

Statements by Ministers

Looking at rail safety issues, of the 123 rail fatalities in 1985, 58, or 47 per cent, were at level crossings. To address this problem, a total of \$25 million is currently earmarked for federal contributions toward the cost of new grade separations. This is to be matched by provincial participation. It is recognized that there is still much more to be done in this area and the current funding levels will be used to address the priority safety projects.

Where crossing improvements such as lights, gates and bells are concerned, the CTC currently has responsibility. In this connection, the CTC has been spending about \$10 million annually with additional contributions from the railways and municipalities, and has plans for improvements such as modern reflectorized arms for gate barriers, flood-lighting at high-risk crossings, and more powerful signal lights.

Another major safety initiative will be to modernize the legislative framework for the rail sector, replacing outdated rules and encouraging the introduction of modern safety practices and technology. Consultation has now begun with industry and labor in accelerating this initiative.

This will involve a complete review of the many safety provisions contained in the Railway Act. It will be important, for example, to update safety regulations focusing on performance standards, to permit the introduction of modern practices, and to encourage the use of state-of-the-art technology in the rail mode.

We also look forward to receiving the findings of the inquiry into the February 8 crash at Hinton, Alberta. Mr. Justice Foisys objective is to determine steps which can be reasonably taken to reduce the risk of reoccurrence of such a tragic accident, and to provide recommendations to improve over-all rail safety in Canada.

Let me deal with the transportation of dangerous goods. To improve the safe transportation of dangerous goods, we introduced the first regulations under the 1980 Transportation of Dangerous Goods Act. The federal regulations came into effect on July 1, 1985. By February, 1986 nine provinces and one territory had adopted for and put into place these regulations.

The objective of the federal program is to ensure that a uniform set of standards is in place across the country, applicable to all modes of transport.

Under the program, employees must be trained in respect of their responsibilities and the products which they may be handling or transporting. In addition, shippers of certain types of dangerous goods are required to present plans as to how they will provide immediate assistance at the site of any accident involving their products. Further components of this program are being developed to deal with issues such as the adequate design, manufacture and use of packagings, containers and tank vehicles.

In order to assure compliance with current regulations, the federal Government has established a new force of approximately 40 dangerous goods inspectors from coast to coast to work with provincial officials to enforce these regulations.

Recently, I established a special task force to examine the flow of dangerous goods by rail through the Toronto area. With a full report expected within two years, I have asked that the task force report as to whether it is feasible to re-route transportations services carrying dangerous goods and whether additional dangerous goods rail safety requirements are needed.

On May 22 I announced approval of the task force's recommendation to accept CP Rail's offer to voluntarily reduce the speed of all trains carrying dangerous goods on CP Rail's north Toronto-Galt subdivision—special dangerous goods freight trains from 56 kilometres per hour to 40 kilometres per hour, and other dangerous goods trains from 80 kilometres per hour to 56 kilometres per hour.

As well, I am presently discussing with the Province of British Columbia and local municipalities the feasibility of establishing a group to examine and make recommendations respecting the transportation of dangerous goods in and around the Vancouver-Lower Mainland area, and to and from Vancouver Island.

Of major significance in the area of transportation safety will be the separation of accident investigation in the rail and marine mode from the current regulatory bodies. This would remove any conflict of interest and ensure an independent examination of all system components, regulations, and equipment during an investigation. A proposal is now being considered for the separation of these functions, including the possibility of combining air, marine and rail accident investigation into a single, independent multi-modal accident investigation board.

In summary, the Canadian transportation system has an extremely good safety record. Accidents will happen, but I have under way a comprehensive set of initiatives to ensure that this record is maintained and enhanced.

Safety has been and continues to be the number one priority of my mandate as Transport Minister. I will not compromise when it comes to the safety of Canadians.

Some Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Winnipeg—Fort Garry): Mr. Speaker, first let me say to the Hon. Minister that I apologize for not being in the House for the major part of his statement. However, I did have an opportunity to read it beforehand. I am responding really because the Transport critic of our Party is not in the city today and has asked me to respond for him.

• (1220)

I want to fully endorse, underline and support the basic priorities for safety established by the Minister. There is no question that in the multitude of responsibilities of the Minister of Transport (Mr. Mazankowski) safety is undoubtedly first and foremost. Safety is the major preoccupation of Canadians. I think the Minister will agree that it is a matter of increasing concern and anxiety. A number of incidents both in this country and abroad have focused the interest of Canadians very much on their ability to travel.