



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR TABLELANDS

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APPROPRIATION BILLS—ESTIMATES COMMITTEE C

Ms LEE LONG (Tablelands—ONP) (5.53 p.m.): I rise to participate in debate on the report of Estimates Committee C. I note that over 40 per cent of the Transport and Main Roads budget is earmarked to be spent in the south-east corner of this vast and decentralised state. Although the wealth of this state comes largely from the rural and regional areas of Queensland, people in rural areas feel that we are always the last to receive the benefits of that wealth. I note that the minister acknowledges that Queensland has the worst National Highway system of any state in Australia. Naturally, that is more noticeable to people in rural areas than to the population in the south-east corner. Of the \$2.1 billion Main Roads budget sustaining 17,500 jobs, it is interesting to note that about 30 per cent of the funding comes from the Commonwealth government.

In answer to questions during the hearing, the Transport Minister commented on several occasions that it was always a challenge to keep adequate work up to railway workshops, especially in Townsville, yet we have severe shortages of rolling stock and associated infrastructure throughout rural Queensland, especially north of Townsville, particularly in respect of the servicing of saleyard requirements. The minister was certainly caught napping on this one. Towns such as Springsure, Charters Towers, Nebo, Sarina, Miowera, Mareeba and Longreach have all experienced problems with a lack of Q-Rail services—problems not experienced before. In far-north Queensland, the non-availability of reliable rail services has seriously impeded our beef and pork industries. Adverse outcomes from this acute shortage is the use of alternative road transport which in turn increases the amount of heavy vehicular traffic and places added strains on country road systems, which are not built to cope with these heavy load vehicles. This results in the roads breaking up and subsequent increased maintenance costs to government and much higher risks of accidents.

I also want to comment on other issues raised which affect my electorate. The Transport Minister stated that a lot of money was spent on roads around the Tablelands as part of the sugar roads package. We are thankful for the recent upgrade on the Atherton-Herberton Road and the current work on the Gentle Annie back road between Millaa Millaa and Ravenshoe. Neither of these roads are on sugar routes. Apart from them, we have had piecemeal repairs and maintenance on other roads, including the main sugar routes to the South Johnstone sugar mill. Some people call it a bandaid job or a Claytons job—jobs when you have not done a job.

A common complaint heard in our part of the state is that road foundations are inadequate to cope with the heavy vehicular traffic now traversing the roads or for our very wet tropical conditions. Those are the main reasons the roads break up so quickly after construction. Many have seen roads breaking up almost as soon as the bitumen has dried. However, to conclude on a positive note, we are happy to have our antiquated bridge at Yungaburra upgraded and a commitment in the budget to replace the frequently flooded one-lane bridge at South Johnstone. We are appreciative of that.
