



Speech by
Mr TERRY SULLIVAN
MEMBER FOR CHERMSIDE

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ROAD TRANSPORT REFORM BILL

Mr SULLIVAN (ChermSIDE—ALP) (5.10 p.m.): I rise to support the Bill because of the benefits it will provide to all Queenslanders. I intend to highlight some of the key initiatives that relate to improving road safety and the concept of a chain of responsibility within the transport industry. The Bill sets in place the legislative framework for introducing reforms that I believe will bring significant benefits to Queenslanders and will continue the work of the Government in contributing to a reduction in the road toll and the trauma caused by road accidents.

The Australian Road Rules will introduce simple, practical and uniform road rules. By introducing these changes in Queensland, we will eliminate confusion and inconsistencies that presently exist between jurisdictions. We have all experienced the uncertainty of driving in other States when we have a lack of knowledge of local road rules. This initiative will have a major benefit, particularly for the Queensland tourist industry, by making it safer for tourists and reducing the number of accidents involving interstate drivers. Yet some local road rules will remain. For example, the queued right turn that is peculiar to the Melbourne City heart to accommodate the trams will stay in existence.

Introducing the Australian Road Rules will involve some modification of existing rules and additional road signs and markings. The details of the road rules will be contained in regulations brought down later this year. Another change involves the banning of the use of hand-held mobile phones while driving. This will not apply to those phones that are linked to a hands-free system within the vehicle.

To ensure that Queensland drivers are well aware of any changes, there will be an extensive Statewide communication campaign leading up to the introduction of the new road rules that will commence on 1 December this year. I am pleased to see that Paul Blake, the Executive Director of the Land Transport and Safety Division within the Department of Transport, is present in the Chamber. He has road safety very much at the forefront of his work within the department.

Another initiative contained in the Bill that will contribute to road safety is the introduction of an amendment that will allow health professionals to report in good faith to the Transport Department health issues that relate to a person's fitness to hold a driver licence. The indemnity will apply to doctors, physiotherapists, occupational therapists and optometrists. It is anticipated that under this arrangement the management of persons whose capacity to drive safely is either temporarily or permanently impaired will be improved for the benefit of all road users in Queensland. The Bill does not include any compulsory reporting requirements and it will still be at the practitioner's discretion whether or not to report to the department. Of course, licence holders are still required to self disclose at any time any medical conditions that may affect their driving.

Throughout Australian society we have an ageing population. Improvements in medical procedures allow people to retain greater mobility and drive at a far greater age than would have been the case some decades ago. What is less easily able to be assessed is a driver's attention span and ability to react to extraordinary traffic circumstances, particularly when a driver is on medication, particularly a mix of prescription drugs. We all have stories of a relative with whom no family member wants to drive because of their erratic driving behaviour. Increasingly, health professionals are becoming aware that their duty of care for patients extends to activities outside the surgery or clinic, such as driving a vehicle. Health professionals need legal indemnity if there is to be an effective reporting system. This legislation provides that protection.

Another important initiative contained in the Bill is the concept of a chain of responsibility for the heavy vehicle transport industry. I say from the outset that many managers and workers in the road transport industry are to be commended for the continuing improvement of their road safety record. The aim of the chain of responsibility is to ensure that those who bear responsibility for conduct that

breaches the law or that contributes to road trauma should be made accountable for their failure to discharge that responsibility. This concept has the support of the Road Freight Industry Council and the Transport Workers Union, which understand the need to hold accountable those who are responsible. The Bill also introduces two initiatives to support that concept: the speeding heavy vehicles policy and the managing heavy vehicles access policy, which have been discussed by previous speakers.

Some speakers from the other side of the House have spoken about the Nundah bottleneck. While I accept what the member for Gregory said in that regard, to a large degree I discount what the member for Clayfield said. I do not take him very seriously at any time, but particularly when he speaks about this issue, because he has spoken with a forked tongue on too many occasions. It is good to see that the former Transport Minister and the current Transport Minister are progressing this project to solve a problem that is almost four decades old. I congratulate the Minister, the previous Minister and the Minister before him for setting up the local area consultative group and the reference group to provide community input. As my colleague the member for Nudgee said earlier, people such as Margaret Pritchard and Norah Bennet, who have been members of those committees for years, have contributed significantly to that community input. I thank the Department of Transport for its ongoing links to the reference group, which I believe provides very good feedback and has led to a better project than would otherwise have resulted.

The proposals contained in the Bill, which I have outlined today, will benefit all road users in the State and will continue Queensland's deserved reputation for delivering road transport reforms that provide significant long-term economic and efficiency benefits to our fellow Queenslanders. Most importantly, the legislation will improve road safety on our transport network and will save lives. I support the Bill.
