



Speech by

BRUCE DAVIDSON

MEMBER FOR NOOSA

Hansard 16 March 2000

TRANSPORT LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr DAVIDSON (Noosa—LP) (12.47 p.m.): In his second-reading speech to the Transport Legislation Amendment Bill, the Minister proposed amendments to a number of current transport Acts that relate to technical policy changes in transport legislation, all of which are designed to improve operational efficiency of the various legislation issues. He concludes with the view that this legislation will be of benefit to all Queenslanders. It is highly likely that this amendment Bill will achieve such benefits to all Queenslanders in that these technicalities have been addressed and will make decision making for and by officers of the Minister's department more efficient. As such, these amendments are to be applauded.

Whilst the matter of compensation, road access or conditions of road usage are of importance to those immediately concerned, they are of little concern to the population at large. What is of concern to the population at large is the safe and efficient use of the State's roads and transport systems, particularly in areas of sustained population growth, such as we have and are experiencing in south-east Queensland. In population growth areas, such as my own electorate of Noosa, road system planning that was both sufficient and efficient for the seventies, eighties and early nineties is no longer efficient or, of most importance, safe in its daily usage by the resident and visitor populations of our region and, I suspect, in other areas of similar growth.

Whilst this legislation proposed by the Minister is commendable, it is legislation telling people what is required of them, rather than legislation that listens to the immediate needs of people and their realisation of what constitutes a safe and efficient road system in their place of major concern, that is, where they live or conduct their businesses—in other words, in their immediate world.

My plea to the Minister today is to take back to his department and departmental officers the call from these people that there is a huge need for these officers to listen to the resident users of our roadways, to listen to the safety concerns that they have for themselves and others using our major road systems that are not engineered to today's vehicular needs or performances. As an example of this statement, let me bring to the attention of this House how these user concerns manifest themselves in my electorate. One of the major feeder roads in my electorate from the Bruce Highway and Sunshine Motorway is Eumundi Road. Over the years, this major thoroughfare has had many facelifts. Some, but only some, of the many hills and gullies that form this winding road as it wends its way from the highway to Noosaville have been eliminated. But it still remains, in its early stages from Eumundi, a roller-coaster ride on a narrow, often bumpy and disrupted surface with edges and shoulders fraught with dangers for the unwary.

To compound this uncertainty and danger, the many poorly planned access roads into subdivisions that have come to life along the length of this scenic area with our huge population growth pose even greater concerns for those endeavouring to join or egress the main thoroughfare when speed limits allow speeds of up to 100 km/h along this narrow, undulating roadway. A perfect example of this inexpert planning is a section of Eumundi Road known locally as "the big dipper". Shortly after passing the Huon Munday Bridge heading towards Noosa, the road climbs steeply to a crest, upon which an access road on the left leads to a residential subdivision.

On the road's descent to the lower valley level, a distance of approximately 500 metres, there are another two access roads to Eumundi Road at ninety degree angles from both sides of the road

with very little vision available to vehicles about to enter Eumundi Road from these residential estates. The speed limit on this stretch of road is 100 km/h, but such is the descent angle that very few vehicles descend at that speed. Most are greatly in excess of the allowable limit. Needless to say, local residents are in fear of the safety of their families and themselves as they traverse this road and particularly as they are about to enter or leave the main Eumundi roadway. This is only the start of concerns about this road.

Having climbed out of "the big dipper", vehicles then descend to the junction of Beddington Road and Eumundi Road passing other access roads into other subdivisions at speeds in excess of 100 km/h to a flat plain which after excessive rain suffers flooding from Beddington Creek, which also intersects this junction. This intersection has been the scene of fatalities caused mainly by excessive speed on a road surface and width not capable of providing safe passage at even slower speeds than those considered safe by local residents.

A petition to reduce speed limits from 100 km/h to 80 km/h on that section of this roadway has been signed by 1,141 nearby residents. Many of these residents are elderly retired people, all of whom want the Department of Main Roads to listen to their pleas. They have real experience of the dangers of a roadway that departmental officers deem to be safe but which fatal accidents and major collisions prove otherwise. These people's concerns need to be heard and acted upon, particularly when the evidence of calamities is so prevalent.

