La Prairie, Manitoba, to Prince Rupert, British Columbia. It follows a more northerly route than the Trans-Canada Highway and passes through Saskatoon, Edmonton, Jasper National Park and Prince George. A southern arm branches off the main route near the British Columbia-Alberta border at Tête Jaune Cache and terminates at Kamloops.

For several years the Yellowhead Highway Association, an interest group composed of communities located along the Yellowhead Highway, has made representations to have the highway upgraded under a federal-provincial cost-shared arrangement.

The Hon. Member will remember that the Government undertook discussions in 1979 with the four western provinces which sought agreement in principle for a multi-year Yellowhead Highway improvement program worth \$120 million, with costs to be shared on a fifty-fifty federal-provincial basis. The Liberal Government chose not to pursue these discussions.

At the present time there are no federal-provincial highway agreements in place under which federal funding could be provided for the upgrading of this highway. In fact, all existing federal-provincial highway agreements are under review. These, too, are subject to the economic parameters within which we must work.

Indeed we are fortunate to have the present Minister of Transport (Mr. Mazankowski) note this worthy debate as he had a long and positive relationship with the Yellowhead Highway Association, and I am sure we can look forward to further productive discussions on this subject.

● (1805)

[Translation]

SOCIAL SECURITY—BENEFITS FOR WIDOWS AND WIDOWERS
AGED 60-64—EXCLUSION OF SINGLE, DIVORCED AND SEPARATED
PERSONS

Mr. Jean-Claude Malépart (Montreal-Sainte-Marie): Mr. Speaker, on November 30, I asked a question to the Right