



Speech by

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MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

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TRANSPORT OPERATIONS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (12.08 pm): It is my pleasure to rise to speak to the Transport Operations Legislation Amendment Bill 2007. I note the support offered by the shadow minister. I also want to congratulate the minister on this levy. Whilst I have some concerns that the levy could have been applied to some other people rather than just taxis—and I will come to that later—I think the principle is admirable.

I note from the second reading speech that the levy will fund initiatives to enhance the safety and security of taxi patrons and taxi drivers throughout Queensland. Obviously that is a major issue on the Gold Coast, and I will come to that in a minute. I also note that the levy will strengthen the arrangements for taxis operating between Queensland and New South Wales in the Coolangatta-Tweed Heads region. That is something I have had personal experience with. Many years ago, I caught a cab from the Greenmount resort back to my House at Broadbeach Waters. I cannot remember why but I remember noticing that the fare seemed very high. As it turned out, I had caught a Tweed cab or something, and I had to pay for a return visit for the cab to go back from Broadbeach Waters without a fare.

Mr Lucas: You could have gone down to Twin Towns and taken in a show.

Mr LANGBROEK: Exactly. I think I probably had and I had strolled over to Greenmount.

I note that the legislation is partly as a result of the incidents that happened soon after I was elected in 2005. I was elected in 2004 but the incidents happened in early 2005. There was a major incident in Brisbane city that caused a safety summit that led to the formation of the Brisbane City Safety Action Plan, which the Premier released I think in conjunction with the lord mayor. At the time I organised a summit on the Gold Coast and the result of that was calling for the same outcomes for the Gold Coast as provided to Brisbane.

I note that the initiatives in the Brisbane City Safety Action Plan were headed under a number of headings including 'Managing alcohol'. I note that of five provisions under 'Managing alcohol' there was the provision of providing additional liquor licensing compliance and enforcement officers for Brisbane. I do not know that we have received that on the Gold Coast. There was to be a comprehensive review of the Liquor Act 1992. I note that legislative amendments from the review were to be operational by the second half of 2006. I note that has not happened. I am disappointed about it, but I am looking forward to debating the legislation which I have put before the House about the provision of alcohol to minors.

There are other sections such as 'Strengthening Policing'. There were 14 tactical crime squad officers to be allocated to the Brisbane Central district, and the capacity of the vehicle used to remove intoxicated persons was to be increased to six people. They are all things we would like on the Gold Coast as well.

The other section with which this legislation deals is headed 'Improving Transport'. I note that section 3(b) of the safety action plan states—

Develop in consultation with the BCC—

the Brisbane City Council—

and industry measures to improve taxi rank security and boost the number of cabs at peak times.

It says at the end of that section—

Measures to improve the availability of taxis during peak periods will be developed by the State Government in consultation with the industry and BCC. The objective is for initiatives to begin to roll out by mid 2005 or earlier where achievable.

Once again, I would be interested to hear from the minister if there has been consultation with the industry on the Gold Coast, because we have major problems with availability of taxis during peak periods. That may well be to do with the fact that we have one taxi to every 700 people in Brisbane and only one taxi to every 1,800 residents on the Gold Coast. I have heard the member for Mudgeeraba commenting on the frustration that she has felt by not being in one of the central suburbs of the Gold Coast. It can be very frustrating getting cabs to the area. I will comment on this further when I speak about this matter later.

I note that since the inception of this program under the Brisbane City Safety Action Plan, under section 4 'Creating a Safer Environment', the government had committed over \$2½ million to the Brisbane City Council for various safety and security initiatives. Once again, I will unashamedly say that we would like our fair share on the Gold Coast, because we think with our influx of tourists and the general population that we have on the coast we certainly have a case for increased funding for the same sorts of provisions such as closed-circuit television, an increase in staff as well as these taxi measures, which of course we welcome.

The final section of the Brisbane City Safety Action Plan is headed 'Working together'. That section established a task force. Again, we note that the Beattie Labor government is very good at establishing task forces. We would like to see something come out of those task forces.

I note the concern of the shadow minister about certain issues such as whether it should only be taxis which incur this levy. If we consider that part of the problem can be the licensed establishments that are providing alcohol and selling alcohol to the patrons who then go out and get frustrated waiting in cab queues—and I have seen examples of this—then perhaps some consideration should be given to liaising with the minister for fair trading as to whether Liquor Licensing could be applying this fee to the clubs which provide the alcohol. I know that they have had various imposts put on them in terms of security, but it would seem to me to be a relatively dilutionary way of making sure that taxis do not feel like they are the only ones who have to wear the pain when they are just driving the people home, and they are having to deal with the frustrations from those cab queues. I have been in cab queues late at night in Cavill Avenue and Orchid Avenue, and it is extremely frustrating for people to be waiting at taxi ranks and to see people queue jumping. Then you see people getting frustrated, which leads to aggression and violence, as the minister mentioned in his second reading speech. Then we have had some of those tragic incidents.

I note that the government assumed funding responsibility from the Brisbane City Council for the secure taxi ranks in Brisbane in November 2005 and that the other eight secure taxi ranks which have been provided in regional areas include the Gold Coast as well as the Sunshine Coast, Cairns and Townsville. There are now 11 secure taxi ranks operating in Brisbane. The government has given an amnesty to taxis until now, when I suspect that the Treasurer may have said, using her bamboo pointing stick, 'It is time to get some more revenue in. Let's try to get it in this year's budget.' The transport minister probably said, 'I think I can find \$300 from a number of people,' and the bamboo pointing stick—

Mr Lee: This is a deviation.

Mr LANGBROEK: It is a bit of a deviation, but I think that is probably what happened. The transport minister said, 'We can get some money from these taxi people.' I note that the legislation provides that the levies be paid into a fund which can only be used for improving the security of taxi services including, for example, the costs of engaging rank marshals and security guards at taxi ranks. Any surplus in the fund at the end of the financial year will be used for further improvements in the subsequent year.

I note that the shadow minister mentioned that the levy will be \$300 for the first financial year and that it will not increase by more than the CPI. I want to return to the issue I raised earlier, and that relates to taxis on the coast. The concern is shared by many people who do not live in the central area of the Gold Coast that there are often problems getting a taxi. I mentioned the ratio of one to 700 in Brisbane and one to every 1,800 on the Gold Coast. I understand that the minister allowed for another 30 licences I think on the coast last year. It still leaves us way out of whack. I understand that Black and White Cabs met with the minister over Easter 2006. They were rejected, so there is no competition on the coast. Obviously there is very little motivation for the current taxi provider to really improve services for the community.

Mr Lucas: I am not being silly here, but do you support having a second operator on the Gold Coast?

Mr LANGBROEK: Minister, I do not know enough about it but I would think that having one provider would lend me to think that possibly, through you, Mr Deputy Speaker, you would not necessarily want to improve your service as much as if there were a competitor. I do not know enough about the process itself, but it would seem to me that if cab licences are selling for \$350,000 in Brisbane and \$670,000 on the Gold Coast it is a bit like that banana situation we had last year: there just are not enough on the Gold Coast.

We clearly need more. We are the sixth largest city in the country, a premier tourist destination, and clearly we could do with some more taxis.

Returning to the legislation, I acknowledge what the minister has done but I would like him to address my other concerns regarding taxis on the Gold Coast. As I said, I support the legislation.