

Tunnel fast-tracked

Work to start next month on \$324m Varsity Lakes transport hub

by Geoff Chambers

CONSTRUCTION of a 300m rail tunnel in the heart of Robina and dual electrified tracks will begin early next month as part of the State Government's massive \$324.4 million Varsity Lakes transport hub.

The project has been brought forward to ease pressure on the faltering Gold Coast transport grid.

Transport Minister Paul Lucas yesterday confirmed work would start in a few weeks.

"We have had people on site but work will begin next month to get things up and running," he said.

"This is an integral project for the Gold Coast and the transformation of the site from what it was when we acquired it is amazing."

The 8.5ha site bought by the State Government last February will become the home of the new Varsity Lakes station, 50,000sqm office space, 10,000sqm of retail space and 500 to 1000 dwellings.

Mr Lucas said the land was acquired from Delfin in a deal which

included public-private partnerships that would allow development on sites next to the station.

The new hub will create 3500 jobs and includes works along Scottsdale Drive, where contractors are ripping down high voltage overhead powerlines and replacing them with underground wires.

Completion of the 4.1km rail extension to Robina is set for 2010. It will incorporate the new station, two road overbridges at Investigator Drive and Robina Parkway and the dual tracks.

Premier Peter Beattie said the Varsity Lakes station would provide at least 300 commuter car parking spaces, a drop-off area, six bus and 10 taxi bays.

"The Gold Coast region is one of the fastest growing areas and this type of project is important to ensure that there is an adequate service provided to them," said Mr Beattie. "We're not only proceeding with the rail infrastructure, we've also set aside another \$23.7 million for work on the transport-orientated development at the Varsity Lakes station.

"And we are already planning even further ahead with an additional \$6 million for early works, planning and design for the next stage of the rail upgrade from Varsity Lakes to Tallebudgera."

The Department of Transport is looking at options on the Transport Orientated Development sites, including residential, green spaces, retail and residential options.

There could be space for up to 500 new homes.

Mr Lucas said the \$107.6 million railway extension was essential to provide much-needed services to residents on the southern Gold Coast.

Mr Lucas said the State Government has committed \$7 billion to improve Queensland's ageing rail network.

Over the next two years, Gold Coast commuters will see a major boost of almost 60 per cent in seating capacity on their line for northbound morning services as the new trains arrive and the extra tracks are built, said Mr Lucas.