

Question on Notice

No. 598

Asked on 22 May 2025

MR R KATTER ASKED MINISTER FOR TRANSPORT AND MAIN ROADS (HON B MICKELBERG)—

QUESTION:

With reference to TC Jasper, the Forsayth to Einasleigh tourist rail that has been closed, with no timeline for repair, which is devastating Gulf region businesses—

Will the Minister commit to repairing the track and providing a timeline, to revive Gulf tourism?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for the question.

Queensland Rail's Tablelands system (the system) is a historic and scenic rail network in Far North Queensland, with two main lines spanning 575 kilometres across diverse landscapes. The system features iconic services like the Queensland Rail-operated Kuranda Scenic Railway and the Gulflander, offering a unique blend of heritage, natural beauty, and regional connection to the large number of customers who travel to the region each year.

In recent years, this region has been significantly impacted by severe weather events, including ex-Tropical cyclones Jasper and Kirrily. These events have severely impacted rail infrastructure in the region and accelerated the deterioration of some sections of the network, particularly bridges.

One of the most severely affected structures is a high bridge, approximately 11 metres in height, located in the Forsayth Range (between Einasleigh and Forsayth). This bridge sustained major damage during the weather event associated with ex-Tropical Cyclone Jasper and remains closed to rail traffic to ensure safety.

The estimated cost to remediate the Kuranda to Forsayth section of the system to safely address compounding maintenance challenges is \$152.8 million over the next five years, and as much as \$300 million over the next decade. Due to competing priorities across the Queensland Rail network, funding allocation is still being assessed across the state.

Queensland Rail does not operate passenger or freight services on the Kuranda to Forsayth section of the system, as this section is solely used by the Savannahlander, a tourist rail service owned and operated by the private company Cairns Kuranda Steam Pty Ltd (CKS).

Queensland Rail works cooperatively with CKS and tourism operators in the region. In recent years, Queensland Rail has worked with locals to ensure customers can still enjoy the unique Savannahlander experience between Mareeba and Einasleigh, before continuing their journey to Forsayth by coach.

Furthermore, Queensland Rail invests approximately \$4.5 million—on average—in operational expenditure to maintain the Mareeba to Forsayth section of the system, and, since 2019, Queensland Rail has invested an additional \$26 million in capital for repairs to ageing timber structures.