



Speech by

Mr. R. CONNOR

MEMBER FOR NERANG

Hansard 16 March 2000

TRANSPORT LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr CONNOR (Nerang—LP) (4.58 p.m.): I rise to speak to the Transport Legislation Amendment Bill. In particular, I want to talk about roadworks in my electorate. To put it bluntly, the hinterland roads are falling apart. Some sections of the roads have been patched so often that there is more patch than original bitumen, and other sections have not been patched at all. In many cases, the edges of the roads have disappeared. Vehicles are being forced to drive off the road edge because many of the roads are very narrow. They are being forced past the gravel edge onto unprepared parts of the road. It is very dangerous, and a number of sections are just disasters waiting to happen.

So what has brought all of this about? In recent months, we have had an unprecedented combination of rain and heavy vehicle traffic. The problem has been compounded by increased local traffic due to the population growth in the area. The number of problems are too numerous to detail in this contribution, but I will try to cover a few of the problem areas. A couple of days ago, I presented a petition to the House in relation to the roundabout at Alexander Drive. This roundabout across the new motorway is unacceptable. It is only a single-lane roundabout, and that is causing massive traffic jams. The area is very dangerous, especially in the mornings.

One of the most dangerous roads in the electorate is the Beechmont Road, in particular the section to Lower Beechmont, about two or three kilometres outside the Beaudesert Shire, between Tarlington Road and the craft shop. I have sent the Minister a letter expressing grave concerns about that section of road. Recently, I travelled along that section of road on a school bus. I can only describe it as terrifying. The road is very narrow, as a result of the road edges being worn away, mainly because a lot of heavy vehicles have been using it. Recently, because of all of the road work and other major works going on in the area a lot of vehicles have been carting rocks and other road materials over the road. During this work, we have had unprecedented rain over a long period. The shoulders of the roads have been worn away. This very steep section of road to Lower Beechmont was already very narrow. In many places, there are sheer cliffs on either side of the road. The school bus makes four trips a day. Literally scores of schoolchildren are being put at risk twice a day. As I said, I found the trip quite terrifying. These kids have to do the trip every day. As I said, I drew the attention of the Minister to this issue. This piece of road is a disaster waiting to happen. If something happens there, it will be a disaster—a bus full of schoolchildren going off a cliff. My descriptions are not normally that graphic. However, the situation is so dangerous that something needs to be done right now. It is just a matter of time before a major disaster occurs. On 14 February I received a letter from one of the local residents who uses that section of road. His letter stated—

"I am an owner truck driver, sub-contracted to cart large rocks from a quarry just south of the Beechmont Hall, to various locations throughout the Gold Coast for the purpose of building retaining walls. On an average day I travel along this road a minimum of ten times. I drive a Kenworth tip truck with a gross weight of 22.5 tonnes and there is up to five other trucks carting from other locations nearby. Also using this road daily are semi trailer milk tankers, rigid fuel tankers, school buses, residents, motor cycles, push bikes, pedestrians and tourists—whom are not familiar with the road.

...

It has gravel verges on either side with deteriorating jagged edges where the bitumen drops to meet the verge. There are no fog lines on the road edges, nor are there any centre lines painted and I encounter foggy conditions along here frequently. Most of the corners on this road are blind owing to rock faces, large trees and ... sections of this roadway that has sheer drops over the edge and have no protective railing to prevent vehicles from plummeting over ..."

It goes on—

"My background consists of ten years in the Victoria Police Highway Patrol and two years interstate truck driving ..."

The most important aspect of his letter was as follows—

"... it is only a matter of time before someone is seriously injured or killed along this section of roadway."

This resident is an independent person who knows what he is talking about. He is a former highway patrol officer and long-distance truck driver. He drives heavy vehicles every day. He knows what he is talking about. As I understand it, Mr Glenn Hickey lives at Beechmont. His letter goes to the essence of the problem there.

In addition, I have had recommendations from the North Road Conveyance Committee. That is a committee instituted to handle bus transport for students in the area. I have also received a letter from the High School Conveyance Committee expressing its serious concerns about this section of road. All of the roads in the hinterland are a disgrace, but this one really has to have something done about it right now.

I turn to another section of road—and this has not so much to do with the condition of the road, although it is terrible; it is one of the ones that I mentioned that has more patches than road—that is, Worongary Road, especially the section approaching Tallai. One of the major problems in the area concerns the Gilston State School, which now has a population of about 550 students. As I understand it, the school was never designed for that number of pupils. Because the public transport in the area is limited, the parents have to drop off and pick up their kids every day. The school is situated near a bend and on the crest of a hill along Worongary Road. It is plainly very dangerous and very badly located. Unfortunately, that is the background that we have to deal with. The problem is that the parking area for the school is so small that, with the growth of the school, the parents are now having to park on the other side of the road and are having to cross the road with their children to access and leave the school.

