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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 26.

The orders of the day are, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), a study of Nav Canada's airport traffic services.

Joining us today from Nav Canada are Mr. John Crichton, president and chief executive officer; Rudy Kellar, vice-president of operations; and Larry Lachance, assistant vice-president for operational support, operations.

Welcome. I presume you have an opening statement, and then we'll move to committee questions.

Please begin.

Mr. John Crichton (President and Chief Executive Officer, Head Office, NAV CANADA): *Bon après-midi, monsieur le président, mesdames et messieurs les députés.* Mr. Chairman, members of Parliament, good afternoon. Thank you for inviting me back to speak to the committee.

Accompanying me again this time is Rudy Kellar, Nav Canada's vice-president of operations, and Larry Lachance, the assistant vice-president, operational support.

In March, when I last appeared before the committee, we discussed the airport traffic services review that Nav Canada had initiated to examine service requirements at a number of airports. We are now undertaking extensive consultation with customers, employees, and community and other stakeholders on those proposed changes. These consultations will include the federal members of Parliament in whose ridings the airports are located. However, I understand from the clerk that the committee wishes to discuss Mirabel airport in particular today.

As you know, Mirabel airport has undergone a significant evolution in the past decade. Airport traffic has fallen by more than 40% since 2000, and passenger service ceased altogether in 2004. The airport operator has closed one of the two runways and is in discussions with a private consortium for the redevelopment of the terminal building into a theme park. Today the airport is primarily used by cargo operators, the aerospace manufacturing industry, and general aviation, including flight training.

As the committee is aware from our previous discussions, we review our levels of service regularly. It is good business practice and an integral part of our mandate that requires us to apply our level of service policy in a consistent manner.

Given the significant change in airport operations at Mirabel, we initiated an aeronautical study in July 2006 to examine our levels of service at that airport. Consultation and analysis were undertaken, and a completed aeronautical study was submitted to Transport Canada in May 2007.

The study recommended that the 24-hour airport control tower be replaced with a 24-hour flight service station. Transport Canada reviewed the study and indicated its concurrence in November 2007. Approximately one year later, on November 20, 2008, the service change was implemented.

Our services at Mirabel are in accordance with our published level of service policy, which we discussed in March. Among other things, the policy states that airport control towers are generally required when the sustained activity at an airport is above 60,000 movements annually. Flight service stations are generally required when an airport has more than 20,000 movements annually, of which about 7,500 are scheduled air carrier movements.

I have appended at the end of my printed remarks several graphs showing annual movements at the Mirabel airport in each year since 2000, hourly average movements, and 2008 movements plotted against our level of service assessment guidelines. At approximately 26,000 annual movements, traffic demand at Mirabel is appropriately served by a flight service station.

Flight service specialists are highly trained aviation professionals who provide safe and efficient operations at 58 airports in Canada, including some with complex traffic mixes and much greater traffic volumes.

You will have heard that some companies have expressed concern about the absence of a control tower at the airport. We have met with the companies in question twice in the past few weeks and will be meeting with them again later this week to discuss their issues and ways to mitigate them. One possible solution is for the companies requesting the control service to agree to pay for it. We estimate the cost at about $500,000 per year.

● (1540)

I can assure the committee that I fully recognize the importance of the aerospace manufacturing activity that occurs at Mirabel airport, and that our service assessment considered the uniqueness of Mirabel operations, where significant test flights originate and terminate.

Our flight service specialists provide excellent service to the aviation community. Their duties are comprehensive, and their track record in safety and service is exemplary. Rest assured that we are prepared to listen to and work closely with the customers and stakeholders involved to address the concerns that have recently been expressed.

With that, Mr. Chairman, we'd be happy to take the committee's questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Madame Folco.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank Mr. Crichton for his presentation.

Mr. Crichton, I want to congratulate you for what I take to be a certain open-mindedness with regard to the Mirabel file. I am from Montreal and I would like to ask you some questions that would help us to understand the situation in Mirabel in a wider context. For example, the situation at the Sudbury airport, Ontario, is about the same as in Mirabel, in that the control tower in Sudbury was replaced by an FSS. Am I right?

[*English*]

Mr. John Crichton: Yes, that's correct.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco: I have a list of eight other airports in Canada: Gander, Prince George, Regina, Sault Ste. Marie, Saint John's Newfoundland, Saint-Jean in Québec, Whitehorse and Windsor. Could you please tell me what is the annual volume of air traffic in these airports?

[*English*]

Mr. John Crichton: We can get that information for you. We don't have it with us, but we can supply that to the committee.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco: I understand very well that you do not have those documents within arms' reach, however, could you tell me if any of the airports among the eight that I just listed receive less than 60,000 landings per year?

[*English*]

Mr. John Crichton: That have control towers?

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Could you tell me if some of the airports among the ones I listed receive less than 60,000 landings per year?

[*English*]

Mr. John Crichton: I believe there may be a couple.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Chair, I would like to ask Mr. Crichton to send the committee some information on the number of landings at these airports on a yearly basis. I could provide the list of airports at some other time.

I would also like to know whether Mr. Crichton is intending to replace control towers with FSS in one or more of the airports that I just mentioned.

● (1545)

[*English*]

Mr. John Crichton: Let me get back to you. We're not sure that there are, but I would draw the committee's attention to the last page in our handout. Just because an airport has fewer than 60,000 movements doesn't automatically mean that it loses the tower service. We also look at other factors.

One of the factors is the number of scheduled movements, as well as whether it has scheduled passenger operations, the complexity of the airspace, and the airport surface itself. A variety of different factors can enter into it. In terms of the complexity of the surrounding airspace, I believe the member mentioned Windsor, Ontario. One of the unique situations we have to deal with there is the proximity to Detroit and the very high-density terminal airspace in Detroit. Some of the Canadian airspace is actually controlled from Detroit.

There are a variety of factors. It's not a simple arithmetical calculation; there are a whole host of other issues, but we will get you all the specific information.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco: This gives me an opportunity to come back to another element, and I am glad that you could tell me that. In fact, you study these airports individually. You note the variables and you make a decision that applies to a specific airport, and not to all of them. Am I right, Mr. Crichton?

[*English*]

Mr. John Crichton: We do an aeronautical study, and that is a study that's all about safety. It's a hazard and risk analysis. It is very open and consultative with all of the stakeholders, including the operators, and it's primarily directed at safety.

Once we've done that, if that study indicates that the change would not pose any safety risk, it's then provided to the safety regulator, Transport Canada. Transport Canada then do their own analysis on it, and if they're satisfied as well that it doesn't pose a safety risk, they allow us to make the change, and that's what happened in the case of Mirabel.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Since you mention safety, Mr. Crichton, I would like to bring in another factor, which is precisely the landing of crafts from the aerospace industry in Quebec.

You certainly know that the aerospace industry in Quebec is very important not only for Quebec but for Canada as a whole. This industry specifically uses the Mirabel landing strips to test its crafts. Therefore, it is a very important element for that industry. The safety of individuals and of crafts is an important issue. Thus, when the control tower is changed for an FSS, it seems to me that the safety of aircraft and especially of individuals is compromised.

