



Speech by

**Hon. Paul Lucas**

**MEMBER FOR LYTTON**

Hansard Tuesday, 17 April 2007

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## **TRANSPORT OPERATIONS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

### **Second Reading**

**Hon. PT LUCAS** (Lytton—ALP) (Minister for Transport and Main Roads) (12.43 pm): I move—  
That the bill be now read a second time.

This bill introduces important changes for the taxi industry in Queensland that will improve safety and security for patrons in key entertainment centres and improve service for residents in the Coolangatta/Tweed Heads border region. The amendments introduce a taxi industry security levy which will fund initiatives aimed at enhancing the safety and security of taxi patrons and taxi drivers throughout Queensland and strengthen the arrangements for taxis operating between Queensland and New South Wales in the Coolangatta/Tweed Heads region. The bill also makes a number of other minor changes to transport legislation.

Members may recall that as a result of two tragic incidents outside a licensed venue in the city and at Caxton Street in 2005 the Premier initiated the Brisbane City Safety Summit to explore ways in which patron safety and security could be enhanced. Following the summit, the Premier's 17-point Brisbane City Safety Action Plan was developed and publicly released. The plan identified a comprehensive list of initiatives aimed at improving safety within the city. Some of these improvements related to the taxi industry. I am very pleased to introduce this bill today as it contains legislation that will help to fund one of those important taxi initiatives. I seek leave to have the remainder of my speech incorporated in *Hansard*. It has been shown to the Speaker's office.

Leave granted.

This key initiative is the provision of secure taxi ranks, supervised by rank marshals and security guards, in Brisbane and regional entertainment precincts.

Long waiting times and queue jumping at unsupervised taxi ranks can quickly fuel frustration levels and lead to aggression and violence.

The provision of marshals and guards at secure taxi ranks reduces the level of risk for incidents to occur by providing a presence that offers authority and supervision. This increases the feeling of safety for patrons and taxi drivers, and restores confidence in patrons that catching a taxi home after a late night out is a good and reliable public transport option.

This has direct benefits for the taxi industry as a whole by increasing public confidence in taxi services and thereby increasing patronage.

In November 2005, the Government assumed funding responsibility from the Brisbane City Council for the six secure taxi ranks operating in Brisbane. As well as paying for marshals and guards at these ranks, the Government made further improvements to the safety of taxi ranks through better lighting, improved signage, the installation of safety barriers and the extension of closed circuit television to most ranks.

Since this time [November 2005], the number of secure taxi ranks operating in Brisbane has increased from six to eleven.

Seven of these ranks are located in the city, three in Fortitude Valley and one in Caxton Street outside the Caxton Hotel.

The success of this initiative has seen the introduction of another eight secure taxi ranks in key entertainment areas in Queensland's regional centres which are the Sunshine Coast, Gold Coast, Cairns and Townsville. Given this achievement, it is highly likely that more secure taxi ranks will be introduced in other regional cities in the future.

Over recent years, Brisbane has grown and developed into a modern, cosmopolitan city. The number of residents and visitors who spend time in Brisbane's key entertainment precincts, particularly on Friday and Saturday nights, has substantially risen. This has increased the need to review and enhance transport services and infrastructure to ensure the safety of patrons and the community.

To enhance transport services, an innovative passenger transport service called NightLink was introduced in Brisbane in December 2005. NightLink moves people out of nightclub areas quickly by providing more taxi, bus and train services more frequently on Friday and Saturday nights from midnight to 5 am in the morning.

I mentioned earlier that there are now eleven secure taxi ranks operating in Brisbane's key entertainment precincts. NightLink taxi services are provided from four of those dedicated secure taxi ranks supervised by marshals and guards, three in the city and one in Fortitude Valley. These services were introduced (together with the increase to the number of secure taxi ranks) to help reduce aggressive incidents occurring when nightclub patrons became frustrated trying to get home because of a lack of public transport or prolonged delays at taxi ranks.

What makes the NightLink taxi services different from normal taxi services is that passengers heading in a similar direction are encouraged to travel in groups in maxi taxis for set fares that are paid up front and cost less than a standard taxi but more than the cost of travel by bus or train. This is a new and unique concept in Australia and is proving to be extremely successful.

When NightLink taxi services were first introduced, the target average number of passengers for each taxi trip was set at four. This target has continually been surpassed, and the most recent monthly average (March 2007) indicates that the efficiency of maxi taxis is being made the most of, with the average number of passengers for each trip at 5.5 for the March quarter.

Over 66,474 patrons have used the NightLink taxi services since its inception on 2 December 2005.

The active involvement of rank marshals has also been important to the success of the NightLink taxi service as they actively canvass for patrons and encourage people to share ride.

To support these important improvements, this Bill proposes to insert new provisions in the Transport Operations (Passenger Transport) Act 1994 that will require holders of taxi service licences in prescribed areas to pay an annual levy for each financial year.

The legislation provides that the levy is 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 a financial year will be used for further improvements in the subsequent year.

Only those taxi service areas where secure taxi ranks are operating will be prescribed as being required to pay the levy. It is important that those areas can be set by regulation so that the Government can retain flexibility about the areas where the levy applies and to be able to respond quickly to areas of emerging need.

As members can appreciate, the provision of secure taxi ranks helps late-night partygoers get home quickly and safely in an environment where violence can easily erupt. These services also benefit the taxi industry by providing organised and monitored ranks where drivers know they will get fares and there is less likelihood for trouble to start.

This has led to increased patronage for the taxi industry. Data from the most recent taxi waiting time survey indicates that taxi patronage levels and the number of taxi trips at secure ranks have increased considerably since November 2005. While passenger numbers increased by 78% and trips by 86%, waiting times have remained consistent at an average of 15 minutes.

