



Speech by
Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

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CAIRNS, BRUCE HIGHWAY UPGRADE AND TRANSIT NETWORK

Mr PITT (Mulgrave—ALP) (11.45 am): Three weeks ago the Rudd and Bligh governments released options for community consultation on addressing the future road and public transport needs of the fast-growing Cairns region. All traffic approaching Cairns from the south does so via the Bruce Highway, but this existing transport corridor is experiencing increased traffic volumes due to population growth.

We have put forward three draft options for the future upgrade of this southern approach, as well as the draft plans for the Cairns transit network—which identifies and protects dedicated public transport corridors that will connect the length and breadth of Cairns, from Palm Cove to Gordonvale and the communities in between. Each option includes provision for buses, motor vehicles, the rail corridor and pedestrian and cycle access. Overpasses and interchanges will replace traffic lights to improve traffic flow and safety for motorists and will free up cross-highway activity, which is the major cause of the current congestion.

Each option sees the road becoming a dedicated motorway to take an extra 50,000 motorists a day into the Cairns city centre in the future. These works are critical to the future economic development and growing transport needs of the region, and the draft options also provide a degree of certainty to landholders and developers about which corridors are no longer on the table. The community consultation process and planning and design of the preferred option will be wrapped up by mid next year. Construction is anticipated to commence in late 2010 on the \$150 million first stage. This is expected to create more than 420 direct and indirect jobs and is due for completion by 2014.

This is not just about meeting current demand; it is also about planning for the future, ensuring that we have an integrated approach. We in the Far North have been the victims of poor planning in the past. Some of the major choke points on the southern approach to Cairns are evidence of this. The population in our region will continue to grow by up to 52 per cent by 2026. This is why a master plan is also being developed by the government for future projects between Wrights Creek, south of Edmonton, and Draper Street in Cairns. Although there is no fixed time line for the rollout of additional projects, the master plan establishes the multimodal corridor needs of the region for the next 30 years. It will be up to me and other elected members to continue to press for more funds for the unfunded components of the master plan.

An upgrade of this scale necessitates the acquisition of some land or properties, and the government is working to minimise impacts on private and commercial properties as much as possible. It is important for people to remember that a preferred option for this master plan has not yet been identified and that these are draft plans only. While some properties will need to be acquired, the majority of these will take place in the medium to long term. Resumptions are serious business. We are dealing with people's lives and their homes and we understand that this puts pressure on families and relationships. I will be working hard on behalf of anyone whose property is affected to ensure that the process happens as quickly as possible and that people are treated compassionately and compensated fairly and with the minimum amount of stress and anxiety.

I was pleased to make the announcement about the Bruce Highway upgrade and transit network projects in Cairns along with the federal member for Leichhardt, Jim Turnour. This is the hallmark of the Rudd and Bligh governments—we work together to plan and deliver for the people of Queensland, unlike

those opposite who have no plans, no policies and no ideas. The LNP continues to defy logic and vehemently opposes what is one of the best examples of road and transport planning in the state. In our last round of consultation late last year, the people of Cairns and the Far North told us what they wanted for their southern access corridor and we have listened carefully to those comments. What the LNP fails to see or does not want to see is that the master plan is the result of community consultation—it is actually what people have asked for.

Although I may have been a little hasty to say that those opposed to the road have no ideas of their own, there have been some thoughts put forward for public consumption. Content to oppose the proposed project on the basis that it came from Labor at two levels of government, former National and so-called Independent Bob Katter proposes an alternative ring-road that will do nothing to assist with traffic congestion—one of the main drivers for the road upgrade and future transit network—and will chew up some of our best remaining farming land.

Recycled Liberal and recently announced LNP candidate for Leichardt, Warren Entsch, continues to proclaim that a second corridor option into Cairns via East Trinity is needed. This proposal will be astronomically expensive for Queensland taxpayers and is doomed to failure. People keeping alive discussion about this option include property owners on the eastern side of Trinity Inlet who would benefit by the subsequent increase in their land values. Self-serving agendas like this have no place in strategic planning for our region.

Can a second corridor be ruled out for all time? Of course not, but this master plan does not include it as an option for at least the next 30 years. These are big plans for the city of Cairns and the Far North generally, so it is important for people to have their say on each of the options that have been put forward. Newsletters have been sent to local residents, and the first in a series of information sessions was held across the region last weekend and will continue until 3 December. This is an exciting and important project for Cairns—one that the Bligh government is determined to deliver in partnership with the Rudd government to safeguard the future of our region. It is another example of Labor getting on with the job.