



Speech by

Mike Horan

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

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HOSPITAL CONNECT

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South—NPA) (10.19 pm): In Toowoomba we do not have many opportunities for people who are poor and sick and who have to visit specialists in the Brisbane area. Sadly, many specialist services are not available in Toowoomba, particularly services relating to radiation, eyes, sleep apnoea and other specialist services. The only way these people can get to Brisbane is via the Greyhound bus service, the ambulance transit service, which is a 15-seater bus, or a system that has been run for 12 months called Hospital Connect, which is run by a husband and wife team with previous bus experience. We do not have a railway system like the Gold Coast, the Sunshine Coast and Ipswich. We only have a train that stops outside the meatworks about five kilometres outside the town during the night or early in the morning. So there is no rail system for people to use.

This Hospital Connect service provides people with a trip to Brisbane to the Wickham Terrace specialists, the Wesley Hospital, PA, QEII, RBH or the Mater for a cost of between \$36 and \$40. If they are eligible for the subsidy through the health department it costs them nothing on completion of the paperwork. The system run by the ambulance of the mini bus that supports 15 people is a good system, but it is meant for those people who need care in transit. There are many other people, such as people who need to access radiation services, eye services and sleep apnoea services and so forth, who need to use the Hospital Connect service—the private service. Those people wanting to access the spinal injuries outpatients at the PA Hospital—and many of the outpatients have appointments in the afternoon—need to travel via Hospital Connect because the ambulance service leaves early to get back to Toowoomba on time.

In terms of finance, the health department pays \$420 per person in the ambulance mini van and it is \$40 maximum in the private Hospital Connect service. Tonight, after many letters to the Minister for Health, the minister for transport and the Minister for Emergency Services, I plead with the minister for transport to provide some assistance to allow this Hospital Connect service to continue. If he cannot do that, this service will finish at the end of the month. All they want is a sliding scale so that when they reach profitability—and they have in the past at times—they are prepared to have no subsidy; they can run it on their own. They just want some assistance.

On many occasions the ambulance transit service cannot take people. Last Sunday night a social worker from the Toowoomba Hospital rang Hospital Connect in relation to a person who could not afford to pay for the transport they needed and who could not get on to the ambulance bus. This service for our city of Toowoomba is absolutely essential. Minister, please provide a subsidy. Do not let us lose this service.