




Speech By
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ADJOURNMENT

Mount Isa-Townsville Rail Line

 **Mr KATTER** (Mount Isa—KAP) (6.14 pm): I rise to talk about the impact of the Strong Choices plan on the Mount Isa-Townsville rail line, specifically the town of Hughenden. Recently, Aurizon announced about 50 jobs going from that line. About 30 indirect jobs were lost from Hughenden which, for a town of that size, is devastating. During the term of the Goss government about 900 jobs went from that region of the line as well. So over the years that area has just been smashed.

Those rail jobs make up the economic fabric of that region. The area needs the Ergon workers and the rail workers to keep its schools viable and its health clinic viable. If the rug is pulled out from rail workers in that area, those things are gone.

When those jobs went the response from the minister was, 'It's out of my hands. It's privatised.' But people need to understand that the people who worked at the OSD shed at Hughenden that was shut down were asked to provide a business plan. They demonstrated that they were the most efficient workshop in Queensland and that they were needed. Now, the only service for above rail is between Townsville and Cloncurry, which is a distance of 900 kilometres between those two service centres. The service centre at Townsville is now complaining that it is overrun by the amount of work it now has to do. The business plan proved that that service centre was much less efficient than the 12 people who were directly involved in the OSD shed. So it was a poor outcome for Aurizon.

Lance Hockridge was a public servant who ran Queensland Rail when it was owned by the government. At that time he would have been on about a few hundred thousand—maybe even \$500,000. But he is now on \$6.1 million. He is one of the highest paid executives in Australia. Yet he is saying, 'We need to cut costs. So we are going to cut these jobs in Hughenden.' It was a bad idea, because Townsville is now complaining that it cannot keep up with the work.

We do not run any commercial freight along that line anymore. We are choking up the roads with heavy vehicles, because our rail line is not working. We do not have enough fettlers along the line keeping the lines maintained and straight. We do not do that work well now. How is that going to be done better privately? They are not magically going to invest a heap of money into something. They are going to take the existing income off it now and that is it. They do not care one iota about keeping the economic fabric going in those towns. We lose control of that.

This is a huge threat to our region, not just economically but socially. I beg everyone in here to consider this issue. It will be a terrible outcome if you sell any of these assets. If the government's job is to fix the economy and there is a basket of assets and it is asking itself, 'What are the ones that we can use to fix the economy?', I say to not sell the Townsville to Mount Isa rail line. That is not an asset that the government should sell. It will not help the government get out of debt.