



Speech by

Mr N. ROBERTS

MEMBER FOR NUDGE

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TRANSPORT LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr ROBERTS (Nudgee—ALP) (12.13 p.m.): I will make a few comments about the proposal to construct a rail link from the airport onto the Queensland Rail system. At the outset I say that I am not opposed to improving public transport access or transport access in general to our airport. That is long overdue. I have made comments to that effect and supported the rail link proposal when it was originally announced. However, I have some lingering scepticism about the proposed figures that back up this particular proposal, specifically relating to the patronage levels. I acknowledge that this is a project that has the support of the Government. However, I feel a need to outline those concerns in this place. I am happy to have my concerns proved wrong. I hope that this project proves to be successful and becomes an important part of the transport access system within this city.

As I did in a submission that I made to the impact assessment study and draft environmental impact statement on the airport rail link, I need to raise some matters on behalf of my constituents. In the proposal, the Brisbane Airport Rail Link organisation, BARL, suggested that the patronage levels would be in the vicinity of approximately 12% of people visiting the airport. That contains a mix of casual visitors to the site—people who are seeing people off on trips and passengers—plus workers who will work on the site. My scepticism goes particularly to the levels of patronage by people who are categorised as casual visitors, particularly domestic passengers. I believe that, in the international market, there may be quite a significant use; however, I am not convinced of the figures that have been put up for the domestic market.

I will make a brief comment about the use by workers. As has been pointed out by the member for Chermside, there is a quite significant development planned for the airport site. There has been some controversy about a proposed parallel runway. I have had my say about that previously. I want to say something about the proposed commercial and industrial development for that site, which is quite significant and will bring significant benefits to the north side economy, particularly businesses in my electorate, and for the rest of south-east Queensland. Many thousands of jobs will be created by the establishment of industry on that site. That is to be welcomed. We need to give the development of that site support in respect of that matter.

I will detail a few more facts about patronage levels. When I met with Mr Roger DuBlet, who was involved in this project from the early days, it was suggested to me that patronage levels would be in the vicinity of approximately 18%. The Airport Rail Link Initial Advice Statement published in February 1997 states that patronage levels would be in the vicinity of 10%, rising by approximately 4% per annum for 10 years to a level of a little over 15%. In the draft master plan for the Brisbane airport, which was produced by BARL, patronage levels were estimated to be about 10%. The figures from a range of different sources vary over a couple of years from 10% to 18%. I took the time to look at a document that was produced for Queensland Transport in February 1995, which addressed the issue of rail patronage levels for the Brisbane airport. It contained patronage levels for comparable airports in other parts of the world, in particular in the United States. The results show that at Atlanta's airport the rail mode share of people going to and from the airport was 9.3%. The figures continue down to Philadelphia's airport, which had a rail mode share of 3.9%. I am extremely hopeful that the projections

outlined by the proponents of this project stack up. However, I think that those figures indicate that there is a varying range of support depending on the circumstances of particular cities.

The other issue that impacts on the use of the rail link is the existence of a major road network in close proximity to the airport, which services quite adequately both the north side and south side of Brisbane. I am referring to the Gateway Motorway. The Gateway Arterial Road would be the route of choice for a large number of people who currently visit the airport site. It is easily accessed by buses, which, to my knowledge, have not been greatly used as an alternative means of transport to the airport. That is a mode of transport that can be developed significantly above the levels that have been tried in the past. I do understand that the Brisbane City Council did trial a service from the Eagle Junction Railway Station to the airport. My understanding is that that is not continuing at this stage. I believe that bus transport to and from the airport is one aspect that has not been fully developed.

Ultimately, the question will be: what mode of transport will people choose? The rail link is fixed in terms of where it goes. It cannot deviate from the route that Queensland Rail has provided and that which the rail link organisation will provide. However, other modes of transport—private car and bus—provide a great deal of flexibility. In my view, many people will choose to use their private cars as an alternative to using a rail link. As I said at the outset, I hope that I am proved wrong because there is a lot of private money being spent on this project. I am sure that, ultimately, it will not go ahead unless the proponents believe that the figures stack up. At this stage, I am not convinced that aspects, especially the impact that it will have on the Gateway Motorway and the potential for a more effective use of bus transport to that site, have been analysed fully by the proponents.

