



Speech by

JOHN MICKEL

MEMBER FOR LOGAN

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ROAD TRANSPORT REFORM BILL

Mr MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (4.47 p.m.): I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate on the Road Transport Reform Bill 1999. I notice that the Bill is focusing on improving road safety. I think that the wider community would welcome the initiatives that have been put in place over the years to bring down the road toll. The road toll is decreasing each year, and I understand that last year's figure was the lowest since 1955. That is because many of the measures that are in place are taking effect. We should commend the engineers at Main Roads for the excellent and improved road systems that they are providing for the motorists of Queensland.

There are many positive road safety initiatives that have been introduced since 1970 which have contributed to the reduction in road fatalities: in 1972, the compulsory seatbelt wearing for passengers in motor vehicles, which was followed in 1982 by a reduction of the legal blood alcohol level to 0.05; in 1988, the introduction of random breath-testing; in 1991, Random Road Watch; in 1992, compulsory helmet wearing for cyclists; and in 1997, speed management with speed cameras. All of these initiatives are positive commitments to road toll reduction.

As to the main feature of road traffic crashes in Queensland—a Transport Department study, established in 1997, found that the fatality figures were overrepresented for young adults and older road users. Road users aged between 17 and 20 years experienced fatality rates at almost three times the average for Queensland. That is tremendously significant in my electorate of Logan, which is a younger electorate. In fact, in the suburb of Crestmead over 60% of the people are under 25 years of age, and it is that group which needs to be targeted both with encouragement and, of course, with enforcement to obey the law.

The number of people driving under the influence of alcohol in the 17 to 24 year old age group has decreased significantly, but obviously we need to make sure that every effort is being made to ensure that people are driving safely and without being under the influence of alcohol.

Based on police opinion of the cause of traffic crashes, disregard for traffic rules was the largest contributor. That was 34% of fatal crashes and 41% of all reported crashes. And although speed is a contributing factor in 4% of all reported road crashes, it also contributed to 16% of fatal crashes.

I want to commend the road safety people in the department, headed by Mike King, for the work that they are undertaking on behalf of the school communities in trying to raise community awareness about road safety and trying to bring about safer conditions outside schools. Recently, I met with people in the Road Safety Division over difficulties that were experienced at the Yugumbir School in Vansittart Road in Regents Park in my electorate where the preschool community were worried about people driving at excessive speeds at the changeover time for preschool students. Every effort is being made to work through that difficulty and to make sure that we have safer conditions on some of the streets that have a long run-up approach where unthinking motorists can be breaking the speed limit.

A similar situation exists outside the Crestmead State School in Augusta Street and also outside St Francis College school in Julie Street, Crestmead. I will soon be having discussions with the road safety people to see what we can do to bring about safer conditions along those streets to ensure that motorists are aware that school students may be crossing there. But I want to commend the work being done by the Road Safety Division with the school community to ensure that our children are able to get to school safely.

Today, I also want to raise the issue of the service road at Park Ridge State School. The school community at Park Ridge State School have been worried for some time about what will happen with the service road with the Mt Lindesay Highway upgrade. We have had a number of meetings on this matter. Their favourite option is to have a road around the back of the school. I understand that this is opposed by Logan City Council because of the fact that such a road would enter a particularly unsafe section of Park Ridge Road. I want to commend Bob Drew, the Main Roads engineer for the district, and also the school community at Park Ridge. We are having a meeting in a couple of weeks' time to see if we can make it even safer down there in the interim before the Mt Lindesay Highway upgrade begins.

The Bill mentions the incidence of heavy vehicles and attempts to make them safer. I draw the attention of the House to the 1997 study of heavy motor vehicles where it was found that fatal crashes involving heavy vehicles occurred proportionately more often at traffic lights and at give way/stop signs. This is important because the Logan Motorway system, and now the new Browns Plains interchange, make it much safer for all vehicles, but the Logan Motorway southern bypass system makes it especially safe for heavy vehicles.

We have excellent roadworks in the southern outskirts of Brisbane and Logan City. We are starting to attract more industries to the area as a result. National Foods has announced a \$26m project at Crestmead. Other factories are coming. Last week, I had discussions with somebody from Sydney who is currently building a factory at Crestmead. One of the reasons that he cited for that construction was the excellent and safe road system that we have in the area.

Because of the work being done on the Logan Motorway to duplicate the road system, beginning at Wembley Road in my electorate and going all the way through to the electorate of the Minister for Police, industrial estates are developing in close proximity to the Logan Motorway. This is also true for the Stapylton Road area—an area which is well represented in this House by the member for Archerfield. We have more and more job opportunities directly related to the improved road system. With the Browns Plains interchange nearing completion, I am very confident that the area to the west of the Mt Lindesay Highway will recover and will be the focus of major investment as a result of much improved road safety and an improved road system.

