

er it would be wise to use such a line for a bicycle path, a nature trail, a hiking trail, snowmobiles in the wintertime—these things would have to be ironed out with local authorities. In my view they are matters which also would have to be decided primarily by the provinces or the local municipal authorities in the area through which the line might run.

● (1620)

If we at the federal level do not take the steps at least to slow down the process of throwing these abandoned lines on the open market after a very short period where, if they are not literally given away, they are sold off in a manner which further spoils forever their potential, then we are not taking our responsibilities seriously. The cost of preserving the lines would not be too great. I feel that if this bill is not going to pass there are two or three things we should do. Mr. Speaker, I think I am about to be interrupted.

THE ROYAL ASSENT

[Translation]

A message was delivered by the Gentleman Usher of the Black Rod as follows:

Mr. Speaker, His Excellency the Governor General desires the immediate attendance of this honourable House in the chamber of the honourable Senate.

Accordingly, Mr. Speaker with the House went up to the Senate chamber.

And being returned.

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. I have the honour to inform the House that when the House went up to the Senate chamber, His Excellency the Governor General of Canada had been pleased to give, in Her Majesty's name, the Royal Assent to the following bill:

Bill C-29, an Act to amend the National Housing Act and the Central Mortgage and Housing Corporation Act and to make other related amendments—Chapter No. 16.

Railways

● (1630)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' PUBLIC BILLS

[English]

ABANDONED RAILWAY LINES CONSERVATION ADVISORY AUTHORITY ACT

MEASURE TO CONSERVE ABANDONED RAILWAY LINES

The House resumed consideration of the motion of Mr. Watson that Bill C-221 respecting the establishment of an authority to conserve abandoned railway lines in Canada be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Transport and Communications.

Mr. Ian Watson (Laprairie): Mr. Speaker, I was in the process of giving some reasons why, in the event—

Some hon. Members: Can we call it five o'clock?

Mr. Speaker: Order, please. When we were summoned to the Senate we were in private members' hour. The hon. member for Laprairie (Mr. Watson) had the floor. Private members' hour is scheduled to continue until five o'clock, so the hon. member for Laprairie should continue.

Mr. Watson: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. When we were interrupted I was in the process of indicating that if this bill which I have proposed today and which deals with abandoned railway lines is not going to be passed by the House, there is nevertheless a necessity for the government to act now and I want to take this opportunity to urge certain action upon the government.

CNR is the only one of the two national railways that takes a reasonable attitude toward railway lines. They at least offer these abandoned railway lines to the provinces; the CPR does not even bother to do that, but I should point out the CNR's position. This is a position they indicated was their policy two or three years ago. It reads:

Once abandonment of a line has been approved by the Canadian Transport Commission, salvageable materials are removed, such as bridges, tracks and ties, and steps taken to dispose of the land and remaining improvements. Attempts are made to dispose of the property en bloc to government bodies or agencies, such as provincial or local municipal governments and provincial hydro commissions. In the absence of interest on their part and on the part of public utilities, such as Bell Telephone, steps are then taken to dispose of the land to adjoining owners. In every case we endeavour to get market value for the lands involved.

Experience has shown that even the one year notice the authority would receive from the railway before the railway would be able to divest itself of any section of an abandoned railway, which my proposed bill suggests, is not adequate. Upon reflection, we will need a period of up to about five year before a railway should be allowed to dispose of such an abandoned right of way. This is not an excessive period when one considers the length of time we take to iron out conflicts between different levels of government. If one is caught in a situation where the land is offered to a province and one provincial department cannot make up its mind and the matter is referred back to some federal department, and so it goes to a