

Oral Questions

• (1420)

This is a difficult decision. The subsidy for VIA this past year was something in the neighbourhood of \$641 million which, if unchecked, would rise to in excess of a \$1 billion a year for a service that was used by a very tiny percentage of the population.

It is our view that the plan announced today by the Minister of Transport retains passenger transport across Canada, gives us the opportunity to strengthen that infrastructure, and renders Canada more competitive. I think in the longer haul it will bring benefits to all Canadians.

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): The Prime Minister not only has a duty to manage the country on behalf of Canadians, he has a primary responsibility to tell the truth to Canadians.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): Today, the Prime Minister just did not destroy a dream or a notion of the past, he destroyed the possibility and the dream for Canadians to enter the 21st century with a modern efficient passenger service binding this country together. That is what he did.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

[*Translation*]

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): Mr. Speaker, in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, on October 14, 1988, the Prime Minister told residents: "We are prepared to submit all federal projects and all projects involving federal land to complete environmental impact studies".

Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister did not say a partial study, he did not say an internal study. He said a complete and impartial environmental study.

How does he account for this one-page so-called study his Minister of Transport shook out of his sleeve today?

Why did he not proceed with a complete environmental impact study? Why did he once again fail to keep the promises he made to Canadians during the election campaign?

Mr. Mulroney: Mr. Speaker, there are some omissions in the information quoted by the Leader of the Official Opposition. We are going to look at the whole document. What we have here is a misquote, since the Minister of the Environment is now developing an action program on the environment. It will be on the leading edge of what is being done in this field, not only in Canada but in most countries which have become major competitors in environmental science and international business.

A number of initiatives have been taken in this area. The Minister of Transport has already announced at a press conference that at the appropriate time and, in fact, very shortly, he will reveal the findings of the studies carried out by his Department.

[*English*]

Mr. Turner (Vancouver Quadra): We now hear the Prime Minister talking about an environmental impact study after the fact because a conversation between his two ministers as an afterthought will not satisfy the people of Canada.

We know that the Prime Minister today appointed a royal commission to attempt to deflect attention away from the cuts to VIA Rail.

How can the Prime Minister destroy VIA Rail and then, and only then, appoint a royal commission to study the issue after the fact? Why, in these circumstances, does he not impose a moratorium on all decisions affecting VIA Rail until this royal commission has had a chance to study it and until a committee of Parliament under the chairmanship of the member of Parliament for Annapolis Valley—Hants has had a chance to study it on behalf of the people of Canada? Why did the Prime Minister not allow this to happen before the decisions were taken?

One further question, Mr. Speaker. When the royal commission concludes, as it inevitably must, that Canadians need a modern, efficient passenger train service system, what is he going to do then to revive VIA Rail after he destroyed it today?