

Adjournment Debate

The important message that we want the government and the minister to understand is just how important VIA Rail is to those of us in northern B.C. That is why we asked and why I have written to chambers of commerce and city councils throughout my riding to invite the minister and Transport Canada to discuss what this route is going to do. In the review of passenger rail transportation in Canada put out by VIA Rail, the government has to step in. There is virtually no mention in this report of that terrific route from Prince Rupert to Jasper and the tourist potential that it has.

It is critical that the Minister of Transport instruct his officials to travel to our part of the province to review this remote run and the others, and to meet with concerned community groups to ensure that they get a chance to explain the potential that there is for VIA Rail in our area, both from a remote service concept and from the incredible tourist potential that we have.

It is unfortunate that in the debate here and in our hometown on this matter that some of the members from the government party opposite talked about how they did not know what the cuts were going to do. It was as if they were not even aware of the concern that people had about VIA Rail. That is shocking because the community group in Prince George, the Save VIA Rail Committee, was headed by residents of Prince George, some of whom worked at VIA Rail and with whom I took a run some months ago to get a first-hand look at the service, which was sold out on many occasions. Yet this Conservative government does not understand how important a role VIA Rail can play in eastern and central Canada but also in remote Canada.

• (1805)

I ask that when the Parliamentary Secretary or whoever on the government side is going to respond they will have the courage to commit to this House that those officials will have an opportunity to travel and hear from the people who rely on VIA Rail passenger service in the remote parts of our country. It is essential. I hope the government will listen for once on this matter.

Mr. John A. MacDougall (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Energy, Mines and Resources): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to respond to the question raised by the hon. member for Prince George—

Bulkley Valley about the future of transportation connections in truly isolated communities which are now served by VIA on its remote routes.

As part of the government's announcement of a national, affordable, sustainable network for VIA, the Minister of Transport indicated that he would be reviewing the transportation needs of the truly isolated communities along the remote routes to determine whether more cost-effective means of access could be introduced.

The truly isolated communities are found on VIA's eight remote lines and on the Winnipeg-Capreol section of the restructured western transcontinental service. They are identified as points where VIA makes scheduled stops which do not have any regularly scheduled air service and do not have all-weather highways access to the national transportation system.

The review will examine the most cost-effective means to meet the transportation needs of truly isolated communities. It will determine if rail service is the most cost effective transportation alternative when compared, for example, to all-weather runways or roads to serve these truly isolated communities.

If rail continues to be the most cost-effective solution, that will be the basis for future action. If some other approach is indicated the Minister of Transport will engage in appropriate discussions to determine if alternative agreements can be in fact be implemented on a satisfactory basis.

VIA RAIL

Mr. Dave Dingwall (Cape Breton—East Richmond): Mr. Speaker, on October 5, 1989, I posed a question to the Minister of Transport. At that time I asked the minister with regard to the termination of the Halifax-Sydney route why those Canadians were being treated as second-class Canadians.

I raised with the minister the fact that the termination of this particular route would negatively affect the tourism industry in industrial Cape Breton and indeed throughout all of Cape Breton. It would deny Canadians living in that region of Canada the opportunity of access to good quality health care in the provincial capital of Halifax.