I would like you to review the situation at the Mirabel airport from the point of view of safety for individuals and aircraft—I would even dare say the safety of the aerospace industry in Canada. To my knowledge the landing strip at Mirabel is the only one in Canada that is capable of receiving this type of craft.

Could you please comment on this?

● (1550)

[*English*]

Mr. John Crichton: We are reviewing any and all specific concerns. I think you're referring to Bombardier, which is the main manufacturer at the site, and Bell Helicopter.

In fact, before we changed to a flight service station, at the request of Bell Helicopter we did change some airspace to make it more suitable for them. In the case of Bombardier, we opened up another whole block of airspace northeast of Montreal for test flights, in addition to the one we already had for them northwest of Montreal. We are continuing that dialogue.

For the information of the committee, at this point we have found no difference from a safety point of view between the operators receiving a control service and their receiving an advisory service from the same tower by the flight service specialist.

I would add that it's important to remember that the main purpose of a control service is to prevent aircraft from hitting each other. It's not a service that in any way looks after the physical airport itself. It is much more related to keeping airplanes apart, keeping them from hitting each other, and keeping them from hitting vehicles on the ground on the runway. The flight service system works extremely well and has, as I say, an exemplary record for doing that.

The Chair: Go ahead, Monsieur Laframboise.

[*Translation*]

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

Mr. Crichton, you put a figure of $500,000 on this problem. There is no longer any service at Mirabel because you wanted to save $500,000. However, I am concerned with the development of the aerospace industry. Everyone is talking about the situation in Montreal. Various figures are quoted, but they say that Montreal is second or third in the world, after Toulouse and Seattle. These two cities have airports with control towers 24 hours a day. And Mirabel has no control tower, to save $500,000!

You said that you had two meetings. Thus, let me share with you some comments that were made after those two meetings. The local newspaper is following this story, and states that a representative of Bell Helicopter declared, following the meetings, that some people did not understand the importance of the safety challenge.

Moreover, I spoke with representatives of the industry. These people do not want me to give their names; they seem to be afraid of you. Nonetheless, they say that it was a non-starter and that the meetings did not yield anything at all because, very simply, you did not want to spend $500,000. That is the problem.

We have safety problems. People from the aerospace industry tell us that they are conducting trials. There are some CF-18s. Pratt and Whitney is testing its motors, that is where they have their tests stand. There are also Bombardier and Bell Helicopter. All those people sign a letter, and all you have to say is that it is not important. You certainly know that two potentially unfortunate events occurred. They were close to being accidents. Now you tell us that it is not up to you to control these things, but those people know how things work. If they tell us that a control tower could have helped to avoid such incidents, I think that we should, at the very least, believe them, Mr. Crichton.

You said that you would hold a meeting this week. I wonder what for. Will you be telling them the same thing? Will you tell them that you did a study and there is absolutely nothing to be done?

[*English*]

Mr. John Crichton: I need to answer a couple of things that you've raised there.

To your last point, we will be meeting with them in an ongoing effort to understand what their specific requirements are, how they may create a safety risk and, if that is a legitimate safety risk, what we can do about it.

Having said that, and because the issue of Seattle Boeing Field and Toulouse having control towers was raised, I should tell you that you'll see from the information before you that Seattle Boeing Field has 300,000 movements a year and Toulouse has 94,000 movements a year. Under those circumstances, they would certainly have control towers in Canada if they had movements like that as well.

The issue of the $500,000 goes back to the basic equity of how we work and the requirement for us to apply our level of service policy. It's a legal requirement to apply it in a consistent fashion. Right now the cost of putting a tower back in Mirabel would in fact end up being borne and paid for by people who do not serve Mirabel. That is the basic fact. In Canada we have a national policy of assessing terminal charges, and that's for good reason: if we didn't, we would end up with the major centres—the Montreals, the Torontos, the Vancouvers—having very low costs assessed to the operators of the airplanes, while the people in the smaller centres—the Kelownas, the Fort McMurrays, the Val d'Ors—would be paying amounts that could be 10 or 20 times as much. For that reason, we have a national policy of assessing the terminal charges, which means we are making everybody pay for every unnecessary dollar that we spend in an airport.

It's also why I come back to one possible solution in this issue. Since it is a very specific group of companies that is asking for the return of the control service, there's a simple way to do it. If they will pay for it—and I don't think it's a lot of money for companies of that size—then we can avoid all that problem. We'd be more than happy to put it back, but we do have a legal obligation not to discriminate in terms of the application of our level of service policies, and it's for good reasons.

● (1555)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Crichton, you are telling us that you will be penalizing our world-class aerospace industry providers. You will make them pay fees that their competitors everywhere in the world do not have to pay. All this because you want to save some money. I find it very difficult to accept this kind of situation.

I will not come back to the questions that were put to you. Some Canadian airports have control towers although the air traffic is less heavy than at Mirabel. To my knowledge, Mirabel is still an international airport. You want to take advantages away from the aerospace industry, but I think that if you choose to do that, it is because you are following orders from the government. Otherwise, we'll have to sit down and discuss the matter. Your way of going about it simply consists in requiring our aerospace industry to pay extra fees.

Is this what you want?

[*English*]

Mr. John Crichton: Mr. Laframboise, Nav Canada's charges are in the lowest 10% among any countries in the world. They are considerably lower than the charges people are paying at Toulouse and considerably lower than the charges that people are paying through various taxes in the U.S.—even if our charges were being paid.

Right now, the fact of the matter is that test flights are exempt from our charges. Last year at Mirabel, Bombardier and Bell Helicopter benefited to the tune of well over $200,000 in flights that were exempt from charges and for which we received nothing, and for which the rest of the aviation industry had to pay, even though they don't go anywhere near Mirabel.

So it's not quite that simple. There is a real issue here, I think, if we talk about the cost of being fair to everyone, including other people who are flying in Quebec.

In its consultative form, what we are doing with those customers now is to try to understand what their safety issues are. At this point, we simply have not been able to agree that there is a safety issue. We're going to have another meeting; maybe there will be other information brought forward.

At the end of the day, it is a decision that the safety regulator makes as well. It's not just Nav Canada saying that there is not a safety issue at this point. Neither has the regulator found a safety issue. We understand the industry's concern, but we're trying to find a way to do this that is fair to everybody, including the people who have to pay and yet never go anywhere near Mirabel. That's an issue as well.

● (1600)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Bevington.

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

It's nice to see you again in front of the committee, Mr. Crichton.

What is the cost of the flight service station, then, at Mirabel, if we go with that rather than the control tower? What's the difference between the two costs?

Mr. John Crichton: It's $500,000.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: I should say, what is the total cost?

Mr. John Crichton: I'll have to get back to you with precise figures, but it's roughly $750,000 a year versus $1.25 million—in that order of magnitude.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: What percentage of it would come from operations at the airport—any of it?

Mr. John Crichton: We charge terminal fees at airports where we have staffed facilities, either an air control tower or a flight service station. However, the charging formula is national. It's based on aircraft weight; it isn't based on the airport's specific costs. We have a flat national fee that applies, so that it doesn't matter.

