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CONFERENCE ON HOUSING AND URBAN DEVELOPMENT

Prime Minister L.B. Pearson, in his opening statement to the Federal-Provincial Conference on Housing and Urban Development in Ottawa last month, said that urbanization and all its problems had become the dominant social and economic condition in Canada. The need for improvement was an urgent challenge to every level of government. The facts and forecasts about urban growth, Mr. Pearson said, were that almost three-quarters of our population lived in cities and towns; by 1980, nearly two-thirds of all Canadians would live in 29 major communities (one-third in Montreal, Toronto or Vancouver); at least 500,000 acres of new land, including good farm-land, would be needed for the expansion of the 29 centres by 1980 - and more might be needed if efficient use was not made of the land in future.

Mr. Pearson said that the Federal Government could not offer increased financial assistance at this time; he proposed the establishment of a joint Federal and provincial council to assess housing needs and advise how to meet them.

Excerpts from the Prime Minister's address follow:

...The Federal Government's involvement in housing and urban development goes back 32 years. In response to the needs and demands of Canadians, its role has increased until it has become the main provider of loans, grants or guarantees in financing a wide variety of programmes. The present National Housing Act has proven to be an important instrument in support of and co-operation with provincial and municipal governments for the development - and redevelopment - of virtually every aspect of the urban Canadian environment...

During the past ten years, the total federal

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investment for privately-initiated housing has exceeded \$3.5 billion. And, in addition to supporting home-ownership and rental housing to be offered on the open market, the NHA provides a variety of financial aids for other forms of housing and related works....

URBAN TRANSPORT

A viable and efficient system of transportation is an essential part of any urban environment. Improvements in existing systems are vital to an improved urban society. These cannot be made effectively by an individual municipality. They must be made within the whole economic and social area to be served, and this area embraces many local governments.

The Federal Government appreciates that the authority for all this lies primarily with the provincial governments, but it is prepared to co-operate in improved planning for the solution of urban transportation problems.

BUILDING PRODUCTIVITY

Last month, the President of the Canadian Construction Association, which represents more than 1,000 leading companies in the construction industry, said that "at no time in our history has the effort to increase productivity and efficiency been of such importance".

That statement reflects the fact that increased efficiency in the construction industry has not been able to offset to a sufficient extent scarcities of skilled labour, wage increases and higher costs of materials, equipment and land.