

*Trans-Canada Highway*

He said the dominion government proposed the highway be financed on a 50-50 basis and all provinces from whom replies have been received agreed to pay 50 per cent of the cost in each province.

I should like to quote from a letter written by the minister of highways for Saskatchewan to Hon. James A. MacKinnon, the then minister of mines and resources, on January 14. The letter says in part:

With reference to item eight,—

Which was asking for technical information.

—I am enclosing a copy of the minimum standard agreed upon by the four western provinces. I may state, however, that when this matter was discussed, it was generally understood the federal government would be prepared to accept responsibility for 100 per cent of the construction cost of this road. I note from a press report from Edmonton you are credited with a statement suggesting that your government is considering assistance only to the extent of 50 per cent of the entire cost. . . .

As it is desirable both from the viewpoint of your government and of ours that work on a trans-Canada highway be commenced as early as possible in 1949, I would respectfully ask that the responsibility for construction costs of this route be finalized as early as possible, in order that the necessary provision may be made in our construction program for this coming season.

The minister of highways in Saskatchewan in that letter accused the federal government of backtracking from the position taken at the conference in December. Throughout the whole file of correspondence—that was brought down as an order for return requested by the hon. member for Rosetown-Biggan (Mr. Coldwell)—between the present minister and the Saskatchewan government, and between the former minister under whose department was placed the matter of a trans-Canada highway, nowhere was there a denial that the federal government had not taken the position in December that it would be prepared to pay 100 per cent of the cost. Certainly, if this government had not led the province to believe that it would be prepared to pay the total cost, it would have denied that statement of the minister of highways in Saskatchewan, particularly when the government was going to the country in a general election within a few weeks.

The Minister of Agriculture (Mr. Gardiner) made the statement that Saskatchewan had not agreed to go ahead with the program on a certain basis and that was one of the reasons why the project had not been undertaken. I want to quote from a letter written on April 7 by the present Minister of Reconstruction and Supply (Mr. Winters) to Hon. J. T. Douglas, minister of highways in Saskatchewan. I should like to read the second paragraph, which is as follows:

It seems clear from the helpful attitude you adopted at the conference, and from subsequent correspondence, that you are anxious to proceed at an early date.

[Mr. Argue.]

Hence during the election campaign the Minister of Agriculture, in my opinion, was attempting to mislead the audience to whom he was talking. The Minister of Reconstruction and Supply himself, who had to deal with this matter, made the statement in writing that the government of Saskatchewan had indeed adopted a very helpful attitude.

There are other letters in that file, written by the Hon. J. T. Douglas in which he repeatedly asks the federal government to finalize its plans so that the province of Saskatchewan could begin the construction of the Saskatchewan section of the trans-Canada highway within the year 1949.

I have already said that the present formula does not meet the needs of the provinces, that the formula will result in some provinces being called upon to shoulder a very high part of the cost; and the formula does not take into consideration the necessity of large expenditures within the various provinces for a provincial highway system that will meet the needs of the people within those provinces.

I think the Minister of Reconstruction and Supply and the government could learn a great deal from the highway program adopted by the United States federal government. We all know that the United States system of highways is the best in the world. As far back as 1912 the federal government of the United States undertook a program of federal grants for the construction of roads throughout the country. Hence when this government decides to pay some money for the construction of a trans-Canada highway it is just thirty-seven years behind the United States in that regard.

In 1916 there was appropriated from the federal treasury in the United States \$75 million for the construction of highways over a five-year period. In 1922 there was appropriated another \$75 million. In the following years, from 1922 up until the period of the war, the federal government in the United States contributed to the states for building of highways the sum of \$1,190 million. Towards the end of the war, in 1944, the federal government in the United States allocated \$500 million a year for the next three years to be spent on the building of highways. I want to point out that contributions coming from the federal government of the United States are not paid to the state governments merely for the construction of interstate highways, but that money is paid from the federal treasury in the United States to the various state governments for the construction of feeder highways, secondary and farm-to-market roads,