If you take an airport such as Toronto, which has 450,000 movements a year, I think the terminal charge today there for a B-737 is roughly $1,500. That $1,500 is what that jet will pay no matter where it lands in Canada. Whether it's in Toronto, Montreal, Thunder Bay, Yellowknife, Kelowna, Fort McMurray—you name it—that's what it will pay. If we changed to site-specific charging—and some countries do this—we would end up with that airplane probably paying $200 in Toronto and paying $7,000 or $8,000 or $9,000 to land in Yellowknife or Fort McMurray.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Is this $1,500 strictly for flight services, rather than for the entire airport operation?

Mr. John Crichton: It's strictly for the services that we provide.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: What is the total that an airplane is paying when it lands? Do you know that figure? That would be determined by the airport. Are the other charges that airports have based on their own particular costs, while only yours are based on this national scheme?

Mr. John Crichton: Ours are based on a national formula. That's a practice that has long been established. It's to try to avoid discriminatory treatment throughout the country. I think it's one that has worked well.

The alternative model is site-specific charging. The problem with it is that it's very volume sensitive. For a given amount of fixed cost that you would have at an airport, the less traffic you have to spread it over, the higher the unit cost becomes. It becomes very dramatic if we go away from the current system, and we don't propose to go away from it, because it seems to work well, and all of our customers seem to find that it's fine.

We are concerned in this particular case that to the extent we would incur more cost by putting a tower back in, it would not be borne by the people who are asking for it; it's going to be borne by the rest of the people in the country who don't even fly to Mirabel.

In our view, it is a good candidate to look at and tell them that if they really want that service, even though it doesn't fall within any of our level of service guidelines and neither Transport nor we feel that it's a safety issue, we can provide it, but they will have to offset the cost.

● (1605)

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Just doing the math, you have 25,000 landings there, and you're saying it's costing you $750,000 for a flight service station. Doesn't that work out to about $30 a landing?

Mr. John Crichton: The fees vary with the weight of the aircraft. Very small airplanes weigh hardly anything. The training aircraft are on a flat annual fee of $70, and they can go anywhere they want in the country. It all depends on the weight of the aircraft.

But that's not the issue. The issue is that if we were to convert back to a tower, we would incur an additional $500,000 in costs. The way the formulas work, that money would have to come from other places. Bearing in mind that the company is based at Mirabel and that virtually all of the flights they are operating are designated as test flights and they're not paying us anything, it's a bit of a sticky wicket. We're not trying to get in the way of anybody, but at some point we have to be fair.

The Chair: Thank you.

Ms. Hoeppner.

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

I appreciate your frankness and I agree it is a difficult issue. I think the answers that you're providing us are forthright, and for my part, I appreciate that. I think it helps put this whole issue into perspective, as difficult as it is.

Can you explain for me as a layman the difference between the service that's provided with an air traffic controller or the flight service station? Is there a difference as far as safety issues are concerned?

Mr. John Crichton: Yes. Air traffic control provides positive control. The controller's main job is to keep aircraft separated so that they do not run into each other, in essence, and on the manoeuvring surface of the airport to make sure they're not going to run into a snowplow or some other vehicle out servicing the airport.

In order to do that, the pilots have to follow the air traffic controller's instructions. There's no discretion, unless there's an emergency. The controller tells the pilot to hold or denies a clearance to take off or a clearance to land. They'll only do that because they don't feel it's safe, because there is a potential obstruction.

In the flight advisory world, what happens is that the flight service specialist provides the pilot with all the information. He will tell a pilot what's going on, and then it's up to the pilot to decide the right thing to do.

Pilots are trained to operate in both and they're quite comfortable operating in both. The difference between the two is traffic volume. Obviously, in a given amount of air space, the more aircraft you add to it simultaneously, the more complex it becomes and the greater the possibility of something going wrong. That's why, everywhere in the world, we determine which level of service is correct based on the traffic volumes.

Interestingly, we use 60,000 movements a year as a guideline in Canada. In the U.S., it's 100,000 movements a year, and in other countries it's different numbers.

But that's essentially it. I guess it's the difference, if you want to use the analogy of driving, between coming to an intersection that has traffic lights and one that just has a stop sign. With the traffic lights, there is no discretion: if the light is red, you do not go through the intersection; you wait until it's green. That's like the controller telling you that it's okay, you can go now. With the stop sign, you look both ways and you determine when it's safe to go. That's the simplest analogy. But they all have the same information.

I believe Mr. Laframboise mentioned two incidents earlier. We've analyzed both of those incidents. They had nothing to do with the level of service at all. It wouldn't have made a difference if there had been three towers there at the time.

● (1610)

Ms. Candice Hoeppner: I have one more question.

How often is the activity reviewed? How often are you looking at airports and their activities? Are you tracking it constantly?

Mr. John Crichton: We're tracking it constantly.

Ms. Candice Hoeppner: If activity were to increase and it warranted a control tower, then it would be put in place?

Mr. John Crichton: Absolutely. In fact, we just put a control tower in Fort McMurray, because it was a flight service station. It grew up through 60,000 movements, and we put a control tower in last year.

Ms. Candice Hoeppner: Good.

I'd like to share my time with Mr. Jean.

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): I'm glad you mentioned Fort McMurray, and I appreciate your coming here today.

I want to confirm, then, that currently we or the federal government, Nav Canada, or the taxpayers of Canada are subsidizing the test flights at Mirabel to the tune of approximately $200,000 per year and that there's a $500,000 savings on the tower not being there, because it's no longer necessary.

Having the busiest single runway in North America in Fort McMurray, I wonder whether that means Nav Canada has more money in its budget to give us another runway.

Mr. John Crichton: First of all—

Mr. Brian Jean: That was a joke. I know you're not responsible for that. We do produce 6% of the GDP of the country, so I just thought it might be appropriate.

Mr. John Crichton: The taxpayers are not subsidizing the difference. Nav Canada does not get a dollar of public money and never has. Those who are subsidizing the difference, if you want to put it that way, are other airlines, in their fees, including foreign carriers as well as domestic Canadian carriers. That's where the difference goes.

The point I was trying to make is that there is an acceptance that it is reasonable in this country—and I used the example of Yellowknife or Fort McMurray—that you would not pay $8,000 to $10,000 to land a B-737 there and only $200 in Toronto, that this would not be fair. So people have accepted it. But when you get into a unique situation such as we have here in Mirabel, where you're so far below the level of service standard, to say that even though there is not a legitimate safety case we still want to have a tower, and then to ask those other people who never go near Mirabel to pay another $500,000, we think, is just going too far.

Mr. Brian Jean: I understand, and that was actually my point.

Another point is that I actually have started my pilot's licence. I'm a student pilot. I do solos, and as a result of that I promised my friends two things: the first is that I would warn them whenever I go in the air and make sure they're not in the vicinity; and secondly, I would study and memorize the book. When I studied the book I was surprised to see how much coordination there is in circuit patterns. In fact, these people who do test pilot programs are the best of the best. They've logged tens of thousands of hours. It's surprising how expert they are and how much the safety record in Canada is, as a whole, as a result of circuit patterns, as a result of levels, etc. I just want to confirm for those people listening that there's a huge organization there, and I am quite surprised at how structured it is and how safe it is.

The Chair: Mr. Dhaliwal.

Mr. Brian Jean: That was a commercial.

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

Thank you, gentlemen.