In mentioning the Browns Plains interchange, I want to commend all the workers and the engineers involved in that project. I think they have done an amazing job when we consider the work that they had to do. They had to cope with the heavy vehicle traffic that uses that road system of a morning and again in the afternoon as our commuters come back to Logan City and North Beaudesert. There has been some dislocation to local businesses but, as I said, the Main Roads engineers and officers from the Department of State Development have been working with the business community, letting them know the opportunities that exist for them once the road system is completed. I commend all the officers involved.

At the same time, we have to recognise that local residents have been inconvenienced. We have tried to work through that as best we can whilst at the same time building a road network at a cost of more than \$30m. I commend the local residents for their patience in that process. The engineers have managed to bring the roadwork in under the deadline that was set down. It means that Christmas trade, particularly in the Browns Plains area, will proceed uninterrupted.

The other important feature of that road system that the engineers have set down concerns the establishment and re-establishment of community links—the tunnelling system. It means that the people in the Regents Park area will be able to access other parts of the highway in the industrial or commercial estates without having to worry about road traffic. I commend the foresight of the Main Roads engineers in bringing about that possibility.

I know that the Mt Lindesay project is going to cost a bit, but I believe it is absolutely essential that we work hard to keep the community together through either bikeways programs or pedestrian programs. Whilst speaking about the Mt Lindesay Highway upgrade, I want to take this opportunity to urge the Minister to ensure that he is in there fighting the Federal Government especially for more road funding to continue to upgrade the Mt Lindesay Highway. I would like to see the Middle Road interchange project begin as soon as possible. If that means fighting for the money in Canberra, or fighting with our own State colleagues, then that is a fight that is well worth having on behalf of those communities. It is necessary to make sure that other Ministers are aware of just how important that project is for the people in West Logan.

Aligned with that, we have the area to the south of Logan City called Munruben. It has experienced rapid growth over the last couple of years and, because of that rapid growth, the planning of the road systems has not kept pace. What is needed now is some extra dollars devoted to making sure that residents who have to access the Granger Road area to the south of Logan City, and who have to access the Mt Lindesay Highway, can do so safely. It is necessary that these people have the same access to the highway as is enjoyed by other residents. Those are two important projects. I urge

the Minister to ensure that his department is aware of them. I urge him to come up with the dollars to ensure that we can have safer road systems in the West Logan area and the North Beaudesert area.

It is not often realised that, if one is travelling north along the southern bypass and along the Gateway Arterial, the first set of lights one comes to is at Gympie. That is a magnificent achievement by Queensland's Main Roads Department. It gives us unsurpassed and uninterrupted and safer travel. For people going west along that road system, the first set of lights they will come to is either at Warwick, if they use the Cunningham Highway, or at Toowoomba, if they use the Warrego Highway. This is what is bringing jobs to the area, and safer roads are playing a vital part in that. In other words, the Logan area presents unique opportunities for businesses who are doing business both interstate and within Queensland. It also means that my electorate is pivotal to some of the initiatives that are outlined in this Bill.

One final point I wish to make in relation to road safety concerns a constituent of mine who was involved in an accident with a vehicle owned by a rent-a-car company. The company concerned, Rollo Rent-a-Car, appears to have given a car to somebody who allegedly did not have a driver's licence. As I understand it, the person may be charged with allegedly not having a driver's licence. The Minister's office may know the case I am talking about. With the Olympic Games coming up, we will have a lot of visitors to Queensland who will want to rent cars. I ask the officers to think about this: what regulations are in place to ensure that the person renting the car has a current driver's licence in either an Australian State or in the country that he comes from?

What this case exposed was that the person allegedly did not have a licence, and yet he was still given a motor vehicle. If proven, this is a real worry. It means that we need to check regulations in the lead-up to the Olympic Games. I urge the department to do that as a matter of urgency. In this particular instance I understand that there were not any roadworthy issues involved with the vehicle, but nevertheless it seems to me that there is a glitch in the system when somebody can drive away in a rent-a-car without an appropriate driver's licence. I know that the Government and the transport officers cannot be there every time a car is rented out, but I believe there is a duty of care on behalf of rent-a-car companies to make sure that every effort is being made to ensure that the person they are handing the vehicle to does have a driver's licence.

I have been told that this Bill has been under discussion for a long while. It deserves to be supported. Queensland has experienced an uptake in tourism, and during the Olympics we are going to have a lot of tourists here. National driving rules make sense because of the huge number of people coming to Queensland. The major change in the national driver licence scheme is a new driver licence classification. All of these things are welcome; they are tremendous initiatives.

For those reasons I support the Bill and I urge the Minister to maintain the fight that he has undertaken on behalf of my constituents to ensure that we have the road funding that we need to bring about safer roads and iron out some of the glitches that have occurred lately with the Logan City Council and Queensland Transport in relation to trying to get a bus service for the Crestmead community. However, I will talk about that on another day. For now, I commend the Bill to the House.
