



Speech by

Mr ROB MITCHELL

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

Hansard 27 October 1999

**APPROPRIATION BILL
Estimates Committee C
Report**

Mr MITCHELL (Charters Towers—NPA) (4.20 p.m.): I rise to speak to the report of Estimates Committee C and in particular to the portfolio of Transport and Main Roads. I was not a member of this committee, but I have read the transcript of proceedings. As a member representing an electorate that is reliant on the Transport and Main Roads portfolio, I was interested in the evidence given before the committee.

My main concern is the apparent reduction in road funding in rural and remote areas of Queensland. I have also noted the Minister's insistence that this is not the case and that all is sweetness and light. However, I can advise the Minister that this is not the opinion of the local authorities, who even now do not know exactly what money they are receiving. There are real fears of job losses amongst the labour force and concerns about their ability to maintain the roads adequately. The Minister has complained that the Opposition has misunderstood the Budget documents in relation to our claims of reduced funding, because the recurrent expenditure was shown in a separate document. There would have to be a large amount of recurrent expenditure, as no roadworks were progressed to any great extent last year. I suggest that this is no-one's fault other than the Government's. If it wanted to be sure that the appropriate comparisons were made, it would have published the appropriate comparisons in the first place.

I note that, despite his protests about this alleged misrepresentation, the Minister has failed to provide the accurate comparisons electorate by electorate. It may just be the sceptic in me, but I am sure that, if it was good news, these figures would have been included in the many press releases that the Minister has been forced to put out on behalf of Labor backbenchers in an attempt to reassure them. As I also mentioned in my speech in the Budget debate, it is very difficult to read the Budget papers and ascertain where the funding for roads will be spent in the electorate. The shires are finding it difficult, as they have not been notified of exactly what funding will be provided for the electorate of Charters Towers.

My other main concern relates to the reliance of rural and remote Queensland upon Queensland Rail. The rail workers in Charters Towers were devastated—or should I say "fascinated"—by the Minister's admission regarding the blow-out of the tilt train budget and the salary of the chief executive, given that their jobs are being terminated. Prior to the last election, the member for Gregory and I travelled right along that northern area and warned rail workers that the Beattie Government would take over from where the Goss Government was halted in its gutting of Queensland Rail in the bush. In the past couple of days, I have been told by the union that 24 positions in Charters Towers will go. That is devastating for a town of even its size. Some of the other towns will lose more.

Even the Labor candidate for Mirani—the poor old grasshopper—has learnt the truth about the rail agenda and has blown the whistle on the Beattie Government's assassination. I share the concerns of the shadow Minister about the lack of road infrastructure projects under this Government. A failure to keep our roads up to pace will result in increasing inefficiency for Queensland's products and will jeopardise the jobs of families in rural and remote Queensland, which has relied upon appropriate infrastructure for equity and access. The Government may think that it can get away with the thimble

and pea trick this year, but I warn it that taking the electors for fools will backfire on it. I put the Minister on notice that the communities around the State are watching closely and will be interested to see whether the Government delivers. For safety reasons, it is imperative that roadworks are totally funded on a yearly basis and, in some areas, fast-tracked so that many of the sections on our highways are completed. I look forward to many of the sections in the Charters Towers electorate being completed, that is, as soon as I can find out where the money will be spent.
