



Media Release / 16 June 2009

Budget spin masks asset sell-off risks, says rail union

Rail workers say the State Budget privatisation plans represent an unnecessary threat to struggling regional Queensland.

Rail, Tram and Bus Union State President Bruce Mackie said that today's Budget shows Queensland will return to surplus by 2016 even without the sale of Queensland Rail.

Budget forward estimates claim that regardless of the sale of public assets Queensland should be out of deficit in 2016 (*State Budget 2009-10, Budget Highlights, P 19*).

"This fact will anger Queenslanders even more as they watch the Queensland Government sell their railways, when there is no need for such a sale," Mr Mackie said.

He said the Bligh Government's sell-off of rail assets had set up Queensland communities for a triple-whammy.

"Today's Budget is basically a medium to long-term plan to cut jobs and services in regional areas," Mr Mackie said, "and the final blow will be the loss of revenue to the state from selling off these cash-generating assets."

The Queensland Government Budget claims the fire sale will raise \$15 billion over the next five years.

The RTBU has vowed to continue its 'Queensland – Not For Sale' campaign against the privatization of rail, port, roads and forestry assets.

Mr Mackie said more than 10,000 of QR's 15,000 workers throughout the state would be affected by the government plans to sell off Queensland Rail.

"Privatisation presents a real risk to jobs in regional areas. Many of our regional communities depend on the freight rail network for jobs and to get their goods to markets. Private rail operators will corner the transport market and jack up prices.

"Jobs will go west, charges will go north, and service will head south. Ultimately, regional workers will pay with their jobs and city workers will pay at the checkout."

Mr Mackie said the RTBU has planned a series of regional community forums to highlight the risks of privatisation to Queensland.

"Bligh and Fraser have talked big about potential income from selling off our assets but have provided very few details.

"It's time for the Premier and Treasurer to come clean about the threat to jobs and services and the risk of increased costs. Regional Queensland wants some answers."

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**For further information or interviews,
contact Brett Young on 0400 080 099.**