



Speech by

Karen Struthers

MEMBER FOR ALGESTER

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TRANSPORT LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Ms STRUTHERS (Algeria—ALP) (4.06 pm): Road transport is the dominant mode of freight method in Queensland, despite the great benefits of rail. I must say that I am a big fan of trains and am using quite a few of them at the moment. The national freight yard is located in my backyard in Acacia Ridge. It is a great facility and lots of my local residents work there. Sadly, many businesses in my local area, when I asked about their use of rail freight, said that they favoured the direct route from point A to B without the double handling that comes with rail freight. So there are a lot of issues. Certainly the lack of federal government investment in track upgrades on the national freight line has meant that it is been less positive for businesses to use rail freight because of the lack of timeliness on occasion with rail freight compared to road freight.

I know a lot of people in my local area are complaining about heavy vehicles using our local roads. I am very pleased that this bill makes a number of very positive changes to the industry to improve road safety. I support the bill because, among other things, it aims to improve road safety and traffic management with new investigative powers and penalties for breaches of heavy vehicle, mass dimension, loading and driver fatigue management requirements.

The most significant amendments in this bill are the adoption of the national compliance and enforcement reforms for heavy vehicles and improvements to the taxi and limousine industries. These are the two areas that I will be commenting on. My local area is a transport and economic hub of south-east Queensland. We need the trucks to distribute freight in and out of our area, but we need to ensure that these vehicles use the main roads and the Logan Motorway, not the local roads, and we need to ensure that trucks are driven safely and responsibly. I commend the former minister—and I am sure the new minister will take his lead in this regard—for doing a lot of work with departmental officers and other stakeholders to get the changes needed to ensure that heavy vehicles do use roads like the Logan Motorway. A fair bit has already been done to try to keep them off local roads, past some of the schools in other areas. Some of them are doing rat-runs through Pallara, down Ritchie Road, using Blunder Road. Until that is upgraded fully, that is certainly not a desirable route.

Crash statistics in Queensland have highlighted the potential hazard heavy vehicles can pose when not managed properly, and the figures for 2006 are very disturbing. When taking into account rigid trucks, articulated trucks, road trains and B-doubles, there were something like 53 fatal crashes in Queensland. This represented something like 16 per cent of the Queensland road toll. So we are certainly dealing with a significant problem. The recent increases in fatal crashes can be attributed to increasing numbers of heavy vehicles, but it is certainly alarming that we had something like 53 fatalities last year.

I know firsthand the impact of a truck colliding with a car. My family were involved in a serious accident at Mudgeeraba many years ago when my cousin and her young baby died. We hit a truck loaded with scrap metal and all of us ended up in the very good care of the Gold Coast Hospital for many weeks and, for some of us, months. It is certainly something we want to try to prevent and it is very positive that we are seeing these national road rules in Queensland leading the way in many areas.

With regard to the taxi industry, there are a number of changes that will improve access to taxis in peak hours that will enhance not only the amenity but also the safety of the taxi industry. There have been a number of moves to have security officers stationed around taxi ranks, and that is all very positive. Certainly, if you are waiting in a dark area—I know when I leave functions at night sometimes I am waiting outside a function centre on my own and not feeling very safe. I was at the Gold Coast recently after a function and a couple of fellows who were pretty intoxicated were hanging around hassling a number of people. A very kind young fellow said to me, 'Please share my cab.' I was taking a risk in doing that, but it was a lesser risk than hanging around with the drunks. It is certainly very important that taxis are timely and that we have more taxis in peak times so that people can readily move about.

The other issue I want to take the opportunity to raise with the minister is not covered in the bill but it is something that I think needs future attention. It has been given some coverage because I have raised this with the former minister over the past year or so. We need to be very clear about what opportunities we provide into the future for safety seats for infants and babies in taxis. At the moment people carry their own baby capsules and insert them into taxis themselves. In other states there are some projects and schemes underway whereby when you book a taxi and ask for it they will provide people with a baby capsule or a safety seat. I ask the minister to keep an eye on developments in this regard. I will certainly be talking with him more about this. It is certainly important that we make the taxi industry as safe as possible and travel within taxis as safe as possible for all passengers, including infants and babies.

I congratulate the new minister on his new role. I know he will take to this role as he does to many others and that is with a great deal of determination. I wish him well in that role.