



Speech by

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AUSTRALIAN INLAND RAIL EXPRESSWAY

Mr COPELAND (Cunningham—NPA) (1.36 a.m.): On Monday I had the great pleasure of attending the inauguration of the Australian Inland Rail Expressway, Melbourne to Goondiwindi line, on the banks of the McIntyre River at Goondiwindi. To mark this momentous occasion, the Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson, planted a river gum and unveiled a commemorative plaque, while the Chairman of the Australian Transport and Energy Corridor, Everal Compton, drove a rail spike into a granite boulder to signify the commencement of the project.

This occasion, attended by dignitaries from across Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria, was a further step towards the creation of an inland rail corridor that will ultimately travel from Melbourne to Darwin. Such infrastructure will herald a new and reinvigorated era for regional and rural Australia. So profound is the expected impact of the corridor, it has been touted as the steel Mississippi—a comparison to the mighty Mississippi River which is the lifeblood of many towns and cities from the north to the south of America. The inland corridor has the potential to provide cheaper and faster freight haulage than road transport and will run with equal efficiency. In turn, this will take pressure off our inland highways such as the Newell and the New England, making them less congested and, therefore, safer.

However, the greatest benefit of the corridor for Queensland especially is the growth and prosperity that it will inject into our regional and rural communities. An initiative called Invest Inland has been established in conjunction with the inland rail to conduct a high profile campaign to influence and organise the establishment of industry in the inland. It is envisaged that with its efficient and cost-effective freight cartage offering ready access to ports for export, the rail corridor will encourage industry to expand and develop into inland Australia.

This vision is very exciting for rural Queensland and will be a massive boost for many townships, including Millmerran, Pittsworth and Toowoomba in my electorate. Our regional and rural areas desperately need development, and this initiative provides the ideal incentive for existing industries to expand, new industries to be created and industries in the cities to relocate.

There are many people who deserve credit for having the vision to open up this rail corridor and the political and business acumen to turn it into reality. Enormous recognition can be credited to Everal Compton and his consortium partners who have fiercely driven this project from the beginning. I thank the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services, John Anderson, for his constant cooperation and support of the project, including financial support. Finally, credit must also go to former Toowoomba mayor Ross Miller who conveyed the pioneering vision of the inland rail to Everal Compton and his wife, Helen, over breakfast in Toowoomba in 1996. I look forward to witnessing the continued progress of the inland rail expressway and the associated growth and prosperity that it will breathe into rural and regional Queensland.
