

*Transportation*

When we speak of the national interest in connection with transportation policy we should first be clear as to what is meant by the national interest. It may well be that when added up in terms of dollars and cents a change of transportation policy would show a net gain. But this gain may be experienced almost entirely in the central region of our country, and may be most detrimental to the economies at the geographic extremities. I do not believe this kind of reckoning is a true indication of what is in the national interest.

I support completely the proposition put forward yesterday by the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) when he said that what is in the national interest is a policy which benefits all the regions of a country, or a policy which does not discriminate against the balanced development of the several regions which make up a nation.

I am sure that by now the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pickersgill) is becoming impatient of members as they rise to take part in this debate, because most of the substantial points with regard to this bill have been made.

**Mr. Pickersgill:** Would the hon. member permit me to interrupt him for a moment? I am far from impatient. I have been listening with the greatest interest to what he has to say. Perhaps he would allow me to ask him a simple question. He seems to find an antithesis between economic cost analysis and policies prescribed by parliament which would contribute to balanced growth in the country. The question I am putting to him is, does he not think that if policies of that kind are to be intelligently devised it is desirable to use the best modern techniques to find out what the facts are, instead of guessing at them as earlier generations had to do because they did not have those techniques?

• (7:50 p.m.)

**Mr. Schreyer:** Mr. Speaker, I agree completely with the Minister of Transport (Mr. Pickersgill). I did not mean to suggest that he was showing impatience right at the present time. I was merely saying that I would not be surprised if he were becoming impatient, for the simple reason that already there has been considerable discussion.

What I was trying to establish in the past few minutes is my contention that many hon. members, and many people in different regions of this country are getting the impression that this new transportation policy will

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do no particular good for the economies of their regions.

Obviously the more time that can be spent on fruitful analysis and discussion of the various terms of this bill, the more information we will have and the better kind of policy we will be able to arrive at when a report is made to the house by the committee. It is not that I am faulting the minister for bringing in the legislation. I am merely trying to say that there is cause for uneasiness, because when a statement is reported in the press to the effect that the policy is intended to allow for the freeing of rates, then it takes a few days, perhaps even a few weeks subsequently to clarify that statement and to give the minister and others time to elaborate as to just how it is intended to protect the economies of the various regions from too sudden and harsh a change or disruption.

It is my contention that the two most difficult parts of this bill are those having to do with freight rates and with branch line abandonment. In the past few years there has been a pretty strong indication that almost every community in western Canada has shown a marked antagonism towards the idea that because of cost factors, and the like, railway branch lines may have to be removed. There is the problem of cost analysis; but we must take several other factors into consideration, and it may well be that with the passage of time people in some of these communities in western Canada will be less reluctant to accepting the idea that certain branch lines will have to be abandoned. They may do so because of a continuing trend among people to identify rather more with their regions and regional economies rather than with their own immediate local areas. But if you expect these people to accept the idea of branch line abandonment it must first be demonstrated to them that their regions and regional economies will not be disadvantageously affected by changes in transportation policy.

In other words, it will have to be demonstrated that all other means of railway rationalization and cost accounting have been investigated and attempted before the railways are given permission to abandon lines servicing some of these communities. That, of course, raises a very moot point, one which the minister touched upon in his introductory remarks, namely that when we speak of railway rationalization, cost accounting, and adopting more efficient techniques, surely we