



Speech by

Mr N. ROBERTS

MEMBER FOR NUDGE

Hansard 10 June 1999

TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (6.49 p.m.): In the midst of the noisy and confused contributions of members opposite, I want to talk about something positive and constructive in terms of the programs implemented by the Labor Government, and particularly by the current Minister, within Queensland Rail.

The Beattie Government has strongly affirmed its commitment to retaining public ownership of Queensland Rail. It has unambiguously rejected recommendations of the former Government's corporatisation review of Queensland Rail which sought to convert Queensland Rail to a proprietary company—

Mr JOHNSON: I rise to a point of order. The former Government never said anything about selling off Queensland Rail. I ask that that be withdrawn.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! It is not a personal reflection.

Mr ROBERTS: Those opposite do not want to hear the good news and the action story of the Labor Government.

Mr JOHNSON: It was offensive and I ask that it be withdrawn.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! You cannot ask that it be withdrawn.

Mr JOHNSON: He made a statement in relation to the former Government's policy with regard to Queensland Rail. I find it offensive and I ask that it be withdrawn.

Mr SPEAKER: Order! It was not a personal reflection.

Mr ROBERTS: I withdraw whatever he finds offensive.

The actions of the coalition Government would have converted Queensland Rail into a propriety company under Corporations Law—a move that could have resulted in one of Queensland's key strategic assets moving away from public control. The Beattie Labor Government has ensured that the corporatisation structure put in place for Queensland Rail by the previous Labor Government in 1995 allows sufficient flexibility for Queensland Rail to operate commercially but remaining within public ownership.

I refer now to some of the initiatives that the Labor Government has undertaken with respect to fixed-term employment. Under this Government, Queensland Rail has appointed more than 700 fixed-term employees to permanent positions. This year, Queensland Rail and the unions reached a without prejudice agreement on a set of principles which cover fixed-term employment. Some of the major elements of that agreement include a commitment to continue to monitor and limit the use of fixed-term employment, often known as temporary positions. Those fixed-term positions that can be projected as permanent will be converted accordingly. The maximum period of fixed-term positions will be two years. Where a fixed-term role is expected to be more than two years or the actual fixed-term employment has been more than two years, then the employee would be converted to a permanent employee, with the employment conditions subject to the termination, change and redundancy provisions. Such employees who are subsequently appointed to another permanent role will then no longer attract those provisions.

I want to talk about some other positive and constructive initiatives with respect to Queensland Rail contracts. Queensland Rail contracts are the vehicle by which both the infrastructure and the jobs

are created. A series of major contracts in various centres throughout the State are providing literally thousands of extra jobs for Queenslanders. I want to give just a few examples. Under this Government, the Redbank workshops have been awarded a \$40m contract to produce 400 new container wagons and an upgrade of a further 319 Queensland Rail freight cars. The contract will create a significant number of jobs in the local Ipswich region, providing security for 30 existing jobs and creating opportunities for extra employment within that region. As well as providing job opportunities, work and investment will flow from the contract to the surrounding communities. Already, millions of dollars in flow-on work goes to local companies in the Ipswich area, and getting this extra work will be a real bonus for the Ipswich community. Indeed, the \$40m contract will mean that the Redbank workshop is now the largest wagon manufacturing establishment within the country.

The railway workshop in Rockhampton has been guaranteed the full upgrade contract of more than 3,000 coal wagons. Queensland Rail is modernising more than 3,000 wagons with the Kwik-drop door system, allowing for faster coal train turnaround and greater efficiency, reduced maintenance, increased wagon payloads and an improved reliability of door operation. So far, about 1,100 wagons have had the new drop-door system fitted. Currently, the work is being carried out at the rate of about 80 wagons a month. The total cost of upgrading the 3,000 wagons is more than \$33m.

Another point I wish to make relates to the significant efforts that Queensland Rail is making to boost apprenticeships and trainee intakes. In accordance with the Government's Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiatives, Queensland Rail is committed to appoint 150 apprentices in 1999, almost trebling the average number of apprentices put on during the previous five years. Queensland Rail is also committed to appoint 100 new trainees in 1999 and will do so before 30 June. The House should note that many major rail infrastructure projects initiated by the Goss Government have been brought to fruition and launched successfully by the Beattie Government under the current Minister.

Time expired.
