

Legislative Council

Hansard

Wednesday 25 March 2026

The President, Mr Farrell, took the Chair at 11 a.m., acknowledged the Traditional People and read Prayers.

[excerpt...]

Low Emission Rail Technology

Ms WEBB question to MINISTER for INFRASTRUCTURE and TRANSPORT, Mr VINCENT

[2.41 p.m.]

My question is focused on the capacity of rail to assist in mitigating fossil fuel dependency. TasRail's statement of corporate intent 2023-24 to 2026-27 lists as a strategic direction of the business the following strategic objective:

Promote the environmental benefits of rail logistics and continue to investigate emerging low/zero-emission locomotive technology.

My question is what progress has occurred in identifying low/zero-emission rail technology and is there a timeframe by which Tasmanians can expect to see any implementation of such technology given its proven strategic importance to shift the state from fossil fuel dependency?

ANSWER

Thank you, Mr President. This has been a very interesting step with TasRail. We've had a renewal program of a lot of the old engines. It's about \$15 million, off the top of my head. It's being done in the Launceston workshop. We've upskilled a lot of local workers to a level now where the CEO is actually talking to other railways around Australia about bringing their engines down to Tasmania to be refitted.

The whole idea behind that was, there is a real gap in the industry at the moment between moving from the old style, which has been pretty well unchanged for many, many decades, to electric, or the word they're telling me, they believe that hybrid will be the way to go in the next step, because the electrics aren't really at a point where they are excited enough to invest the money.

The money the government's invested into the renewal program gives an extension of approximately 10 years, maybe 12, maybe 15, at the most. What it allows us to do, instead of trying to jump in at the cutting edge and make an expensive mistake on buying the wrong type suited to Tasmanian haulage, this will give them that 10-year buffer where they believe the industry will have matured. Because of the large freight on the mainland and other countries, the industry will have developed the next stage of hybrids or electrics, or whatever else might come out, which will then allow a sensible purchase that will take us into that zero- or lower-emission area.

It has been quite exciting working through that with them, and they have a deadset program to make sure they don't falter in the next 10 years while they move towards that program. When you go to these amazing workshops in Launceston, the exciting thing is they

really are set up well, and how they bring them in and do all the work. You talk to these quite young people there that have skilled-up from just being a basic railway engineer working on the basics to actually doing and machining special parts to keep all these going. There is an amazing skill level developing there in Launceston, which is just a side benefit, but it's amazing what they are doing in that area.

I hope that answers that question for you.

Ms Webb - Mr President, just to clarify, that 10-to-15-year timeframe is before we move to some form of low or zero emission?

Mr VINCENT - Yes. I cannot remember them saying a deadset time line, but it certainly covers the period that they feel they need to bring it in. Some of that technology might start to come in year five, seven, nine, but they've had to protect themselves so they're still operational in the time period until that advancement in the engines is available to us.