




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR TRAEGER

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ADJOURNMENT

Western Queensland, Rail; Regional Airfares

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (6.25 pm): I rise to talk about two topics, the first of which is the rail in western areas. The other day the member for Gregory mentioned the issues with rail freight in Central Queensland, as Aurizon has not found another company to take up its business, so could be dropping it. We could see that freight go onto the roads. More importantly to my electorate is the rail link between Townsville and Mount Isa. As the member quite rightly said, that line intrinsically links the fortunes of Townsville and the north-west minerals province. The industry settings have to be right and one of the primary foundations of the industry is that rail link. The other day a very pertinent comment was made by one of the main users of that rail link when talking about the eastern access rail corridor to be built to Townsville. They said that in five years time it will be an expensive mountain-bike track and that is all it will be, because there will be no users left on the rail track between Townsville and Mount Isa.

Could the government have a worse scorecard if we cannot fix that? It is an income-generating asset. All we need to do is make some changes to the conditions around the Queensland Competition Authority guidelines, which really are a barrier to proper trading and the functioning of that line. While that was probably done with the best intentions, now we see perverse outcomes even though there are users who really want to get on the line. However, those users have experienced price hikes. One user reported a 70 per cent price increase over three years, which means freight is going onto the roads, which means the roads get ripped up by trucks while a rail line that earns money for taxpayers is not being used as users progressively go off it. Rail is intrinsically cheaper for carting bulk commodities 900 kilometres from the Townsville port to the north-west minerals province. This problem has to be fixed. It has not arisen overnight. For the past two years we have been talking about it and the government cannot turn its back on it.

The second issue I raise, which is yet to see any action, is the price of airfares in regional Queensland. The government cannot afford to say that this issue is nothing to do with it, as it is run by the feds. People really are crying out for help from this government. Many people can ill afford to spend \$800 or \$1,000 on a one-way plane ticket to Brisbane. That is unfair on families that are living and working in regional Queensland, keeping our schools and hospitals going. It is not right that they cannot afford to return home to see their parents, for example. The government has to step in and regulate. It should release the report to government. Those people need looking after too. While they are not there in big numbers, as in the city, they are just as important to our state and they need looking after. I ask the government for help on these issues.