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Chair

Mr. Merv Tweed

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● (1535)

[*English*]

The Chair (Mr. Merv Tweed (Brandon—Souris, CPC)): Good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, meeting number 22. Our orders of the day are pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), a study of high speed rail in Canada.

Joining us today from the Canadian Airports Council is Jim Facette, president and chief executive officer. From the City of Kingston, we have Mayor Harvey Rosen, along with Jeff Garrah, chief executive officer. And from the Cement Association of Canada, we have Michael McSweeney, vice-president of industry affairs. Welcome, everyone.

Jim, I understand you might have a time restraint. Do you want to start us off?

Mr. Jim Facette (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Airports Council): Mr. Chairman, thank you very much.

Thank you to the committee for your indulgence. I do have a family commitment that I could not get out of.

[*Translation*]

Thank you very much, Mr. Chair. It is a great pleasure to be here today.

I am speaking to you today on behalf of Canada's airports. The Canadian Airports Council has 45 members that handle 75% of passenger traffic in Canada and virtually all of the air cargo arriving in Canada.

[*English*]

The potential introduction of high-speed rail in Canada has been an ongoing subject of discussion for many years. Its proponents point to systems in Europe and Japan as models and urge significant public investment and government intervention in our transportation system as a sort of environmental nirvana for Canada sometimes. Canada's airports have some concerns with the direction of the debate.

Canada's airports believe there may be a place for high-speed rail in Canada. However, it will be difficult for us to support an approach to high-speed rail if it is pursued in a manner that disregards the importance of our aviation sector or severely risks our sector's prosperity. Like members of this committee, we eagerly await the outcome of Transport Canada's study due out early 2010. We hope it provides some answers to the many questions we all have.

Canada has a sparse population largely strung along the vast Canada-U.S. border. On a per capita basis, our economy is highly reliant upon international trade and foreign tourism. As a nation, accordingly, we are highly dependent on aviation. I cannot make this point more strongly. Without aviation, Canada would have trouble functioning as a prosperous nation.

Much of the discussions of high-speed rail suggest a heavy public sector investment is necessary. This includes public-private partnerships. An injection of funds into rail would come in a fiscal environment for aviation in Canada that already is heavily criticized around the world for burdening our sector with high taxes.

For airports, the most notable of these is the $300 million in airport rent our members pay each year. At the same time, airports are responsible for their own infrastructure improvements and have invested more than $9.5 billion in airport infrastructure since 1992.

These are investments paid for not by the taxpayer, but rather through airport improvement fees paid directly by users. If public investment into high-speed rail is inevitable, perhaps the government could make a step toward the elimination of airport rent, the air travellers' security charge, and other aviation fees.

Without structural change to the aviation sector, a public investment in high-speed rail would be a double whammy for our industry, upon which more than 200,000 Canadian jobs rely. With airports already on the hook for infrastructure improvements and burdened by rent and other taxes, having to compete with an improved, subsidized high-speed passenger rail service clearly would be a disadvantage for Canada's aviation sector and its workers.

Airports and airlines are in competition with rail. We acknowledge that. Further subsidies by the federal or provincial governments to support expansion of high-speed rail services would serve to further an unlevel playing field in favour of the railway operators and at the expense of Canadian airlines and airports that pay their own way.

That said, we also believe it is important to point out the highly integrated nature of air travel. The introduction of high-speed rail has the potential to greatly impact Canada's complex airline networks. For example, on any given short-haul flight into a hub airport like Toronto, Montreal, or Vancouver, only a portion of those passengers are local. A significant number will be travelling on to a second or even third point in Canada and perhaps beyond.

The integration of transportation modes and the connectivity between modes needs further examination. The viability of the Canadian airline network depends on travellers being able to conveniently and seamlessly connect through a Canadian airport on to their final destination. Connecting traffic can make or break a decision on whether an air carrier will operate a particular route or even serve a community.

Europe understands this to an extent. Its rail and aviation networks are highly integrated. If Canada gets this wrong, we risk losing our passengers altogether. We cannot forget that an Ottawa-Tokyo passenger can just as easily choose to fly over Detroit or Seattle as he or she can choose a Canadian gateway.

In addition, the challenge going forward is that the government is being placed in a position of picking winners and losers. For example, high-speed rail developments in the Alberta context are geared towards collapsing regions and economies, so governments will also be picking winner and loser communities or regions. High-speed rail service that serves only the Calgary airport but does not make stops at other major airports in Alberta would essentially siphon off and consolidate air traffic into a single airport from other airports in the province.

● (1540)

Much has been made about the environment as the raison d'être for high-speed rail in Canada. However, high-speed rail is not necessarily an environmental answer all the time. At the distances needed to travel most of Canada, rail could be less environmentally responsible than aviation. Even in short-distance corridors in which rail may represent an environmental improvement, diverting air passengers to trains would have little overall impact on the environment. Aviation represents just 3% of emissions worldwide.

As I prepare to conclude, let's consider some numbers. Canada's airports handle about 100 million passengers a year without government subsidy, supporting about 200,000 jobs nationwide. As you explore the introduction of high-speed rail in Canada, we ask that you consider these numbers. Around the world there are numerous examples of high-speed rail that is properly integrated into a nation's transportation system as part of a carefully considered national transportation strategy. Passenger rail can be a valuable part of the transportation chain, but success is only ensured if rail is expanded in a fair and equitable manner. If it is introduced at great public expense while aviation continues to suffer a tax squeeze, if it is introduced without regard to its impact on aviation, or if it is introduced as a parallel system of transportation not integrated with aviation, the introduction of high-speed rail would not be right for this country.

The Canadian Airports Council members are not opposed to the work this committee is doing on high-speed rail. It should be explored, but it should be considered as part of a long-overdue national transportation strategy that considers the entirety of our national transportation system.

We look forward to participating in this debate in the future.

Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for the opportunity.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Rosen, would you like to go next?

Mr. Harvey Rosen (Mayor, City of Kingston): Certainly, thank you.

Mr. Chair and members of the standing committee, on behalf of the City of Kingston, I am pleased to have this opportunity to appear before you to speak to the issue of a proposed high-speed rail line, one that will one day connect the major cities across southern Ontario and Quebec.

Kingston has a prominent place in the history of our country. From 1841 to 1844, Kingston served as the first capital of the united provinces of Upper and Lower Canada. Today the city remains the regional hub for culture, business, and government for over 350,000 citizens in southeastern Ontario and is a national educational and training centre. Kingston is the home community for three post-secondary institutions: Queen's University, St. Lawrence College, and the Royal Military College of Canada, and also hosts many training programs for the Department of National Defence. Canadian Forces Base Kingston is one of our largest employers and is the department's largest base. A number of public sector offices, representing several provincial and federal government ministries, including Corrections Canada institutions and regional offices, are located here.

Kingston is also home to important private sector businesses such as Novelis, Invista, DuPont, and Bombardier, forward-thinking, progressive businesses that contribute to the balanced strength of our local economy and employ a great number of people throughout the region. Individuals who work and serve through these public and private sector businesses and institutions consistently use the existing passenger rail service.

