Burke Slams Chief Minister for Northline Railway Pull-Out

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CLP Leader Denis Burke has today expressed his alarm over national media reports that have painted a gloomy picture of the future of the Alice Springs to Darwin Railway.

Today’s Weekend Australian, joined other media in reporting that Northline Freight Management has withdrawn 80% of its freight from the railway, returning it to road transport.

Mr Burke said that Chief Minister Clare Martin has failed to understand that government must play an important role in the development of the railway in its early years.

“Territorians are stakeholders in the railway to the tune of around $200 million and the Martin government has to wake up and realise that to grow the railway and Darwin as a true port then it must take an active, leadership role. It can’t simply sit back and wait for things to happen. The Territory has already waited three and a half years for action and it can’t afford to wait any longer,” Mr Burke said.

“This is just like opening a new motel without providing any marketing or advertising for it. While people are interested in it because it is new, it takes hard work, leadership and vision to ensure growth and success. Chief Minister Clare Martin and her government have shown none of that. They sit idle while major customers are pulling out. The government has a responsibility to provide whatever resources it can to expand the market for the railway and is currently avoiding all of its responsibilities.

“I would have thought that recent comments from Hai Win Shipping that the railway was simply uncompetitive would have finally prompted the Chief Minister to act but it appears that it has simply fallen on deaf ears.

“Northline’s pull-out from the railway is the clearest example yet that the Martin government has failed to realise the potential of the railway and is a damning indictment of their lack of commitment to rail freight in the Territory.

“Clare Martin’s admission in parliament that her government had not completed one major project in three and a half years was damning – but now they can’t even ensure the success of those CLP initiated projects given to them like the railway.

“The Martin government is high on rhetoric and spin but fails completely when it comes to action, vision and leadership to develop the railway to its full potential.”

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