




Speech By
Shane King

MEMBER FOR KURWONGBAH

Record of Proceedings, 14 February 2024

TRANSPORT AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

Report, Motion to Take Note

 **Mr KING** (Kurwongbah—ALP) (2.08 pm): I move—

That the House take note of the Transport and Resources Committee report No. 33, 57th Parliament, *Inquiry into the Peninsula Developmental Road (Laura to Weipa) Project*, tabled on 13 April 2023.

The Transport and Resources Committee inquired into the Peninsula Developmental Road, Laura to Weipa. The Peninsula Developmental Road, or PDR as it is fondly known, has been a vital transport route that travels over 500 kilometres through Cape York to Weipa. However, historically the road has been in a poor state, with only a quarter of its length being sealed prior to 2014-15 and it being flooded and cut for up to four months during each wet season. The impacts of the road being inoperable for such long periods each year have been significant on communities across Cape York. The outcomes from road closures have included isolation, the hindering of economic and social opportunities, the need for residents to stockpile provisions—in particular, food—and a requirement for locals to be airlifted for medical services.

The prior state of the PDR and the effects of poor connectivity across the cape have contributed to the region experiencing significant disadvantage—in particular, the local First Nations peoples. During these road closures, the other option to Weipa residents and the mining operation for transport of consumables, vehicles and materials is by ship. We were told that it has been prohibitively expensive.

When our committee resolved to conduct a public works inquiry into the Peninsula Developmental Road, Laura to Weipa, we drove the PDR. In June 2022 we held hearings with local communities to discuss the works. We received overwhelmingly positive reports on the impacts of the project to date. Some of the positives included a focus on training and utilising local residents and businesses for the required works. The benefits of the works have also included a recent increase in tourist and visitor numbers to the cape following the improvement of accessibility of the PDR.

While this has the potential to further contribute to local economic growth, we heard from local communities about the influx of tourists who fill their vehicles with fuel and food in Cairns and who spend a little in the cape communities but still require the use of facilities. As the councils have a lower rate base, the challenge is now the cost of maintaining and improving these amenities with limited funding. The committee encourages all levels of government to continue working together in order to improve services to the residents of Cape York and visitors to this region.

We saw the early works of the Archer River Bridge. It will be an impressive piece of infrastructure when it is finished. Some of the challenges we heard about in terms of the planning for works in an area such as this are unique. This bridge, for example, is not guaranteed to be dry 100 per cent of the time but will be open for significantly longer periods. If the bridge were raised to a flood-proof level, the cost would make it unviable. While the bridge would be dry, the road for tens of kilometres in either direction leading to it would be well underwater. That is the reason for what they have done.

The committee concluded that the work was suitable for its purpose; the work was necessary and advisable; the work was reasonable value for money; the costs of the work were reasonable; the work has had a positive impact on the community, the economy and the environment, as I have stated; the procurement method for the work was suitable; and the balance of public and private sector involvement in the work was satisfactory.

I would like to thank the members of the Transport and Resources Committee for their work on this report as well as the hardworking secretariat and Hansard. We had quite a number of changes during this inquiry; I am no longer on the committee, either. I would like to thank Deb Jeffrey, who started the report but no longer works here, and Jodhi, who continued it along with Zac and the team. We all appreciate their work and the work of the committee.