Recent statistics show that Kingston's VIA Rail train station is the fourth busiest station in Ontario in terms of passenger traffic through its doors, and the fifth busiest in Canada. These numbers prove a significant demand is in place for passenger rail service, especially considering Kingston is the twenty-fifth largest census metropolitan area in the country.

In addition to our mobile workforce, Kingston's geographic location makes rail service an important mode of transportation. Kingston is situated on the north shore of Lake Ontario, at the entrance to the St. Lawrence River, along the 401 corridor. Kingston is located less than two hours by motor vehicle to the south of the nation's capital, just over two hours east of the provincial capital of Toronto, and just over two hours west of Montreal. Our geographic location demonstrates that Kingston is the transportation hub for southeastern Ontario and is thus a busy rail feeder community for those larger municipalities surrounding us.

Many residents, business travellers, military and provincial government personnel, as well as a significant number of tourists prefer the use of rail transportation to travel to and from the city, due to its cost-effectiveness, its convenience, and the fact that it is an environmentally responsible alternative to automobile use. The prospect of the implementation of a high-speed rail service is exciting and, we would submit, is much needed along the Quebec City-Windsor corridor to include Ottawa as well. It is imperative that Kingston remain in consideration as an important stopping point along any proposed future high-speed rail line.

An infrastructure project such as this requires planning and forecasting that goes far beyond the year ahead of us or even the next 20 or 50 years. With the expected continued population growth in the decades to come, a process that is moving away from the large metropolitan centres such as Toronto, Montreal, and Ottawa to communities along the 401 corridor, including Kingston, it is important to ensure that future service to accommodate the residential and business growth is in place. With the region's expected growth, Kingston's prominence in the region is projected to become even more pronounced.

Kingston possesses over 20 national historic sites, over 600 historically designated buildings, and as many of you are aware, it is the home of the UNESCO World Heritage sites, the Rideau Canal and Kingston fortifications.

Kingston's historic education and training significance to the region and more broadly to the country, in combination with its geographic location and current status as the fifth busiest train station in Canada, all reflect the need for its inclusion on a high-speed rail line connecting Quebec and Ontario through its major centres. Kingston is a major centre that must be accessible from any future high-speed rail line to better service the people of Canada.

● (1545)

Mr. Chair, the Kingston community recognizes that a significant amount of energy and research time has been invested over the past few decades in the identification and potential implementation of a high-speed rail service connecting Quebec and Ontario urban centres. That being said, the Kingston community urges the Standing Committee on Transport, Infrastructure and Communities to work toward identifying and confirming Kingston as a location on any future high-speed rail system.

The City of Kingston is aware of the SNCF report, and we will consider joining that group of cities supporting it, under certain circumstances. It is imperative that the proposed high-speed rail line, currently planned to connect Ottawa and Toronto, come through or come close to Kingston. As it currently appears, the line passes through a large rural and wilderness region of eastern Ontario, one that misses the entire southeastern Ontario urban population, from the Quebec-Ontario border to Toronto. We understand that for a high-speed line to be most effective, the number of stops needs to be kept to a minimum. But adding an important regional stop in or near Kingston would avoid the exclusion of our entire region under the current SNCF report.

A station stop 15 minutes north of Kingston would be a healthy compromise, and one that would encourage Kingston to invest in and expand our use of municipal transit to support access to a high-speed rail station, including connection service to the existing VIA station.

The City of Kingston is also aware of the joint federal-Ontario-Quebec study that is under way, and we are intently interested in its findings.

I encourage the government to consider all options. One of these options must be Bombardier's advice respecting a 401-centred alignment, one that could eventually follow the 407 through the GTA. This model would service the most heavily populated region of Canada.

Would it not be more prudent for the government to aim to transport as many people as possible through the largest site points on a corridor already owned by provincial governments, one that is easily accessible for construction purposes, avoiding the scores of lakes, rivers, and marshes that would have to be acquired and traversed on a more northerly route?

High-speed rail has been discussed on and off for more than 25 years, and little action has been taken. The City of Kingston is encouraged by the new-found study activity, for several reasons. The construction of a high-speed rail line will create numerous new jobs in Quebec and Ontario, it will help to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and it will reduce infrastructure spending on our major highways.

The municipality is willing to work in partnership to ensure that local infrastructure and services are in place to complement any future plans that include Kingston.

As a great Kingstonian once said, “In conclusion, I would again implore the House not to let this opportunity pass. It is an opportunity that may never recur. If we do not take advantage of the time, if we show ourselves unequal to the occasion, it may never return, and we shall hereafter bitterly and unavailingly regret having failed to embrace the happy opportunity.” The man who spoke these words was Sir John A. Macdonald. Our first Prime Minister spoke of seizing the moment to plan for a better Canada. Today, Sir John A. Macdonald's home city of Kingston asks to be included in this “happy opportunity”.

Thank you, Mr. Chair.

● (1550)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Michael.

Mr. Michael McSweeney (Vice-President, Industry Affairs, Cement Association of Canada): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee.

My name is Michael McSweeney. I'm with the Cement Association of Canada.

I'd like to thank you for having us here today to provide a little bit of input on how to relate cement and concrete to your study on high-speed rail in Canada.

In terms of a brief overview, which you've been provided with, I'll begin by introducing the cement industry and what we believe is our role in the economic stimulus plan. Then I'll touch on the sustainable properties of cement and concrete and discuss the importance of both life-cycle analysis and total cost of ownership concepts as important planning tools for high-speed rail in Canada.

The Cement Association represents the cement industry right across Canada. Our members include eight cement companies, with manufacturing facilities in five provinces. They are Lafarge North America, Holcim (Canada), Essroc Italcementi, Federal White, Ciment Québec, CalPortland, St. Marys Cement, and Lehigh Hanson Canada. These are among the world's largest multinational cement companies, all operating here in Canada.

In addition to making up over 98% of the Canadian cement manufacturing industries, our members are totally vertically integrated with concrete, aggregate, and construction companies across the country.

In case you didn't know—and I always raise this because I was once with a provincial minister of the environment who asked me what the difference was between cement and concrete—cement is a fine grey powder that, when mixed with gravel, sand, and water, makes concrete. Cement is an intermediary product in the manufacture of the most commonly used and sustainable construction material in Canada, across the world, actually—concrete.

Concrete is second only to water as the building product most used around the world. Concrete is indeed the foundation of our infrastructure. When you look around, you start to notice that everything in our society is built on concrete. Every time you go to the washroom and flush the toilet or wash your hands, it's a concrete pipe that ultimately takes away the waste water. This building is manufactured with concrete. Roads, sidewalks, and runways at airports are made with concrete.

With an understanding of the makeup of our industry and the significance of concrete to construction, it's clear that our industry is a necessary and central part in the government's effort to renew the infrastructure across Canada. In fact, the federal government's economic stimulus plan, in its commitment to make historic investments in Canada's infrastructure, is indeed a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to spend historically large amounts of money, but spend them wisely.