As I explained, this section of road is on a bend on a hill, with a crest to the south. Effectively, the corner is totally blind; as the cars come around that curve and up the crest, they simply cannot see the pupils crossing the road. Clearly, there needs to be either a dramatic increase in the car parking in the area or some substantial road rectification work. In fact, the area is so bad that they are not even prepared to use lollipop ladies there because it is too dangerous for them. Yet the pupils have to cross that road. It really is a very dangerous situation. As I said, it has become very bad recently because the increase in the size of the school has meant that when the parents are waiting to pick up their kids after school there is now a contest to get into the parking area, because the other option is so dangerous. The parents are arriving there anything up to 20 minutes and 30 minutes early so they can access the parking area, which is not as dangerous as parking on the other side of the road. Under normal circumstances, we would say that this also was a disaster waiting to happen. I am sure it is. However, compared with the Lower Beechmont Road, this is only a minor issue in my electorate. I have no doubt that these issues of themselves in any other electorate would be causing the media to jump up and down. However, we have many such problems in the electorate. I remind the House of the question that I asked the Minister this morning. I was not attempting to be light hearted or not to take this issue seriously. My question was: why is the Minister neglecting the roads in the hinterland? I can see no other reason, because the issues are so numerous and the situation is very bad.

While I am on the Gilston State School parking issue, I might just mention that I have received a number of representations from the P & Cs and others involved. I have a letter here from the Gilston preschool P & C and also from the Gilston State School P & C. It might be worth reading part of these letters into the record. The first letter is signed by the president of the Gilston preschool. He states—

"Stated briefly, traffic mayhem, and its attendant danger to our children, reigns supreme for the twenty or so minutes at the end of school.

I have been informed that several submissions have been made to the relevant authority seeking a marked-crossing; however, it would appear that these have met with bureaucratic inaction.

Accordingly I seek your assistance in urging the appropriate authority to approve a suitable crossing on the Worongary Road in such a position as would reduce the risk of death or injury to our children."

The next letter is from the secretary of the Gilston State School P & C. The letter is dated 14 March, and it states—

"We, as a parent group, support a pedestrian crossing or some other safety precaution to protect our children.

We have been told that our road is too dangerous for the likes of such, but we continually allow our children, with their siblings and parents, to literally take their lives into their own hands, twice a day, five days a week.

We have 585 students including the pre-school, 50 staff and 58 car parking spaces in total."

As honourable members can appreciate, with very limited public transport, of an afternoon the parents of those 585 students arrive in their cars to try to pick up their children, with only 58 car parking spaces. As they quite rightly say, there is absolute traffic chaos and, again, it is a disaster waiting to happen.

Here is another letter, this time in relation to the Numinbah Valley. I received this letter from James and Debbie Panitz, who are local residents. I guess this best describes what is not one of the worst sections of road in my electorate but is still a major problem road. The letter states—

"I am writing to express my concern about the condition of the Nerang-Murwillumbah Road (in particular the stretch between Pocket Road and the Springbrook turnoff).

On this particular stretch, one has to deal with extremely rough shoulders and huge furrows on the edges of the road caused by runoff. There is very little room to pass here, and it is quite nerve wracking to encounter one of the many buses or trucks that use this road on a regular basis.

...

I am concerned that a very serious accident (involving one of those buses or the many trucks using this road during the day) will occur here if repairs are not undertaken as a matter of urgency."

It goes on and on.

As I have already mentioned, there is that other section of Worongary Road where there are more patches to the road than there is road. Then there is the goat track, which is classed as a State road, that runs from the Numinbah Valley up the back way to Springbrook. That is unbelievable. It is the sort of road that one would put in a contest for the television show Who Dares Wins. That road is a two-way road, but it should not even be one way. The road is only almost wide enough for a truck, and even then the wheels of the truck would be on either side of the bitumen. Even the average car cannot fit fully on the bitumen.

That particular section of road, remembering that it goes up to Springbrook, is sitting on sheer cliffs with in many cases drops of hundreds of feet. As I said, it would be perfect for an episode of Who Dares Wins. It is very, very dangerous. It is another road where the shoulders have worn away or, in some cases, they have joined. People drive along the road and find that there is no longer a road because the shoulders have worn away so much on either side that it ceases to be a road; all that is left is gravel. I am not exaggerating about these roads. I just wish that the Minister would go and have a look at them; they are an absolute disgrace.

We then have the main road up to Springbrook, which is another goat track. Again, that road has received a minimum amount of maintenance. It is probably not the worst road in the electorate, but it is still a disgrace.

Mr Baumann: They need a cableway there.

Mr CONNOR: At the moment, without a cableway service, substantial numbers of tourists are travelling up to Springbrook by road. It is a beautiful place and has a great deal to offer tourists. We on the Gold Coast are doing our best to promote the green behind the gold, to bring the tourists into my electorate and that of the member for Albert and to get them to enjoy the environment and ecosystems in the hinterland. However, with them come the coaches to get them there. As a result, the usage of the roads is increasing more and more. Those big heavy vehicles are wearing away the shoulders and, unfortunately, the maintenance is not keeping up with them, especially with this long stretch of wet weather. So it goes on and on. I do not know where to stop. There are just so many sections of road—

Mr JOHNSON: This is important legislation under debate. Although I do not want to interrupt the member for Nerang, Mr Deputy Speaker, I draw your attention to the state of the House.

Quorum formed.

Mr Sullivan interjected.

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr CONNOR: I think that this litany of stories only briefly covers just how bad the situation is in my electorate.

Mr Johnson interjected.

Mr Sullivan interjected.

Mr CONNOR: I plead with the Minister to do his best to get down there, have a look and do something about it as soon as possible.
