



Speech by

Hon. STEVE BREDHAUER

MEMBER FOR COOK

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Rockhampton-Townsville Line Upgrade; Brisbane Airport Rail Link Project

Hon. S. D. BREDHAUER (Cook—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Minister for Main Roads) (9.51 a.m.), by leave: This Government is getting on with the job of creating jobs. Yesterday I gave an update on the Brisbane Light Rail Project, and today I want to inform the House about two extremely significant heavy rail infrastructure programs that will result in over 1,500 jobs for Queensland. The first project is the \$240m track upgrade between Rockhampton and Townsville, which is the largest rail investment being made in rail anywhere in Australia. I can tell honourable members that after the Commonwealth Government allocated \$250m to the entire national railway network over three years and we announced our \$240m track upgrade of the line between Mackay and Townsville, we were the envy of every other State in Australia and of the Commonwealth because of our rail investment program. The second project I refer to is the Brisbane Airport Rail Link.

The \$240m track upgrade between Rockhampton and Townsville will create more than 1,200 regional jobs in the construction, manufacturing and related industries, including 750 track laying jobs. This will have significant flow-on economic benefits to the rest of the State. There will also be another 500 jobs created in supplying materials for the project throughout Townsville, Mackay and Rockhampton.

The current track conditions have limited some train speeds to 80 km/h and maintenance costs are expected to increase substantially over the coming five to 10 years due to increases in traffic on the line. As part of the work, over one million timber and steel sleepers will be replaced with modern prestressed concrete sleepers. Queensland Rail will also be replacing the existing 41 kg/m rail and turnouts with high load capacity 60 kg/m rail and concrete turnouts. Also the safety of tramway crossings will be improved to enable higher speed train operations. Once completed, the upgrade to concrete sleepers will enable freight trains to operate consistently at a maximum speed of 100 km/h. These upgrades will also result in a high strength, buckle-proof rail line allowing Queensland Rail to increase wagon loads and remove up to 75% of speed reduction areas on the line by the end of the works in 2002.

Overall, I am pleased to say these benefits will result in Queensland Rail being able to offer more reliable and high level service to customers, making rail freight far more competitive with road freight. It is anticipated that, over the next four to five years, rail freight between Brisbane and Townsville can capture an additional 30% of the market. Queensland Rail will be in a much stronger position to gain this additional traffic. The improved rail efficiency and performance will in the end deliver economic benefits to the State.

Airtrain was granted an exclusive mandate in 1996 to develop a build/own operate/transfer proposal for the Brisbane Airport Rail Link, subject to strict conditions, including: no net cost to Government; no contingent liability; and the BARL system to be transferred to Government in an operational condition and at no cost to Government at the end of a 35-year concession period.

Mr Borbidge interjected.

Mr BREDHAUER: In answer to the Leader of the Opposition, we delivered the project. The can-do Beattie Government delivered the project.

All necessary agreements between numerous relevant parties were in place and financial close reached by 8 February 1999, thus commencing a 27-month design and construction phase. When the Opposition was out there trying, we delivered.

The benefits to the State as a result of the BARL are expected to be considerable and include: the \$200m project will generate the equivalent of over 300 full-time jobs in design, construction and provision of rolling stock for the project; the project is seen as a boost to public transport in south-east Queensland; and the project is an example of this Government's support of and encouragement for private sector investment in public infrastructure. It is expected that passengers will be travelling to and from the airport by rail by mid year 2001, with fares expected to be \$7 per single trip between the city and the airport.

Key features of the BARL proposal are: the BARL spur line will leave the main Citytrain network near Toombul rail station, and extend for approximately 8.5 km to the airport; there will be stations at both the domestic and international airport terminals; the service will be integrated into the Citytrain network to achieve a seamless transfer of passengers; and the service will operate at 15-minute intervals with direct links to the city and direct links every 30 minutes to the Gold Coast. Queensland Rail will have an involvement in the project through commercial arrangements mainly related to the provision of services to Airtrain.

I record my appreciation to all who have been involved, and I look forward to seeing the project take shape and become a successful addition to our State's infrastructure and public transport service. The \$200m BARL and the \$240m upgrade of the rail line between Rockhampton and Townsville will continue the momentum that the Government has created in Queensland by delivering jobs, increasing rail efficiency and delivering economic benefits to the whole of the State of Queensland.