I also need to raise some issues with respect to the impact of this proposal on behalf of my constituents. The main impact that has been raised with me has been the potential for noise impact on those communities on the northern side of Schulz Canal. I notice that on the southern side, which is located in the electorate of the member for Clayfield, a noise barrier has been erected along the Gateway connector between Sandgate Road and Nudgee Road. Of course, that will assist not only with road noise but also with any noise impacts from the rail link. However, people in my electorate on the northern side, particularly along Walkers Way, will not have that protection. In the design of the rail link, which is an elevated platform that the rails will be affixed to, there is no provision for any form of noise attenuation, particularly on the northern side. I have written in my submission that that is a design matter that should be taken into account by the people who are building it, and I intend to raise that matter again. I have not received a response to the request that I made in relation to that matter.

Other issues that have been raised relate to the visual impact. I know that it is difficult with a structure of this size to eliminate all of the visual impact. However, I think that there are opportunities along the Schulz Canal side for the visual impact to be minimised because there is parkland, which is currently managed by the Brisbane City Council, and walkways that are used by a lot of people for bike riding, walking dogs and so on. I hope that the proponents intend to address that matter in their discussions with the Brisbane City Council.

The other concern that has been raised with me, particularly by people living on the Walkers Way side of the site, is the night-time operation of the trains. These trains will have very powerful headlights and a number of homes will be directly in the line of light, particularly as the trains come from the airport returning to the city. Again, I believe that appropriate design measures could be taken to lessen that impact.

The impact assessment study also makes the claim that the proposed rail route supports little habitat of ecological value. A number of my local constituents have disputed that. There are areas along Schulz Canal that have become quite popular fishing spots. If one has the patience and the time, one can catch bream and mud crabs there, particularly in the vicinity of Hedley Avenue, for those who are looking for the site. I think those issues need to be taken into account. Those areas are popular places that local people use and if there is to be any impact on those recreational places, then that should be considered by the people who are constructing the rail line.

The other issue that I raise is not related to the Airtrain Citylink proposal but it follows from an issue that was raised by the member for Nerang, and that is speed limits on a particular portion of Sandgate Road in my electorate. While the Minister is in the Chamber, I take this opportunity to expand on this matter. On several occasions I have raised this issue with the department, both under this Minister and the former Minister. It relates to the speed limit outside Boondall State School on Sandgate Road, which is currently set at 70 km/h. Since being elected, I have argued consistently that

that speed limit is too high on that main road. Departmental records indicate that, about 12 months ago, one report assessed the average speed past that school at 78 km/h. I suspect that the speed is a little higher, given the nature of the road about which I am speaking. That speed is much too fast. I have stood at that intersection with small children. Although I accept that it is signalised, the speed at which the traffic passes only a matter of a metre away from where young children are standing is excessive. I will consistently maintain the proposition with the department—and, hopefully, the Minister will listen as well—that in the vicinity of that school the speed needs to be dropped to at least 60 km/h.

One argument that has been put to me by the department is that it does not install school zone signs on busy main thoroughfares such as Sandgate Road. About a week after I received that letter, I was travelling along the Nicklin Way on the Sunshine Coast, which in many respects is basically identical in design and traffic volume to Sandgate Road, and lo and behold there opposite a school situated adjacent to the Nicklin Way, which is a dual carriageway, was a school zone sign reducing the speed from 70 km/h down to 60 km/h. Again, I draw that matter to the attention of the Minister. The school community and I strongly believe that there needs to be a school zone sign installed outside Boondall State School dropping the speed limit to at least 60 km/h. Hopefully one day, in the interests of the safety of the children who use that intersection, we will be able to achieve that.
