



Speech by

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KURANDA HERITAGE TRAIN

Dr LESLEY CLARK (Barron River—ALP) (11.58 p.m.): The Kuranda heritage train, which every year takes more than half a million tourists between Cairns and Kuranda, is no doubt well known to members of this House. After leaving Cairns station, the train travels through the residential suburb of Cairns North, past the Pioneer cemetery, houses, motels and the Cairns North school. It then passes adjacent to the communities of Aeroglen, Stratford and Freshwater travelling between the Kamerunga Road and the canefields and the Barron River.

It is along the stretch of line at Stratford that there are two community beautification projects. The most recent of these is 10 colourful garden beds planted by John and Yvonne Carrick with support from Queensland Rail and Cairns City Council. I commend them for their commitment to that beautification program. The train then goes on, stopping at the heritage-style Freshwater Station before it crosses Freshwater Creek and heads to Redlynch, where it passes the old Red Beret Hotel. It then goes over the rainforest Kuranda range through the Barron Gorge National Park on its way to the lovely Kuranda Station beside the Barron River with its famous landscaping and hanging baskets of ferns.

I have painted this picture to remind members who have travelled on this line of its wonderful scenic values and just how unique it is. But like railways anywhere in Queensland, it too has potential dangers for the careless, the unlucky or the unwary. As well as the heritage train on this line, it is used by freight trains and the Savannahlander train which goes to Einasleigh, and accidents are always a possibility.

A Queensland Transport project to address public liability issues surrounding all railway lines has been initiated to protect Queensland Rail from being sued for failing in their duty of care to protect the public from harm. The proposed means of addressing Queensland Rail's public liability problem is the construction of a 1.8 metre high chain mesh fence along the entire length of the railway line up the Queensland coast, including the scenic Cairns to Kuranda railway line.

While this strategy may be the most appropriate for achieving Queensland Rail's goal along the majority of the line, it is not, in my view or in the view of the communities that I represent, at all appropriate for Queensland's most scenic railway journey. I met with Queensland Rail and Queensland Transport personnel to explore alternative options that would be more acceptable to the community while meeting the needs of Queensland Rail to address their public liability exposure.

I am pleased to report that agreement has been reached to undertake a new, independent risk assessment to explore alternative strategies to the construction of a 1.8 metre fence to meet Queensland Rail's needs to protect the public. I understand that public education, slower train speeds and signage are just some of the alternatives strategies to be explored. I have the support of the Minister for Transport for this approach in an attempt to retain the scenic character of the Cairns-Kuranda railway experience while addressing the public liability issues. We are seeking, and hope to find, a win-win solution for both Queensland Rail and the community.