

sion on Grain Handling and Transportation reported in the middle of May this year, and it recommended a certain amount of abandonment of branch lines in the three prairie provinces. I looked at what the Minister of Transport said ten days later, and I am quoting from a commentary he made on May 27 of this year, at page 6:

Where any line is in fact abandoned, I want the roadbed property to revert automatically to the federal Crown.

There is our Minister of Transport supporting the principle, but in a specific instance of abandonments authorized by the Canadian Transport Commission.

He said, in addition,

The Government of Canada would then, after consultations with the provinces, offer that land to the provincial Crown involved, for ultimate disposition to a local municipality, or we would offer it for sale as soon as possible to adjacent farmland owners;

I think some of us would like to ensure that any proceeds would go back into the railway operation, if that is our ultimate purpose. I will repeat again what the minister said in August on the same point in responding to the brief of the three prairie transportation ministers. I quote from page 4 of a document dated August 15, 1977:

Abandoned Right-of-Way

Where any line is in fact abandoned, the roadbed property should revert automatically to the federal Crown. The Government of Canada would then, after consultation . . .

And so on. There twice is reiterated the position of the government in support of the bill.

It seems to me we would be more prudent to have the committee consider what the ramifications are. We have a way of doing it and I intend to support the bill that the hon. member is bringing forward, Bill C-222.

Here are some of the considerations that I think cannot be met in this House in the broad scope he has given to the motion. I know he is interested in the Kettle Valley line. It is a specific instance again, but supposing all of those properties revert to the Crown, what would be the burdens on the federal government in maintaining the properties in the meantime? Would it in fact wish to sell them off? Would any sales be consistent with long term planning in a municipality, or even a requirement that there be a federal/provincial agreement on long term transportation corridor needs? We don't know and can't know unless we have much more information.

What are the city properties worth in, say, downtown Toronto, if put into convention centres or hotels or non-railway uses what hundreds of millions of dollars worth of property would automatically revert to the Crown if we accept the motion? We ought to know in some detail the amounts of money involved here and if, in fact, the railways would lose the opportunity of sale of those properties, would they also lose the financial capacity to reinvest in rail networks?

● (1652)

The implications are serious enough that although we can say quite frankly to the hon. member that he has a good principle here, and I think the government is in basic agree-

Railway Rights-of-Way

ment with it, as I have quoted from the minister, however, there is too much involved simply to support the motion. I will indeed support the bill when it arrives.

Mr. Fred McCain (Carleton-Charlotte): Mr. Speaker, it is rather heartening to hear the hon. member opposite speak as he did. As he pointed out, there are a multitude of interests involved in both the bill to which he referred and the motion presently before the House.

It is of interest to the Canadian public that the money which may be realized from what was in many instances granted land for the purpose of the construction of railroads should accrue to transportation. At the moment, it is being deflected by both our major railroads into rental property and sales, and any other venture that can take place, or it becomes a free piece of land for the construction of a very commercial venture without charge to that venture, whether it be an hotel, shopping market, or whatever else may be constructed.

The transportation interests of Canada are getting short-changed in a very major way with rentals, property sales and so on as a result of the other uses made of granted land, whether it be the New Brunswick Railway Company, CPR, CNR, the Kettle Valley or any other railroad.

All members on this side are very heartened to be assured of some support for the bill which will succeed this motion. I do not think it would really be bad at this moment if this motion were allowed to pass pending the outcome of the bill. I think it should be passed.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ian Watson (Laprairie): Mr. Speaker, I want to add at least a few observations to the ideas contained in the motion before the House today. I myself introduced a private bill during the last session and again in this session concerning the use of abandoned railway lines. I think their use represents a huge potential, during the summer for bicycle paths, and during the winter for cross-country skiing or snowmobiles. In addition, their use could be very important for recreation, and we should not yet allow the railway companies to continue abandoning them without due concern for the public interest in the areas where those lines are located.

Something happened recently in the Eastern Townships where, I think thanks to the intervention of the provincial government, it may be possible that a line abandoned by the CP near Brome Lake will be used; on the other hand, I do not think the present situation should be allowed to last because we should probably allow some compensation for those lots. If they have little value, then we could grant the public a right of way which could mean a lot for the future of recreation. In any event, I think we should do the most sensible thing.

[*English*]

I do not want to take away from the time of another hon. member who has indicated he wishes to speak on this. Before sitting down, I want to state that the idea is an excellent one. The railroad should be obliged at least to offer to public bodies, provincial and municipal governments, these sites