



Speech by

**Mr M. HORAN**

**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH**

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Hansard 27 November 2001

### **TRANSPORT LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr HORAN** (Toowoomba South—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (8.40 p.m.): I rise to speak to the Transport Legislation Amendment Bill. I will raise a couple of very important issues relating to the Toowoomba area. One is the second range crossing and the other is the Gatton bypass.

The second range crossing for Toowoomba has been identified as one of the important infrastructure needs of our area. The Warrego Highway, running from Brisbane through Toowoomba, is generally regarded as the heaviest freight carrying road in Australia. It is the main road running from Brisbane to Melbourne and Brisbane to Darwin. At any particular time on the main east-west road of Toowoomba, which is the Warrego Highway—or James Street—particularly in the afternoons, at each of the intersections with traffic lights more than 50 per cent of the traffic would be B-doubles. The main east-west route through Toowoomba is starting to become seriously clogged with heavy trucks. It is becoming extremely difficult for residents to get from east to west in the city. I would not be surprised if it frightens some people to be sitting in a car amongst half a dozen B-doubles.

It was predicted that the road up the range would become clogged by about 2006. There are various estimates, but 23,000 to 26,000 vehicles per day would clog the double lane highway up the range, particularly because of the percentage of those vehicles that are heavy vehicles and also because of their speed, because they are grinding up the range in a very low gear. Those factors contribute to the clogging of the road. Once heavy vehicles get to the top of the range and traverse Toowoomba, whether they are going to Melbourne or to Darwin they have to proceed through some 16 sets of traffic lights, coming down a steep hill into the centre of Toowoomba. That can be quite dangerous as they approach a number of traffic lights, lights at schools and so forth. They then go past the edge of the CBD and past a major shopping centre area. This is a very pressing and serious problem.

The second range crossing has been proposed for some time. I am pleased to say that some progress seems to be being made. The RIP recently put out by the department indicates that by 2003-04 the important preliminary work of design and research and the purchase of properties in the corridor will have been completed. That will be a very important step towards the next part of the actual construction.

A number of my former colleagues, particularly Graham Healy and Russell Cooper, did a lot of work in years gone by in getting the corridor identified and in helping to work through the issues. It is always hard to determine where a new highway will be built, whose place will be affected and whether the social amenity of an area will be affected by the vision, the noise or, indeed, people losing a portion of their property or feeling that their property is affected by the road corridor. But that was identified some time ago.

There are a couple of reasons this road will be a great thing for Australia and for Queensland. As I have mentioned, this is probably one of the most important transport routes in Australia, linking south-east Queensland with Melbourne and Darwin. Also, it links the Darling Downs with many of the bulk carriers—the B-doubles and semis that cart grain and other products to Fisherman Islands.

There would be a huge improvement in the social amenity of Toowoomba if our main east-west street were freed up. This new road would take probably 70 or 80 per cent of the heavy transport out of the city. Importantly for the transport industry of Australia, the time spent crossing the range could be

shortened by somewhere in the order of three-quarters of an hour—maybe more—particularly considering the time it takes to come up the range, to traverse the 16 sets of lights, to get through Toowoomba itself, through the western suburbs of Toowoomba and out onto the open road.

The proposal for the road is that it would veer right east of Toowoomba and come out on the northern side of Toowoomba. Importantly, it would be about half the gradient of the existing highway. Whereas the highway to Toowoomba has a gradient of about 10 per cent in many parts, I understand that the new road would have a gradient of about five per cent. That would allow most of these B-doubles to traverse the range at around 80 kilometres an hour. There would be huge savings in time and fuel. I think safety would be greatly enhanced. Every now and again we do have a semi go over—a cattle truck, a grain truck or whatever—on the range, where they are coming down in low gear, using jay brakes and so forth. It is a very difficult descent. Much of that problem would be eliminated by a well-designed, well-engineered road such that trucks could traverse the range at that particular speed.

I think it would also greatly add to the ongoing convenience of people on the downs and people in the south-west of Queensland. For those who have to travel from Dalby to Toowoomba, for example, the new road will probably take a good deal of time off their trip. It will really open up that area and people in that whole area will feel that they are closer and that other places are more accessible, if they have to do business in the city for whatever reason. There are a huge number of economic benefits.

There has been a lot of toing-and-froing over this issue over time. I think it is quite clear that this is a federal government responsibility. It is part of the National Highway. I think I am right in saying that the federal government had proposed that full funding to start the road and so forth was to commence around 2007. We in Toowoomba are seeking to have every possible endeavour made to have that brought forward. At this stage some \$27 million has been allocated by the federal government for the design of the road, all of the feasibility studies and the purchase of all of the properties. I guess about 50 per cent of the properties in the corridor have now been purchased. I commend the department for the way it has been proceeding in a careful, staged way—just dealing with those properties that needed to be purchased in the early stages for personal reasons and so forth. I think the process has been well managed. I thank the department for the regular briefings it has given representatives of state and federal parliaments and the council about where the project is at.

I have great confidence in the professional ability of the officers of the department based in Toowoomba, and the department itself, to get the design of this road right. It will be one of the great roads of Australia. It will be important that the design is right. At this stage I think they are looking at various alternatives—whether at the top of the range there will be a cut or a tunnel, whether at some stage it could be joined with any proposed rail link and so forth.

Some of the aspects of tunnelling bring about huge expense. I think we all understand that. At the top there may be just a cut with something over the top of it so that the New England Highway can cross it going north. That will be determined. I have seen some preliminary designs and possibilities. At the end of the day, we have to make sure that what is built is an excellent road at good value for money so that it is not out of the reach of the federal government and out of the reach of our area.

