



Speech by

**Mike Horan**

**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH**

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## **TRANSPORT LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr HORAN** (Toowoomba South—NPA) (6.13 pm): The Transport Legislation Amendment Bill covers some six bills and many of the issues that are dealt with are very, very important. My electorate of Toowoomba South and the Toowoomba and Darling Downs area generally is a huge trucking centre. There are some very large major companies in Toowoomba like Simons Transport, Neil Mansell and Wagners with its aggregate trucks and concrete trucks. The nearby towns of Pittsworth and Oakey are also very, very big transport centres.

The main road through Toowoomba—James Street or the Warrego Highway—is one of the heaviest freight-carrying roads in Australia. Whilst I do not have the latest figures, somewhere in the order of 3,500 to 4,500 semitrailers—mostly B-doubles—go through the main east-west street of Toowoomba every day. They are heading from south-east Queensland, through Toowoomba and then they either turn right and go to Darwin or turn left and go down through central New South Wales to the southern states to Melbourne, Adelaide and Western Australia. Traversing the city they go through 16 sets of traffic lights. It is a major issue in our city. You can stand at any set of traffic lights at nearly any time of the day and see about half a dozen B-doubles at either side, east and west, at those lights. It is the main east-west street of our city.

As not only the volume of traffic but the weight of traffic continues to grow, it makes the social amenity of the main east-west street of the city very difficult for people. Many people would normally use that road, particularly mothers, to take their kids to schools like St Xavier's, St Joseph's, St Mary's, Harristown State High School, Concordia, Glennie, St Ursula's—all the schools in that particular area. It really makes it very difficult for people to go east and west.

For that reason the second range crossing, or the Toowoomba bypass, has become essential. Some years ago the federal government put forward the money to purchase the corridor. That has been done. The money is there now for the final detailed planning which is underway, and I believe the test drilling of the tunnel is almost complete. Once this road is put in place it will have about three lanes either side, two of which will be operable and the third one will be a spare for pipelines and communication lines and so forth.

The benefit of a second range crossing will do is twofold: firstly, there will be a dramatic change to Toowoomba by taking thousands and thousands of heavily laden trucks out of our city trying to traverse through 16 sets of traffic lights; and, secondly, the number near incidents and crashes that occur will decrease, particularly on the range where literally hundreds of incidents have occurred in recent years resulting in deaths, injuries and major dislocation to the extent that the city is virtually cut off.

The second range crossing is essential. I think it is the most important road in Australia that needs to be built. However, I do understand the importance of upgrading the very strategic Pacific Highway in the north of our state with the floods that occur. But when one looks at the sheer volume of traffic going through one of the biggest, if not the biggest, inland cities in Australia other than Canberra, it is no longer tolerable to have that volume of trucks going through the main east-west road of our city.

For the transport industry, using the second range crossing will take at least three-quarters of an hour off the travel time. They will be able to cross the range at 80 kilometres an hour. The cost of running a B-double is somewhere in the order of \$100 an hour these days, so there is a very significant saving in

time and money. The proposal that is being looked at is a possible business case for a public-private partnership for that road.

It does seem a shame to me that ring-roads are built around Melbourne and Sydney and four-lane and eight-lane highways from Brisbane to the Gold Coast and to the Sunshine Coast, but because we are a regional city we are looking at a public-private partnership to build this road because of the sheer cost. This is one of the most important pieces of road infrastructure for the transport industry of Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory—for the nation. Toowoomba itself deserves to have this bypass road so that we can have a reasonable social amenity within our city. I look forward to announcements by the federal government to put forward the money. We have been asking for it for many, many years. A substantial amount now has gone into the planning, the purchase of the corridor and the drilling, which, as I have said, has been undertaken.

There are a couple of issues in this bill that are important, and I understand that they have been addressed. One is the issue of volumetric loading and the other one is the issue of mass loading. These are very important measures in Queensland. They were brought in by my colleague the former minister for transport and member for Gregory and have been continued. Queensland is the envy of other states because these measures are so sensible and practical. Speaking as the shadow minister for primary industries, I think volumetric loading is important. If a person has four decks of cattle—whether they are steers, bullocks or cows with varying weight; whether there are 26, 24 or 22 per deck depending on their size—they are allowed to have a full load.

The mass loading arrangements mean a 7½ per cent tolerance. If you have a semitipper registered for farm use and you do not have scales on the farm, you are out on the paddock or getting the grain from a chaser bin or a header, then you are able to cart that out and have that sensible and practical tolerance. I think it is good to see that maintained and also the four-hour concession for livestock operators, because they often have to stop to check cattle depending on the load. It might be drought stricken cows and they need to check the load regularly. They have to stop and make adjustments to the load to get a cow upright which might be down. All of those issues mean that they could be delayed and that is a sensible provision to have maintained in the bill.

An issue brought up in the bill is the chain of responsibility. As far as the trucking industry goes, I think it is a good thing because it makes people responsible, particularly those at the end such as the consignor and the ones who are sending the particular load. If it is vegetables coming out of the Lockyer and the truck leaves in the afternoon and has to be at the Sydney markets by eight the next morning and if there is a time where loading is arranged and that is delayed, that puts the truck driver and the truck company under enormous pressure because, if they are not at the markets by a certain time, it is not considered fresh and it may not meet the quality arrangements and so forth. Therefore, they are often in a position where they have to try to get there in a reduced period of time. Likewise with people loading cattle, if the cattle are not ready or if the yards are not of sufficient capacity or standard, then hold-ups occur.

