

Alleged Failure to Cope With Urban Growth

government for assistance in planning and implementing urban renewal programs. More than 200 towns and cities have undertaken urban renewal studies aimed at improving the local environment.

The Department of Regional Economic Expansion is preparing to assist provinces financially to provide the necessary social infrastructure in a number of urban centres where it is clear that industry is going to settle due to the government's industry incentive program.

In his remarks opening the debate the hon. member referred to the subject of urban transportation. It is felt by many that there is an urban transportation crisis in Canada. This is purported to be a compound of congestion caused by an increase in automobiles, which is in part an effect of urban development, and the needs of public transit systems which cannot be financed from fares and which therefore require municipal subsidy. The argument has been put forward—and I detected overtones of this in the hon. member's observations—that the federal government, through initiatives under the National Housing Act, has caused suburban subdivisions to develop rapidly while failing to contribute to the solution of the concomitant problem of increased vehicular traffic and the difficulty of providing increased public transport to serve those areas. Further, it is argued that the high cost of scarce urban land has driven developers farther and farther from the centre of the city. The public transportation system set up to serve these commuters is often inadequate. Indeed, sometimes no such system exists.

In earlier days of national development, transcontinental transportation was accepted as a federal responsibility. The argument is now advanced that the concentration of Canada's population and wealth in approximately 29 urban areas makes the transportation of persons and goods a national economic and social problem, albeit with an urban focus. Yet the central government remains uninvolved.

In the first place, it is not the federal government but the provincial and local governments which determine the pattern of urban settlement, whether low density or high density, suburban or downtown. It is simply a myth that the pattern of suburban growth in this country has been determined by the kind of mortgage insurance aid offered under the National Housing Act. These lending aids are

[Mr. Andras.]

equally available whether a building is suburban or downtown, high rise or low rise, compact or dispersed. The premise of this argument, then, is nonsense. As to its substance, it is true that urban roads and public transportation systems are enormously expensive and that they constitute one of the main burdens which local governments bear. For the most part, however, they serve the residents of the area in which they are located and it is difficult to accept the view that responsibility for meeting these costs should be borne by the federal level of government. If local governments lack funds with which to meet the costs of the transportation services they should provide, they must also lack funds with which to pay for all the other things they need to provide. And they do, in many cases. This situation, however, reflects the acknowledged general financial difficulties facing local government and does not represent a transportation problem as such.

Contrary to the assumptions of the hon. member, the federal government will be playing an increasingly important part in transportation research. Recently the government contributed \$75,000 toward the expenses of the first Canadian urban transportation conference and provision has been made in both the Transport Act and the Canadian Transport Commission Act for research studies to be carried out in this field, the results of which, it is hoped, will produce long-term benefits for all cities. But this is something quite different from taking a direct position, city by city, or province by province, in actual urban transportation activities.

Reference has been made to pollution, Mr. Speaker. As the Minister of Regional Economic Expansion (Mr. Marchand) stated in the house a few days ago on June 24, the government intends to make a policy statement in the house concerning the proposed Canada water act and to engage in discussions with the provinces during the summer in preparation for introduction of legislation at the next session. Hon. members, I know, are awaiting this legislation to learn what measures of pollution control it will involve.

If one looks at the urban community, the results of the federal government's involvement can be seen in the homes, in the central city and in the suburbs. It can be seen in airport and railway facilities and in major urban utilities. The integrated plans of major urban centres are influenced by or depend upon the exercise of federal legislative powers in many areas including