Before us now is the opportunity to build a new foundation of sustainable, safe, energy-efficient infrastructure, including our transportation system, that will contribute to improving Canada's competitive edge. A focus on sustainability will be critical to ensure that we invest our dollars wisely and that these investments will provide Canadians with a lasting and durable infrastructure program.

Additionally—and I know it's not in the purview of this committee—cement and concrete can play an active role in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. I know that the Minister of the Environment would be pleased to see other government departments doing their fair share to reduce greenhouse gases across the country. If I might add to my colleague Jim's comments, while the airline industry produces only 3% of the greenhouse gases, it produces them way up there where they are transferred all around the world.

Our industry has a central role in the construction of sustainable infrastructure, an infrastructure that should be built to last. With a track record that is literally thousands of years old, cement used in the construction of the ancient pyramids has many eco-friendly attributes. It's durable, resource and energy efficient, and produced locally; it minimizes the urban heat island effect; and it has a low carbon footprint. Concrete offers innovative construction solutions and architectural possibilities.

From coast to coast, think of Canada's major concrete projects: the Confederation Bridge that links P.E.I. to New Brunswick; the architectural magnificence of the Museum of Civilization across the river in Gatineau; and the Dockside Green housing development in Victoria, which has recently been recognized by the Clinton Foundation's global climate initiative as one of the world's model projects for sustainable urban growth. Before construction began, a lead-contaminated area was remediated with cement-based solidification and stabilization. Concrete is the cornerstone of that development.

Let me assure you, though, that concrete also offers innovative solutions to high-speed rail, which we're here to talk about today. Our members have the ability to bring their multinational experiences to the construction of high-speed rail systems from around the world right here in Canada.

There is a global momentum gaining speed around the construction technology called concrete slab track, which is specifically designed for high-speed rail use. It is essentially the concrete highway of railway. Just as highways are built with concrete—they last longer, they're safer, they require 22% less lighting, they're economical—so too should our rail systems be built with concrete.

Concrete slab track is ideal for high-speed rail as well as heavy freight traffic and other railway loads. In fact, concrete slab track is on the horizon to replace traditional track structure of ties and ballasts, which at this point is a centuries-old building practice. Experience and extensive testing by governments and industry around the world have demonstrated that concrete slab track provides many advantages for the high-speed rail system.

● (1555)

Of many advantages, let me highlight just a few. First, with a concrete slab track, derailments are less frequent, as track alignment and grade are better maintained. Second, there's greater stability and better electrical insulation. Finally, there are lower maintenance costs, and as I'm certain you can appreciate, less frequent maintenance means less interruption of service.

As an example of movement towards concrete slab track, following the hard lessons from the high-cost maintenance of the bullet train, the Japanese Railway Technical Research Institute has spent over 30 years researching concrete slab railway track. Now, all new high-speed rail lines in Japan are built on concrete slab track systems.

As Europe is moving towards integrating its national railway system, both the German and French governments are considering concrete slab track for their own high-speed rail use. Concrete slab track has also been used for portions of the Long Island Rail Road and the Eurotunnel, and even by the CPR here in Canada, near Rogers Pass, in British Columbia.

International research has shown that while there's an approximate 30% upfront premium cost for concrete slab track, this premium typically has yielded a payback of between five and twelve years. These kinds of upfront costs highlight the need to include life-cycle cost analysis and take a total-cost-of-ownership perspective when evaluating the costs of construction, constructability, maintenance, and operation of a high-speed rail system.

The model should never be, when you spend taxpayers' money, that the lowest-cost tender wins. That's just wrong. The model should be to built it once, and build it right. Life-cycle assessments and the total-cost-of-ownership concept are an integral part of a cost-benefit analysis, both economically and environmentally.

To conclude, let me say that my colleagues and I have watched your proceedings very closely and with great interest, and we were pleased to learn that Transport Canada, along with the Governments of Ontario and Quebec, are updating a feasibility study on high-speed rail in Canada. However, in order to ensure that Canadians receive the maximum value and benefit for long-term infrastructure investments, we must ensure that we look beyond the initial cost. We must not take the short-term view. We must take the long-term view and support the choice of a more durable, sustainable infrastructure solution like the one concrete can provide.

That's my soapbox, Mr. Chairman and committee members. It has been a pleasure to be here today. Whenever you're ready, I'm able to answer some of your questions, hopefully.

Thank you.

● (1600)

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Volpe.

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you, gentlemen, for coming and sharing with us your perceptions on where this study is going and where it ought to go.

I'm wondering if I can begin with Mr. Facette, because he's the one who has to rush away.

Mr. Facette, I didn't hear you say that your association is against a high-speed train concept, because I think you used some key words here, that you were looking for a totally integrated and connected multimodal passenger system that would obviously include air travellers. The second thing you indicated is that what this country has been lacking for quite some time is a transportation strategy. I think you used the words “long overdue”.

That said, you did point to two other issues: one, the investments that your association has made over the course of 10 years, which are about $900 million a year; and secondly, that you don't want your productivity or your profitability hurt. I can respect both.

So I'm going to ask you something about one of your members, the GTAA. It currently has two terminals, quite large. One of them, I think, is underutilized. It was classic in its day, about 20 years ago, Terminal 3. I'm wondering whether your association has thought at all in terms of the perspectives that Mayor Rosen has brought to the table, and that is that they might want that particular terminal to be converted into a station for a high-speed rail that would provide immediate conductivity and total integration.

Mr. Jim Facette: As an industry association, we've given it a little bit of thought in terms of interconnectivity with other modes of transportation. Mr. Volpe, you've touched on one possibility that might exist at one of our member's facilities. That's a possibility.

The use of existing infrastructure at an airport is something that is consistently looked at by an airport authority, whether it's in the GTA or Edmonton or Winnipeg or anywhere else. I think what you're pointing to is how airport authorities in Canada look at their facilities and how they want to integrate those facilities with other modes of transportation.

There are two fantastic examples already in Canada—or three, in fact. If you look at what Vancouver has done, Vancouver has made its own investment in rail into downtown: the Canada Line. It will be opening, I believe, in August or September of this year. In fact, it may be opening early. The airport authority has invested, I think, in excess of $200 million of its own money in that section of the rail on the airport property. So it owns that infrastructure on the property. It will take passengers from their flights at the airport right to downtown Vancouver.

There are two other airports in Canada. In particular, in Winnipeg they have an inland port project, which will be a total integration of many different modes, whether it's rail, current freight rail, or highways. Our minister made a major announcement on a major highway project into the Winnipeg area for this port project. And in Edmonton, there is the Port Alberta concept.

Airport authorities are consistently looking at how they can integrate with other modes of transportation. Your example, sir, of how Toronto might look at Terminal 3 is an option they may explore. I understand that they'll be here on Thursday. It would be a good question for them on Thursday, maybe, so you can get some detail on it.

● (1605)

Hon. Joseph Volpe: The most important issue, though, is that you're looking at a system that's totally integrated. You really don't have a problem with that.