Mr. Crichton, when I look at the air traffic management, whether it's Mirabel airport, Bathurst Airport, close to my riding of Newton—North Delta, the YVR, we find similar complaints, whether you go to Surrey or you come to Montreal. I'm holding a town hall meeting on July 9 in my riding of Newton—North Delta, and it's open. You're welcome, in addition to Nav Canada, to attend that.

When I read the study done by Nav Canada to do with the air traffic management in my area, I had some questions arising. Why is it that Nav Canada cannot do what other jurisdictions in other countries do to implement noise-related corridors to minimize noise in the densely populated areas?

● (1615)

Mr. John Crichton: Well, actually, you raise an issue. There is, as you know quite well, an issue in the Greater Vancouver area, and particularly in Surrey and North Delta, with some changes we made in recent years to the approach and departure paths for Vancouver International Airport. Those changes, by the way, are right now saving the airlines $20 million a year in fuel and—I've forgotten the number—thousands of metric tonnes in greenhouse gas emissions. However, that has upset some residents who feel they weren't adequately consulted. They now are experiencing aircraft noise that they didn't before. So we listened to that. We made some changes to those patterns as a result of that.

The number of noise complaints we have received since we made those changes has dropped dramatically. The issue has not gone away, so we have funded noise monitoring stations in the areas, along with the YVR airport, which is also funding them. We've also recently put up an interactive website that shows all of the air traffic movements in real time in that area, and it identifies the flights and has a process for people. If they are bothered by a flight, they can identify specifically which one it is because they can replay the tape and right on the exact time.

However, on noise monitoring, we have not had any incidents yet where any aircraft, other than I think on one or two rare occasions, actually penetrated the internationally accepted levels of noise, as being more than just the urban background noise. We've certainly detected lots of other noise events that are not aviation related.

Having said all that, there are still people with a lot of concerns. We're continuing to meet with those groups, with the various municipal councils. I'll take your invitation for July 9 under advisement. We'll see if we can send somebody there. We are sensitive to them. We've also committed that in future we will do more consultation ahead of time with various communities if we feel there are going to be any adverse effects.

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: When I talk to my community, to the people who are working on this issue in the community and are putting hundreds and thousands of volunteer hours into this particular issue, the response I get from them is totally different. They indicate that it's a one-way dialogue and that your department is not open, transparent, and willing to sit with them and have a discussion so the stakeholders can be involved in this particular issue.

Mr. John Crichton: Well, Mr. Dhaliwal, I will have our people who are handling this contact you to hear your views on it and to get some feedback from you, number one, but also to show you the consultations we have done, the reports we've done ourselves and dealt with, the meetings we've gone to, and as well, to give you the results of the noise monitoring, which is, by the way, the only independent, objective way you can deal with this issue.

Quite frankly, there are people who object if they look up and see an airplane, even if they can't hear it. They just don't like the sight of an airplane. The only way you can sort of cut through everything is to have.... These noise monitors are run by independent companies, not us. They are scientific engineering companies. They produce a 24-hour precise measurement of all the noise. They can even identify where the noise came from or what it was. Those monitors are indicating there is not an issue, but I think we need to share that a bit more.

● (1620)

The Chair: Monsieur Laframboise.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Yes, thank you.

Mr. Crichton, in a letter addressed to you by Bombardier, Pratt & Whitney, Bell Helicopter, L-3 Communications, Hélibellule and Federal Express,we read the following:

> The current situation has an impact on the operations and the finances of the users of Mirabel airport [...] Bombardier and Pratt &Whitney are about to begin building new factories in this sector [...] Consequently, air and ground traffic at Mirabel airport will continue increasing over the coming years and will become even more complex. Moreover, we must once again emphasize the severe apprehensions of the users for their safety.

Do you think that these people sent you this letter on a whim?

[*English*]

Mr. John Crichton: No. What I'm saying is that we have been meeting with the companies you mentioned, the couple of companies that, as far as I know, have not been part of the group asking for the tower. My understanding is that Bombardier, Bell Helicopter, and Pratt & Whitney are the only three asking for the tower. We are meeting with them. We will continue to meet with them.

We are trying to validate—and this is with Transport Canada involved—whether or not there is a safety issue. I'm simply saying to the committee at this point that so far, in everything we've seen, we have not been able to identify a safety issue. That may change. A week from now, they may produce something we're not aware of.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: What would it take to make you change your mind: a collision between two airplanes or between a CF-18 and a plane used for flight training?

[*English*]

Mr. John Crichton: Well, no. As people in our business do all over the world, there are very well-established standards for determining risk in our business that are very detailed and quite accurate, and we are applying those standards. That is the way we go about doing these things.

We are trying to find out, in listening to this group, if there is something unique that we're not taking into account or something unusual happening here. So we are listening, and we're going to look at that. In the meantime, should Mirabel grow, as a lot of people hope it will and as we hope it will, and if it becomes busier again and the air space becomes more complex again, then you may see a tower come back just for that reason alone. But in the meantime—

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: You consider that it would take 60,000 flights, but there are only 25,000. In your mind, given that everyone else is paying while these companies are not paying, you will never give them that gift. I do not believe you. You will wait until there are 60,000 flights before paying that money.

You know that one of the two incidents occurred because a CF-18 had to come back and it could have collided with the other plane. It did not happen, because it succeeded in avoiding the emergency landing and in avoiding the accident. In your analysis of the situation, you say that there are no safety problems. Are you waiting for two airplanes to collide before you react?

Things will become ever more complicated as you know. These industries are developing equipment, performing tests and they need to come back to the landing strips very quickly. Moreover, many emergency situations could occur.

You say there are more flights in Toulouse or Seattle. This is fine. However, these companies are developing systems and they have certain needs. These people wrote you this letter because they need a control tower. This is not a whim on their part. You simply want them to pay you $500,000, so settle it with the government.

If there is a safety problem, let us solve it, because we must ensure the development of these companies and these industries. Who will pay for this? You are entitled to tell me that you do not want to pay, but tell us at least that there is a safety problem. You are saying that there is no safety problem. Are you waiting for an accident to happen?

[*English*]

Mr. John Crichton: We have not been able to identify a safety problem.

Now, you mentioned a specific incident involving a CF-18 that had a bird strike and had to return. There would not have been any difference with the control tower there on how that situation resolved itself. It was not a safety issue.

Every day in this country, aircraft run into mechanical problems at airports that have flight service stations and they have to return to the airport, and at airports that are busier than Mirabel. So in terms of that specific incident, with due respect, it was not a safety issue that would have made any difference between the tower or the flight service station.

● (1625)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Mr. Crichton, you know that the problem is not due to the fact that he collided with some birds, but to the fact that there was a training aircraft on the strip that he could have collided with when he came back. It is irrelevant that he collided with a bird, or that he had a problem in flight, or that this was a test and that he was asked to come back.

He could have collided with an airplane because you were not able to detect it. That is the problem. You told this committee that a control tower is used to avoid collisions between airplanes. It could have happened. Please be honest at least on this point. It did not happen, that's great, but the next time, it could happen.

[*English*]

Mr. John Crichton: So is the flight service station; in that event, if the pilot chose to declare an emergency and say he had to land right away, the flight service specialist would have told the other aircraft there was an emergency coming in on the runway and to please get off. It's no different from what the controller would have said. That's all I'm saying.

