



Speech by

Mr ROB MITCHELL

MEMBER FOR CHARTERS TOWERS

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APPROPRIATION BILL, ESTIMATES COMMITTEE C

Mr MITCHELL (Charters Towers—NPA) (3.58 p.m.): The evidence presented to Estimates Committee C concerning the Transport and Main Roads portfolio supports the concerns raised by the shadow Minister, the member for Gregory. As a representative of an electorate that has somewhere in the vicinity of 3,500 kilometres of State controlled roads, of particular concern to me is the failure of the Beattie Government to address the road infrastructure needs of that part of Queensland.

The only major infrastructure projects under construction in this State are those that were commenced by either the Goss Government some five or six years ago or the Borbidge Government some two years ago. The Beattie Government has failed again to match the Budget commitments of the Borbidge Government. This is despite the increase in Federal road funding. When we analyse the budget we see that much of the road funding this year comes from carryovers of road projects that are either behind schedule or delayed.

The Minister has admitted budget blow-outs in relation to the South East Transit Project—he and the shadow Minister just had a good discussion on this subject—and has confirmed that there have been significant budget blow-outs in relation to the Pacific Motorway. The Minister was unable to quantify the extent of the blow-out but has confirmed that provision is being made for another \$300m to settle the contract claims that are presently being negotiated. I hope what he just said is true. That is, if this makes a better project, then it is well and good, but it is a lot of money.

The scrapping of the Brisbane light rail project has left a sour taste in the mouths of the major engineering firms both here in Australia and also overseas. Despite his original denials, the Minister has also had to admit that the fundamental connection between the Normanby and the Queen Street bus tunnel has also been consigned to the Bredhauer scrap heap, along with Briztram and all the other Labor relics.

Rail workers throughout Queensland are in revolt. They know that the Beattie Government—

Mr Schwarten: I thought you were going to say something nice about me.

Mr MITCHELL: The Minister should just wait for it; I will. They know that the Beattie Government is hiding the real cost of the tilt train to Cairns and, at the same time, is flushing thousands of rail jobs down the drain. The Minister is quick to say that these are voluntary redundancies. But the real question is: will those workers be replaced? Of course, the answer is: no. This is always the case once these issues are mentioned.

This morning the Premier came into this House and tried to accuse the coalition of attacking Queensland Rail on the basis of some letter that has come from the Commonwealth. The same logic means that Mr Beattie automatically supports Mr Beazley's policies without question. Fancy him accusing the Queensland National Party of blindly following the policy contained in a letter coming from a Liberal in Canberra when the Premier supports "Bumblin'" Beazley's policies all the way. I can only assume, like one of the writers in the letters to the editor in the Australian newspaper this morning, that the Premier has been sniffing the petrol issue a little too closely.

As I mentioned in my speech during the debate on the Budget, I was pleased to see finally the allocation of funding of \$4.3m to the Gregory Development Road south of Charters Towers. I wish to

reiterate the need to fast-track other work programs on this highway because of the huge increase in traffic, including heavy vehicles, tourism traffic and mining traffic.

Mr Johnson: It's very dangerous.

Mr MITCHELL: I take that interjection. That is the main reason I keep pushing this issue, and I have done so now for about the past five years. We need to fast-track this program as quickly as we possibly can to save lives on that highway. We are already two years behind since the original RIP back in the coalition Government's time.

Work has also commenced on the sealing of a 31-kilometre section between Devils Marbles and Ella Creek on the Herveys Range Road, which will benefit a great part of north and north-west Queensland in terms of bringing produce to the markets or the meatworks in Townsville. The other projects are the Flinders Highway, which is constantly being funded. We have a few more years to go, but I want to once again advocate the fast-tracking of a lot of these projects because they are behind due to rollover funding for the past two years.

I also take this opportunity, as the member for Gregory has done already, to thank the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing for his support in putting public housing into my electorate. It has happened in a good few areas. I am starting to hear of a few more every week. Even though I am not getting the chance to put it into the paper, I am very grateful that it is occurring. We have units going in for the older people of Charters Towers as well as another couple of units there. There are also a lot of upgrades in airconditioning across my electorate, for which we are very, very grateful. I was listening to the member for Burdekin a short time ago. As he outlined, these needs have existed for a long time. I am pleased that we are starting to catch them up and actually give these people a bit of quality of life.

Recently the member for Gregory and I took a quick visit to Aramac. I know that the shadow Minister has written to the Minister concerning the housing situation in Aramac, where the construction of in the vicinity of eight homes is under consideration. That will really benefit that little town because the need is there. I bring that to the Minister's notice once again. I know that the member for Gregory has already done so. Once again, I thank the Minister very much for his support in that area.
