



Speech By  
**Robbie Katter**


**MEMBER FOR MOUNT ISA**

---

Record of Proceedings, 16 February 2017

**PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENT**

**Flinders Highway**

 **Mr KATTER** (Mount Isa—KAP) (2.42 pm): In question time today, I asked a question of the Deputy Premier and Minister for Transport and Minister for Infrastructure and Planning about rail and road, which has become an acute problem that is much discussed. There are many studies on the Townsville to Mount Isa route, which takes ore from the North West Minerals Province to the Port of Townsville, creating a lot of wealth for Queensland, as it has done for approximately 100 years. Various mines are now transporting by road bulk freight, ore and concentrates that should be transported by the rail line that was built for that purpose. The rail line provides an intrinsically cheaper mode of transport for the delivery of those things.

All things being equal, with the way charges and policies have developed over the years, mines are being forced to make commercial decisions as it is now cheaper or more attractive to transport things by road. That is an enormous problem for us as a state and for the government, because it owns the rail line and is trying to make money off it, but if people are using the road instead, arguably, the government makes no money at all. In fact, the freight tears up the road. We are facing a situation, and I do not exaggerate, where literally thousands more road trains are travelling on the Flinders Highway, which is putting lives in danger. We are talking about triple road trains. People travelling to Townsville have to try to pass those road trains all the way along the route. I guarantee there will be deaths. If thousands more road trains travel on that road than are using it now, that will create a big problem for everyone. Obviously, safety is the biggest issue. The second issue is that there will be no income from the rail track that runs through the area. Central to much of the problem is the policy that was put in place many years ago where a return of about nine per cent is needed to make owning that rail track viable. Therefore, I imagine that, as other users stop using the rail track, those who are left on the line will have to be charged more to achieve that return, accentuating the initial problem.

Recently Aurizon, the private operator of the rail line, laid off 29 workers in Hughenden and 38 in Mount Isa, after posting an 18 per cent increase in its half-year profit. We know that Lance Hockridge, one of the previous CEOs, was paid over \$6 million a year. There are hundreds of thousands of tons of business waiting there, but they have parked up their carriages and are not talking to anyone, so mines are transporting stuff by road. This is a huge problem for everyone. I do not want to be back here in a year's time reporting that the situation has gotten worse and that people are dying on those roads because too many road trains are ripping up the roads, which cannot carry that sort of capacity. We should not be forced to wear that, when right next door to the road is a perfectly good rail line that is underutilised and could be a bigger source of revenue for the government. I think the issue of the nine per cent return needs to be addressed, because it is far too low a risk for such a good return on that asset. We do not want people losing their lives on that road.