



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS

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APPROPRIATION BILL [No. 2]; APPROPRIATION [PARLIAMENT] BILL [No. 2]

Mr NELSON (Tablelands—IND) (5.46 p.m.): It is time that the Main Roads and Transport Minister, Steve Bredhauer, faced reality and accepted that the integrated transport study for the Kuranda Range is busy trying to answer the wrong question.

The study is looking for the best road to service future urban growth nodes to be developed at Myola, Speewah and Koah. In other words, the question is: what road should be built to best urbanise Kuranda and its hinterland. Urbanisation will be the inevitable result of building a major road to Kuranda.

The study is following the directive of the FNQ 2010 regional planning process. It is as if the planning process was hijacked by an anti-East Trinity development lobby who vetoed placing the overflow population growth from Cairns on the other side of Trinity Inlet. The planners did not want to place that population growth on viable cane land north and south of the city, either. That would risk closing down the last sugar mill and putting several hundred people out of work.

Looking further out, the planners found Kuranda up in the hills only a half hour's drive from the city centre. They felt the rural areas around Kuranda could be the solution. There would be no need to disturb the acid sulfate at East Trinity and no need to wipe out the remnants of the once proud sugar cane industry. The planners believed that the overflow population from Cairns might live 400 metres above sea level in new suburbs around Kuranda.

But what about Kuranda's tourism industry? Kuranda is one corner of the region's so-called tourist triangle. Its attractions rate amongst the best in the country. It is a very valuable industry and is sustainable in the long term. Why compromise that sustainability by dramatically altering the nature of the area? The populations of the future Kuranda urban growth nodes would have to commute to Cairns to work, hence the need for the road. There would be very few employment opportunities in the nodes themselves. Under this plan up to 70,000 people could be commuting down the mountain to Cairns. The environmental impact of all that traffic would be enormous. It seems that, of the three options for accommodating the overflow growth from Cairns, the Kuranda option would be the most damaging, the most expensive and the most inconvenient when viewed from every conceivable perspective.

The FNQ regional plan clearly needs to be refocused away from impractical concepts aimed at appeasing minority interests. It needs to take a big picture view of what is working for the people of this region now and plan ways to make that continue to happen. One thing that is not working as well as it should is road access between the major population centres of the region, specifically Cairns and the tablelands. The most acceptable, and therefore busiest, of the available roads between Cairns and the tablelands is the Kennedy Highway, part of which is the Kuranda Range road. It is quite steep in places with very tight corners; it is so steep and tight that B-double trucks cannot use it. It is often closed in adverse weather and is the scene of too many traffic accidents. It is usually congested and has few passing opportunities.

The study has reported that the Kuranda Range road is rapidly reaching its capacity. On present growth patterns, it will reach saturation point in the next few years, and will be overloaded from that time on. Less than half the traffic on the Kuranda Range road is actually going to or from the Kuranda area. The majority of it is going through Kuranda because that is where the road takes it. It is actually

travelling between the Cairns area and the tablelands, the cape and the gulf areas. All that through traffic is forced to take a 17 kilometre detour to the north through Kuranda and Smithfield, twice crossing the Barron River, as it travels from Mareeba to Cairns. The main reason for that is past planning decisions, which is why present day planning decisions need to be made intelligently and realistically.

Mareeba is ideally placed to accommodate industrial and urban growth. It is perfectly suited to a new regional airport development. It is an existing, established, productive community with enormous potential to do a better job of providing for the Cairns overflow growth than Kuranda could. All it needs is a new direct highway link. Such a link could readily be developed in the form of the Lake Morris-Davies Creek road. It is a 45 year old route, originally built to service the logging industry, which now serves as a powerline corridor. It is as close as possible to a straight line between Cairns and Mareeba. It would provide far greater benefits to the region and its residents than a Kuranda Range road upgrade for about the same money. It is the only degraded corridor through the wet tropics World Heritage listed area.

The public consultation phase for the integrated transport study for the Kuranda Range resulted in massive public support for the Lake Morris-Davies Creek road. Of the 3,629 persons who signed their name to a point of view regarding the integrated transport study, 99.23% want the Lake Morris-Davies Creek road built. The residents of the outlying areas of the Cairns region require and deserve a new highway link that directly connects their two biggest population centres. This road must be environmentally sensitive, reliable under tropical weather conditions, suitable for heavy freight, user friendly and not destructive to the existing sustainable industries.

It is time the correct question was asked: "What road development would best link Cairns and the tablelands?" The answer to that is the Lake Morris-Davies Creek road. A total of 3,601 local individuals recently told the Queensland Government that. The number included over 10% of the electorate of Tablelands. It would be a sad day for democracy in this State if all those people were to be ignored by the Government they elected.

It is time the Minister did what has to be done: leave the Kuranda Range road as it is for the Kuranda people and their tourism industry and build a highway to serve the region on the logical, central alignment that benefits the most people—the Lake Morris-Davies Creek road.
