

Our ref: PET 56745

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Mr Neil Laurie
The Clerk of the Parliament
Parliament House
George Street
BRISBANE QLD 4000

Dear Mr ~~Laurie~~ ^{Neil}

I refer to petition 4298-25, lodged with the Legislative Assembly on 17 September 2025 about the privately-owned *Savannahlander* service.

The Crisafulli Government acknowledges the importance of maintaining infrastructure assets across the state, including the regional rail network, and the significant role infrastructure plays in connecting Queensland. I understand the concerns raised by the community and appreciate the passion people have for the *Savannahlander* journey.

The *Savannahlander* is a privately-operated tourism service that runs on the Queensland Rail Tablelands system between Cairns and Forsyth. Cairns Kuranda Steam (CKS), the operator, has a Transport Services Contract with the Department of Transport and Main Roads to operate the *Savannahlander* tourism service between Cairns and Forsyth, and an access agreement with Queensland Rail to operate on the system. Queensland Rail does not operate any services on this system, beyond Kuranda.

Queensland Rail works closely with the *Savannahlander* operator, CKS to provide access and in-kind support for its operations on the Queensland Rail network. As part of its in-kind support, Queensland Rail granted CKS a \$1 peppercorn lease in 2001 for three heritage rail motors to assist in its operations.

Unfortunately, due to significant damage caused by multiple natural disasters over recent years, including Tropical Cyclones Jasper and Kirrily, and the 2024 bushfires that saw bridges lost to fire, sections of the rail line have been closed for safety reasons.

Despite these challenges, Queensland Rail has continued to invest and undertake repairs to make sure the service can still operate on the open sections. This investment sees approximately \$5 million spent annually on operational costs for the Mareeba to Forsyth section, which is only used by the *Savannahlander* service. However, in FY26, \$7.1 million is allocated for maintenance.

This expenditure ensures the *Savannahlander* can operate between Mareeba and Einasleigh this season, with coach services covering the closed sections.

In August 2025, the Crisafulli Government announced that Queensland Rail will undertake repair works on the Copperfield rail bridge, which will allow the *Savannahlander* to extend its route beyond Einasleigh through Wirra Wirra in 2026, subject to weather and safety conditions.

However, restoring the full Kuranda to Forsyth route to a maintainable and safe standard is a major undertaking. Many assets, such as bridges, were built over 100 years ago and are reaching their end of life, and it is estimated that it will cost up to \$300 million over the next decade to keep this section of the Tablelands system operational. This level of investment requires careful consideration against priorities across Queensland's broader rail network, including those networks used by regional communities to access medical appointments, visit family and travel for work.

Queensland Rail remains committed to working with stakeholders to ensure the *Savannahlander* continues to operate where it is safe to do so, and we thank the community for their continued support of this iconic service.

I trust this information is of assistance.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brent Mickelberg". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

BRENT MICKELBERG MP
Minister for Transport and Main Roads