

have been reduced by the curtailment of the Federal budget. The committee is plainly hoping that many of its proposals will have reached the point at which they can be quickly implemented before or soon after the conference planned for 1971—and it is at the same time disconcerted to find that the work done so far in the planning of this conference has fallen short of what it considers necessary.

AIR TRANSPORT

Narrow Shave for the SST

THE project to build a supersonic civil aircraft in the United States narrowly survived defeat in the House of Representatives last week, by 176 to 162. The margin is narrow enough for those who have consistently opposed the project to hope that they will yet be able to bring it to a halt, although the chances are small that they will now be able to deny the Department of Transportation the \$290 million in the budget for the coming financial year that has been earmarked for the development of the Boeing aircraft. Their next chance will come when the budget finds its way to the Senate a few weeks from now.

The recent history of the American supersonic transport will seem familiar to those who have followed the Concorde project in detail. Public money was first spent on the project nearly 10 years ago, when Congress authorized \$11 million for study of the design. The original intention, fostered by President Kennedy, was that the Federal government should foot 75 per cent of the bill for development and that the total cost should not exceed \$1,000 million. After competitive and parallel studies by Boeing and Lockheed, a consortium of Boeing and General Electric was chosen to build the commercial version of the aircraft in 1966. So far, \$517 million of public money has been spent on the project, and the sum earmarked for the year ahead will carry the total over the ceiling suggested by President Kennedy in the early sixties.

Opposition to the project has been apparent in Congress for several years, and is now also apparent within the Administration. One of the most vigorous opponents has been Senator William Proxmire, whose economic subcommittee has been collecting evidence against the aircraft for the past five years. Since the beginning of the present Administration, there have been several inquiries into the desirability of continuing support for the project. An inquiry under the auspices of the Under Secretary for Transportation, Mr James Beggs, at the beginning of 1969, was inconclusive, and a review of the documents of that case is now known to have persuaded the President's Science Adviser, Dr Lee DuBridge, to say that he was not in favour of continued support for the project, chiefly on the grounds of public nuisance. A further study in Dr DuBridge's office seems to have confirmed this opinion, but the Administration as a whole decided to go ahead with building the supersonic transport in September last year.

As things are now, the Department of Transportation is the most consistent supporter of the supersonic transport within the administration, chiefly on the grounds that the aircraft will enable the United States aircraft industry to retain its technical leadership. One estimate is that the United States would lose a total

of \$16 billion by 1990 if other people's supersonic transports turn out to be successful but if the United States has not by then followed suit.

Annual Medallists

THE National Academy of Sciences at its 107th Annual Meeting this week has made the following awards: Dr KLAUS KEIL has been given the George P. Merrill Award for his work on meteorites—he is at present professor of geology and director of the Institute of Meteorites at the University of New Mexico. Dr EDWARD P. HENDERSON has been awarded the J. Lawrence Smith Medal for his lifetime's work for the division of meteorites at the Smithsonian Institution—he retired in 1966. Dr EARL R. STADTMAN receives the academy's Award in Microbiology for his work on enzyme control mechanisms at the National Heart Institute. Dr A. DALE KAISER has been awarded the US Steel Foundation Award in Molecular Biology for his work at Stanford University on the replication of virus DNA in infected cells. Dr RAYMOND C. MOORE, of the University of Kansas, receives the Mary Clark Thompson Gold Medal for his work in editing the monumental *Treatise on Invertebrate Palaeontology*. Dr THOMAS FRANCIS, professor of epidemiology at the University of Michigan until his death last October, was posthumously awarded the Jesse Stevenson Kovalenko Gold Medal for his involvement with the introduction of vaccines against virus diseases, particularly the Salk polio vaccine in 1954 and the influenza vaccine in the late sixties.

NATIONAL SCIENCE BOARD

Chairman for Science Board

THE National Science Board, the governing body of the National Science Foundation, last week elected as chairman for the next four years Dr H. E. Carter, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Illinois. Dr Carter will succeed Dr Phillip Handler, who became President of the National Academy of Sciences a year ago. Dr Handler remains a member of the National Science Board, but the election will remove the anomaly in which Dr Handler has been chairman of what is essentially a government agency, autonomous though it may like to think itself, and also president of the National Academy of Sciences and potentially a critic of government policy. Although this arrangement seems not to have prevented Dr Handler from speaking out on important issues, especially in the past few months on the reduction of the budget for university research, it has been plain even to his admirers that the arrangement could not continue indefinitely.

The appointment of Dr Carter will be watched for signs of whether he will be able to develop within the National Science Board the apparatus for appraising the development of public policy towards science and technology which has been thrust on the board in the past two years.