



Speech by

**Mike Horan**

**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH**

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## **TRANSPORT (AMENDMENT OF QUEENSLAND ROAD RULES) BILL**

**Mr HORAN** (Toowoomba South—NPA) (8.55 pm): This bill gives us a chance to think about the important principles of a private member's bill. There was a time in this parliament when no-one ever got a chance to debate a private member's bill. People simply stood up and delivered them into the parliament. They were quite a rarity. I remember one day when Matt Foley brought one into the House, and I thought, 'What's that?' It sat on the *Notice Paper* until the end of that particular session, and then we started again. The benefit of a private member's bill was simply to have it in black and white on the *Notice Paper*.

However, in recent years we have had the opportunity to debate private members' bills. We should treat these bills seriously and give them their due regard. Often private members' bills are brought in for very genuine reasons and they have been studied carefully. This is one such bill, and it looks at the safety of infants and young children.

I would ask members to look at the history of road safety and think about all the different things that have been brought in over a period that were at first considered to be a real nuisance. People complained and said that we did not need it, but at the end of the day they all made a difference.

At a time when Queensland probably had one-third of the cars that we have now and none of them were as fast as they are now, the road toll was about 840 or 850. It was incredible. Over the years a number of things have happened to dramatically reduce that road toll.

Despite the fact that there are far more cars on the road now—it is not unusual for a family to have two or three cars—and we have a far greater population, a number of changes have brought the road toll back to around 320 to 340. I would add, though, that that figure is bad enough, especially when car accidents can result in spinal injuries, head injuries and so on that can affect people for the rest of their lives. It is a dreadful carnage and we must continue in our genuine attempts to reduce it.

One of the key contributors to the reduction in the number of deaths on the road was the introduction of the breathalyser. When it was first brought in, the legal limit was .085. Everyone complained. All sorts of responsible people whom I knew, even police officers, would say, 'I'm all right. I can go home. I'll just drive slowly and watch the white line.' Everyone said that the breathalyser was dreadful and terrible. However, it made a big difference and the limit was reduced to its current level. Certainly, the breathalyser has made a vast difference to what happens on the roads, particularly to young people aged between 18 and 26, who are overrepresented in accidents resulting in death and/or injury.

When seatbelts were brought in people absolutely rubbished the idea. It was incredible. People said, 'I won't be able to turn around,' or, 'I'm an old footballer and I have a crook shoulder. I can't shut the door. I can't move,' or, 'I feel like I'm going to choke. When the car stops I'll be strangled.' All that sort of thing was said. People felt that they had lost their freedom or independence or something—I do not know what it was. People fought the introduction of seatbelts like mad. But it has eventually been proven that going to that little bit of trouble of clicking up—the current generation know that that is what they have to do—has been a major contributory factor to the reduction in deaths and the halving or better than halving of the carnage on our roads.

All those changes have been difficult. Sometimes people have fought against them. The recent introduction of 50-kilometre speed limits in suburban areas is a nuisance for a lot of people, but it is worthwhile and it makes our suburban streets safer. The introduction of the 40-kilometre speed limit zone outside of schools is another example. We have to do it. We have to look to see whether the speed limit applies during school time or just for short periods—some are between 7 am and 8.30 am and others are between 7 am and 4.30 pm. People have to slow down and take care. Sometimes if the kids are all in school and you crawl by at 40 kilometres an hour it feels like an eternity, but it is a worthwhile and necessary initiative that has made our school precincts safer.

So I say to those people who look on this as being a bit difficult or more onerous that they should consider historical things we have done that have dramatically reduced the death, the tragedy, the carnage, the maiming, the paralysis, the head injuries and all the suffering from injuries that have happened in car accidents. I thought about this bill myself when I read it. I thought that small businesses are going to have to get accredited and that that will be a nuisance. They are going to have to train their staff to know how to do this exactly. A little more care is going to have to be taken with our kids—because this involves kids aged one to seven. But when you think about it, it is worthwhile.

When we had our first couple of kids a special seat for kids had just been introduced but when the boys were babies we just put them in a wicker basket on the back seat. That is all it was. We would put the wicker basket on the back seat and drive home from the party. I would say, 'I'm right. I'll get you all home. I'll get the family home.' I look back on it with terror and I think how unsafe it was. Members have talked about the ambulance capsules which are a wonderful service. The seatbelt goes through the capsule and they are specially fitted, which is just terrific. Now young mothers and fathers have that extra safety for their children in an inevitable crash that a certain number of people with a baby in the back of the car will have. How much safer is that child going to be now? The baby capsule was a great improvement.

We had an EH Holden that had a bench seat in the front. We bought a seat with two little hooks that went over the seat and it had a little gate that opened and shut. The kids would sit up there on the front seat. I look back on it and I wonder what would have happened if I had stopped suddenly. They would have gone straight through the windscreen. But that was the primitive model of seat restraints that was available at the time. Bit by bit throughout history these good systems have evolved—the wonderful capsules and the blocks that kids can sit on in the back seat that have a seatbelt to restrain them.

I think a lot of thought has gone into this bill. Some people have said, 'You're not going to stop those who are irresponsible.' We have to try to stop them with policing, education and so on. This is about making the restraints that we have and the way those restraints are put into the cars just that bit better so that we can reduce the number of children who die or are injured. The shadow minister spoke about the fact that an average of six kids are killed and 312 kids are injured each year. If we could just reduce those numbers by 10, 20, 30 or 40, that would be a wonderful thing to do. I am sure that parents would do it if they felt that this was a step forward and made their kids a little safer.

The age group of one to seven years that the shadow minister has addressed in this legislation is an important time. At the age of one kids are out of the cot and starting to crawl around or toddle or walk. If they are three or four they have ants in their pants. They do not want to sit in the back of the car. They want to move around, get up and look out the window. They get restless and ask, 'Are we there yet?' That is the time when they need a good restraint—something that is comfortable. Then if they are involved in a smash, it is not going to pull across their neck because they are a bit too small and instead of the seatbelt being across their shoulders it is half around their neck or they fall out sideways for other reasons. I think this legislation is worthwhile for that age group of one to seven. By the time they reach seven years of age most kids are of an adequate size where the normal seatbelt would suit them.

Any rational examination of this legislation would make people realise that, yes, it is a little more of a nuisance but it is for the safety of their kids. If one in 10 children or one in 20 children are saved from injury or are saved from a more serious injury or even death then it will have been well worthwhile.

The other aspect of this debate has been the adequate fitting of these restraints. I think it is important. Cars do vary dramatically in size and shape. It is important that the fitting is right. If there are different types of seatbelts then that is a small price to pay in time and cost to ensure that children are adequately, safely and well restrained. If the children are safely and properly restrained, then people would drive their cars a little better. They would not be turning around to yell and scream at their kids to tell them to shut up and get back under the seatbelt—all those things that can distract people and cause accidents. I think people would drive with a lot more confidence and be confident that what they are doing for their children is worthwhile.

I say to everybody in this House that they should have a good think about this. They should not think about it as a them and us situation—them on that side and us on this side. A lot of thought has gone into this legislation. It is sensible and practical. Yes, it does involve a little extra work and difficulties, but in the interests of young children it is well worthwhile giving it support.

Time expired.