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the place and that radar should be doubled up and improved, there are limitations to that.

I do not want to cry here this afternoon on the floor of the House. It is not the right thing to do.

An hon. Member: Go ahead.

Mr. Pepin: I just want to inform hon. members. My hon. friends might ask me the reason for the reduction in the capital program on the air side. There are a number of reasons for that. First, the number of projects has been completed, and they are important ones. I am thinking about Calgary and Mirabel, built in recent years. A number of programs have been postponed because of controversy, and I am thinking about Pickering, for example, and the general restraint program of the government. So I want to emphasize this fact again to prove that it has limitations. Sometimes when I answer questions in the House I have the feeling that the demand is bottomless and ceilingless with regard to airports that could be built or improved.

● (1550)

The final section of my estimates has to do with the surface transportation program. There is a lot of money here because half of the departmental estimates are in this section. We see here an increase of \$70.3 million over 1979-80, for a total of \$802 million.

With reference to the speech made by the hon. member for South West Nova, \$52 million is attributable particularly to Via Rail. Attributable to the payment for the urban transportation assistance program is \$26.7 million, and the amount attributable to the acquisition or leasing of hopper cars is \$10.8 million. These amounts are partially offset by reductions in other programs, the largest being the highway improvement program where you find reductions of \$12.6 million in the Atlantic highway strengthening program, \$16.5 million for the prairie highway improvement program, and \$10 million for the western northlands program.

We will have somewhat of a philosophical debate here because it seems to me—and my hon. friend on the other side, the hon. member for Joliette, might agree—that there has been a developing trend in Canada according to which the two levels of government should not try, whenever it can be avoided, to do the same thing. Most of these highway development programs have to do with intraprovincial road development, and consequently hon. members will see a decline in that area, so that the federal government will have money to allocate on projects of a federal nature. It is a very difficult decision to make and I expect to be chastized occasionally by members of the House for not being sufficiently sympathetic to local situations. That is a point of constitutional philosophy or theology which one might bear in mind when criticizing the Minister of Transport.

I have a few notes on the urban transportation assistance program which is so popular with members of Parliament. It is included in the estimates with \$57.7 million as compared with \$31 million. The money on this one is going up. As is well

known, this program provides assistance for urban transit capital projects as well as the construction of railway grade separations under the terms of the Railway Relocation and Crossing Act. Again hon. members see \$57.7 million only, but the demand is unbelievable. It seems that in recent years every major municipality in Canada worth its salt has had an urban development plan, including a railway crossing, grade separation and relocation, and to do all that my department had only \$57.7 million. Again I am trying to assess the possibilities in relation to the demand.

Support to rail passenger services in Canada, including assistance to employees affected by the establishment of Via Rail Canada in March of 1978, is provided for under the amount of \$424.3 million, which compares with \$277 million last year. There is a very substantial increase here.

I point this out to the committee so that hon. members will be in a position to assess where the money is going. Much of that money is going to Via Rail. I want to emphasize immediately the fact that, out of the \$424 million, \$307 million is for operations and \$117 million is for capital projects. This is equipment that Via Rail is acquiring. Some of it is LRC, that is, a light, rapid and comfortable train system which has been developed by the Bombardier-MLW-Alcan group and others. I point this out in an effort to indicate where the money allocated to the Department of Transport was going.

If someone else would like to make a little speech now it would give me an opportunity to collect my notes to answer the specific and detailed questions asked by the hon. member for South West Nova.

Mr. Gamble: Mr. Chairman, my line of questioning and my comments this afternoon are directed to the President of the Treasury Board. I wonder if he could indicate whether he is acquainted with the proposal that has been made by Michael Pitfield, the clerk of the Privy Council, with respect to the employment of an electronic transfer of funds system, and if he is, does he contemplate the establishment of such a system?

Mr. Johnston: No, Mr. Chairman, I am not acquainted with that project. I do not have the information with me and, as the hon. member knows, I do not have my officials with me at present because we are alternating officials between the Department of Transport and my department. But if the hon. member would like me to obtain that information, I shall be pleased to do so within the next several minutes.

Mr. Gamble: Under the circumstances, Mr. Chairman, I would be in a position to explain some of the advantages of the proposal that has been made with respect to the implementation of the electronic transfer of funds system.

One of the most intriguing advantages of this system would be the potential elimination of what at one time the clerk of the Privy Council indicated to be in the neighbourhood of 60,000 public service positions. I am fully aware of the great reluctance of the President of the Treasury Board to speak in terms of goals or target numbers, but having regard to the fact that most of these positions might well be in the postal service