

Adjournment Debate

The first thing I hope they do is call their local Conservative member of Parliament and say very clearly that the transport committee of the House of Commons has wisely decided to hold hearings to review these documents and we think it is extremely important that some of those hearings be held out here where we live, away from Ottawa, so that we can tell you firsthand what we think of your decision so that hopefully we can influence that decision even though it will already be an order in council. Orders in council can be revoked.

The second thing—and this one depends a lot on the first as to how they respond to the request from the people of Canada to be heard—is that I hope they will tell the Conservative members of Parliament that if the VIA cuts are not cancelled, then at the next election the taxpayers will cut the Conservative from office.

• (1825)

Mr. Ross Belsher (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, I listened attentively to what my hon. friend from across the way had to say about how decisions are made around here. He must be seeing government through a different set of eyes than those I see through from this side of the House.

I can only reiterate what has already been stated repeatedly, both in this House and elsewhere. Many people would have us believe that trains are the most efficient mode of transportation. Energy efficiency depends to a large extent on passenger levels.

In 1980, a study on the energy consumption concluded that buses, not trains, were the most energy efficient mode of transportation based on the energy consumed per passenger mile. Eighty-four per cent of all the intercity travel is by car, and nobody seems to be disputing that figure, 6 per cent is by bus and 3 per cent is by train.

Contrary to all the rhetoric which has been bandied about in recent months, VIA Rail's performance is worsening. It is not improving. My hon. friend is shaking his head no. Let us look at some of the NDP economics.

While 1988 revenues did increase by 13 per cent, on \$26 million of revenue, operating costs increased by 15 per cent or \$94 million with the result that the government subsidies to VIA for its operation alone had to be increased by \$68 million for that year alone. This means that for every additional dollar earned by VIA in 1988, the government has had to disburse an additional \$2.62.

We are asking all Canadians to pay this subsidy but only 3 per cent of the travelling public uses this mode of transportation. Continued subsidization of a mode of transportation which costs more and more and quite frankly is not used to the same degree as it was, say, 10 years ago, is not a sound investment in our future, particularly when that investment is being made with the Canadian taxpayers' money. That is why the government announced a new policy approach for VIA and asked the corporation to prepare a new business plan which would reflect its new reference levels.

VIA Rail's corporate plan is currently under consideration. An announcement will be made in due course. We anticipate it will be made within the next few days. The government expects the financial and operational performance of VIA Rail to improve and to function in a more cost effective manner. When money is scarce, it is spent where it is most needed and where it is most likely to produce results.

A cost effective transportation system is essential if Canada is to preserve and to enhance its position in world trade. In order to meet the challenge, we must make the best use of each mode of transportation and a wise use of the Canadian taxpayers' money.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Champagne): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

The House adjourned at 6.28 p.m.