The Chair: Ms. Brown, very briefly.

Ms. Lois Brown (Newmarket—Aurora, CPC): I'll go very quickly.

Mr. Crichton, I wonder if you could tell us if there are any other airports where you have the same kind of situation, where you've got the potential for other partners to be covering the costs. Or is Mirabel totally unique in Canada?

Mr. John Crichton: As a public airport, in the large sense that you understand it, it's probably unique. And I don't want to pick on the member for Fort McMurray, but in terms of the development of the oil sands, we have reached agreement with a number of the oil companies who have built jet strips north of Fort McMurray, within the tar sands. We are providing commercial services to them of various types, which they are paying for, because they need them and they're outside the norm.

So yes, it is, but we have other commercial arrangements in different parts of the country for different types of services, a lot of them with airports. In terms of public airports, Mirabel is a bit unique, because it is a very small, cohesive group of stakeholders who are asking for the tower, and others aren't. It just creates this situation that I described earlier.

Ms. Lois Brown: But in other places, your agreements are working well.

Mr. John Crichton: Oh yes, and we're quite free to reach commercial arrangements like this. We do it all the time. We'd be happy to do it.

Ms. Lois Brown: Thank you.

The Chair: With that, I'll thank our guests for being here. We appreciate your input.

We're going to take a quick break for our next guest to be seated and then we'll continue.

Thank you very much.

● _____ (Pause) _____

●

● (1630)

The Chair: Welcome back to the second part, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), the study of high-speed rail in Canada.

I want to advise the committee that we have set aside about 15 minutes at the end of this meeting to review the subcommittee's discussions from the previous meeting. If we can keep our questions succinct, we'll be fine.

Joining us now from the Canadian Urban Transit Association, we have Mr. Michael Roschlau, president and chief executive officer.

I welcome you. I know you know the routine, so I'll ask you to present.

Mr. Michael Roschlau (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canadian Urban Transit Association): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I appreciate the opportunity to be here today to comment about the complex issue of high-speed rail in Canada. I say complex because in order for high-speed rail to be a successful initiative in this country there are really several factors to consider.

First, in order for high-speed rail to thrive and have a truly transformational impact on Canada, it absolutely must be complementary with public transit. In other words, high-speed rail has to be integrated with the local and regional public transit systems across the country. When you consider travelling from city to city, there has to be sustainable public transit at both ends.

[*Translation*]

The TGV in France,

[*English*]

the ICE in Germany and the AVE in Spain work because they connect outlying citizens directly with world-class public transit systems in French, German, and Spanish cities. It's the same in Japan; it's the same in South Korea. High-speed trains without connectivity to transit are trains to nowhere. France, Germany, and Spain invested heavily in public transit long before considering high-speed rail.

The second point I would like to highlight is the issue of cost-benefit and value for investment. A question that repeatedly comes to mind is this. What is the best balance for investing in our public transportation network for the future?

Resources need to be allocated optimally in order to assure that our transportation systems are meeting the needs of all Canadians. President Obama in the United States has raised the level of debate and excitement over high-speed rail in North America. This is a positive step, but it also needs a note of caution.

Many MPs and policy-makers would be stunned to know that in the U.S. the federal government provides close to $10 billion of direct, dedicated investment in public transit every year. This is long-term sustainable funding. Canada needs to consider this model before investing in high-speed rail in isolation.

Canadians are continuing to choose public transit at unprecedented levels. Last year Canadian transit ridership exceeded previous highs for the sixth consecutive year. A total of 1.82 billion transit trips were taken across Canada in 2008. This means that, on average, every Canadian uses public transit 60 times per year, or more than one trip per week for every woman, man, and child in the country.

● (1635)

[*Translation*]

The increased use of public transit shows that this service is growing. If we want to maintain the growth and encourage more people to use public transit, we must make investments for the future and on a long-term basis to improve the service.

[*English*]

While our transit systems continue to serve more riders than ever, they are also facing the need to rehabilitate and replace aging infrastructure. The most recent report on Canadian transit infrastructure needs has estimated the total requirements over the five-year period from 2008 to 2012 at $40 billion, including both renewal and expansion.

[*Translation*]

Public transit should not be in direct competition with a high speed train, but it should rather be a potential partner.

[*English*]

Transit, ladies and gentlemen, should not be in direct competition with high-speed rail, but a potential complementary partner. The question for policy-makers, however, is clear: which investment will impact the lives of most Canadians and invigorate our economy? Is it interurban high-speed rail or an investment in local and regional community transit, the engine of our urban economies?

Lastly, we have to explore the issue of high-speed rail's overall benefit to Canadians and to the country. How many Canadians will be directly advantaged by a high-speed rail system?

Public transit touches the lives of everyday Canadians, and your constituents, in an exceptional number of ways. We have the young couple who take the bus or train to work every day. There are families who depend on transit to access health care. Students, our country's future leaders, need to take the bus to and from school each and every day. All of these are examples of Canadians who depend on public transit to fulfill their everyday mobility needs. Indeed, we have to rise to our country's economic, social, and environmental challenges.

Contrast this with the objectives of high-speed rail, which primarily would facilitate intercity transport in a few key corridors, which for most people is not a day-to-day concern.

With unlimited resources, both a high-speed rail system and an efficient and effective public transit network would be of great benefit to this country. However, with limited resources, we must ensure that the immediate and future mobility needs of Canadians are met first. What's needed is a bold vision to ensure that as we move forward to build a better Canada, a fair and equitable distribution of transit infrastructure resources is provided.

Targeted public transit investments will make a real difference in allowing transit systems across Canada to meet the growing demand and expectations of Canadians. Such investment is a powerful benefit for the environment, for the economy, and for quality of life.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much. I'd be pleased to answer your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Kennedy.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Thank you for your testimony.

My questions may be a bit different. Can there be any synergy between both systems? I think that public attitudes towards public transit could undergo great changes. I think that by having the same means of transit between cities and within cities, we could be more efficient, if we convince users that this is their most efficient means of transit.

[*English*]

I understand the limited resources, but I would like to hear a little bit more about this. High-speed rail, I think, represents a conviction on someone's part, once it goes forward, that we're going to change the means and ways of transporting people. Just reflecting the community that I'm familiar with, I think that still needs to take hold for local transportation as well.

I'm just wondering if there are studies. Have discussions taken place between your members and some of the proponents in times past—because we know this is a recurring idea—in terms of some of those mutual benefits? I'm sure your members are chasing their current costs and their renovation, their *renouvellement*.

Overall, I would think that CUTA has a view of where the country needs to head, whether it is green-inspired or just about efficiency of goods and services and people-inspired. Could you address that for us in terms of some of the synergies? I think we hear the caution, we hear the preference that we might expect, but I wonder if those synergies are well understood. I guess that's what I'm trying to get to.

● (1640)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michael Roschlau: You are putting some excellent questions. Thank you.

[*English*]

We have just completed nine months of work on visioning the future, on trying to get a sense of what Canadian communities will look like in 30 years, and how public transport, particularly local community and regional transportation, can best serve those needs.

We've learned about an aging population. We've learned about yet increasing concentrations of Canadians in cities. We've learned about the difficulty of access to cheap energy and mobility and the need for more collective transportation of all kinds and about the willingness of Canadians to move away from low-density to more mixed-use, higher-density, compact communities.

