

Question on Notice

No. 710

Asked on 14 July 2020

MR R KATTER ASKED MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT AND MAIN ROADS (HON M BAILEY)—

QUESTION:

Will the Minister confirm that no Queensland Rail jobs on the Townsville to Mount Isa (Great Northern) Rail Line are sought to be repositioned to Townsville from western towns like Cloncurry in the near future?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for Traeger for the question.

The Palaszczuk Government knows the vital role the Mount Isa line continues to play in supporting mineral freight exports and regional jobs in North West Queensland.

The line spans more than 1000km from Stuart, near Townsville, to Mount Isa, with a branch line from Flynn to Phosphate Hill, and supports a number of communities along the line through passenger transport on the Inlander service, and movement of general freight.

Queensland Rail currently supports more than 80 direct jobs along the Mount Isa line through its capital and maintenance works programs. These Queensland Rail employees are strategically located in Townsville, Charters Towers, Hughenden, Richmond, Cloncurry and Mount Isa, supporting not only Queensland Rail's operations, but also the local economies in which they are based.

A major capital sleeper replacement project to be delivered in 2020–2021 will bring approximately 50 additional staff to the region for six months of the year.

The Mount Isa line also supports jobs across regional Queensland including: mining, traincrew, construction and maintenance workers, contractors, hospitality, local quarries, fuel stations and local businesses while staff are working away from home.

In 2019, the Government announced a \$500 million plan to boost mineral freight exports on the Mount Isa line. This includes:

- a \$380 million investment over five years to maintain and improve the Mount Isa line
- \$30 million for a new common user freight terminal in Townsville, with the Port of Townsville providing the remaining \$18 million
- a further drive the shift of freight from road to rail, an \$80 million commitment over four years in the 2018–19 Budget to subsidise rail access charges on the Mount Isa line.

These investments are delivering greater certainty for industries that rely on the Mount Isa line and continue to generate regional jobs.

Queensland Rail acknowledges there are challenges in recruiting and retaining local employees in small communities across the Mount Isa line. This is also the case in Charters Towers, where many Queensland Rail employees recruited to roles in the town live in Townsville.

Following consultation with employees, four employees in the Charters Towers team, who were commuting at their own expense to Charters Towers from Townsville to fulfil roles, are now joining the track team in Townsville. This will enable greater flexibility and ensure their skills are retained. It does not change the level or type of work along the corridor.

These four positions will continue to be deployed across all areas on the Mount Isa line and 26 Queensland Rail employees remain in the Charters Towers team.

There are currently two vacant positions in Cloncurry and Queensland Rail is working closely with the local mayor and the council to assist in the recruitment of these positions locally. There is also one recent vacancy each in Mount Isa and Hughenden, which Queensland Rail will also be recruiting locally.

Queensland Rail continues to recruit local jobs in the smaller towns and this will remain a key priority.