



Speech by

Hon. D. HAMILL

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

Hansard 24 August 1999

HERITAGE TRAILS NETWORK

Hon. D. J. HAMILL (Ipswich—ALP) (Treasurer) (11.40 a.m.): Hardly a day goes by when the Leader of the Opposition does not seek to denigrate someone or criticise a project which will benefit the people of Queensland. That is why I was not surprised when he criticised our efforts to support tourism and, through tourism, jobs in regional and rural areas. I refer of course to our Heritage Trails Network. This imaginative program has been incorporated as a part of Queensland's celebrations for our Centenary of Federation. However, unlike those celebrations, which end when the last firecracker has exploded and the bunting comes down, these projects are designed to provide a lasting benefit to the communities of our State.

The Heritage Trails Network is providing financial support to a wide range of community projects designed to maintain sites of cultural and heritage significance in communities from Cooktown in the north to Charleville in the west. It is being supported by an allocation of \$39m over three years from the Queensland Government.

The audacity and hypocrisy of the Leader of the Opposition in seeking to discredit this project is breathtaking, even by his standards. The Heritage Trails Network was actually conceived during the time that Mr Borbidge was Premier. It was the coalition Government that forwarded a submission to the Commonwealth seeking financial support for the four Heritage Trails.

Among the various projects which the Borbidge Government considered approvingly were two in the city of Ipswich. These two projects were Global Arts Link, which was officially opened earlier this year by the Federal Minister, the Honourable Peter McGauran, and my colleague the Minister for The Arts, the Honourable Matt Foley, and the Rail Technology Centre at North Ipswich. It is interesting to note that both of these projects had received express support of the relevant Ministers in Mr Borbidge's Government.

The then Treasurer and Minister for The Arts, Mrs Sheldon, endorsed Global Arts Link and provided subsidy from the Queensland Government. The then Minister for Transport, the honourable member for Gregory, who is sitting in the Chamber now, publicly endorsed the establishment of the Ipswich Rail Technology Centre. In the Queensland Times of 12 November 1997, it was reported—

"Mr Johnson said the project had bipartisan political support and his personal backing, and so would definitely proceed."

I table the article. Mr Johnson tried to progress the project by establishing a community reference group which included representatives of the Transport Department, Queensland Rail and the Ipswich City Council, along with the National Party candidate for Ipswich West, Ms Wykes, and me.

Unfortunately, like a large number of projects which the Borbidge Government promised to deliver under Heritage Trails, the promise was not backed up by cold, hard cash. Nevertheless, the Borbidge Government continued to make positive noises about its support for the Rail Technology Centre. In the Queensland Times on 1 May 1998, while launching Ms Wykes' campaign, the then Premier, Mr Borbidge, indicated that Ipswich should be "cautiously optimistic" that the forthcoming State Budget would include a major cash input for its Rail Technology Centre. He stated—

"Vaughan Johnson is a great champion of the project and I think people can be cautiously optimistic."

Mr Borbidge added that financial support for the project would be a matter for examination in the Budget. I table that article as well. I have never had any doubt whatsoever as to the sincerity of the honourable member for Gregory in his support for this project. However, the actions and words of the Leader of the Opposition clearly demonstrate that he is a man who simply cannot be trusted.

Despite the hint that financial support for the project would be in the coalition's May Budget, not one cent was allocated to the Rail Technology Centre. In fact, the situation was actually worse than it first appeared. Not only was there no provision for the \$15m for the Rail Technology Centre; the Budget papers revealed that \$20m worth of other Heritage Trails projects were similarly unfunded. What an absolute disgrace.

In the May Budget, the coalition provided only \$3m for the Heritage Trails Network. This was despite the fact that, in addition to the Rail Technology Centre, projects totalling over \$70m had been identified as part of the program. It should be noted that the Federal Government pledged \$50m for capital projects in Queensland which may complement the State Government's financial support for the Heritage Trails Network.

Before the last State election, Labor made no secret of our total support for the Heritage Trails Network in general and the Ipswich Rail Technology Centre in particular. In fact, our support for that project was clearly stated in our policy document titled Ipswich Economic Development Strategy.

The Beattie Labor Government delivers on its commitments and in my first Budget I set aside \$39m over three years to make the Heritage Trails Network a reality. This \$39m represents payment in full covering all of the individual projects which were to be funded by the State Government under the Heritage Trails Network as well as the \$15m which the Borbidge Government had identified as being necessary for the Ipswich Rail Technology Centre.

