

*Canada-Alaska and Maine Corridors*

Hon. members who oppose this idea represent their areas well when they make their arguments and I respect their judgment when they say that this sort of proposal would be harmful to their areas. My counterargument to those points is simply that 20 years ago people in small towns opposed the building of highways bypassing their towns out of fear that this would cause a loss of general business in the towns. As these people were proven wrong when these highways eventually brought business to those towns and relieved them of traffic congestion, I argue that the suggested bypassing of the area from Rivière du Loup down through New Brunswick by the highway system would be more than replaced in its effect upon the tourist economy of the area by the large increase in the number of tourists that would be brought into the area. And, knowing the uncertainties of maritime weather, once people get down there the good weather is unlikely to last for more than a few days and these people will be breaking off their vacation somewhere along the way and taking their time coming back.

The important thing is to get people down there. Once they are down there, they will wander all over the maritimes and they will be into northern New Brunswick and Gaspé in much larger numbers than they are now. The entire economy of the maritimes would benefit from a tourist business point of view by the construction of such a highway.

There is now a further argument which has become increasingly important. I would certainly like to be able to produce it here in the House today, but I cannot put my hand on the document. However, a few years ago—I believe it was in 1971—the Department of Transport made a study of the truck transport saving which would result from the construction of such a highway. If my memory serves me well, at that time the potential saving was in the area of \$20 million to \$30 million per year. With gasoline costs more than double what they were at that time, and with the prospect of their being much higher within the near future, the potential saving in energy to the transport industry in Canada is enormous. That argument is quite apart from the tourist argument, but it would be a sufficient argument for this kind of corridor.

As maritime administrators continually point out, tourism is a major industry down there. Surely a proposal which would double, triple or quadruple the number of tourists going to that region should deserve a much more interested look from the federal authorities and, as a matter of fact, the authorities from those provinces. Everyone seems to be sitting on his hands. I have had a little correspondence recently with the Department of Transport and the kind of reaction I get is one of total ignorance of this earlier report. In fact, according to the most recent information which I received, such a report simply does not exist—although I saw it—and the argument would seem to be that the Department of Transport simply says that such a proposal would not be economic. The kind of reply I got was based on the paving of the Alaska Highway, which has never been part of my proposal. Paving the Alaska Highway over its entire length at this time does not make sense and I doubt if it ever will. As I said earlier, the idea is simply doing what we already must do by way of repair to that highway, perhaps at an accelerated pace, in

[Mr. Watson.]

return for the American government spending "X" number of dollars on the Maine highway.

Presumably there are a few side issues here. Some maritimers conceivably might feel more exposed to upper Canadian commerce, but I argue that competitive maritime business operators would benefit enormously from the decrease in transportation costs to central Canada. There are a certain number of protests in Maine every summer about speeding Canadian tourists, and presumably that source of friction could be eliminated.

● (1720)

Another consideration that I say is a major one for members like the hon. member for Madawaska-Victoria (Mr. Corbin) is the potential of such a system requiring the federal government to sponsor new national parks. If northern New Brunswick were shown to be deprived of tourists by such a project, for example, it would then be incumbent upon the federal government to provide more attractions in the area such as, perhaps, another national park.

The basic fear is that if the traffic is taken off the roads, everybody in the area east of Quebec City down through northern New Brunswick will suffer. I am totally convinced that this would not happen, but that the long-term result would be highly beneficial to all the maritimes. Even those areas immediately affected by the decrease in commercial traffic would benefit at almost the same time because of the large numbers of tourists.

I think all these things could be analysed and we could arrive at definitive answers about how people would be affected. The potential in savings to the touring public and tourist operators, who would have a longer and better season, and to the governments of the provinces, who would reap additional sales taxes, etc., and all the other factors, argue for more serious consideration than the proposal has received.

The state of Maine has had two public votes on bond issues to finance such a highway, which were turned down. Surely if the government of the United States paid the shot, the residents of Maine would have a different view. I talked to members of the United States House of Representatives and a senator from Maine who indicated there would be strong sympathy for such a proposal and that the United States Congress would give it serious consideration.

The province of Quebec undoubtedly has some reticence in the matter. The area east of Rivière-du-Loup may fear the loss of tourism, but I am convinced that this could be overcome. I would argue that the highway would not only engender and push a new national park for northern New Brunswick, but would also open up the national park potential of the whole beautiful area along the Maine-Quebec border which is at the moment one of the most backward economic areas in the province.

The project has enormous potential, Mr. Speaker, but has been given very little consideration by the government. I hope that by raising the matter today we can persuade provincial and federal bodies to bring the idea to fruition. It is practical, it is economic and it is becoming more economic all the time as transportation and energy costs rise.