I think ultimately that's what it's going to come down to—where Canadians will live, where Canadians will work, where we go to school, where we play, which determines our transportation needs. It's clear from all the research we've seen that has gone into this visioning exercise that the vast majority of travel is going to be regional and local. It's going to be within and around the communities where people live. But the willingness to move from personal to collective transportation, from driving alone in a car, for example, to riding together in a bus or a train, is going to be driven by the locational advantages of access.

To me, getting to a high-speed train is going to depend on whether there is an easy way for me to get to that station by transit, by bus, by taxi, or by commuter train. Or am I going to drive? And if I drive, we're back to the same model. Once I'm in my car, how far do I take it? Do I take it to the airport or to a train station, or do I drive all the way to my destination?

So it's a complex question you've asked, and I've probably presented you with a complex answer, but it's very interrelated. I think people's willingness to change their lifestyle to be more sustainable is there. It's going to be up to us to provide those integrated systems of land use, and that's a municipal question of where we grow and how we grow our communities to what sort of transportation systems we put in place to serve the needs of those residents.

Mr. Gerard Kennedy: There's going to be a study coming back. I think this is a live decision. We don't want to miss your main point; we want to put it in perspective. We need a national transit strategy, that's clear. We need to make some long-term decisions and not short-term infrastructure types of things.

I wonder whether you could address for me a piece that may be related to this, which is the electrification. Could you give me a quick précis of where that needs to be in terms of the dialogue about local and regional transit? It's live in Toronto and maybe in other places. Is that an inevitable direction? I think there has been talk about the airport corridor in Toronto, in particular. People are wondering, if we're going to have all this building taking place, why we aren't moving to that.

I wonder if you could let us know. I don't want you to get enmeshed in what Metrolinx, TTC, or anybody else is going to think about this, but I think that's going to be a key element if we're looking at infrastructure. Is that smart infrastructure for the future, or is that just some kind of choice that we have? I think most of the high-speed links offer at least some different technologies as well, most of them with some pretty green outcomes.

● (1645)

Mr. Michael Roschlau: There's no question in my mind that, technically, electricity is the best energy source for moving vehicles that start and stop or that travel really fast. The question is whether that electricity is generated on board or comes from elsewhere. The hybrid buses, for example, generate their own electricity on board through a diesel or natural gas engine and store it in batteries and recover it when the vehicle brakes.

The high-speed train requires an electric feed through a wire, just like a subway has a third rail and runs directly off that electricity, which allows it to be pollution free and efficient with very effective increases in speed, acceleration, and deceleration. It's the same for streetcars. It's the same for trolley buses like you have in Vancouver.

But in order to justify the infrastructure investment, which is expensive, you need to have a very intensive service. So there's not much point in electrifying a line where there's a train every half an hour. It makes sense to electrify a line that has very frequent, high-volume service, so that you can spread that investment over a lot of users. If you have a commuter rail line where there's a train every five minutes, the electrification probably makes sense; if you have one that has five trains a day, it probably doesn't.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Laframboise.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Let me tell you that electricity does not present a problem in Quebec. Moreover, Quebec paid for its installations on its own, without getting any money from the federal government. This is not the case with the oil and nuclear industries.

You said that this train must become a new complementary part of public transit. I know that there's not enough money to develop public transit. You say that the Americans are investing $10 billion a year in public transit. Your message to us now is that we should finish the public transit network before discussing the fast train. Am I right?

Mr. Michael Roschlau: We must ensure long-term funding of public transit before thinking about a fast train. Without a healthy, well-funded and efficient network, we will not get the best advantage from the fast train. In France, the TGV runs between Paris, Lyon and Bordeaux; in Germany, between Frankfurt, Munich and Berlin; in Spain, between Barcelona, Madrid and Cordoba. These countries already had well-developed networks of subways, trains, tramways and buses that were all integrated before implementing the TGV. To a certain extent, the TGV depends on this environment for each of its stations, unless a station is built between the cities with a big parking lot as an incentive. However, I wonder if that is really the objective.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: I understand, but the fact remains that our public transit system would be able to support a high-speed train network. You do not agree. I agree that we should always invest in public transit. You have got figures on public transit requests. What are they?

Mr. Michael Roschlau: If you look at the proportion of the Canadian public impacted by a high-speed train, between Montreal and Toronto, or Quebec and Windsor, or Calgary and Edmonton, I do not know what kind of impact a cost-benefit analysis would reveal. It's a matter of balance. Personally, I would like to do both. These two options complement one another in an ideal way. Individuals would be encouraged to use public transportation over long distances, in other words, trains between two cities, and public transit over short distances, at the local transit level. In my opinion, it would be ideal. Let's hope we can afford to do both.

● (1650)

Mr. Mario Laframboise: I prefer that message. If over the medium term we do not make a decision, we will be forced to widen highways in the Quebec-Montreal-Windsor corridor. There is high population density, there's development and the highways are overloaded. Decisions have to be made. Ideally, everything could be done at once, but we should be cautious. If we hear that we need to deal with the urban transit network first, we will do so, but we need to widen the highways. In doing so, we will encourage people to take their cars to get out of the cities and travel. All of this is not easy. I think this is a turning point.

You mentioned what the American administration is doing. I think Canada has gotten to that point. Like you, I hope we can develop both networks. That is in fact why part of our study aims to integrate mass transit. We will get the report we want. We are heading in the same direction. You seemed to say that we must deal with mass transit before considering high-speed trains. If so, the auto sector will expand further. In some corridors, some people are thinking of widening the highways.

Mr. Michael Roschlau: Our position is clear. There is a strong link between investing in high speed trains and local and regional mass transit. If we do not have the means to do both, local transit is at a greater advantage throughout the country, in small-size cities and larger ones. For instance, it is rather unlikely that a high-speed train would stop in small towns with populations of 20 000, 50 000 or 100,000. That is the problem, in a way.

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Correct me if I'm wrong. You may have had an opportunity to examine studies or carry out analyses. Either way, clearly, the more we discourage people from owning cars, the more public transport, including high speed trains, will be favoured and expand. At this point, people do use the public transit system, but they feel that they must have a car because they have to travel between Quebec and Montreal, for instance. In any case, there is no other way to travel. At some point, you have to tip the scales in the other direction.

I was surprised to hear from the motor bus operators' association that they were prepared to join in a public/private partnership that would involve their motor bus network. Obviously, the objective there would be to discourage people from owning cars. It is already a good thing environmentally speaking. At some point, the government is going to have to focus its investments in the area of mass transportation rather than consider building roads and widening highways.

Mr. Michael Roschlau: It is the same choice. For long distances, we have to decide whether to invest in highways or rail transportation, and for short distances, whether to invest in city highways or public transit.

[*English*]

The Chair: Mr. Bevington.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: When we look at integrated systems, and say we take Toronto, to integrate the transit system in Toronto so that you would get this kind of ridership on a high-speed rail—just the one in Toronto rather than looking at where the person is going to end up at—what would you see as the changes that would be required in Toronto's urban transit system?

