

Railway Act

1958 a provision was introduced to make it possible for the railroads to put reflective markings on the railroad cars. Periodically we pick up our newspapers and learn that someone travelling along a road at night or perhaps during a storm when visibility was poor has run into the side of a train at a crossing. I well recall the arguments put forward in this connection by a former member of this house, Mr. Gordon K. Fraser. This was one of his ideas, that railroad cars should have reflective markings on the side so they would stand out at night. We know that some of the Canadian National cars are now marked in this way, and they are more easily seen as they are moving over a crossing during a period when visibility is poor. I was wondering if the minister would have any idea how far this work has progressed, and what the plans of the railway are for the future in regard to putting these reflective markings on railway cars.

This act is to be extended for another three years, and I am sure the people of Canada who travel on our highways will be happy to learn of this fact, because we want to do everything possible to minimize the danger of accidents at railway crossings.

Mr. Thompson: Mr. Chairman, there is just one matter I want to mention. It is simple, but I believe it is important. We all realize that we are dealing with money which will be allotted for the installation of railway crossing safety devices. We are concerned about this because everyone knows that from time to time serious accidents are occurring across this nation which in the aggregate are taking the lives of many Canadians.

Not only are our newspapers full of references to such accidents but we each have our own experiences in our own areas in this connection. Only a few months ago in my own city of Red Deer a whole carload of people lost their lives while riding in a taxi when the car collided with a train at a crossing at which there was not ample protection.

I am thinking specifically, however, of a bus accident which occurred at Lamont, Alberta, a few years ago, in which a whole busload of children were involved, many of whom lost their lives. At that time the committee investigating this mishap received evidence regarding a comparatively cheap safety device which was actually demonstrated at the time. This device is activated by a low power radio transmitter on a locomotive engine and makes contact with any nearby vehicle that has the corresponding device installed inside it. Cost of installation of this type of device, both for the railroad and the automobile, is comparatively

cheap and can be reckoned in terms of tens of dollars instead of hundreds of dollars, which is the cost of the normal automatic safety device. Because it is safe and simple, and because it gives a certain amount of protection, it could serve in many places where accidents take place almost daily.

I would like to ask the minister whether any consideration has been given to the acquisition of this type of safety device which could be used particularly by public vehicles, and in many cases by people who frequently use unprotected railway crossings. I do not think any of us can be complacent in the face of this appalling toll of human life which takes place month after month, and certainly this device is worth investigating. It would give much more widespread protection, at an inexpensive cost compared to the very expensive type of safety signal now being used. Does the minister have information in regard to this?

Mr. McLraith: Mr. Chairman, the hon. member for Wellington-Huron asked some questions, and I want to point out to him that the method of voting the money in the estimates was changed because it was found that the actual expenditures were not taking place in the year in line with commitments. The form of the estimate is now really a commitment authority, but it adds up to the same thing. It is a different and I think a better way of doing it. This method was decided upon in the light of experience, and there is no reduction of funds. The \$10 million which was formerly provided in the estimates as a direct vote is now provided by way of direct vote and by way of commitment authority, and it brings the full amount up to the equivalent of \$15 million a year.

In answer to the questions about the application, and so on, I should perhaps inform the committee there are about 35 active applications for grade operations; there are about 400 active automatic protection projects, and the rate of putting reflectors on the cars—whatever that is called—is about 6,000 cars per year. The number of grade crossings that are having reflectorized material put on the crossing signs is about 2,500 per year. I hope these statistics have given the answer to the hon. member for Red Deer. If not, and if he will restate his question, I will try to give him the information.

Mr. Thompson: I am somewhat familiar with the cost of the normal automatic signal device which is being installed and being presently considered for several hundred crossings, but I am interested in something that is cheaper, which might not give the same degree of safety but which could