I think this is one of the linchpins to development in our area, along with a number of other projects which have a window of opportunity at the moment, including two proposals for industrial and transport hubs on the western side of the city. The Department of Transport is involved in one proposal, the Charlton complex, and the other proposal is from private enterprise. Both of them would be located right next door to the corridor for this new highway, which will cross the range just north of Toowoomba, link up with the old Warrego Highway in the Charlton area and cross the downs to the south west for about another 15 kilometres to link up with the Gore Highway, which runs down to New South Wales and Victoria.

It provides an opportunity for two transport and industrial hubs and I think it could make Toowoomba and that western side of Toowoomba a mini Singapore for the handling of much freight and maybe the transshipment of freight. The proposed Australian inland railway or the Australian Transport and Energy Corridor—ATEC, as it is called—would come through that particular area, which means that transshipments could occur there. If that exciting proposal of the inland railway can get under way and eventually be linked to Darwin, Gladstone and Fisherman Islands, as is hoped, it will provide an enormous decentralisation boost to our region. Linked with the proposal to bring the recycled water from Brisbane to the Lockyer and the Darling Downs, it means there would be an enormous increase in the amount of containerised exports of produce. It is estimated that the recycled water would enable an increase of \$150 million in farm-gate sales in the first year alone. Much of that, of course, would simply have to be shipped away for export. There is enormous potential.

This road is a real linchpin and it has the wonderful attribute of an ability to take out of our large and beautiful city the busiest and heaviest freight carrying trucks in Australia, saving the Australian transport industry a huge amount of money through the ability to cross the range at around 80 kilometres per hour. It would improve road safety greatly and open up the west for the more convenient transport of goods into those warehouses and industrial complexes that could well proceed—and I

certainly hope do proceed—on the western side of the city. At the same time, to add to that the benefits that would flow from the use of recycled water would be the icing on the cake.

In the past, our area has not had big coal mines, big ports, big new electrified railway lines, and so forth. This part of Queensland has enormous potential, based on the soil and the sunshine. It just needs water to be one of the food and agricultural bowls of the world and to provide massive exports of agricultural and livestock commodities. This sort of transport infrastructure which allows business to run more efficiently and conveniently and which helps increase exports is just the sort of development to open up the south west of Queensland and the Darling Downs.

Another road infrastructure project I wish to speak about is the Gatton bypass. Again, it is still the Warrego Highway, for which the federal government has responsibility. Since the Gatton bypass was put in place roughly 11 years ago, there have been in the order of 13 fatalities on it. At the latter end of a trip back from Brisbane, it can be a very lonely, long, dark road for people who may be fatigued. It is a road that has had some narrow strips of bitumen. It is a road that suddenly goes into single lanes in the midst of a four-lane highway either side of it, making for some dangerous driving at times. There have been some gradual improvements with passing lanes provided in some sections. However, over recent years it has been the subject of great contention in Toowoomba. Mrs Joan MacDonald led a move to get petitions going and a large number of people signed petitions to have the road upgraded. I am pleased to say that the federal government has provided the funds for that and that it will be constructed in three phases by the department.

**Mr Bredhauer:** It should have happened before now.

**Mr HORAN:** Anyway, it is happening now and it is happening in three phases. The funds will be provided and I think everyone is grateful that the effort of pushing for it has borne some fruit. It will of course be managed by the Department of Transport. I appreciate the briefings we have had from the department and the way in which it is approaching this project. It is to be done in stages to endeavour to minimise any inconvenience that may occur on this particular section of the road.

I take this opportunity to continue to push for the timely construction of the second range crossing. We do not have long before the Warrego Highway will be absolutely choked. It is very pleasing to see that this preliminary stage will be completed by 2003-04 and it is my wish and hope that we will then move on to construction. That will entail a lot of pushing and lobbying by ourselves of our federal colleagues. I know the local federal member is doing that. He now has a ministry and will be pushing very hard in that regard. Also, I think it needs that continual push from the state government and from elected state members, such as myself, to see that it gets under way.

With regard to the funding and the whole development of this road, there has been strong support from the Toowoomba City Council, the transport industry and a number of financial institutions. The Toowoomba City Council, through the mayor, has been pushing hard to see if there are any possible ways in which this project could be brought forward.

**Mr Bredhauer:** There is no doubt about where she stands.

**Mr HORAN:** In her inimitable style, she has been able to put the pressure on. I see the minister is aware of that

**Mr Bredhauer:** She's good value.

**Mr HORAN:** She is a very genuine lady who fights hard for a cause. I think that what the local community has been doing is to look at any possible way in which this project can be brought forward, and the task force has looked at that.

As I have said, I think one of the keys to this is to have it well done. It needs to be well designed and it needs to be an outstanding road that, for all the money that will be involved, will provide that safety, that access and the speed across the range that we all hope for and one that can have the good exit points and access points and can provide for a good safe crossing of the New England Highway, which crosses it just on the northern side of Toowoomba.

I just make the point for the benefit of the minister's department that we have greatly appreciated the way that the departmental officers in the regional office in Toowoomba have addressed this. They have worked closely with the council and others who are pushing to bring it forward and I think we have to maintain that time span and endeavour to get this road built as quickly as we can, because this is one piece of infrastructure that will bring about enormous economic benefit to Queensland, particularly the export industry, and I believe it will be a big boost to jobs. It will be a big boost to opportunities for young people going through the University of Southern Queensland who will be able to get good professional or good trade work within the export industries that would follow the development of this road, particularly with the additional benefits that would flow from the recycled water and the addition of the proposed transport and infrastructure hubs on the western side of the city.

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