● (1655)

Mr. Michael Roschlau: I think in the event that we were to have a high-speed rail system in this country, there would need to be really strong linkages and connectivity at each stop. That is to say that whether it's Union Station in Toronto or Gare Centrale in Montreal, or any other city, that needs to be the hub. There needs to be really good access from the surrounding urban area to that particular spot. And that would apply in each case where there's a stop, where there's a station, as I was saying earlier, to avoid the tendency of having to create huge parking garages or parking structures around the station, and so that it's connected from a network perspective as well as from a travel fare perspective.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Is this study that's going to take place actually going to address the issues? To your understanding, is the study that's been commissioned to upgrade the previous high-speed rail studies going to actually take into account the requirements for these kinds of connectivity?

Mr. Michael Roschlau: I couldn't tell you, because I'm not that familiar with the terms of reference of the study. But I would strongly encourage consideration of the benefits to all Canadians of the investment in question.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: They did a previous study. This is upgrading a previous study. Are you familiar with the previous study?

Mr. Michael Roschlau: I'm familiar with it in general, but not specifically with the details.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Are some of the assumptions they've made about ridership based on a model where there's this great connectivity?

Mr. Michael Roschlau: I couldn't tell you, because quite honestly, the concept of long-distance intercity transport, which high-speed rail is, lies outside of our mandate as an urban and regional transit association.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: I guess if you're not familiar with it, then probably it hasn't been done.

Mr. Michael Roschlau: That's possible.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: I think it's quite obviously something that the committee will have to take into account when and if it actually reviews a new study that comes forward.

Mr. Michael Roschlau: What I can tell you in that regard is that I don't recall CUTA being consulted in those previous studies.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Okay. So are there other studies in the world, or are there other examples that you refer to, to bring this forward at this time?

Mr. Michael Roschlau: High-speed rail is an evolving phenomenon that began in Japan many years ago and was then developed in Europe, initially in France, then in Germany and Spain, now Italy, connecting to places in Belgium and the U.K. through the Chunnel. Now Korea's developing one. They're talking about it in many countries because it's a great way of bringing people together fast.

I think the study needs to look carefully in that regard at the objectives in terms of transportation choices, but also the outcomes in terms of the distances that people travel, that they need to travel or are indeed encouraged to travel. Where is the balance, if you will, from a sustainable perspective, between people travelling together in a sustainable electric mode, people travelling long distances, as opposed to locating things closer together and not needing to travel as much? In other words, there are two sides to the coin in terms of the benefits and disbenefits of a particular investment.

● (1700)

Mr. Dennis Bevington: Having travelled on the high-speed rail in Japan, I think it's remarkable how these trains work. I had to arrive somewhere on time; well, there's a train every three minutes on a high-speed line there. It's a truly remarkable feat of engineering with these things hurtling down the tracks at that rate.

So it's very impressive, but I didn't see as much connectivity in the Japanese system. Perhaps I wasn't looking for it. I was impressed with the connectivity at some of the airports, such as Schiphol airport. Now, there's a place where everything seems to come together in the same location.

Are you familiar with that?

Mr. Michael Roschlau: I am, although I don't think the high-speed train comes into that airport. I think it connects from the central station in Amsterdam to Brussels and Paris.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: But there is a very good link there. There are subway links—

Mr. Michael Roschlau: Absolutely. It has a great link with the local regional rail as well as the subway and bus networks around the Netherlands.

Mr. Dennis Bevington: What do you think of the proposed link that Toronto is looking at between its airport and Union Station?

Mr. Michael Roschlau: Our airports definitely are under-connected to their communities. If you look around the world at the way in which major cities have built rail links to their communities, whether it's to downtown or other parts, even across the U.S., such as Chicago, Washington, Philadelphia, and Atlanta, we are not at that level of development. However, in two months Vancouver will have an airport-rail link. It will be the first one in this country.

I think those linkages are really important, whether they are heavy rail or light rail or a really good bus connection like Ottawa has on the transitway. I use the 97 bus every time I come here, 20 minutes to downtown.

An hon. member: For two dollars.

Mr. Michael Roschlau: For two dollars, that's right.

Certainly airports like Toronto and Montreal don't have the level of connectivity that they should.

The Chair: Ms. Brown.

Ms. Lois Brown: I could argue about the cost of the 97 bus. It's $3 a ticket if you buy a single ticket, right?

Mr. Dennis Bevington: It's $2 if you buy it at the information kiosk at the airport.

Ms. Lois Brown: I've only bought mine on the bus. I stand corrected. I'll have to make use of that. I do take the bus from the airport downtown.

Mr. Michael Roschlau: It's a bargain, regardless.

Ms. Lois Brown: It is, absolutely, and I am an advocate for public transit, Mr. Roschlau, so thank you.

First of all, I want to say thank you very much for continuing to send your pamphlets and magazines. I have really appreciated them, particularly in this study. It's been most helpful to have them. One issue of your magazine, maybe a month or so ago, had quite a write-up on what Toronto was planning to do. I'm sure my colleagues here are going to get very tired of my saying this, but I am a York region member of Parliament, Newmarket—Aurora is my riding, and I'm very concerned about what's going on in the York region area.

We've obviously had our growing pains with public transit. Our government has committed substantial dollars to Toronto for upgrading public transit. Part of that is being felt now in York region, with the subway that's going to go to Vaughan and the proposal to take the subway up to Richmond Hill. Our investment in the Viva system is going to be of tremendous assistance to York region.

I saw in your magazine that Toronto has a plan to bring in a light rail line north along Jane St. and a second one north along Don Mills. I don't how far north those are coming; they just had arrows on them, so I'm not sure what the distance north will be.

I have a couple of questions for you.

Do you have any benchmarks in your studies for at what point it would be wise for an area to start discussing a subway? I mean, I look at the history of Toronto, and Toronto had a subway by the time it had a million people. They were already building the subway by then. York region now has a million people in it. Although the subway's starting to come north, we're kind of late off the mark. Do you have a benchmark for that?

Also, can you talk about the connectivity in the Toronto area? Obviously, Durham, Peel, and York region are all going to be impacted by how this connectivity happens. The one thing you do need to know is that I will advocate for high-speed rail to come into York region.

An hon. member: Hear, hear!

Ms. Lois Brown: If we're going to do that, I would think that the corridors down into Union Station are absorbed by what's going on there now, and I could see usage of the 407 corridor or the hydro corridor being a real possibility for us for high-speed rail. I would advocate for it to come in around the north end of Markham, and it could go through to the airport from there. Do you have any comments on that?

One other comment that I would like to make upfront is that not only does our government see its responsibility in investing in public transit, but at the same time, it's urging people to make use of those investments by allowing them to get tax credits on their income tax for usage of public transit. They're trying to come at it from both ends, not only on the investment but on the incentive to use it as well.

I wonder if you could comment about the connectivity in York region in particular, but in the GTA area in general.

● (1705)

Mr. Michael Roschlau: I'm impressed with your understanding of the issues.

Ms. Lois Brown: Thank you.

Mr. Michael Roschlau: I appreciate the government's commitment, absolutely.

Your question about a threshold is an interesting one. I think it has less to do with the overall population of a community than it does with the way in which that community is designed. You can have a million people in an area that's spread out uniformly and would never support a subway, but you can have a million people concentrated along one corridor, like Yonge Street in Toronto, that could support two subways. Ultimately, it's a question of the distribution of those people and the way in which they're concentrated.

