



Speech by
**Hon. BRIAN
LITTLEPROUD**

MEMBER FOR WESTERN DOWNS

Hansard 25 August 1999

ROAD TRANSPORT REFORM BILL

Hon. B. G. LITTLEPROUD (Western Downs—NPA) (5 p.m.): In rising to speak to the Road Transport Reform Bill in the later stages of this debate, I acknowledge that the Opposition has already indicated its support for the various initiatives in the legislation. I personally acknowledge that the construction of roads in Queensland and the regulation of road use is a vast task. Of course, it is made all the harder when we try to coordinate our efforts with those of the other States of Australia.

I want to raise a couple of issues that are relevant to my own electorate, firstly with regard to heavy transport. I notice the measures that this Bill takes to ensure that heavy transport is well regulated and that it is safe. I also note the comments of the member for Gregory, who referred to the efforts being made by the transport industry to make sure that things are operating as they should. Currently, most of the heavy transport going along the Warrego Highway are road trains rather than semitrailers. That is creating more danger for the drivers of other vehicles, especially those people who are not used to driving on western roads. The time and distance that is needed to be able to overtake a road train is much more than what was needed to overtake a semitrailer. I think that we need to take whatever opportunities we can to educate the public in terms of how to handle road trains. The other thing is that there is an expectation on the part of the Federal Government and the State Government that the width of our western roads and the road alignment are adequate for road trains and that other drivers are able to see well ahead to see what sort of vehicle they are coming up against.

I turn now to the Roma-Injune road through the Bungil Shire. Over recent years, both Governments have spent money on upgrading that road to make it the major access route between Melbourne and north Queensland. Sections of that road are now absolutely first class. However, some of the existing road through the Roma and Injune areas is of an old style and of an old alignment. I commend both the recent Governments because we are now putting some money towards realigning that road and making the road pavement wider. We have just to keep up the good work, because the increase in the amount of heavy transport going through that area is enormous. The local people have concerns about using that road in its present State when they travel backwards and forwards to Roma, which is their major centre.

While I am talking about that road, I want to say that the day before Easter this year I was travelling along that road to Emerald. On a section of the road where the alignment was not very good I came across a convoy of cotton vehicles, cotton module makers and cotton-pickers with an escort vehicle out in front. I know that that sort of thing happens on country roads all the time. However, I thought that the fact that it was happening on Easter Thursday was pretty crook. The people in the industry would point out quickly that the harvesting of cotton moves from the north to the south, that cotton picking had finished in the Emerald district and that these people, as contractors, were moving down onto the downs and into the St George area. However, I spoke to the local policeman and told him that I thought that it was not very wise to have that sort of transport on the road just before Easter. I was assured that they would not be travelling after dark. However, I think that we should do a bit more towards alerting the travelling public that, when they get to the west of the range, they are travelling through agricultural areas and that they should expect to come across wide loads, escorted loads and all of those sorts of things because it is the nature of the industry. Perhaps through the Travelsafe committee we can think more about whether those sorts of escorted loads should be stopped on days such as those before Easter and just after Easter.

The Minister will remember that some months ago I spoke to him about a section of the national highway, the Warrego Highway, just west of Dalby. I want to report that, yes, that piece of road now has been done up. At the time I suggested that, because the Federal Government intends to reroute the Warrego Highway through the Eurella road, that particular road that I am talking about from Dalby through to Ranges Bridge would become a State responsibility pretty soon and that it was best if the Federal Government spent its money on doing it up. It looks like the Minister has been successful in that regard, because that piece of road has been done up. The Minister is probably also aware that there are recommendations coming from the Wambo Shire Council and the Dalby City Council about fixing up that section of the Warrego Highway east of Dalby—between Dalby and Bowenville—where the road surface is breaking up pretty badly. Water goes over that road from time to time. Anything that the Minister can do to keep the pressure on the Federal Government to upgrade that section of the road will be appreciated.

I also am pleased to advise the House that word came from the Federal member, the Honourable Bruce Scott, who represents the seat of Maranoa, that the Federal Government is going to spend \$13m on rerouting the Warrego Highway west of Dalby along the Eurella road to get it away from the flood-prone Ranges Gully. He is going to insist that that money be spent. I hope that I do not see the Minister—

Mr Bredhauer: The first I heard about it was when Bruce Scott put it in the local paper. We have had nothing from the Commonwealth and we have got no extra money.