Mr. McSweeney, one of the reasons I think the committee wanted to invite you and your industry here is that we wanted to get a sense of all the stakeholders or all the participants in constructing high-speed rail. In your introduction, you wanted to talk about some cost factors. Has your association or any individual member actually done an assessment of what it would cost the constructor—the builder—in cement, concrete, and so on to lay the base for the rail?

Mr. Michael McSweeney: Yes. As I mentioned, it's about a 30% premium to build it, but it would last for 40 to 50 years and would have a payback period of between five and twelve years. You know, it depends.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: When you say it's a 30% premium, that is on what?

Mr. Michael McSweeney: For the material being used today, it's a 30% premium over the cost of traditional building materials for ties and ballasts.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: On a per kilometre basis, what would it cost?

Mr. Michael McSweeney: I haven't done those numbers, but I'd be happy to provide them.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Could you ballpark it, just so I know what you're going to give us?

Mr. Michael McSweeney: No, I'm sorry, I can't, but I'd be happy to provide that in the next week or so.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Would you, please, maybe through the chair?

Mr. Michael McSweeney: Yes, I will do it through the chair, no problem.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mayor Rosen, I know that it's a little uncomfortable trying to deal with three disparate views, all on the same topic, with seven minutes of time.

The Chair: You have one minute.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Oh, I have one minute. Sorry.

We had a representative from another city here to talk about the advantages of high-speed rail. We really didn't know whether you would say yea or nay or whether in fact you're in favour. But it seemed like a fairly balanced position. You're in favour of high-speed rail, but it has to go through Kingston or very close to it. Fifteen minutes outside downtown Kingston sounds to me like the short-term, mid-term planning cycle of the city for expansion to wherever it is the train station's going to go.

Since you're giving us a sense of the importance of a station to the City of Kingston, can I get a sense of what the City of Kingston might want to do with a location? I just asked Mr. Facette about Terminal 3 as a station. What do you have in mind?

Mr. Harvey Rosen: It would likely have to be north of the 401, and 20 kilometres north of the 401 you're at Rutledge Road, just north of Loughborough Lake. Anywhere in that 20-kilometre range is 15 minutes from Kingston, from the built-up area. It's certainly outside, at this point, the long-term growth prospects for the city north. The city is growing west and east, not so much north. But certainly the municipal transit system would connect, obviously, to a high-speed station at that distance. It would provide a shuttle service from the existing VIA station, which would be a collector from the region to feed the high-speed station. If it went to Pearson Airport, I think that would be an advantage to the airline industry to have that facility and that base of population served by that airport.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: To interface and connect with high speed. The local transit authorities, if I might call them that, would be prepared to make the connection or connectivity with that kind of system without asking the federal government to foot the bill.

Mr. Harvey Rosen: At this point there's no project on the books, but we are the home of Bombardier, and perhaps a light rail connection from downtown Kingston wouldn't be out of the realm of possibilities in the long term.

● (1610)

The Chair: Thank you.

Monsieur Laframboise.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have some questions for you, Mr. Rosen. In your presentation, you stated that the City of Kingston is aware of the SCNF report and will consider joining the group of cities supporting it, under certain conditions. What might those conditions be?

[*English*]

Mr. Harvey Rosen: I said Kingston would join that group of municipalities that are sponsoring the SNCF report. I did speak with the mayor of Quebec City, Régis Labeaume, about the possibility. The report at this point is a first report. It does not consider Kingston as a stop or even near the line that the report proposes. Mayor Labeaume indicated that if Kingston were to join and make a financial contribution to the cost of the study, the question of Kingston's access to the line would be considered. I would like to have a stronger commitment than a consideration.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: If I understand correctly, Mr. Facette, the Canadian Airports Council supports high-speed rail, but under certain conditions. These include the removal of airport rents, the AIF, or airport improvement fees, and probably the fees paid to NAV Canada. If all of these fees were eliminated, you would be prepared to support this initiative. Do you have any additional conditions?

Mr. Jim Facette: I wouldn't go so far as to say that we support the initiative now being discussed because several questions have either not been raised or remain unanswered.

If taxpayer dollars are invested in high-speed rail, that might be an opportunity to eliminate some of our fees. Our industry is alone in paying fees to the federal government. The money goes directly to Transport Canada. If the rail industry receives an injection of public funds, then this could be an opportunity for our industry. That's all we're saying.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Is this your first appearance before a committee to discuss high-speed rail, or have you already made your views known?

Mr. Jim Facette: This is our first such appearance.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: I see.

Will some of your members or some of the airlines also be making representations to the committee?

Mr. Jim Facette: Our members are the airports, not the airlines. We are the voice of airports in Montreal, Quebec City and Toronto, to name a few.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Obviously, you charge the airlines fees.

Mr. Jim Facette: Yes.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: You charge airport improvement fees, not only to users, but to the airlines as well, to cover cost shortfalls.

Mr. Jim Facette: Yes, we do.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: So then, if you can save money, your goal would be to lower the fees charged to airlines. Is that correct?

Mr. Jim Facette: Yes, that would be our expectation.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: The objective is to increase passenger traffic.

Mr. Jim Facette: Correct.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Have you looked at the situation in other countries around the world?

Mr. Jim Facette: We are only just beginning to do so. We have yet to do a comprehensive study.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. McSweeney, I've noticed that autoroute 40 in Montreal has been resurfaced, mostly with concrete. Concrete is supposed to be more resistant and to last longer.

Some of the witnesses have said that concerns over the tracks have to do with our climate, in particular our cold weather. Will the concrete react as well in cold weather? Has its performance already been analysed elsewhere? Japan's climate is different from ours. Has concrete been tested under extremely cold conditions, or is that not a problem?

● (1615)

[*English*]

Mr. Michael McSweeney: We've all driven on Highway 40 or on the Autoroute Ville-Marie and we know what asphalt is like, don't we? I can tell you that concrete highways are the way of the future. In Toronto, for example, Highway 407 is completely concrete. The Queen Elizabeth Way is completely concrete with an asphalt overlay. The reason they use concrete is that it lasts 40 to 50 years. It is not subject to the potholes that you see with asphalt. It's very reflective; you can have 22% fewer light standards, which saves electricity. It is 3% to 7% more fuel efficient for trucks.

When oil was down to $20 to $25 a barrel, asphalt was very cheap. Now that oil is between $60 and $150 a barrel, concrete highways are getting closer to being competitive in price with asphalt highways—build it once, build it right. It may cost slightly more, but it is adaptable to our climate. The transportation advisory council, which works with all of the transportation ministers across Canada, is actively looking at this. So is the federal transportation minister. In Quebec alone, between federal and provincial funding, we're going to spend about $66 billion on redoing bridges and highways. I know that our industry will be making the point that it's cost-effective. If you only look at a five- to seven-year period, asphalt is going to win, time and again. But if you look at a 35- to 50-year period, concrete will win over and over again and provide a much more sustainable product. After all, asphalt is a petrochemical and a fossil fuel. We should be looking to use other resources besides fossil fuels.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Regarding the study that the provinces of Ontario and Quebec and the federal government are currently updating, you seem to imply in your presentation that you have not been consulted about the route alignment. There is agreement in Quebec on the proposed route alignment.

