

Trans-Canada Highway

their desire to proceed with the project by the time parliament was dissolved, the resolution was not proceeded with.

Considerable progress has been made during recent months in analysing provincial estimates of costs, studying procedure for determining completion costs, evaluating past expenditures, discussing technical details with provincial authorities, seeking agreement on matters of policy, and preparing the ground generally for introduction of a bill into the House of Commons and the signing of agreements with the provinces which would follow in due course.

Early in September I forwarded letters to the ministers responsible for highways in each province, seeking agreement on broad questions of policy which might ultimately form the bases of agreements. Replies indicating agreement on principles have been received from nearly all provinces. Concurrence of others in a general way has been indicated verbally. Some technical details remain to be worked out between the federal and provincial governments, and specific routes remain to be defined by formal agreement.

It is at present possible to travel the 4,200 odd miles between Halifax and Vancouver by road on Canadian soil, though not in comfort throughout the length of it. Only some 60 per cent of the total mileage is paved, and much of this paving is of low standard. Legislation will therefore be placed before parliament seeking to enable the federal government to enter into agreements with the provinces for sharing the cost of construction of a hard-surfaced, all-Canadian, interprovincial or trans-Canada highway.

Mr. Drew: Mr. Speaker, before making any remarks in regard to this may I ask this question? Is the minister prepared to indicate what percentage of the cost the dominion government contemplates assuming?

Mr. Winters: Yes, Mr. Speaker. That information is in the bill. On the resolution stage I do not know how much you, sir, wish us to debate. I think I can tell the house, though, that the federal government contemplates paying fifty per cent of the cost of building the highway.

Mr. George A. Drew (Leader of the Opposition): Mr. Speaker, that information is the key information to any discussion of this subject, because the simple truth is that the decision by the dominion government to assume fifty per cent of the cost means that it is an utter impossibility for a number of the provinces to proceed with the effective construction of a trans-Canada highway.

Mr. Winters: They have not said so.

[Mr. Winters.]

Mr. Drew: Mr. Speaker, I happen to know something of the discussions that have taken place from the other point of view. I know that the discussions that have taken place in the past in regard to the trans-Canada highway have been characterized by the absence of any practical approach to this problem, which really meant that, unless a great deal has happened in the past year, they are very far from any understanding of what the problem really is.

The conference that was referred to as having taken place here last December was not a conference which did more than conduct a general discussion of this subject. When we discuss the construction of a trans-Canada highway it is highly desirable that we recognize that the first step toward the successful decision as to the carrying out of a project of this kind is an agreement between the dominion and the provincial governments as to the satisfactory procedure by which the highway will be built and the satisfactory method for determining the route of the highway right across the country and a practical method for financing the cost of the construction of that highway when the other details have been completed.

I wish to make it clear that when I said that the assumption of fifty per cent of the cost will not settle the problem I was making that statement subject to the reservation that it applies only to the extent that the provinces are bound in their financial capacity by the present financial agreements that they have with the dominion government. It is all very well for the minister to smile in regard to that, but the fact that this rather important consideration is ignored in the discussion of these subjects simply indicates a failure to recognize what the basic problem of the provinces really is today in regard to the assumption of any new responsibilities for education, for the construction of highways, or for any other great activity of this kind.

As it stands at the moment, outside of provinces which happen to have found themselves in a particularly favourable position as a result of some unexpected events, the provinces which accepted a certain fixed payment for the term of an agreement in exchange for certain taxing powers have indicated that they are having considerable difficulty already with some of their financial problems. They have indicated that very clearly by the proposals that are being made for financial support of various kinds. For that reason I do suggest that in the discussion of this subject we shall not be satisfied merely to express approval of the construction of a trans-Canada highway, but that there shall