

*Private Members' Business*

body has ever expressed a concrete interest to CN officials in purchasing the line, not one, Madam Speaker.

Where then would the hon. member suggest a real buyer be found for this trunk line? It may be accurate for him to say that such a line would allow mining and forestry development in the northern region of Quebec but such potential did not transpire overnight.

Even when the Canadian economy was booming and prices were high for mineral and wood products, there was not one proposal put forward to CN which called for the 97-mile route to be taken off the railroad's hands.

With this in mind at a time when the natural resource industry remained depressed I sincerely do not know how the member hopes to find a saviour, a white knight who will rescue the Franquet-Chapais line from its ultimate fate.

Let us not be mistaken. CN Rail has not been jealously guarding its many trunk and feeder lines in the hope of preventing potential buyers from taking them away and making better use of them. Quite the contrary, in fact.

For a number of years Canadian National has been making a strong concerted effort to sell off its smaller lines to private interests in hopes of concentrating more fully on the primary areas of operation and reducing its staff and maintenance costs. The sell-off has been even more actively promoted in eastern Canada. In fact, CN even went so far as to produce a line of all trunk lines that it felt had a real potential for interested buyers. Unfortunately the Franquet-Chapais line did not make that list. I believe the reason for this was simple. It has been a consistent money loser for years while many of CN's other trunk lines were managing to turn a profit.

What is one to make of this predicament? CN Rail went even further to do away with lines like the one in question. It actively pursued sales offers not only from the private industry but also from other public entities such as municipalities and even the Quebec government. Not one of these bodies expressed an interest in taking on the Franquet-Chapais line.

• (1415)

Simply put, CN Rail would love someone to take the line off its hands but no one has approached the railroad about it and time is running out for anyone to do so. Therefore, what am I to make of the hon. member's motion? It is certainly well intentioned and I commend him for that but I honestly do not know if it is feasible. This is where my concern lies.

That is not the end of the confusion surrounding this motion. Officials I have spoken with at CN expressed some concern about the vague terminology of the member's motion, especially the phrase that calls for the line to be offered to a bidder for a nominal sum. What is exactly meant by this unclear choice of words? He has cleared that up a bit today.

In terms of what CN Rail would actually be willing to see the Franquet-Chapais line sold for, federal transportation policy is very explicit and, I might add, quite reasonable. If a company wishes to take over unwanted rail line from its owner at any point during the abandonment process and is willing to pay the basic salvage value of the rail line as determined by the National Transportation Agency then the railroad must sell the line in question.

In the case of the Franquet-Chapais line this abandonment process has been dragging on for a period of five years but no potential buyers have forced CN to divest itself of this asset. I may point out that the concept of salvage value is important here because it shows that CN could not possibly be holding on to a money losing line because it is not getting top dollar offers from outside sources.

In actual truth the railway simply has not received any purchase offers for the Franquet-Chapais line, period. It could be that in this case the total salvage value of the 97-mile route would turn out to be nothing more than a nominal sum. Is this what the hon. member is actually driving at?

My impression is that he would be satisfied to turn the trunk line over to private interests for the sum of \$1. Certainly this would accomplish his goal but it would not be a benefit to CN. It would open every line in its system to takeover for \$1. In fact, CN Rail would never agree to such a proposal and this is the hard fact of the situation. The Franquet-Chapais line is worth more to CN sitting idle than it would be as a gift to private investors.

Let me express my sincere sympathy for the member for Roberval because I understand very well what he is trying to accomplish with his motion. My riding is also facing rail problems similar to those that have plagued the Franquet-Chapais trunk line.

In British Columbia's Slocan Valley, a rail line is being threatened with closure because of a variety of negative economic factors. I understand what the member is driving at. I am now trying to get abandonment proceedings delayed in my own riding just as has been done in the past in the hon. member's own area.

If a delay in Slocan Valley is successful as it was in his own area with the Franquet-Chapais line, then it should be up to that specific area to promote rail business through local economic development if the people of that area want to keep the rail line in the long term.

In the case of the Franquet-Chapais line the citizens of the region had the chance of stretching it over a five-year period to bring about the renewal and redevelopment of the line. Unfortunately, it appears that nothing was done with this opportunity. This suggests that there simply was no business to promote on the line to begin with.

Hopefully the Slocan valley rail line that is now on the chopping block will be given the same chance for renewal the Franquet-Chapais line has already had. Hopefully we will be