This Government is obsessed by the need to generate employment opportunities and we are determined to ensure that those employment opportunities extend across the length and breadth of Queensland. The Heritage Trails Network comprises four trails: the Coast Trail, extending along the eastern seaboard to Cooktown in the State's far north; the Mining and Dinosaur Trail, extending from Charters Towers through Richmond to the State's north-west; the Matilda Trail, linking Charleville, Blackall, Longreach and Winton; and the Early Settlers Trail, extending west from Ipswich through Toowoomba, the downs and on to the State's south-west.

Funding under the Heritage Trails Network is supporting projects in a wide variety of centres including Rockhampton, Mount Morgan, two projects in Longreach, in the electorate of the member for Gregory, Jondaryan, Glengallan, Winton—also in Gregory—Blackall, which I think might be going into Gregory, and of course Ipswich, to name but a few.

The project funding is being provided to worthwhile projects and not on the basis of the political affiliation of the local member of Parliament. Just for the record—this probably applies as much to the member for Ipswich West as it does to the Leader of the Opposition—I want to make it clear that, contrary to the attempts to smear me and to distort the truth, the Rail Technology Centre is not located in my electorate. Perhaps the Leader of the Opposition should undertake a lesson in basic geography, or perhaps he should get around to learning the history of his adopted State.

Ipswich was and is the birthplace of Queensland Rail. Queensland Rail has been operating on the North Ipswich site for 134 years. The first rail service in Queensland left that site for Bigges Camp, now Grandchester, 134 years ago. Nothing that Mr Borbidge might say or do can alter that irrefutable fact.

The Heritage Trails Network will produce around 2,500 jobs through tourism and associated activity. For those regional and rural communities, many of them small and struggling communities, there will be substantial and lasting benefit.

I am proud to be a part of a Government that has its priorities right. I am proud to be a part of a Government that has made its No. 1 priority jobs and creating the opportunity for more jobs. In our first 12 months we have implemented our election commitments, in particular our jobs strategy, with outstanding results. Unemployment is now the lowest it has been for almost a decade. Jobs growth has been the envy of other States. Economic growth at four and a quarter per cent exceeded even our expectations. Notwithstanding the Asian crisis and poor world commodity prices, our policies have resulted in a massive upswing in business confidence and a massive increase in business investment.

These economic achievements have come hand in hand with the delivery of substantial improvements in social services. In respect of education, policing and that much-needed boost to disability services, this is a Government which delivers strong economic management with compassion.

It is in keeping with this balanced and commonsense approach to Government that we have overhauled National Competition Policy in Queensland. We simply do not accept the proposition that there should be competition for competition's sake. We do not accept that regional and rural Queensland should be devastated in the interests of the boardrooms of Sydney and Melbourne. Yes,

our industries need to be competitive and able to compete in domestic and international markets, but there is a legitimate role for Government to play a constructive part as regulator. But those regulations must deliver benefits in the public interest. That is why we have overhauled the administration of the public benefit test which applies to the National Competition Policy. That is why the Premier and I have been forthright in the defence of Queensland's rural and regional communities against an ideologically hidebound National Competition Council, which seems hell-bent on undermining our State's sugar and dairy industries, as well as threatening the provision of water to rural towns and industries. Ours is a Government that delivers, whether it be major capital investment through the Capital Works Program or the smaller but no less important projects under our Heritage Trails Network.

While I can stand here and say with confidence that the \$39m we have set aside meets our commitments in full, I cannot say the same in respect of the promises that were made by various Federal coalition members of Parliament in the lead-up to the last Federal election. While the administration of the Heritage Trails Network and all matters pertaining to the Centenary of Federation celebrations fall within the responsibilities of the Premier, I am aware of growing community concern that the Federal Government may have overcommitted its \$50m grant in Queensland. Despite repeated requests to the Commonwealth for a definitive list of the projects which will share in its \$50m of funding, no such list has been forthcoming. It is simply not good enough.

There are many community groups that are getting justifiably anxious that, unless the Commonwealth backs up its promises with the actual dollars, many of these projects which were to be a part of our Centenary of Federation celebrations will simply be undeliverable for our centennial year.

The Heritage Trails Network and the range of other activities planned for Queensland through the Centenary of Federation should unite us as a people and not be used by craven politicians to pursue their dishonest and divisive political agendas.