



Speech by

Mr G. HEALY

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

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COBB & CO. MUSEUM

Mr HEALY (Toowoomba North—NPA) (11.57 p.m.): The Cobb & Co. Museum, located in my electorate, opened as a branch of the Queensland Museum in December 1987 to display the nation's most significant collection of horse-drawn vehicles. Since that time, the Cobb & Co. Museum has developed into an important regional tourist attraction; a role model for small museums throughout Australia; an innovative education and training institution; and the national research centre for the history, technology and heritage trades associated with horse-drawn vehicles.

The museum also plays an important role in the coordination of regional tourism, especially cultural tourism. The museum itself attracts over 20,000 visitors per year who are drawn mainly from the local and south-east Queensland markets and, as a branch of the Queensland Museum, it provides a number of services and events for the local community which are free of charge. In fact, about 38% of all users of the museum's services receive those services free of charge.

The museum is in a unique position in that it shares a site with the Toowoomba campus of the Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE. A number of joint venture projects have been undertaken by the two institutions, including training programs in blacksmithing and database accessioning. In addition, plans of some horse-drawn vehicles have been produced using computer-aided drafting.

The museum made a submission for Heritage Trails funding for the development of a fully operational carriage factory and heritage training facility and was subsequently identified for inclusion in the Queensland Heritage Trails Network. However, in April this year, the museum was asked to resubmit a proposal to the value of \$2m, way below the original projected capital works forecast of \$6.5m. This decision now poses several problems. Under the original proposal, there was the need to transfer suitable land between the Cobb & Co. Museum and the Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE to enable the project to proceed, and TAFE has indicated that it is willing to action the transfer of the land immediately funding is secure. In fact, the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations has been briefed by the Director of the Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE regarding this project and the transfer of the land. I understand that the Minister for The Arts has also been briefed on this project by the Queensland Museum.

A second best proposal is not in the best interests of cultural heritage on the Darling Downs. The original \$6.5m proposal for the carriage factory and heritage training facility would provide 4,300 square metres of year-round cultural tourism, training and museum resource facilities for southern inland Queensland and be the major hub for the delivery of services along the Early Settlers Trail. Of course, no announcement of even the \$2m has been forthcoming, yet initiatives have been in place for quite some time for the project to begin.

The carriage factory concept has been developed over a number of years. The Southern Queensland Institute of TAFE carried out an initial study of interest in heritage trade training throughout Australia back in 1992. This was followed by a market assessment and feasibility study conducted by Coopers and Lybrand in 1996. This report established that there was a clear potential to capitalise on international trends towards cultural tourism and, more importantly, the accreditation of training facilities to support and improve standards of heritage tourism projects and the equine industry in the region. In 1997, Project Services undertook a value management process to provide the detailed planning required for this project.

Extensive research has been carried out and there has been extensive investigation of national and international models. It would be impossible to develop the carriage factory training facilities with only \$2m, if that is in fact all the funding that will be received from the Queensland Heritage Trails Network. The best that could be achieved would be a temporary display gallery, a few more interactive displays with the vehicle collection, staff research and work space and a coffee shop. Even if this option is the only one available, there is still the urgent need to address the land issue with TAFE, as land has been identified for this project on the basis of the development of heritage training facilities.

I am calling on the Premier, who received a deputation on this issue recently at a Community Cabinet meeting in Toowoomba, to pursue this matter with his colleague the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations to see if training funding can be sourced to complete the total original project. The training component of this project will be the real innovation.

The proposed original model sees extensive training in conjunction with TAFE and ranges from accredited courses that are not available anywhere else in the world to short leisure courses and hands-on workshops for visitors to the factory. The carriage factory will become a TAFE interpretive tourism training facility on the model of TAFE training restaurants and with further possibilities to produce heritage products for the museum's shop, and in fact right across the region—not unlike the Colonial Williamsburg shop network operating across the USA.

The project's strength is its ability to draw together many critical components for future economic development of the region, including tourism, training and the export of cultural products and services into a single project managed by nationally recognised professionals in the museum, training and cultural tourism fields. It deserves special consideration.