Mr LITTLEPROUD: No, but he has—

Mr Bredhauer: I am in the process of writing to John Anderson now, because there is no extra money and the first I heard about it was when Bruce Scott—

Mr LITTLEPROUD: I can tell the Minister that he has been in the papers out there saying that he has \$13m over the next year and the year after.

Mr Bredhauer: I know he has. If he has got an extra \$13m, I am happy but it is out of our hands—

Mr LITTLEPROUD: I am happy, too, because he said that he has got it. So I am very happy. That work desperately needs to be done.

Mr Bredhauer interjected.

Mr LITTLEPROUD: I just want to congratulate the member for Maranoa, because he has reported back that John Anderson said that there is \$13m for the job. As the local member, I want to see that work happen. Today in this House there has been quite a bit said about the need for a second road up the range to Toowoomba. I support that, but not at the expense of doing up the Warrego Highway west of Chinchilla and west of Dalby. So I was delighted to see that indication from John Anderson that he is going to make available that \$13m.

I want to raise a couple of other issues pertaining to my area. In relation to the Warrego Highway between Chinchilla and Miles, I understand the Federal Government was going to make money available—and part of the work was done by the Chinchilla Shire Council—to upgrade that road by taking out culverts and putting pipes under the road. The Federal Government was also going to give funds to broaden the pavement to allow road trains through. The Chinchilla Shire Council now has the contract and has put in the culverts but for about 12 or 13 miles the road pavement has not been done up, yet the road trains are coming through. I ask the Minister to bring some pressure to bear on the Federal Government and say, "You have done only half the job." The road trains are coming through on a piece of road where the shoulders are pretty sharp and the pavement is not very wide. I think that it would be in the interests of public safety if, in fact, the Federal Government gave the council the money for that 12 or 13 miles of road west of Chinchilla.

I turn now to road use management. Previously I have spoken to the Minister about these two issues that I raise again today. The Minister might want to refer to them in his reply. The first one relates to the people in Dalby who manufacture polythene tanks. They are pretty popular. They are replacing the old concrete tanks and the galvanised iron tanks. The Minister would be aware of that. They come in all sorts of sizes. At one stage, the biggest was 5,000 gallons, or 25,000 litres. Now, the tanks have gone up in size to 50,000 litres, or 10,000 gallons. Obviously, the diameter of those tanks is much greater. Of course, when these people try to transport those tanks around the west, they are running into problems with the current regulations because the tanks exceed the allowable load height. They are not very heavy tanks, the problem just relates to their height. However, the tanks do not have to go under bridges or tunnels out in those western areas. I have spoken to the Minister about this issue. He might like to report back in his reply as to what has gone on. These people are pretty big employers throughout Queensland, but they have an enormous base at Dalby. I think that their customers would be disadvantaged if they had to use the 25,000 litre tanks when they would rather have the 50,000 litre

tanks. When those people who live in the drier areas have a thunderstorm, they want to catch all the water, not fill up a tank and then have a lot of the water go to waste.

The other issue that I have spoken to the Minister about, which he told me was still under review, related to vehicle transporters. They are mostly double-decker vehicles. Black Toyota are probably the biggest dealers of Toyota vehicles in Queensland. It is all right when they transport most of their fleet, but when they transport a truckload of Toyota Landcruisers, which are greater in height, the vehicles on the upper deck of the vehicle are above the allowable height. I know that the bloke in Dalby who has made a business out of transporting these vehicles for Black Toyota has done all he can already to lower the platform height of his vehicle. He has put the deck down below the axle as best he can. He has done all sorts of things. I think that the Minister has come up with some sort of a situation where he can continue operating under a permit system for the next six months, but then the situation has to be reviewed. I ask the Minister to give a report on that situation in his reply or to write to me about it. I just wanted to raise those two issues, because they are of importance to local industry in my electorate.

I commend the Minister for his efforts in continuing the upgrade of the Warrego Highway west to Dalby and past the cotton gin, which was in a terrible state. The Federal Government needs to fulfil its promise to finish the section of road between Chinchilla and Miles. That road is too narrow and its shoulders are too steep.

I ask the Minister to remember that I am concerned about the heavy transport vehicles that travel out west. It is important that we have adequate control over people driving in that area, because for many, especially city drivers, it is a new experience to overtake a road train rather than a semitrailer. One needs good alignment, a good line of sight and perhaps a bit of education to know that it will take a quite a few hundred yards to get around a road train. I support the Bill and thank the Minister for the opportunity to contribute to the debate.