Unfortunately, this is not the only concern about this major feeder road to Noosa. After passing the intersection of the Sunshine Motorway, which is also a feeder road in its own right and which has added excessive volumes of traffic to Eumundi Road, motorists are then subjected to a roadway that in no circumstances could be considered a safe, major access corridor to anywhere. Just one kilometre from the Noosaville industrial estate, the very edge of Noosa, and south of Beckmans Road and stretching for a further distance of one kilometre to Holletts Road, Eumundi Road runs through a flood plain and is actually laid below the datum line of this flood plain. This one kilometre long area is bounded by two road signs pronouncing the area as a flood plain, with flood depth signs erected on the road edges. Two waterway run-off culverts run underneath the road in this area but are more a hindrance than a help in clearing away water.

With just an average downpour of rain—a great deal less than we have experienced this year, and particularly last year—this signed area becomes a lake and impassable with anything other than a four-wheel drive or a high truck. Most permanent residents are aware that in times of heavy rain this area does flood and they take appropriate diversionary action to avoid vehicular travel on the road. Unfortunately, visitors arriving by car in Noosa—and more than half our tourist travellers enter via this route—can find themselves in serious trouble as they enter the area travelling at the speed limit of 100 km/h with the road covered in flood waters, particularly on dark and rainy evenings. I am sure members can appreciate the trauma that such an arrival would have on an unsuspecting motorist, particularly a visitor inexperienced in coping with local road conditions. Unfortunately, it is a situation that has persisted for many years. It has now been exacerbated by the volume of traffic using this road ever since the motorway added the overburdened traffic loads which Eumundi Road was never designed to cope with prior to the opening of the motorway.

Mr DAVIDSON (Noosa—LP) (3.30 p.m.): With funding for the Eumundi Road/Bruce Highway intersection works already approved and with the Eumundi bypass works to commence this year, traffic on the major regional road will only increase and thus multiply the dangers and safety concerns, already the cause of great despair to all residents and users of the road. This increase in traffic flow will also have a further detrimental effect on the condition of Eumundi Road at the Noosaville end. Any driver traversing this road between Beckmans Road and Holletts Road across the flood plain will attest to the patchwork quilt nature of the road surface.

Similarly, from the Sunshine Motorway roundabout to "the big dipper", the road surface is once again a matter of great concern in that long stretches of bitumen have been replaced by temporary, quick-fix repairs. In both of those areas the surface has deteriorated into dangerous, rough passageways which not only jar vehicles' suspensions but also contribute to unsafe vehicle movement and the overall unsafe nature of Eumundi Road. Unless department engineers take heed of the voices of the people immediately affected by speed and the deteriorated condition of this road, a road designed for the 1970s and 1980s and unable to cope with the vehicular and traffic requirements of this millennium, then no measure of planning for efficiency as spelled out by the Minister in regard to this Bill will have the slightest effect on the problems on our roads. The apparent inability of experts to listen to those vitally affected by intolerable road conditions—people with an intimate knowledge of the actual performance of our roadways—will and does contribute to road fatalities.

The same traffic traumas exist in the southern end of my electorate along the Coolum-Yandina road, especially in the immediate area of Quanda Road. Almost two years ago in May 1998, on behalf of very many concerned residents and business people from this immediate area, I raised the matter of

speed limits and the safety conditions of this stretch of roadway. Those were not frivolous concerns as fatalities had occurred in the immediate area due to poor visibility, narrow road access to industrial and business sites, and insufficient turning and overtaking lanes coupled with a speed limit of 100 km/h.

The Transport Minister of the day, my colleague Mr Vaughan Johnson, dispatched department engineers to investigate the claims made by residents against the safety aspects and conditions of the road. Minor changes were made to the road, but the main issue of speed limits being reduced from 100 km/h to 80 km/h was not considered by engineers to be required. At that time, in their opinion, neither the volume of traffic using the road nor the road conditions warranted such changes, despite the protestations of the local residents to the contrary.

On 20 January this year, a massive four-vehicle collision occurred on exactly the same stretch of roadway as prophesied by the residents two years earlier. A resident of the immediate area for 11 years, Mr Simon Apte, wrote to me about this horrendous accident. In his letter he stated—

"On the road in front of my house lay the wreckage of four cars and 12 injured people."

Mr Apte then went on to describe the mayhem and horror that greeted all who came upon this area of devastation until the last of the maimed children and their badly torn and injured parents were taken to nearby hospitals. Mr Apte stated further in his letter—

"We understand the potential and the problems, please, please, help to fix this shameful mess."