You would like the City of Kingston to be included as a location for the high speed rail system. I support you and agree with you that the rail line should pass through your city. Are you saying that no discussions took place in Ontario to decide the definitive route?

[*English*]

Mr. Harvey Rosen: Not that I am aware of. I know there was a report. I'm not sure if it was from this committee, but there was a route that the federal government had studied—and I'm not sure if it went as far as a proposal—that was a direct route, some years ago, back in the nineties, I believe. It went from Ottawa directly to Toronto. The route would have passed by Kingston somewhere in the neighbourhood of Sharbot Lake, which is about 80 kilometres north of Kingston. We want to make sure that this is not the preferred route. As I said, the costs of that route are substantially more. The environmental assessment will hold up construction on that route for a substantially longer period of time.

And where you have the right-of-way owned by the province at this time—not only Highway 401 but Ottawa could also use highways 417 and 416 as a right-of-way for the high-speed rail connection—it just makes sense to keep it south in a more conducive construction climate.

● (1620)

The Chair: Mr. Bevington.

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Thanks, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Facette, I didn't get your presentation, but I've been interested in the question of deferred capital on airport spending if we go ahead with another transportation source in the corridor. You say you've expanded considerably over the last 10 or 15 years since the last fast-rail study was done. What was the value of the system, not just the replacement but the expansion of the system?

Mr. Jim Facette: Canada's airports have invested, since 1992, $9.5 billion across Canada.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: And how much of that would be in the corridor?

Mr. Jim Facette: Toronto is the largest chunk of that. Somewhere in the neighbourhood of $6.2 billion or $6.3 billion would probably be in the Quebec City-Montreal-Toronto corridor.

There is expansion going on all the time. Quebec City just expanded and built a new air terminal building. Montreal has ongoing expansion plans.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Are you anticipating a greater frequency of air traffic in the future and a continued expansion of these airport facilities?

Mr. Jim Facette: The best projections we have in 2009, right now, show us getting passenger travel back in Canada to where it was before the recession hit—and it has hit hard—somewhere in the neighbourhood of 2011. And there is continued growth. The airports are in a situation where the way they're operated and managed today is drastically different from what it was before. And they're constantly looking ahead because they have been given a mandate by Her Majesty as managers of the facilities, to grow, and to grow with the communities.

So yes, there will be future growth. That's dependent upon each airport's growth expectations.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Yes. So if we're looking at taking 40% of your customers away and putting them on fast rail in that corridor, you'd likely not continue with a growth scenario. You would have to adjust that, and there would be considerable capital savings in the years to come in terms of what you have to spend on the airports to match up to the growth.

Mr. Jim Facette: Not having done the comparison between investments in high-speed rail versus the existing expansion of current airports, it's difficult to say one way or the other.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: The last study didn't give any value to reducing capital expenditures in any other transportation field. I'm trying to find the match that means we have a full understanding of what it means to drop high-speed rail into this region.

Mr. Jim Facette: As are we. We share your search for the knowledge.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Okay. Well, hopefully we can continue that.

There's another thing I'd like to ask you. You understand the nature of air transportation probably pretty well. Most of the greenhouse gas emissions are with regional carriers. Is that right? The difference between international and regional carriers is pretty marked, according to the numbers I've seen.

Mr. Jim Facette: When you look at aviation's contribution to greenhouse gas emissions, you will find that it is largely with the carriers, with the aircraft, and that takes place either on the ground but predominantly up in the air. There's a very small percentage of it that actually takes place on the ground at an airport facility itself.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: No, I was trying to get to the difference between international or large-scale travel and regional travel, because I don't think we're going to replace travelling across the country in an airplane with high-speed rail. We're only going to do it in the corridors, so the traffic that will be curtailed at your airports will be regional carriers in that corridor.

What percentage of the business of your corridor is regional carriers?

● (1625)

Mr. Jim Facette: Right now, if memory serves me right, if you look at Air Canada, because their regional feed is provided by Air Canada Jazz, I believe Air Canada Jazz has about 55% of the regional market. I can't recall what WestJet's is, so perhaps you may be impacting the regional feed between Quebec City and Toronto on a flight, or Quebec City and Halifax—anywhere else, I don't know.

I think the important thing to look at is not that route in terms of origin and destination but in terms of how it fits into a larger picture. So if you take a passenger from Quebec City into Toronto on high-speed rail.... Let's take that scenario for a minute—and it could be the reverse, getting into Quebec City. If you're going into Toronto, you want to make sure that the high-speed rail connectivity meshes with a larger plan, perhaps, for aviation in the GTA or elsewhere. It's not only about origin and destination point to point; it has to fit into something that makes some sense. That's why we say that at this time it's hard for us to take a stand either for or against it. We're not against it right now, but we need more information and we're asking you to look at this, as Mr. Volpe pointed out, in a larger context going forward.

We appreciate that you don't have a lot of answers either.

The Chair: Mr. Mayes.

Mr. Colin Mayes (Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

As a member of Parliament from British Columbia, I appreciate the airlines. I wouldn't want to be racing across the country every second weekend, doing 3,300 miles on a fast-speed train across this country.

One of the things this committee heard from one of the witnesses was that the population densities in the corridor between Montreal and Toronto are actually equal to or more than those densities in corridors in some of the fast-speed rail lines in Europe. Are you aware of that, Mr. Facette?

Mr. Jim Facette: No, I'm not.

Mr. Colin Mayes: Mr. Chair, we should have that information confirmed, simply for us to know, because we've heard two different stories here and I'd like to know if that is a true statement.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: He only said he's not aware of it, because he didn't hear me giving out the stories before.

Mr. Colin Mayes: Oh, okay.

What would be interesting to me is the number of people who would use high-speed rail, what I would call commuters rather than travellers, those who were flying from one destination to another. That, I think, would be an interesting statistic, to really discern whether or not those who would use that high-speed rail would be maybe going to work or to shop in Toronto from 100 or 200 kilometres out.

Mr. Jim Facette: It would be.

I think a lot of the air travel in Canada continues to be domestically based. We have seen, as a result of the economy obviously, a significant drop in transborder travel between Canada and the United States, and international travel has come down in many parts of the country. So yes, there's a large domestic component and that will continue for some time to come, we expect, although I would caution you in looking at numbers too much. The current recession has, I think, shed a light on what can happen to projections, so you want to be careful.

Mr. Colin Mayes: Thank you.

As far as optimum seat utilization by the airline goes, do you see where there will be some challenges regarding air traffic and capacity within existing airports to really handle increasing volume in the future?

Mr. Jim Facette: The short answer is no. The investment of $9.5 billion has been made by the Canadian Airports Council members with the idea in mind that they can handle growth. Toronto can handle about 10 million more passengers—that may be stretching it a little. I know that some airports try to be careful about building out too much. Parking is a challenge.

We have the capacity to handle continued growth in Canada going forward. We don't have the same challenges they do in the United States, where they are really under some serious capacity constraints going forward.

● (1630)

Mr. Colin Mayes: You mentioned earlier that the airlines pay user fees for airport improvement and that type of thing. I guess they are reflective of the number of flights taken in at an airport.

