

Adjournment Debate

Mr. Goodale: It would simply save time at eight o'clock, if members were in agreement. I do not suggest we should begin the debate.

Mr. Knowles (Winnipeg North Centre): It doesn't save any time, and the minister is not here.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I would point out to the parliamentary secretary since the minister is not here that if the government wishes to introduce the motion another minister would need to move it on his behalf, and the floor would likely go immediately to the opposition because if I put the motion now an hon. member would take the floor and call it six o'clock, which would entitle him to the privilege of speaking at eight o'clock. So the hon. member's suggestion is not as satisfactory as perhaps he thought it was.

Is it agreed we should call it six o'clock?

Some hon. Members: Agreed.

PROCEEDINGS ON ADJOURNMENT MOTION

[English]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 40 deemed to have been moved.

TRANSPORT—DATE OF DECISION ON PROVISION OF FUNDS FOR URBAN TRANSIT PROJECT

Mr. F. A. Philbrook (Halton): Mr. Speaker, I wish to pursue a matter which has been of concern to me and to many of my colleagues for some time and which I raised again recently with the Minister of Transport (Mr. Lang) during the question period.

On June 2 I asked the minister whether a decision had been reached concerning the provision of promised federal financial assistance to provincial and municipal authorities in improving commuter transit facilities in metropolitan areas. This decision, which relates to an announcement made in 1974 that the federal government intended to spend \$290 million on transit aid, \$100 million of this on commuter aid, has already been deferred on several occasions.

For example, the Ontario minister of transport, the Hon. James Snow, who lives in my own constituency, sent a telegram to the federal Minister of Transport on February 24, 1977. I should like to quote from his telegram:

At our meeting of Nov. 30, 1976, wherein we discussed such matters as the Toronto transportation terminal redevelopment, federal participation in the acquisition of bi-level commuter rail equipment and the proposed federal urban transit assistance program, you agreed to respond to our queries and concerns by Dec. 1976. I confirmed the position of the province on these matters in my letter of Dec. 7, which to date has not been answered. Subsequently, through discussion at our executive level, we were advised that the federal position would be made known to us by late Jan., 1977.

The text of this telegram was published in the *Oakville Journal-Record* and elsewhere on March 7. The Ontario minister goes on to say:

I would stress the urgent need for a clear statement of the federal government's intention so that we can proceed with or cancel planned projects on a rational basis.

I would therefore request that you advise me at the earliest opportunity of the federal government's position on the Toronto transportation terminal, the acquisition of commuter rail equipment and finally the urban transit assistance program.

In his reply to me, the minister indicated that a decision still had not been reached on the matter. In addition, he stated that the province of Ontario had yet to avail itself of the substantial assistance provided through existing programs. Mr. Speaker, I must consider the hon. gentleman's reply as both ambiguous and inadequate. What assistance? What programs? Incidentally, we are not asking the government to spend more money but to rearrange its spending. I raise the matter again at this time because I believe it is imperative that a decision be made, and made soon.

It would, of course, be preferable, for reasons I have outlined on numerous occasions both in this chamber and elsewhere, if the final decision was rendered in favour of the proposed aid. At this stage of the game, however, I think it is most important that a decision be announced one way or the other so that those who must budget according to this decision can proceed apace with their efforts to upgrade public transit systems on a rational basis. With respect to the Toronto area in particular, projects such as the expansion of Union Station, the removal of the bottleneck at Bathurst and the extension of commuter service to Milton have been placed on a back burner by the Ontario government as they await a commitment from Ottawa to help out.

Meanwhile, funds which might be put to good use on smaller projects elsewhere are tied up until a decision is made. For the sake of clarity, I would point out that the existing programs to which the minister referred in his reply to me constitute only a partial fulfilment of the original announcement. The five-year \$100 million capital assistance program to commuter services, which apparently came into effect on April 1, 1977, would be particularly welcome. However, in the absence of an announcement we have no idea where we stand with regard to this aid. Also, it represents only about one-third of the sum originally set down, and is woefully inadequate.

For example, the deficit of the Toronto Transit Commission alone amounted to about \$50 million in 1976. Here in Ottawa, the transit deficit for 1976 was about \$14.8 million and the projected deficit for this year is \$15.4 million. Admittedly, the federal plan was not designed to cover operating costs, but these deficits indicate the gravity of the problem. The fact that no money has yet been requested by the Ontario government under this capital assistance program may indicate that it does not wish to tie itself into one program while the possibility remains that more money may be available later under a separate, more generous scheme. Separate programs involving grade separation and railway relocation represent separate promises and should not be confused with this issue.