

Statements by Ministers

● (1130)

DANGEROUS PRODUCTS**TRANSPORT ACROSS METROPOLITAN TORONTO—REPORT OF TASK FORCE—STATEMENT BY MINISTER**

Hon. Benoît Bouchard (Minister of Transport): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure to table, in both official languages, the final report of the Toronto Area Rail Transportation of Dangerous Goods Task Force.

This report was commissioned by the Government in March, 1986, to investigate the feasibility of rerouting or relocating the movement of dangerous goods around Metropolitan Toronto. The task force was also requested to investigate and make recommendations on the relationship between train speed and safety.

This report finds rail movement of dangerous goods in Metro Toronto safe, not only related to other modes but compared to other countries as well. CP Rail is the safest railway in North America; CN currently ranks fifth. This is a tribute, not only to the employees of each railway but also to the commitment the Government has to ensuring safe transportation systems for all Canadians.

When I received the report last night from task force Chairman Harold Gilbert, we had the opportunity to discuss its consultations, findings, and recommendations.

[*Translation*]

Although the task force submitted 130 recommendations, my comments today will be limited to the two most important aspects of its mandate: train speed and rerouting of traffic.

The task force asked a consulting firm to investigate the relationship between train speed and safety. Although the report is technical in nature, it implies that from the safety point of view, speed reduction might not be necessary. The task force recommends further studies in this area.

[*English*]

I have considered carefully the representations made by citizens, municipal Governments, and Members of this House. Further, I note that three members of the task force expressed the view that lower speed limits were desirable on the tracks identified as high risk.

I have considered these matters in light of my primary concern, which is safety. I think that the best course is to lower the speed limits on the high-risk routes. I shall immediately take the necessary steps to set and enforce the lower speed limits on the following rail lines: from Weston Road on Canadian National's Weston Subdivision and from Starview Drive on the Canadian Pacific's McTier Subdivision to the West Toronto Diamond, from Kipling Avenue on Canadian Pacific's Galt Subdivision to the West Toronto Diamond, from the West Toronto Diamond along the Canadian Pacific's North Toronto Subdivision to their Agincourt Yard in Scarborough, and from Canadian National's McMillan Yard along their York Subdivision eastward to Doncaster.

The task force recommends that all levels of Government collaborate in approaching the issues of rerouting and relocation. The task force does not see this as an issue solely of safety. It states that relocation has an economic effect, and it has a primary effect on land use and zoning policies on the provincial and municipal Governments.

I could not agree more, and since this is a matter of provincial jurisdiction I would like to inform Hon. Members that I will be writing today to the Hon. Ed Fulton, Ontario Minister of Transportation, seeking the province's position.

[*Translation*]

During the last four years, the Government's commitment to safety has led to a number of initiatives, including the regulations on the transportation of hazardous materials, adopted in 1985; the Railway Safety Act, which received Royal Assent on July 28 this year; and the Bill to establish the Transportation Accident Investigation Board, tabled in the House not long ago.

[*English*]

The Standing Committee on Transport has played a vital role in all these matters, many of which bear on the task force's recommendations. With its knowledge, expertise, and accessibility to the public and industry, I believe, Mr. Speaker, that the standing committee can best advance the work of the task force. Therefore, I am referring this report to the standing committee.

The report I have received includes all public submissions made to the task force. I shall provide these to the standing committee along with a minority report prepared by a member of the task force. As well, I would advise the House that the report of the Vancouver Task Force on Dangerous Goods is expected to be completed in the next few weeks. It is my intention to refer that report to the standing committee.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Harold Gilbert for his excellent work and dedication to this project. This has been a very intensive and demanding study, and all task force members are to be congratulated for their commitment of time and expertise.

Hon. Chas. L. Caccia (Davenport): Mr. Speaker, we received the report today with a sense of happiness because the process has been completed. Having listened to the Minister of Transport (Mr. Bouchard), I think there are a few remarks that have to be made from this side of the House.

The report is finished. The process was a lengthy one but was very thorough. It had to delve into very complex and difficult issues. Out of that process, 130 recommendations have emerged. Now the Minister must act. We have mixed feelings because this report is vague and in some respects requires further studies. Here is where the political crunch comes. The Minister of Transport must make certain difficult decisions very soon because the process has now come to an end and further studies are not desirable.