I know the challenges, because in the Vancouver area the cruise ship lines have told us that they are losing half of their cruise ship passengers to Seattle simply because a passenger can fly to Seattle for $300 less than flying into Vancouver.

Mr. Jim Facette: That's absolutely correct. We lose 1.7 million passengers to Buffalo. It's an awful lot of people.

Mr. Colin Mayes: That's probably a good topic for study in the future.

To Mr. McSweeney, one of the challenges we had about three years ago in British Columbia was all the activity in the shipments of cement to Asia. There was a lack of supply. Lafarge has a plant in Kamloops. I talked with the operations president of that facility, and he said they just couldn't keep up with domestic needs.

Do you see that as a challenge as we roll out our infrastructure and possibly take on something as large as this project?

Mr. Michael McSweeney: I'm not sure of the information he gave you, but our biggest problem in British Columbia is the Asian imports to Canada. We have three plants: Kamloops, Richmond, and Delta. We export 40% to 50% of our cement to the United States today and have done so over the last five years.

There might have been a misunderstanding there, because there has never been a problem, to the best of my knowledge, with fulfilling the demand. Today the plants are down right across the country. Asian imports are up between 13% and 15%. People are opting to purchase Asian cement because they don't have to pay the carbon tax on it. They only have to pay the carbon tax on cement that is manufactured within British Columbia.

So there must be some misunderstanding. There is no problem fulfilling the demand, because 40% to 50% of our product goes to the United States today.

Mr. Colin Mayes: Thank you.

Mayor Rosen, has your community planned any corridors through those areas 15 kilometres out of town? Have you spent any time with your association of communities looking at corridors?

A big part of the cost of this type of project is land acquisition for a corridor. You don't want a new Wal-Mart built right where you would like to see this corridor happen. Have you had any conversations or made any planning preparations for something like this?

Mr. Harvey Rosen: No we haven't had any discussions with our neighbouring municipalities. But at the same time, the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing has some bias with respect to growth of the city of Kingston north of Highway 401. There is not a great deal of development going north of the 401 at this time, and that's why the city is moving east, west, and south of the 401. That northern area is very much undeveloped and open for any sort of transportation corridor that might be desired.

I did want to say that the situation in Kingston is much like the situation in London, Ontario, where, if you have two regional collectors and the major stops, then Windsor would be a gateway to the United States, Toronto, Ottawa, Montreal, Quebec. The collectors of Kingston and London represent our regional hubs either side of Toronto between Windsor and Toronto and between Ottawa and Toronto and would be, in a system-wide analysis, very essential to feeding the high-speed rail from those regions.

● (1635)

The Chair: Mr. Dhaliwal.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My question is for Mr. McSweeney.

If I heard right, you said that you export the cement to the U.S. now. If we get this high-speed train project going, would you say that you have the capacity to deal with the situation, or do we have to import cement from outside Canada?

Mr. Michael McSweeney: I would say we are probably more than self-sufficient to meet this demand. In Ontario we export between 30% and 40% of our cement across the Great Lakes to the United States.

You have to understand that there are not too many cement plants, as they are traditionally located on a piece of land where there is a quarry and an adequate—by which I mean 50 to 75 years—supply of limestone. That's typically where you will find a cement plant.

We are fortunate. If you look at St-Constant, Quebec; St-Basile, Quebec; Bath near Kingston; Bowmanville; and St. Lawrence in Mississauga, all our plants are located along the Great Lakes—Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence. Today it is very easy for them to export the material to satisfy the demand in the United States. The United States is the only country in the world that is not self-sufficient for cement. So we have in Ontario and Quebec a 30% to 40% surplus that goes to the United States under normal business conditions, which we're not facing today. In British Columbia about 40% to 50% of our cement goes to the United States.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: My next question is to Mr. Facette.

One of the major advantages that we see with the high-speed railway is that it does not require the waiting time that is required at the airport. What can be done to make it more competitive and reduce the waiting times that we have at the airports right now? Can the government be of any help?

Mr. Jim Facette: Yes, it can be a great help. You may want to be careful about making an assumption, sir, that there will not be a necessity to have some kind of security screening on board a high-speed rail train. I don't know if there will or will not be, but you might want to be careful about that assumption going forward.

We can have a full-day discussion about streamlining the screening process at an airport. Suffice it to say this: there are probably some business model efficiencies of the screening process that can be used to speed things up a little bit. We are constantly working with CATSA to identify new technologies for the screening process going forward.

Regarding harmonization of screening standards, right now, as you know, if you go through a screening process on a flight to the United States, by and large you are probably taking your shoes off, but you're not in Canada. Other parts of the world have other screening processes that are different. So we need to look at how we can harmonize our screening procedures. You get off a flight going from Atlanta to Toronto, and then from Toronto to Ottawa you have to go through screening again, only because you have now touched your bag at customs. There are ways where you don't have to touch your bag again at customs and you don't have to be re-screened again. So the hassle factor of going through an airport would be reduced significantly.

So there are some regulatory issues we can eliminate that will expedite the process of going through a screening at airports. But that's a whole conversation for a whole day. We have all kinds of ideas, sir.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: On the other issue, WestJet told this committee that the fixed nature of airport security fees made short-haul flights less profitable. So to the extent that short-haul traffic could be diverted from the airports to the high-speed railway, would it be wise for the air industry to focus on the long-haul flights with their competitors, or do you think you still can compete when it comes to the short haul?

● (1640)

Mr. Jim Facette: Airport authorities have a mandate to be economic engines for their community, and their mandate says “thou shalt be self-sufficient”, which they are, but they also add to Ottawa's coffers. If you're going to introduce a major competitor between Quebec City and Montreal on to Toronto, through Kingston or whatever, you have to give that airport authority and our industry, I think, some time to prepare. The best way to prepare is to eliminate the cost that the government imposes on the aviation sector. Eliminating the airport rent, eliminating the air travellers' security charge, will go a long way towards allowing us to compete. If those charges stay in place, it's going to be extremely difficult for any airport authority, especially on smaller routes, to be able to stay in business.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Mr. Laframboise.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

My next question is for Mr. Rosen.

Before I was elected to the House of Commons, I served as mayor of a municipality. Therefore, I understand the situation. When Transport Canada officials appeared before the committee, they brought with them a study prepared in 1995 by the Ontario, Quebec and federal governments. They also tabled the call for tenders for the new study which, among other things, would update the 1995 study.

Two options were advanced in the 1995 study: high-speed rail, or 200 km/h technology, and very high-speed rail, or 300 km/h technology. I wish to point out that both scenarios proposed in 1995 called for the building of a station in Kingston. According to the report, if the option selected was the 200 km/h system, with a rail line from Toronto to Kingston, the existing Toronto-Napanee line would be used and a new line would be constructed from Napanee to Kingston, as well as a new line from Kingston to Ottawa. For the 300 km/h technology, the existing rail line would be used, but with new lines being constructed from Coburg to Kingston and from Kingston to Ottawa.

Are you familiar with this study? The plan called for a station to be located in Kingston. Are you worried about the location?