This bill amends the Transport Operations (Passenger Transport) Act, particularly relating to taxis and limousines. There is an issue which I recently wrote to the minister about, and I want to raise this particular matter because it relates to this act. I think many members of the House would be interested in this because it would affect their electorates. The issue relates to the Harley Owners Group, which runs a 'Cruise for Cancer' and has raised over \$100,000 over the last five years. A similar ride occurs in many electorates. In Toowoomba this year the ride went from Toowoomba down to Queen Mary Falls near Killarney. The money charged for people to go on the bike was collected by Rotary. There was a picnic lunch, and people paid for the pleasure and privilege of going on the bike.

There are many other events around the state—things such as outback getaways and other rides that are in place. The issue here is that the group which runs this ride has done so for many years and it runs it very well. Some of the meals are provided by TAFE. Suncorp provides sponsorship. The Queensland Police Service provides supervision because it can cover up to three to five kilometres of bikes along the highway. It sounds like a squadron of Lincoln bombers approaching when you hear the pulsating roar of the Harleys.

The provision of motorcycle rides to the general public in return for payment of a fee, the department says, is regarded as a motorcycle tourist service. This is not really a tourist service; it is a fundraising event. They have blanket drives and those sorts of things as well. There are a number of exemptions that would allow a charity ride such as this to be exempted from the need to have an operator accreditation and driver authorisation of all of the drivers. This particular group, HOG, meet most of the exemptions: that the ride not be held on a regular basis; that it is attached to a fundraising charitable event—they get a tick there—and that the ride must not be established as a commercial enterprise—in other words, proceeds go to a charitable organisation, and they get a tick there. Where they do not get an exemption is that the ride must be of short duration, that is, no longer than 15 minutes. That is the problem.

I would presume this would apply to Rotary and its outback getaways and maybe the 'Big Bash' charity bashes held to raise money and so forth. The penalties are up to \$12,000 for operators and \$7,500 for each driver. The department was kind enough to allow an exemption this year because the ride was

about to take place. The reason it came up was that they never knew about this; they never bothered to apply. When they did apply, suddenly all these issues are there. The real issue is that no-one in the department seemed to have the ability to provide an exemption. Certainly in Toowoomba there was not the devolution of responsibility to provide the exemption. But there was also this issue of one of the four rules which they could not get an exemption for—that is, the ride being longer than 15 minutes. I have written to the minister about this issue. I am sure the minister understands the good intent behind this. There is no way that they are trying to transgress anybody's tourism service. They are one-off events and if the minister could address that, which I am sure he will, that would be excellent.

The other thing I wanted to speak about tonight in the time left is the issue of taxidriviers. To go back to another point, the provision of a plate for heritage vehicles over 30 years is a good provision. They are quite a unique part of special occasions, particularly school formals and weddings. With regard to taxis, I have checked with some of the people involved in the taxi industry in Toowoomba. The service level is still above 85 per cent, which I understand is an acceptable level. It is mainly in places like Brisbane and the Gold Coast where there seems to be such huge demand. The demand, I understand, from talking to people in the taxi industry in Brisbane is huge. People in the taxi industry themselves say that there is a need for additional vehicles.

I want to turn to the Gold Coast and the stories I have heard from there. The Gold Coast is a city that is heavily reliant on tourism. There is nothing more offputting for tourists or for young people who want to go out to nightlife than having to queue for cabs. At two o'clock or three o'clock in the morning people do not want to have to queue for cabs. A couple of years back I was in Melbourne with my wife, and we had the pleasure of going to the Derby on Saturday. That Saturday night the Wallabies played the Irish in a game, and there were some celebrations afterwards. At the appropriate time we left and walked out to the cab rank. The queue at the city cab rank which is near the casino must have been about three or four kilometres long. I said to my wife, 'I am not waiting here; I've had this.' We were staying at a motel some few kilometres out of town, so we walked. But two hours later I said, 'I have had enough,' and I was about to lie down on a park bench when we struck a cab coming along the road.

But my impression of Melbourne was spoilt by that. If a city promotes itself and advertises itself for events, then there should be ways home. In Melbourne at 12 o'clock at night—or it might have been earlier—all the public transport stopped. They had brought in the innovation of matches—whether it was Australian Rules, Rugby or the odd State of Origin match—at night. They start at about eight at night and go to about 10. By the time you go somewhere and have a cup of tea, before you know it the public transport has stopped and there is no way of getting home.

We are heavily promoting the Gold Coast and Brisbane as safe cities. For Brisbane, in particular, young people come from Toowoomba to work or to go to university. They like the city because it is safe. Like our home city of Toowoomba, it is a good, relatively safe city. For a city to be safe, there have to be cabs at night for young people, particularly for young girls. Some of the things that have been brought in are good, such as security at cab ranks and having substitute taxis which the companies can bring on stream at times. But we still have a real shortage. For a place like the Gold Coast, which is one of the great tourist destinations of the world, there must be enough cabs because that is an essential part of a tourism service.

Other speakers have spoken about the limousine service and some of the difficulties with electronic bookings and passenger systems. Whilst we support this bill, there have been some reservations about the practicality of that. That is my contribution. I thank the minister for listening to that issue in particular about charity rides.