These results indicate that the secure ranks are operating more efficiently and suggest that NightLink services are having a positive effect on taxi rank waiting times.

The levy is considered appropriate and necessary to enable the provision of secure taxi ranks which provide important services (including NightLink) to continue.

The proposal to introduce a levy formed part of the package of recommendations to implement safety related taxi initiatives that was considered and subsequently endorsed by Government in September 2005.

The taxi industry were consulted in the development of those recommendations and also played a key role in determining the amount of the levy. The taxi industry are generally accepting of the need to introduce a levy and there has been positive feedback in relation to improved safety for drivers as a result of the secure ranks and the improvements that I mentioned earlier (better lighting and signage, installation of safety barriers at selected ranks, and the extension of closed circuit television to most ranks).

The framework to support the levy has taken time to develop, particularly as it requires amendments to primary legislation. As a result the levy has not been implemented side by side with the taxi initiatives as planned. This has inadvertently provided an amnesty period for the taxi industry of the requirement to pay a levy for over twelve months.

As outlined earlier, the Government has been funding the taxi initiatives since November 2005 without financial contribution from the levy. It is now both appropriate and timely that the levy comes into play to ensure the sustainability of these services which ultimately benefit the taxi industry.

The levy only provides money to partially fund the costs of providing secure taxi ranks (currently estimated at 55%). The Government will continue to fund the remainder of the program.

Importantly, the industry has been receiving the benefits of a \$2 surcharge that applies to taxi hirings in Brisbane since November 2005, and Sunshine Coast, Gold Coast, Cairns and Townsville since December 2006.

The \$2 surcharge can be applied to taxi fares between midnight and 5 am seven days a week (except Anzac Day) and provides an incentive to drivers and taxi operators to operate their taxis during those periods.

The Bill proposes to establish the levy at \$300 for the first financial year and enables regulations to prescribe the amount for the levy in following years and the taxi service areas that the levy applies to.

Importantly, the Bill provides that the levy will not be increased by more than Consumer Price Index for any financial year.

The new provisions also ensure an open and transparent process with regard to the use of the levy through the establishment of a controlled fund to administer the levy.

The Bill also inserts a head of power to allow a regulation to be made to exempt certain taxi services from the requirement to hold a Queensland taxi service licence. The purpose of this provision is to exempt certain New South Wales taxis from the requirement to hold a taxi service licence in Queensland.

The power introduced by the new provision will realise a commitment made by our Premier and the New South Wales Premier, Mr Morris Iemma, when they signed the 'Memorandum of Understanding: Services in the Tweed-Gold Coast Region' on 27 February 2007.

The population in the Tweed-Gold Coast region is approximately 580,000 and is expected to grow significantly over the next 20 years. The Gold Coast area alone, which makes up nearly 500,000 of the current population, is expected to increase to 763,000 by 2026, an increase of 53 percent. For people aged 65 years or older, a demographic more reliant on taxi services, the population in the Gold Coast area will increase from 69,000 to 149,000, a massive increase of 116 percent.

As social and community services in the Tweed-Gold Coast areas develop, many of the residents will want to conduct business in both areas, making it essential that we integrate the public and economic aspects of the two areas.

The 'Memorandum of Understanding' forges a partnership between Queensland and New South Wales to support residents, businesses and visitors.

Transport services are a key element of the MOU, along with improving health care services. The Premiers agreed that passenger transport links between the two areas must be simplified to deliver improved transport options to the residents and visitors to the region.

As a result, the government is taking positive steps to increase the reliability of transport in the area and improve connectivity between the regions, and a critical component of that is to strengthen the arrangements under which local taxis can operate.

It will allow more certainty for the taxi industry and, most importantly, it will improve taxi services for the people who live in the growing region of the Tweed-Gold Coast.

As a result of amendments contained in this Bill and consequential amendments to the Transport Operations (Passenger Transport) Regulation 2005, Queensland Transport will establish new "dual" taxi ranks in the lower Gold Coast/Tweed Heads area where a New South Wales taxi can stand or ply for hire to take passengers to New South Wales. Queensland taxis will be able to do the same at designated ranks in New South Wales.

The designated "dual" ranks will be located where significant numbers of passengers undertake Queensland-New South Wales taxi journeys, for example the Coolangatta airport in Queensland and the Southern Cross University in New South Wales. At these "dual" ranks, passengers will be able to choose their taxi according to the State of their destination.

The location and numbers of additional ranks will be finalised in consultation with the taxi industry and users.

Once the changes to the Act and regulation are in place, New South Wales taxis will be able to enter Queensland to drop off passengers they have picked up in New South Wales and then rank at a designated "dual" taxi rank to pick up passengers for a return fare to New South Wales.

This will put an end to the current situation where Queensland legislation requires all taxis operating in a defined area to hold a taxi service licence. To date, this has limited the level of taxi services offered to people in the Tweed-Gold Coast region.

The proposed amendment will encourage taxi operators on both sides of the border to undertake trips as they will now be able to pick up a return fare instead of running empty on their return journey to their home state.

The introduction of this flexibility in taxi services will provide greater choice and transport options for those people wishing to travel in and out of the region.

The Bill also makes minor amendments to correct a drafting anomaly in section 125 of the Transport Operations (Marine Safety) Act 1994 to make clear the application of a penalty and to update drafting language in the Transport Operations (Road Use Management) Act 1995.

Mr Speaker, the introduction of this Bill supports two important government responsibilities. It continues the Government's commitment arising from the Brisbane City Safety Summit to enhance safety and security of taxi patrons and the community in entertainment precincts and enables better transport services to a vital and growing part of our state.

I commend the Bill to the House.