[*English*]

Mr. Harvey Rosen: I'm not so concerned about where exactly it's located, but that it will be located within a reasonable distance of Kingston. As I understand it, no high-speed rail system can properly function if it's sharing the line with freight. They have to be dedicated lines. I wonder how they can use the existing line from Cobourg to Toronto when that's carrying a great deal of freight now.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: According to the 1995 report, freight would be moved on another line. A different solution was to be found to move freight.

Now we're hearing that the 1995 study will be updated. I'm telling you that Kingston was mentioned in both studies. You appear concerned that high-speed rail will bypass Kingston. We've been informed that the call for tenders to update the 1995 study has gone out. If this proves not to be the case, then I will have to recall the Transport Canada officials and ask them what route alignment they are considering, because their decision could also affect Quebec. You have seen some proposed route alignments that bypass Kingston and that worries you.

[*English*]

Mr. Harvey Rosen: I spoke with Mayor Labeaume of Quebec City, and the SNCF report did not recommend a route through Kingston. I was under the impression—I may be mistaken—that the prior report, the one that you referred to as well, had at least an option that excluded a stop in or near Kingston. My impression is that there is some jeopardy to our community and to the region of not having a high-speed rail stop accessible to it.

I'm here today just to ensure that this doesn't happen.

● (1645)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: I see.

Perhaps the Clerk could provide Mr. Rosen with copies of the 1995 studies so that he can have a closer look at them.

We could send you the documents that Transport Canada tabled to the committee and you could forward your comments to us in writing.

[*English*]

Mr. Harvey Rosen: I would appreciate that. Thank you very much.

The Chair: Ms. Hoeppner.

Ms. Candice Hoeppner (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you to the witnesses for being here.

Mr. Facette, I appreciate your mentioning CentrePort. I think it's a very important project, and it's not located right in my riding. The riding I represent is Portage—Lisgar, but the people in Portage—Lisgar support it because they see it's a big picture investment. It's something that will not just have an impact on one part of industry or agriculture or export, but it will have a large impact on all of those sectors, and I think it will be a long-term impact. That sort of frames my question.

I have mayors in my riding who are having real trouble with railway abandonment, for example. This is maybe a bit of a rhetorical question for Mayor Rosen, but if you were a mayor in one of the communities in southern Manitoba, which are growing, thriving, and paying taxes but some of which are actually breaking down because of railway abandonment, and then across the country we want to put some very large amounts of investment into more railway—different types of railway but it's still railway investment—I'm just wondering how you would view that.

My other concern is that we're seeing right now the change in the economy and how quickly things can change. When we put that kind of investment in a particular area, if things do change, it's not like the airline where the airline can decide to look at different routes and won't fly to a certain city because things could change. This infrastructure is there. It's permanent. In layman's terms, how can we justify this kind of large investment? What would the payoff be for all Canadians?

Mr. Harvey Rosen: I'm mainly concerned with the Windsor-Quebec corridor. That route, especially between Montreal and Toronto, which passes through Kingston, is a very high-traffic area for all modes of transportation, whether it's air, vehicle, or rail. We don't have ships, but we could have ships. That seems to have been abandoned long ago. If you have an infrastructure for rail that is competitive and convenient, it will get cars off the road. It will allow people to have a reasonable choice to leave their cars at home and take the train. It's not that we should abandon the current VIA Rail service among the smaller communities, because that would be essential to provide the traffic to the high-speed rail through major collector points, like Kingston or London.

I don't know about Manitoba, but I know most of the lines run east and west through Winnipeg. I'm trying to remember, was it CN goes north through Saskatoon and CP goes south through Regina? If there were a high-speed stop in Winnipeg—and I don't know if that's in the cards or even being considered—you would need to have the smaller rail service maintained so that the smaller communities can take advantage of the advanced rail system, and that the major collectors can be accessed by rail through the normal rail that currently exists.

● (1650)

Ms. Candice Hoeppner: Thank you. I appreciate that you're here on behalf of your city, and you're doing a great job. Congratulations.

I'm here speaking for my constituents, and I think my concern is the huge overall infrastructure cost. At the same time, it takes vision, and sometimes those costs have to be incurred. I don't think any one of us wants to stand in the way of progress.

To Mr. McSweeney. We did have some other witnesses who talked about the standards that would have to be established in Canada for the actual rail for high-speed rail lines. My concern is, has the research gone into cement so we know it can withstand...? I know we talked about weather. This is a huge issue. Can cement withstand not just the weather but the weight, the speed? We've been told that this research has not been done.

Mr. Michael McSweeney: I first wanted to say, in response to Mr. Laframboise's question on the weather patterns, that for concrete roads, second only to Ontario is Manitoba, with the work that's being done on the perimeter of concrete highways in Manitoba. With so many Manitobans around the table, I thought I'd get that out, because I forgot to mention that. Manitoba, as you know, has very harsh and very long winters.

We're not reinventing the wheel here. This has been done in Japan now for 30 years.

Ms. Candice Hoeppner: Canada is not Japan.

Mr. Michael McSweeney: But standards are standards. I am sure that people want to go back and talk about Canada not being Japan. In Europe today we're incorporating 35% limestone in the cement, which means we're saving over 30% of greenhouse gases because we don't have to use fossil fuels at the start of the process. Yet we have neanderthals here in Canada and the United States saying we can't do that. If it works in Europe.... The pyramids used concrete and they're still standing.

Japan might not be Canada, but I can tell you they have as rigorous, if not more rigorous, standards. I used to be the CEO of the Standards Council of Canada, so I'm somewhat of an authority on this. All over Europe, the European norms and standards are allowing this. If you're going to say we don't have the right standards or you have a concern with that, let's ship it off to the Canadian Standards Association and ask them to have a look at this. We have three or four good standards bodies: the Canadian General Standards Board, the Bureau de normalisation du Québec, Underwriters Laboratories, and the Canadian Standards Association.

People have been trying for years to say we've got to reinvent the wheel here in Canada. We don't have to reinvent the wheel.

Mr. Andrew Kania (Brampton West, Lib.): Mr. McSweeney, you mentioned Japan as a model. Are you saying Japan only builds with concrete at this stage?

Mr. Michael McSweeney: For the last 30 years. And it's my understanding, to the best of my knowledge, that today concrete slabs are being used for the construction of high-speed rail for the bullet trains.

Mr. Andrew Kania: What about page 5 of your report? You indicate that "As Europe is moving towards integrating its national railway systems, both German and French National Railways consider concrete slab track for their high-speed rail programs". Are they using concrete as well?

Mr. Michael McSweeney: In certain parts, they are. Again, a lot of this depends on costing, but certainly the research we've done in preparation for coming here today indicates that this is a viable technology and that it's being slowly adopted around the world, just as uses for concrete in many projects and products are slowly being adopted as people are looking at new forms of technology. Do we want to use timber and soak it in tar and lay it down and expect that to last? Is that a technology we want to put high-speed rail on? I'm not sure.

● (1655)

Mr. Andrew Kania: Are they still building high-speed rail in Germany and France, using your example, not with concrete? In your comment you said that in certain parts they are using it.

