



Speech by

Liz Cunningham

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

Hansard Thursday, 21 October 2004

TRANSPORT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL (NO. 2)

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (3.04 p.m.): I rise to speak in the debate on the Transport and Other Legislation Amendment Bill (No. 2) 2004. It is critically important for communities that are growing rapidly and those that are looking at changes in traffic patterns to have a cooperative relationship between the local authority and Queensland Transport and Main Roads. I believe in many local authority areas that that cooperative relationship already exists. The legislation that we are debating today will mandate that relationship.

There have been situations in my electorate where local government decisions have somehow slipped through the net without adequate consultation with Queensland Transport. This has resulted in the state roads being impacted upon at the conclusion of the development. During the previous minister's time there was a shopping centre development that would, in most local authority areas, normally be a ribbon development but this was on the corner of a state controlled road and a council controlled road. It was not until that shopping centre was completed and was operational that the local authority realised the extent of traffic generated and the related traffic issues due to its location. It was adjacent to a high school. Steve Bredhauer had installed as a matter of urgency traffic and pedestrian lights to ensure more streamlined traffic flow on that corner. A lot of angst could have been avoided had negotiation and consultation occurred prior to approval. This bill will address that issue. It will mandate a requirement for local authorities to consult with the chief executive officer.

The Department of Transport officers in Rockhampton are very good to deal with. They have regard for the state transport needs in a very efficient way. In many local authorities the relationship between those seeking development approvals and Queensland Transport is informal. If this legislation ensures better planning and more strategic planning for railway and road transport corridors that will be a benefit to the community.

The minister rightly commented on the overpass at Callemondah. Construction of that overpass is essential for the safety of not only the industrial transportation network but also domestic traffic. A lot of people who live on the southern side of Gladstone—it always feels like it should be the western side—work at NRG, QCL, Orica, the Comalco refinery and other developing industries. They use that bypass to avoid traffic going into the city of Gladstone. Much of that traffic is industrial or industrially generated. Once the Callemondah overpass is completed it will quite significantly increase safety for all that transportation. I thank the minister for the funding for that.

Mr Lucas interjected.

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM: It was Steve. The member for Gregory raised an issue that I have written to the current minister and the previous minister about. The issue relates to the centralised booking of mechanical inspections. It has generated a lot of anxiety and annoyance in my electorate and, I believe, in many electorates. There was a close working relationship between the machinery inspector locally and the people who had to bring their vehicles in, whether they were truck drivers, taxi drivers, bus owners or whoever.

Those people established a relationship. Therefore, they were able to make adjustments to appointments when necessary and get those inspections done reasonably efficiently. It is my understanding that part of the reason for the change was the collection of moneys to ensure that fees for those inspections were paid by the applicant. I believe there are better ways to address that issue than the centralised booking system as it is. It continues to be a source of annoyance for those local people who regularly have to have vehicles, whether it is trucks, taxis or buses, inspected. The minister's office helped thankfully with our aged care bus. There was a mix-up because the vehicle had to be brought down here for inspection and there was going to be a period of time when the bus was not able to be used. Any disruption to access for social activities, doctors appointments or meetings for older people has the potential for them not to re-enliven their contact with friends at the senior citizens centre, and the minister's smoothing out of the process was very much appreciated locally. As a result, there was no disruption to the service and the inspection could be done as required.

This legislation deals with the authorisation or the designation of tow truck operators as suitable persons after criminal history checks and other checks. I have to commend the minister for that. Whilst I am not casting aspersions on any tow truck operator, they do attend accidents and breakdowns when people are relatively vulnerable. It is often at night. Often there is only one person in the vehicle and that person is often a woman. So it is vitally important that operators who have contact with people in situations of vulnerability are appropriate persons to do those jobs. There are also the other issues of vehicle rebirthing and the like where any previous criminal history that exists—contrary to the tow truck operator being a person of good conduct and good reputation—means that that person should not be involved in the industry where there is an opportunity for the wrong thing to be done.

It is that same issue that I want to raise with the minister in terms of the power in this legislation for Queensland Transport inspectors to stop heavy vehicles to check if the vehicle is carrying explosives and to stop private vehicles if the officer reasonably believes the vehicle is carrying explosives. I am not sure how that reasonableness test will be exercised simply because it would be fairly difficult visually to assume or presume that an ordinary sedan was carrying explosives. I can understand if the inspector received a tip-off, but I bring to the minister's attention the fact that again there is the possibility that people on their own will be asked to stop by Queensland Transport inspectors and the drivers of those vehicles could feel extremely vulnerable in terms of the places that they are stopped and the time of day or night that they are stopped.

I am not saying that an incident has happened, and again I am not casting aspersions on Queensland Transport inspectors. However, it should be borne in mind that any officer of the state—or federally—who has the power to stop a vehicle needs to remember that in doing so they are placing the driver of that vehicle, particularly if it is a person on their own, in a position of vulnerability. There needs to be wisdom in exercising that power to ensure that vehicles that are stopped are stopped in an appropriate place and in an appropriate manner with proper identification being provided to the driver as early as possible. I am sure that the minister's officers have already thought about all of those things.

However, I received an email—and probably many other members did also—of an incident that occurred in Australia. A purportedly unmarked police vehicle—it had a blue light—attempted to pull up a young woman driving a vehicle. The young woman had the presence of mind—and her parents had told her this, and it is something that I did not know—to call a number in order to advise the police communications centre that she had been hailed to stop but she was not going to stop because she wanted to travel to a safer place. She did this. The communications centre officer had the vehicle checked and it turned out to be an imposter. The person driving the car was actually a convicted rapist who had stolen the equipment to make his vehicle appear to be an unmarked police car. Most young people would not have the presence of mind. They are scared witless if a blue light comes up beside them and the driver of that car orders them to pull over. Hence my comment about officers with the power to pull up vehicles being sensitive to who they pull up, where they pull them up and at what time of the day. As I said, the officers in our region do a wonderful job. I will be supporting the legislation.