

Railways

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Stand by unanimous consent.

Order No. 13, the hon. member for Prince George-Peace River (Mr. Oberle). Shall the order stand?

Some hon. Members: Stand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Stand by unanimous consent.

Order No. 16, the hon. member for Esquimalt-Saanich (Mr. Munro). Shall the order stand?

Some hon. Members: Stand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Stand by unanimous consent.

Order No. 17, the hon. member for Surrey-White Rock (Mr. Friesen). Shall the order stand?

Some hon. Members: Stand.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier): Stand by unanimous consent.

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[*Translation*]

**ABANDONED RAILWAY LINES CONSERVATION
ADVISORY AUTHORITY ACT**

MEASURES TO CONSERVE ABANDONED RAILWAY LINES

Mr. Ian Watson (Laprairie) moved that Bill C-221, to provide for the establishment of an authority to conserve abandoned railway lines in Canada, be read the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Transportation and Communications.

He said: Mr. Speaker, Bill C-221 provides for the establishment of an authority to conserve abandoned railway lines in Canada. Canadians are becoming increasingly aware of the possibilities offered by abandoned railway lines and unused rights-of-way in the field of rapid urban transport and recreation. Too often in the past, buildings were erected on portions of lines sold by the railway companies, which virtually prevented the establishment of urban transportation, bicycle paths, foot paths, or snowmobile trails. In the long run this bill will protect the interests of the people in urban transportation and recreation by conserving the use of lines and rights-of-way of abandoned railway lines.

[*English*]

Increasing numbers of people in Canada have come to realize what a fantastic, unused resource are these lines running out from cities which provide a linkage between our urban areas and the countryside, these lines of open space which have a potential as linear parks not only for bicycle paths and hiking trails, but for other imaginative recreational uses. These strips in most cases link urban centres with the

[The Acting Speaker (Mr. Ethier).]

countryside and have the potential to form the basis for a network of trails and bicycle paths which would provide a recreational opportunity for people that, up to now, has not been available to either citizens of the city or the countryside.

The CNR offers these lines to the provinces and has indicated that henceforth it will offer any such abandoned railway lines to the provinces if they are prepared to pay the market price for them. The CPR has taken the position that it will simply sell the lines back to the contiguous line owners.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): Sell them back! They were given the lines in the first place.

Mr. Watson: Right. When these lines were originally built, the railway companies benefited from government assistance.

It seems to me that this resource has the great potential of improving the quality of life which we enjoy in our cities and towns. Under no condition should we be allowing the railway companies to turn back this land to the neighbouring owners at prices which usually do not provide a productive return to the railway companies. Even if a small portion of a line is sold, it ruins the potential of that line being used. Such a network would enhance the ability of people within its area, and even of people living between cities which are a considerable distance apart, to communicate with each other by means other than highways and existing railway lines.

The bill which I have proposed would set up a committee that would be empowered to advise the government in so far as these railway lines are concerned. It would advise the government on, for example, the best way of taking an inventory of the existing abandoned railway rights of way in Canada, which would include a determination of just who owns what as far as these lines are concerned, because there is a great deal of confusion about who in fact does own some of the rights of way.

I believe that at the moment the CPR is in litigation which could be extremely expensive from its point of view, resulting from such a situation where it has found that one of its main lines belongs to somebody other than the body to whom they thought it belonged. Another thing which this advisory committee could do is assess and determine the potential use of such a right of way for rapid transit. We passed a bill on April 30, 1974, which allowed the re-use of railway shunting yards for other purposes within city cores. That bill, the Railway Relocation Bill, also provided for the upgrading of existing railway lines for urban transit purposes.

Mr. Paproski: And the government promised a lot of money for it too, remember?

Mr. Watson: Yes. Unfortunately this government has ignored this bill recently, but the lines are still there and the potential is still there. In my view, we will have to make use of those lines sooner or later. If we follow what I propose in Bill C-221 we would be more adequately prepared for that potential use of the lines for rapid transit purposes. The committee which I am suggesting would advise the government on wheth-