



Speech by

Hon. Paul Lucas

MEMBER FOR LYTTON

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Tilt Train Derailment

Hon. PT LUCAS (Lytton—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (11.10 am): The *City of Townsville* tilt train derailed at 11.55 pm on 15 November 2004 at Berajondo, 50 kilometres north of Bundaberg. The train was travelling from Brisbane to Cairns. There were 157 passengers and crew on board and, thankfully, there were no fatalities. Today I am tabling a report into that derailment.

The government makes no apologies for inviting the Commonwealth government agency, the Australian Transport Safety Bureau, to not only jointly conduct the investigation with Queensland Transport but also chair the proceedings. The investigation was not a finger-pointing exercise. Its purpose was to determine the cause of the derailment and to make safety recommendations.

The investigation report revealed that the principal cause of the derailment was excessive speed, with a number of other factors contributing. Eleven recommendations have been made to Queensland Rail. Already a number of safety enhancements have been made to the tilt train service, and these efforts are acknowledged in the report. Queensland Rail lowered the speed limit to 100 kilometres an hour. Both drivers also now remain in the drivers' cab when the train is on specified curves and verbally confirm the designated speed for that section of track.

In addition, automatic train protection has been fully installed and tested on the Rockhampton tilt train, which is the first part of a staged roll-out of this technology. ATP is a system that applies the brakes if the train is travelling too fast or is at risk of passing a red signal. The report recognises that QR was already working on the introduction of ATP on its tilt train services when the accident occurred.

The introduction of ATP on high-speed sections of the line between Brisbane and Cairns will address a number of the report's recommendations. Its introduction is already well under way. ATP has now been fully installed and fully tested on the Bundaberg and Rockhampton electric tilt trains and has been operational on those tilt train passenger services since 8 July 2005. Roll-out and testing of ATP on the Cairns tilt train is planned for progressive completion from early 2006.

The Director-General of Queensland Transport has advised me that, as rail safety regulator for Queensland, he does not propose to approve the return of the trains to full speed until ATP has been fully implemented on each tilt train. Higher speed running on the Rockhampton electric tilt train is planned for April 2006. Higher speed running on the Cairns tilt train is planned for late 2006.

Encouragingly, the report reinforced the mechanical and structural reliability of the train. Mechanical faults were not a contributing factor. The report also found the track was safe. There was no design deficiency or defect that directly contributed. A mechanical examination of the wheel profiles, suspension, bogies, tilt mechanism and braking systems found no items that would have had any direct or indirect causal effect. An independent assessment of the structure of the train found it performed very well, particularly the passenger compartments. It found that both drivers were medically and psychologically fit. Alcohol and drugs were not a factor.

Mr Speaker, you would be aware that I travelled to this sitting of parliament in Rockhampton on the tilt train and, as always, I was impressed by the very high standard of the train and, more importantly, the competency, ability and courtesy of its staff, including drivers and passenger service staff.

Rail safety in Queensland has an enviable reputation across the country. Queensland has the second-best rail safety record in Australia—second to Tasmania, which carries passengers on only a few tourist services. This report will give passengers confidence to continue to safely travel on our rail system. It is impossible to guarantee that we will never have accidents on our rail system, but even before the report our rail safety record has been enviable.

Figures from the ATSB itself show that Queensland had 0.053 rail fatalities per 100,000 head of population. That is a quarter of the rate per head of population for both New South Wales and Victoria. The last passenger fatality on any Queensland train was in 1993. However, there have been no passenger fatalities in Queensland as a result of a train collision since 1985, and that was at Trinder Park.

Tilt trains continue to be a popular way of getting around Queensland. They carried almost 200,000 passengers between January and August this year. Queensland Transport will continue to work with Queensland Rail to ensure the report's recommendations are acted on. The Director-General of Queensland Transport has also advised me that he will ask QR to provide an interim response to the report and its recommendations within three months. I propose to table that response once it has been provided to Queensland Transport.

I want to stress that Queensland Rail is already working on a number of safety issues identified in the report and has made significant progress, which has been acknowledged in the report. I want to thank the emergency crews, Queensland Health—and I want to make particular mention of Bundaberg Hospital staff and Gladstone Hospital staff; everyone wants to have a go, but I thank all of those staff for the work that they performed—QR staff, the passengers and the local community for their brave efforts. I especially want to thank passengers for taking the time to fill out questionnaires prepared for the investigation. Seventy-five per cent of them did so, and their information was vital to investigators. That is an excellent response.

We will learn from this. Our challenge now is to make sure that we build on Queensland's outstanding rail safety record, and that is what we will do.