

to the abandonment of more lines than was really to the advantage of the economy of the community of western Canada, and I think we have to consider that possibility.

I do not mean to be political or critical of the proposition of the last speaker, but if we establish a vehicle for the disposition of land—which would have to be Crown-owned in any instance, I believe—then I think that vehicle should not be interdepartmental. If we get an interdepartmental committee I think we will run into roadblocks with each department having to make its own decision on its own merits. I would take sharp issue with any such proposal as that if it were put before the House on a serious basis. If there is an inclination by the Crown to dispose of its abandoned rights of way, then in my view we should not set up an interdepartmental committee. We should define very clearly the authority and terms and conditions under which such land will become the property of somebody else, and permit that authority to give a quick decision rather than spread the responsibility throughout an interdepartmental structure.

The present transportation commission has so much on its platter now that perhaps we should name a single official who might draw help, if he requires it, from local people. If it is in the city, get the mayor of the city involved and let him appoint a couple of other people—perhaps from the railroad. But let us get down to it so that the decision-making process will not take 18 months to two years when somebody may really be in a hurry—I refer particularly to a municipality.

I think that this subject matter has never been discussed in depth in a committee of the House in a policy-seeking position with a policy-seeking reference as a result of which a decision could be made or a proposal could be offered to government. What do we do with this land? How do we dispose of it? I would add to that, as I have already implied: what are we going to do about the abandonment of rail lines in long-term transportation planning? Whether it be in the west or in Carleton-Charlotte, it needs long-term planning.

There is a relationship between the business available and the abandonment of a line, but there does not seem at this moment to be a pursuit of business by the railroads which would indicate that they wish to keep their lines open.

I know the hon. gentleman from London. I am sorry I cannot name his constituency. I should know it. I know he has some sympathy with my feeling that the railroad officials are not, in fact, pursuing business. I have repeatedly stated that in the province of New Brunswick we are hauling lumber by truck from mills in New Brunswick across the CPR line and across the CNR line to the Bangor and Aroostook railroad in Maine and in other instances to another line in Maine, and it does not pay to truck that lumber to destination if you are within a reasonable distance of a Maine railroad. The ridiculous part of the whole thing is that the little Maine railroads are making money by extending lower rates than our own rail companies in our own country are charging. I submit that the cost of the declining traffic as a result of the diversion of traffic to other sources is making certain rail lines the subject of abandonment at some point in the future. It is foreseeable.

### *Abandoned Rights of Way*

There is already one application present. However, I must admit I have digressed from a subject which is very close to my heart. I hope there could be some vehicle by which some study of the best transportation system for Canada could be developed to get the cheapest form of transportation.

Although the motion does not say so, I think we are discussing only Crown land as it relates to rights of way. I do not think we could consider that we are talking about the private property of a company in the transportation industry. We have to be talking about Crown land.

While farmers may not be interested, as the last speaker said, in becoming the owners of a railroad right of way, for obvious reasons, if that railroad happens to intersect their farms it is a prior responsibility that that land do become, if possible, whether private or Crown property, the property of the farmers whose farms are intersected by a railroad right of way. That is a consideration which should be made primary. Those which are in an area of pastureland or otherwise undeveloped, are of interest to the farmer. The typical basis for Crown disposal has often been that if the right of way lies within the property or adjacent to that of another owner, that land may very well revert to the other owner for historic reasons. This is an important matter which we should consider—that if it is adjacent to existing property and if it is Crown property, first the municipality and then the individual should be given priority in eventual ownership.

● (1650)

This is a broad field. There are many options, and many suggestions have been made, but I hope this bill will stimulate the type of interest that is necessary so that some vehicle is established, perhaps a special task force, so that a group of members of the House interested in this subject matter might analyse the long-term transportation requirements and the cheapest possible way of transportation, meld the two together and develop a system to provide the service which we have historically received. I think the mails are an example which can be used in respect of our general transportation facility and the efficiency of our railroads today. Twenty-five years ago if you sent a letter from Ottawa to my home at ten o'clock in the morning, it would be at my home at one o'clock in the afternoon. Today, if I send it from Ottawa to my home, it will take 48 hours, 72 hours or 96 hours to two weeks—there is no regularity or dependability in the mail service today. The same situation has developed with the railroads. The two services are comparable in their capability to deliver service. I think we need to study what changes can be made, and then perhaps the subject of land created by railroad abandonment will not even be on our minds.

**Mr. Robert Bockstael (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Transport):** Mr. Speaker, I must say at the outset that I share the views expressed by the hon. member for Mississauga North (Mr. Fisher) on this bill. The hon. member said that each part of the country had its unique problems and unique opportunities with respect to abandoned railway lines. This could not be more true in western Canada.