

Suggested New Brunswick Airport Complex

Furthermore, the Commission report shows that the Saint John airport is far from being unprofitable.

The report also shows that the Fredericton Airport, on account of its location near the capital, is a necessity.

It seems to be that the reasoning behind the report findings is sound. It is good reasoning. The philosophy that a central airport would be preferable to three small ones is not necessarily true. It also struck me when I heard of it a few years ago. I thought we could close certain small airports and have a bigger one. But if we consider the figures quoted in the report, it is very interesting to note that the service provided by Air Canada at Saint John, for instance, as well as at Fredericton and Moncton, was not at a loss. Perhaps it is not as efficient as it should be, as the hon. member for Saint John-Lancaster put it, but at least it justifies itself.

Being in the centre of the Maritimes, Moncton airport is used by many private aircraft. The same applies to Fredericton. If this airport's importance and traffic were reduced, it would not be beneficial to either the people or the government because there might perhaps be a loss in revenues.

Moreover, as to whether there should be an international airport in New Brunswick, it seems to me that the factors to consider are clear and obvious. It is a matter of determining whether international traffic would justify it, and members of the opposition who have participated in this debate have not indicated any study which would justify it. I would like to know, because I am sure that members are responsible enough not to suggest the construction of international airports without making sure that there is a sufficient demand.

Consequently, Halifax is setting up an international air service. It seems to operate well enough. There is at least one flight from Halifax to London three or four times per week. Now, traffic and demand would have to be determined and thereafter a decision on the opportunity of building an airport would have to be taken. I am sure, as I stated a moment ago, that members are too responsible to suggest the construction of airports merely for the sake of building them, because if it is so, the northern area of New Brunswick would need some.

The citizens of Bathurst and of the Campbellton area maintain that the Charlo airport should be further developed.

Now, before making expenditures for the establishment of such infrastructures in New Brunswick, they should be justified.

• (5:40 p.m.)

[English]

Mr. James A. McGrath (St. John's East): Mr. Speaker, I should like to say a few words in support of the resolution which is an annual one put forward by my colleague from Saint John-Lancaster (Mr. Bell). I am not as well acquainted with transportation difficulties in that province as is the hon. member and the hon. member who has just resumed his seat, but no one who travels to the maritime provinces and has occasion to pass through the

[Mr. Breau.]

province of New Brunswick could come away without being impressed with the need for a new airport, especially one that would serve the cities of Moncton and Saint John and the population in between. Airports in the province of New Brunswick, like most of the airports in the Atlantic provinces, are small, inefficient, have inadequate terminal space to cope with the present traffic and do not come near meeting the demand that will be placed upon their facilities by the traffic anticipated in the future.

The resolution also avails me of the opportunity to say something about air transportation problems with which we in Newfoundland have to cope. In my own city of St. John's, which has a population of 100,000, we are almost totally dependent on air transportation. The airport in St. John's serves a population in excess of 150,000 people. We rank second in the list of major airports in the Atlantic provinces in terms of number of passengers handled per year, but rather interestingly we rank a very poor third in the amount of terminal space available to handle that passenger traffic.

Perhaps a few vital statistics would illustrate this problem. I should like to quote from a parliamentary return to a question that I placed on the order paper in February of this year. This question asked for the total number of passengers handled in each of the major airports in the Atlantic provinces for the past five years. The figures for St. John's, Newfoundland, indicate that the traffic has risen from 145,000 passengers handled in 1965 to 189,500 in 1969. This figure compares with over 500,000 at Halifax airport, which is by far the largest airport in the Atlantic provinces since it is also an international airport in terms of international and trans-Atlantic flights. The number of passengers handled at Moncton has been rather stable for the past five years and this traffic in 1969 stood at 133,600. Passengers handled at Saint John, New Brunswick, in the same year amounted to 123,000.

I should like to apply these statistics to the situation at St. John's, Newfoundland. The airport there has a record which shows that an increasing number of people are using air transportation as a means of travelling and an increased demand is being placed on its very limited facilities. The 189,000 passengers handled in 1969 had a passenger terminal space of 9,320 square feet, compared with 39,000 square feet at Gander which has the lowest number of passengers of the major airports in the Atlantic provinces—69,000 in 1969. There are 43,000 square feet at Halifax airport, which makes St. John's, as I say, the second busiest airport in terms of number of passengers handled, through it has the third smallest amount of terminal space available. This is an indication that the facilities at the airport at St. John's are taxed to the limit, especially during the peak travel months of June, July and August when tourist traffic is at its height and people are travelling to and from the mainland and other points in the world for vacation purposes.

The airport terminal at St. John's was one of the first new terminals to be built. It was built in 1958 and very few modifications or changes have been made since it