Mr Apte, a motor mechanic, then expressed his summary of the main problems with this stretch of roadway as he perceives them to be, as follows—

1. Speed limit (100KPH) is too high.
2. There is little or no shoulder on the road.
3. Heading west, the corner is sharper than it seems and at 100KPH, it is very easy to drift onto the wrong side of the road. This corner is also blind on the approach to my near neighbour's (property)."

Mr Apte then went on to explain the many other dangers inherent in this very dangerous stretch of road. The final plea in his letter to me is as follows—

"I am sick of the carnage and I am fearful for the lives of my family, my staff and my customers.

I will not give up now until sanity prevails and the speed limit is reduced and the road is modified. I urge you not to give up either.

Please, I believe you have a responsibility to do all in your power to effect a resolution to this issue."

Today I am attempting to do all in my power to bring those issues to the attention of this House and the Minister for Transport and Main Roads.

People who use our roads deserve to be heard on the matter of safety on the roads that they use. They know—more intimately than departmental boffins and advisers—which roads are in need of planning review and change so that they can be made to cope with the demands imposed on them by the ever-increasing volume of traffic in a manner that is safe to all users.

The poor planning of access roads into and out of the industrial estate that runs parallel to this killer stretch of road that is the Coolum-Yandina road is testimony to the vital need for closer cooperation among the Transport Department, local councils, local members and the affected residents in a quest for sufficient and safer roads in our State.

As a measure of this suggested cooperation, may I bring to the attention of this House and the Minister a perfect example of the lack of understanding and cooperation between a local council and the department in the matter of road planning. On the Cooroy-Tewantin road—a major access road to Tewantin and Noosa for traffic from the north and a main carriageway for local school buses—approximately one kilometre from the town of Cooroy is the intersection with Swift Drive. Directly opposite this road is the entrance to McPauls Road and immediately off the entrance to Swift Drive is Gumtree Road. This intersection can only be described as a catastrophe waiting to happen as the main Cooroy-Noosa Road is a narrow two-lane carriageway with very small bypass lanes providing access to either McPauls Road or Swift Drive.

Swift Drive is the only outlet to the Cooroy-Tewantin road from this 100-plus allotment estate. It is also used as a feeder road to Lake MacDonald Drive, thus creating a great deal of local traffic, all of which converges into the Cooroy road from this intersection. Recently, the main users of this intersection—all local residents—held a public meeting about the inherent dangers in this ill-planned intersection, which was attended by 127 people. All of those residents signed a petition asking that the

60 km/h sign on the Cooroy-Noosa Road be relocated 200 metres east of McPauls Road so as to slow traffic that now arrives at that intersection at 100 km/h.

Given that many of the residents, some elderly, and all of the resident schoolchildren need to cross this busy intersection to catch or alight from buses, that request seemed to be of particular relevance. The request was denied by the Noosa Council Traffic Safety Committee on the grounds that the speed of the approaching traffic and the small number of incidents that had occurred did not warrant the re-siting of the 60 km/h sign. However, that committee agreed to monitor the ongoing situation relating to the residents' concerns.

In relation to the council's response, a resident of the Swift Park Estate, who has excellent vision of all the near misses that occur at this intersection, has written to me. He states—

"One could be forgiven the thought that the official line of thinking in these matters is, let's wait until something serious happens before we do anything about it."

One hundred and twenty-seven people voicing an opinion and requesting an action of a local council may seem insignificant in the big scheme of Government planning, but these 127 people are on the ground, as it were; they are intimately involved in the potential for disaster at a place where they reside. Surely those people are well qualified to understand the dangers and safety requirements of their specific neighbourhood and the actions needed to rectify traffic hazards or, better still, prevent possible fatalities that may be caused by poor or faulty planning.

My earnest plea to the Minister for Transport and Main Roads is that when he takes this enacted legislation back to his departmental officers, he also takes to them my request that they pay more heed to the people who are most vitally affected by their decisions in the matter of road safety. In doing so, we may achieve a result in the matter of road and traffic planning and safety issues that reflects the desires of all of the people of Queensland and, as the Minister has stated, for the benefit of all Queenslanders.

Cause 31 inserts a new Schedule which details specifically what matters may be placed in a waterway transport management plan. Such regulations are of vital concern to my electorate of Noosa, whose economic livelihood relies very much on the tourism industry, which in turn relies heavily on the way in which our waterways and beaches are used and preserved.

