



Speech by

**Jason O'Brien**

**MEMBER FOR COOK**

Hansard Wednesday, 23 May 2007

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## **TRANSPORT OPERATIONS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr O'BRIEN** (Cook—ALP) (3.03 pm): I rise to support the Transport Operations Legislation Amendment Bill 2007. I do so not just as a member of the government but as a former taxi driver. I drove taxis on and off in Cairns for about five years. My father owned taxi No. 42 in Cairns for over 10 years. Driving taxis helped put me through university. It also helped me at another point in my life when I was a bit cash-strapped. I quite enjoyed driving a taxi. I enjoyed the fact that at the end of the day's work you had a day's pay in your pocket. That certainly helped me in those days.

I drove days and nights but predominantly nights. There were a couple of situations that I got myself into which were a bit hairy. There were some violent incidents in the taxi, some unpleasant incidents with people who were intoxicated, throwing up, making gooses of themselves, hanging out of the car, being unsafe, getting stuck into each other and getting stuck into me. There were times when it was a particularly unsafe place to be.

The initiatives that the minister has put in place to increase safety, not just for drivers but for their patrons, are to be applauded. This bill that is before the House is a continuation of those efforts. In particular I rise in support of the security levy amendments that are contained in the bill. The levy will provide financial support for the ongoing funding of the secure taxi rank initiative in the regional areas of Cairns and Townsville. This enables the provision of rank marshals and security guards at taxi ranks located in the malls of both of those cities—the Lake Street Mall in Cairns and the Flinders Street Mall in Townsville.

Since the inception of these secure taxi ranks in November 2006 the success has been as evident as in the Brisbane ranks. Cairns taxis have carried over 34,000 people home in 15,000 trips and Townsville taxis have carried over 20,000 people home in 10,000 trips. The provision of marshals and guards at these ranks is hugely valuable as they provide a central rank close to many of the clubs and pubs to help late-night partygoers get home quickly and safely.

As the minister said in his second reading speech, marshals and guards provide a presence that offers authority and supervision which makes it easier for patrons to feel safer as they know there is less chance for violence to erupt at a supervised taxi rank. Secure taxi ranks also benefit the taxi industry by providing an organised and monitored rank where taxi drivers know that they will get fares quickly. This is strengthened by the fact that taxi drivers have been strongly servicing the ranks in Cairns and Townsville since November last year which has helped cut waiting times. Reduced waiting times means long-term profits for the taxi industry as patrons are far more likely to use and return to a taxi rank when waiting times are moderate.

Importantly, steps are being taken to make further improvements to the safety of taxi ranks. As members will know, the government has committed significant funding for improvements to infrastructure such as better lighting and signage, closed-circuit television and safety barriers in areas where safety related taxi initiatives are implemented. The secure ranks in Cairns and Townsville will feature some of these improvements before the end of the 2007 financial year. The closed-circuit television systems that are currently in place will be enhanced to provide better coverage of the secure taxi ranks, and

improvements to safety barriers and signage will be made to secure the rank in Cairns and improvements to lighting and signage will be made to secure the rank in Townsville.

The government has been funding the cost to provide the rank marshals and security guards in these regions without financial contribution from the levy since November 2006. The introduction of the levy will ensure that these important services which ultimately benefit the taxi industry can continue by providing a contribution towards their ongoing costs, currently estimated at 90 per cent in Cairns and 86 per cent in Townsville.

I am extremely pleased that the bill proposes to amend the Transport Operations (Passenger Transport) Act 1994 to allow for the introduction of a levy on the holders of a taxi licence in those areas where secure taxi ranks operate. I welcome the introduction of the levy delivered by this bill and I commend the bill to the House.