

Government Orders

That the Dominion Government shall assume and defray all the charges for the following services; viz., efficient steam service for the conveyance of mails and passengers to be established and maintained between the island and the mainland of the Dominion winter and summer, thus placing the island in continuous communication with the intercolonial railroad and the railroad system of the Dominion.

We have to be careful with that particular condition of entry into Confederation. In the Minister of Finance's economic and fiscal statement of December 2, 1992 there was a paragraph on page 28 that said:

In addition, the federal government will commit to the construction of a fixed crossing to P.E.I., if the province recognizes that the facility meets Canada's constitutional obligation. To demonstrate this commitment the government will facilitate advanced engineering and environmental work.

This is if we agree to write off the constitutional obligation.

The project, expected to begin in the spring, will generate up to 3,500 person-years of employment over a five-year construction period. Roughly 70 per cent of the estimated \$800-\$900 million project cost will be spent in Atlantic Canada.

I am happy to say that the condition which was laid out has since been withdrawn, if I am not mistaken. I believe some people got carried away with the fact that the bridge would be built and forever Canada would have washed its hands of its constitutional obligations. With some vigilant negotiation that has been dropped as a proposal.

During the first years that P.E.I. was a province this so-called continuous service continued to be provided by steam vessel and ice boat. In 1885 the idea of a tunnel under Northumberland Strait was proposed. This was supposed to ensure year-round communication. The tunnel concept was studied and analysed off and on for the next 30 years but never really got beyond that stage.

In 1917-18 the advent of ice-breaking ferries put the tunnel and the concept of a fixed link to rest until the mid-1950s. In 1966 construction was actually begun on a bridge-causeway combination. Access roads were built but before work on the actual bridge-causeway got started the project was scrapped. That is when the province of P.E.I. signed a development agreement with the federal government in lieu of continuing with the bridge-causeway concept.

The latest round of discussions began with the public works study in 1982. This was followed by unsolicited public and private sector bids. A major Public Works Canada feasibility study took place in 1987-88 and further bids were solicited during that time.

This brings us to 1988 and the move by the Government of Prince Edward Island to consult the population on whether or not they wanted a fixed link to the mainland. On January 18, 1988 Islanders voted. The results were 60 per cent in favour of the link and 40 per cent opposed. Prior to the vote, then Premier Ghiz wrote to the public works minister, Stewart McInnis. November 6, 1987 was the actual date of the letter. In his letter Mr. Ghiz, on behalf of the Government of P.E.I. indicated that support for the link was contingent upon the satisfactory address of 10 principles. These 10 principles had to do with highways, the Woods Island ferry, the submerged lands, tolls and how they would be arrived at, the displaced workers at Borden-Cape Tormentine, economic development for the town of Borden, the Atlantic content in the materials which would be used and the labour required, an environmental impact study, the fisheries which was very important to Prince Edward Island, and the utilities. That was the utility corridor to be used at no cost to the province.

• (1640)

These 10 points have been addressed to the satisfaction of both Premier McKenna and Premier Ghiz. A short time ago they signed an agreement with the three levels of government addressing all of these problems. Whether or not they have been addressed adequately, it was adequate enough for the two premiers and the federal government.

In the fall of 1992 Mr. Ghiz in his capacity as premier signed a federal-provincial agreement, along with Premier McKenna of New Brunswick and the federal Minister of Public Works. This signature indicated that he was satisfied that all 10 of P.E.I.'s concerns had been addressed. This has assured me and most Islanders that in the opinion of the province of Prince Edward Island, the premier of New Brunswick and the federal government, every reasonable measure has been taken to ensure that this project was environmentally, economically and socially acceptable.