The matter of a river management plan for the Noosa River has long been a subject of controversy and toing-and-froing between the State Government and the Noosa Council, despite many issues of community concern which need to be addressed. One of these issues is the use of personal watercraft or jetskis in the enclosed areas of the Noosa River system. One of the proposals in relation to control of these craft—that is, the system which allows traversing only from point A to point B in defined areas and which excludes all freestyle activities—is to be commended. This activity from recreational users of PWC causes shore damage from wash and is in conflict with the distances that current marine law requires of ships when passing moored or anchored craft, swimmers, jetties and pontoons.

In enclosed river systems, such as Noosa River, where residential properties abut the shore line, such measures which curb what is now an environmental menace will be much appreciated. It is to be hoped that the Minister will endorse such measures in the Noosa River system from the Noosaville boat ramp down to the river mouth.

The matter of unauthorised moorings, the need for holding tanks and a final interpretation of the time factor for extended live-on moorings, as well as the new regulations in regard to holding tanks on all houseboats and large craft, be they commercial or recreational, will provide for better sewage control than has been available in the past. I commend these amendments to the management of the Noosa River, and in doing so I commend the tolerance and forbearance of the officers of the Minister's department, who have not had an easy task in monitoring or controlling these activities on the river in the past.

I now turn to another issue which is of great concern to me. We have heard from the Minister for Transport about how the Transport Legislation Amendment Bill will clarify the operations and administration of various aspects of his portfolio, but will this legislation improve the daily personal interaction of his departmental staff with the public? For instance, will it improve the lot of driving testers, who are currently at the end of their tether in coping with the demands placed upon their meagre resources?

On Monday of this week one of my constituents, a driving school instructor, endeavoured to book driving tests for two of his pupils—two young girls who had spent months and sums of money learning how to drive a vehicle according to the rules set down. To his and their great chagrin, they were informed that the Sunshine Coast testing facility was unable to provide any booking for the months of March or April and the roster for May was not to be completed. So no bookings could be accepted for May. This is an intolerable situation and is a direct response to the lack of funding available to provide adequate staff to perform these duties, even though they are self-funding at \$29 per half hour per test.

Of the seven testers employed in Maroochydore, half are on sick leave because of stress. Of the seven PADAs employed in south-east Queensland, three are on stress or sick leave.

I am informed that in June last year on the Gold Coast 80 driving tests were cancelled due to lack of staff caused by stress. There is surely a message herein for the Minister. What is the Minister going to do to rectify this appalling situation, which cannot be unknown to him? His inaction in this area and thus the duress of licensed testers will surely test the patience of the impatient, will be the cause of many unlicensed drivers on our roadways and will place more pressures on our underresourced police force. Perhaps it is time for the Minister to act on the now hidden Q-Safe report—hidden because it was going to cost \$2.5m to implement.

I would like to know what happened to the Q-Safe report. The Minister may recall that I wrote to him in November, advising that one of my constituents, a young girl from Cooroy, was unable to get a driving test at Tewantin. He responded on 13 January, saying that he had responded to her much earlier than that. The letter from the Minister dated 13 January states—

"I have personally discussed the issue of waiting times with Senior Queensland Transport staff and representatives of the Driver Training Industry. Following these discussions I can now confirm that new arrangements to reduce waiting times have now been introduced.

The main aspects of these arrangements include a shorter test time which will enable two (2) additional tests per Driving Examiner each day. Also two (2) temporary Driving Examiners will be employed through until February 2000 in the Sunshine Coast area. In addition, all Queensland Transport Customer Service Centres now have test booking sheets in place up to the end of March 2000."

It is of major concern to my driving instructors and to their students who are wanting to be tested for a driver's licence that they have to wait 8, 9 or 10 weeks. They are unable to book a slot to be tested by an examiner. Many of these people are relying on a driver's licence to drive themselves to and from their employment, to and from school or to and from the Sunshine Coast University. Some are hoping to drive to Brisbane for employment, and they are unable to get a licence. They have to wait 12 months to be examined by a driving examiner, and they cannot get a booking.

It is the middle of March. No bookings are being taken up until the end of May. We have a number of people, not just in Noosa but right across the Sunshine Coast, who are wishing to book a time so they can become qualified drivers. I understand there is a 40% failure rate, and that just adds to the problem. There are many driving students who have to reapply for their licence. Unless the Minister puts some resources into the Sunshine Coast to overcome this problem, the situation will just worsen. Many of those people are annoyed and frustrated because they cannot sit the exam which would enable them to get their driver's licence.

Time expired.