That gets me back to this whole issue of coordinating the development plans and the growth of a city with the transportation investment you make. If the plan is to develop a uniformly low- to medium-density set of residential, commercial, and industrial subdivisions, then you'll have to invest in a very extensive roadway and parking network that serves the local, the regional, and the high-speed connections with freeways.

If you build clusters of mixed-use medium- to high-density developments in places or along corridors where you can justify building light rail or a subway, and then decline that density as you move away, you can put in that kind of infrastructure. Those are the questions that need to be asked. What kind of future do we want? How do we want to develop our cities? Do we want to develop more automobile-dependent lower-density communities? Or do we want to put those million people around highly efficient and effective public transit?

Ms. Lois Brown: Newmarket comes under Mr. McGuinty's places to grow legislation. There was legislation introduced three years ago that designates certain points in Ontario as places to grow for population intensification. Aurora, which is at the south end of my riding, is not nearly as impacted by that population intensification because it has the Oak Ridges Moraine going through the south end of it and it's quite rural, owned by one owner.

Newmarket is going to be impacted by the legislation. However, because the normal flow of traffic is south, to Toronto—most people head south for shopping, for work—Aurora is going to be impacted just because of the traffic flow.

So again, my question is, how do we build for that in the future? If we know that the population intensification is coming, and Newmarket already has its urban plan in place, and a great deal of population is going to go along the Yonge Street and Davis Drive corridors, are the studies for Toronto building out that far? Are you looking at those areas in your studies and making recommendations to these towns?

Mr. Michael Roschlau: I think the vision that the province has developed for the Greater Golden Horseshoe—the integration of the various policy levers that are in place, whether it's land use or the Municipal Act, or the places to grow legislation—really does look in a very integrated fashion at coordinating those kinds of growth centres with the transportation links that need to bring them together. When I look around the world, I must say that Ontario stands out as a model of good policy in terms of what's happening right now in transportation planning, in land use planning, in providing the municipal governments with the right incentives and the right levers to become more sustainable in the future.

As it impacts the York region, it's a step-wise progression in terms of moving from a very heavily automobile-oriented environment to one with an improved bus service, to the bus rapid transit with Viva, to putting those buses on their own rights of way, on their reserved lanes, and then to moving into rail when the demand warrants. And that's mostly the east-west connections. The north-south ones are different because they need to be seamless into Toronto, which is why extending the subway makes sense, which is why the GO trains work as well as they do, and which is why the Jane Street and Don Mills light rail lines that have been proposed by the City of Toronto would probably eventually run north of Steeles Avenue as well.

● (1710)

Ms. Lois Brown: So we're talking about high-speed rail coming into the York region.

Mr. Michael Roschlau: You bet.

Ms. Lois Brown: Thank you.

The Chair: I have about a minute left. I'll give everybody one minute for any last-minute questions.

Mr. Pacetti.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Just quickly, you cited vaguely, but I'm wondering if you have specific examples in Canada where you would see the public transit linking right away with the high-speed rail.

We always talk about the Quebec-Windsor corridor. It's something that every government has announced, provincially and federally. How is that going to impact the public transit?

At this point I think it's mutually exclusive, but you seem to think they still need to be worked on collectively. I think at this point we just have to invest in the high-speed rail. The public transit is another issue. I think it's mutually exclusive, but in the end, yes, they'll have to work together. But I think we have to get going on this high-speed rail. Is that correct or not?

Mr. Michael Roschlau: We used to have a joke in our industry that said if you keep pushing the CTrain north and you keep pushing Edmonton's light rail further south, eventually they'll meet in Red Deer.

That's a joke.

An hon. member: It's true.

Mr. Brian Jean: We don't even have a train in Fort McMurray, so why start it now?

Mr. Michael Roschlau: You can say the same about the GO train going east from Toronto and the AMT going west from Montreal.

But all kidding aside, ultimately Union Station in Toronto and Gare Centrale in Montreal would be clear hubs for high-speed rail, for subways, for commuter rail, for everything linking those two regions. The others, whether it's Ottawa, Windsor, Quebec City, Edmonton, or Calgary, are far less clear because there really isn't a transportation hub.

Mr. Massimo Pacetti: So the priority for you would be Montreal-Toronto?

Mr. Michael Roschlau: Well, I think those are the two cities that have the most significant transportation hubs already in place.

The Chair: Mr. Gaudet.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Roger Gaudet (Montcalm, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a very simple question. I have heard that you had a meeting that dealt with the specific needs of the AMT. Earlier, we talked about Toronto. What are the AMTs needs with regard to urban, public transit in Montreal?

Mr. Michael Roschlau: My understanding is that the AMT must have the means to establish a truly integrated public transit network that meets the needs of Montrealers and residents of the greater Montreal area. That means that the public transit network on the island of Montreal, whether bus or metro, will become integrated with that of Laval, Longueuil and the north and south shores.

The CITs (intermunicipal transportation boards), which currently manage the suburban train service, have to be able to harmonize their rates and schedules. For instance, bus and train transportation have to connect in a timely manner. There has to be a network that meets the needs of the public, instead of 12 distinct networks. It is the AMT's role to ensure such intermunicipal integration. What are needed are financial means and the mechanism to conduct such planning.

● (1715)

Mr. Roger Gaudet: If I understand you correctly, if the network were to be completed — a study on a high speed rail system has already been launched by Montreal and Toronto — that would be a plus for high speed rail, because the two networks would intersect.

Mr. Michael Roschlau: For a high speed train to be effective and financially viable, there cannot be too many stops. With speeds reaching 200, 300 or 400 kilometres an hour, such a train cannot stop at every station. Stops can only be located in areas with significant demand. There would likely be one stop and station per city.

Mr. Roger Gaudet: Very well.

In your view, what population size would justify a high speed rail station? Is it 100,000, 200,000 or 300,000 inhabitants?

Mr. Michael Roschlau: That is not really my area of expertise, but if you consider how things are elsewhere — in France, Germany or Spain, for example — there rarely are stops where fewer than 200,000 or 300,000 inhabitants can effectively access a station.

Mr. Roger Gaudet: Very well, thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Watson, you may have the final question.

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You've said here today that the consideration of high-speed rail and public transit ought to go hand in hand, essentially. We have heard cost estimates, by one of our witnesses, for a long-term commitment to high-speed rail of anywhere from $20 billion up to $50 billion. How much of an investment in the necessary connectivity in public transit would we be looking at by way of a commitment at one time?

Mr. Michael Roschlau: I would take the question back to what is needed to provide the level of access and mobility needed by Canadians who are living in urban areas that are over 10,000 in population. Our estimate of that is approximately $40 billion over a five-year period. If you annualize that, you are looking at about $8 billion per year in expansion to keep up with growth and to replace the existing assets as they wear out.

That's about $8 billion per year shared, obviously, across the different jurisdictions in question.

The Chair: Thank you very much for attending today and providing us with more information.

We're going to take a one-minute break. I'm going to ask that the room be cleared, as we're going in camera to discuss a bit of committee business. Then we'll wrap it up.

[*Proceedings continue in camera]*

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