Mr. Michael McSweeney: That's correct—in parts.

Mr. Andrew Kania: So in other places in those countries, they're not using concrete.

Mr. Michael McSweeney: That's right, and I would have to assume it's for a variety of reasons. One of those reasons might be cost.

Mr. Andrew Kania: I'm not for or against; I'm just trying to get the facts. It's because of costs in relation to durability considerations as well, presumably.

Mr. Michael McSweeney: I can't speak to that.

Mr. Andrew Kania: You indicated earlier that when using concrete there is a 30- to 50-year wearability of the slab. What is the durability of the traditional method that's still currently used in parts of Germany and France?

Mr. Michael McSweeney: I can't speak to the durability of the current use. I can only say that when we looked at Japan, which is one of the first countries in the world to build high-speed trains, they started with the old technology, as I understand it, and today they are using concrete slabs.

Mr. Andrew Kania: So you don't actually know what the durability comparison is between concrete and the current traditional method.

Mr. Michael McSweeney: Off the top of my head, I don't know, but I can get it for you.

Mr. Andrew Kania: I would respectfully suggest that we need to know that in making this decision, especially when there is an increased price.

Mr. Michael McSweeney: I'll get you that information.

Mr. Andrew Kania: As for other reasons for concrete over the traditional method, I'm concerned about the weather in Canada as well. This point was raised by my friend. Although Japan may use it, we have much different conditions here.

What would the weather rating be in terms of negative temperatures and what we have to face here? Do you know? Are there any studies, or is there any evidence on this question?

Mr. Michael McSweeney: There aren't any done by Canadians, but there are by the Japanese and Europeans. I'll do my best to get you some exact excerpts from those studies.

Mr. Andrew Kania: Okay.

The other thing is, concerning the overall price—one of the other gentlemen mentioned getting cars off the road—are there any studies showing exactly what would take place if this high-speed were in place? For example, what would the price be? Do we know? This may be something that will be reviewed on Thursday, when I won't be here. But if it's $500 to go from Montreal to Toronto, there'll be fewer people using it than if it's $150.

I'm curious as to whether there are any studies showing that.

Mr. Michael McSweeney: I'm not from the airline industry or from VIA Rail, so I can't comment on that.

The Chair: Ms. Brown.

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): My real question was for Mr. Facette; I'm sorry he's not here.

I want to make a comment to Mr. Rosen. I'm sure my committee colleagues are going to get very tired of my saying this, but should high-speed rail go through, I will be an advocate for its going through York region, because I represent a riding just north of Toronto.

My question to you is, have you had any discussion with other mayors or members of the Federation of Municipalities of Ontario to discuss this issue of where corridors may go?

I'll wrap in some of my question that would have gone to Mr. Facette.

I think Ontario—and I'm looking particularly at the corridor between Toronto or York region and Montreal—would be the most likely place for us to begin with a project of this nature. We have to think of this in some terms of nation building. We need to put that vision part into the discussion. In Ontario, we are now going to have to deal with the Oak Ridges Moraine acts that came into play in 1998 after the last study was done. There are significant environmental assessments that will have to go on, and corridor studies. Someone was discussing corridors along Highway 407, perhaps, which I think is a very reasonable area for us to look at.

Have you had discussion with the other members of the federation of municipalities of Ontario?

● (1700)

Mr. Harvey Rosen: I have had some. We have an organization in eastern Ontario, the eastern Ontario mayors' caucus, which I established after the election in 2003. They are the mayors of the cities and separated towns in eastern Ontario. We invited Ottawa; they didn't want to join. But we have all of the other cities and separated towns as members.

At the last meeting, just last Friday, I discussed my presence today before this committee. They were very supportive of recognizing Kingston as a collector point for eastern Ontario. To give you an example of the central location of Kingston in terms of this part of the province and of the country, although the meetings of the eastern Ontario mayors' caucus began in Kingston because I was the chair, we've moved through four separate chairs, the others being from Prescott, Brockville, and Peterborough, and we've always had meetings in Kingston because it was the most convenient point for everybody to attend.

Ms. Lois Brown: It would make every sense because of the size of the university and the military base there. I think it's a reasonable idea to entertain, but I would suggest that perhaps the municipalities to the west of Kingston also should be part of the discussion. Perhaps we need to be inviting people from the association to be part of the representation here, as well.

Mr. Harvey Rosen: Maybe I shouldn't say this, but I think that AMO—it probably would be AMO, the Association of Municipalities of Ontario, since we're talking about this corridor through Ontario—might be reluctant to make a representation. Toronto is not a member of AMO at this point. If they took a position one way or the other with respect to any particular community, they might have mayors urging their communities to resign their membership. It's a controversial and contentious issue among competing cities, and they have to represent everybody on an equitable basis. I think they would find it very difficult to present a case that would be common to every municipality that might be affected by this transportation system.

The Chair: Because of the time, I'm just going to make one more round, if there are any other final comments or questions—a couple of minutes each, if you'd prefer.

Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Chair, after Mr. Facette's testimony I asked the department to provide for me a list of funding that this government has provided to airports across Canada since 2005-06. I want to table it for the interest of the committee, just because of some of the comments he made. I respect Mr. Facette greatly, but this government has put a tremendous amount of money into airports across the country, including Toronto's to the tune of $2.4 million, for instance, in 2006—and even Fort McMurray's, in my own riding, Mr. Chair. I want to table this, if I may. It's not in both official languages, but I'm wondering whether I could get the consent of the Bloc in relation to that.

Monsieur Laframboise, I have a provision of funding that has been provided to cities and airports across Canada since 2005-06, and it's not in both official languages. Obviously, the cities include many cities in Quebec. I guess it would be in both official languages, unless there are different languages for each city.

I would like to table this document, if I may, but I can't do so without consent. Is that okay?

Merci.

The Chair: Yes, we can table it and also have it translated and distributed. Thank you.

Mr. Volpe.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: I think the parliamentary secretary raises a good point. It's unfortunate that Mr. Facette is not here to address the issue; however, governments over the course of the last decade that he points to have in fact contributed to the infrastructure of an airline transportation system, just as governments from all stripes have contributed to a road transportation system, be it for auto or for trucks. They've actually even contributed to a rail transportation system, and they continue to do so.

So in one respect, with all due respect to the other presenters, if Mr. Facette's organization is focusing on how it handles its own infrastructure issue, I think the more important fact is not that it receives x dollars, or three times x dollars, or x^2 dollars from governments, but that his organization favours a multimodal, integrated, connected transportation system for a policy. I think he took great pains to say that it's long overdue.

I'm taking the parliamentary secretary's desire to show how governments have contributed to the upkeep of all of those infrastructures as an indication that, had he had the opportunity to gather the information over the course of the last dozen years, he would have been more than delighted to present it. We'll do with just a little tip of the iceberg, so far.

● (1705)

The Chair: Thank you.

Are there any other comments?

I will thank our guests today for their input. We appreciate your time before the committee today. Thank you very much.

The meeting is adjourned.

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