

Rail commuters see results

BY TONY MOORE

ROBERT DOW is Brisbane's chief transporteer.

He runs the public transport users' website and lobby group, Rail: Back on Track, which has put two Queensland cabinet ministers, Paul Lucas (Infrastructure and Planning) and John Mickle (Transport), under the microscope.

Mr Dow loves trains. When he was a boy, his grandfather took him on rail trips and young Robert built models while growing up in Victoria. He also loves the intricate workings of timetables.

"Queensland Rail is probably one of the world's great railway networks," he says. "It's a fantastic outfit when you look at what is happening up north - the railway servicing the coalmines."

These days, Mr Dow, a medical industry teacher at Queensland University of Technology, sees himself as the voice of the humble Brisbane commuter, frustrated at the agonisingly slow pace of reform on the suburban rail network.

Rail: Back on Track started in Brisbane in 2006, before the state election. The founders wanted to force change and were frustrated at writing letters to ministers, Queensland Rail and newspapers as individuals.

"A couple of us were sitting on the train one day and said, 'Things aren't improving real quick are they? We're getting more and more people on the trains and we don't seem to be getting any more trains,'" Mr Dow says,



Transporter and rail watchdog... Robert Dow, who runs public transport advocacy group Rail: Back on Track, gets down to business at Oxley station.

Photo: Tony Moore

sitting on the platform at Oxley station in Brisbane's south-west. "We thought, well, if we got together and collectively lobbied as a community group, we might get a better impact."

Mr Dow insists Rail: Back on Track comprises "normal Brisbanites" without a political barrow to push. "We are just normal commuters," he says.

"There are obviously some rail enthusiasts who are part of our group, but the majority of our group are just everyday public transport users.

"Most of them are rail users, but we certainly have our bus- and ferry-orientated people as well."

Mr Dow served 23 years in the Australian Army as a medic and pathology scientific officer - including active service in Vietnam.

After he left the army in the early 1990s, he worked at the Mater Hospital before joining QUT.

Mr Dow acquired the computer skills to run websites while completing his further studies in the army. He also runs a site for the Australian

- > DOW'S RAIL SOLUTIONS**
- Increase frequency of suburban train services to 7.5 minutes in peak times and 15 minutes in off-peak times from 5am to 8pm Monday to Friday on all lines.
 - Build Darra-Springfield line with stations at Ellen Grove and Springfield Lakes, in addition to Richlands and Springfield, from the beginning.
 - Introduce incentives for "go card" users and discount travel for early and late peak times (before 7am and after 7pm). Reintroduce family weekend tickets.
 - Expand Airtrain services to match arrivals and departures at domestic and international airports.
 - Introduce loop services, from Corinda to Yeerongpilly to CBD to Exhibition Station.
 - Build underground loop extension through Dutton Park-Park Road, Woolloongabba, Parliament, Eagle Street, Central and Exhibition, with a branch from Woolloongabba to St Lucia and Indooroopilly.

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Institute of Medical Sciences. He lives with his wife and two daughters at Oxley, where to his delight the massive upgrading of the rail line from Corinda to Darra is his territory.

Mr Dow says Rail: Back on Track has raised several problems with the "go card" electronic ticketing system in meetings with former Translink chief Luke Franzmann; questioned the short-sighted ideas of delaying a rail line to Springfield and then not including stations; and more recently suggested how better to use

Brisbane's inner-city stations. The lobby group and Mr Dow would love to see a connection - possibly underground - between Woolloongabba, the University of Queensland and Indooroopilly when the State Government finally releases concepts from its Inner City Rail Study. Queensland Rail would make no comment, simply confirming the study is due to be released midyear. "People are starting to listen to us," Mr Dow said. "We are starting to get some results."