



Speech by

Vaughan Johnson

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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TRANSPORT OPERATIONS LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (2.55 pm): I rise to make a short contribution to the Transport Operations Legislation Amendment Bill 2007. From the outset let me say that I support entirely the words of the shadow minister. I think this is a very important piece of legislation, because we are dealing primarily with the taxi industry. I believe that the taxi industry is the most sacred and most important type of public transport that we can have. It is absolutely paramount that we put every step in place to make it even more secure than it already is.

I commend the government for putting surveillance cameras into cabs in recent times. This has certainly been an additional safety measure not only for patrons but also for taxi operators themselves. It is a measure that has increased the support base for taxi operators throughout Queensland.

This is a unique situation. I spoke to a lady today who said that she does not use cabs anymore of a night-time in Brisbane. This is a lady from my own electorate. I asked her why and she replied, 'Because I don't feel safe.' I said to her, 'That is the safest form of transport you can use.' I stand by the taxi industry on this issue. Most times people can be driven to their suburban homes, as you probably well know yourself, Madam Deputy Speaker, as you live in a suburban area of Brisbane. The cabbie can pull up and shine a light on your house and see you walk through the door. There is no other form of transport that can do that. You know yourself when you pull up at your own home and walk inside that there is nobody else observing you either.

Mr Lucas: The dog usually barks.

Mr JOHNSON: Yes, that is if you are late home. I haven't got a dog anymore but anyway—

A government member: You would never arrive home late, Vaughan!

Mr JOHNSON: I will not go there. I definitely will not go there. The point I am making is that this is a serious business we are talking about, unfortunately. In recent times the police minister introduced legislation into this House in relation to zero tolerance around Brisbane, and as a result of recent problems we have this safe ranks legislation, or safe ranks initiative, where we now have 11 safe ranks. I know the Premier has made points in relation to this legislation, but I think this is good legislation for the reason that maybe it is going to save somebody's life or save somebody from getting brain damage or being seriously injured.

What a sad situation it is when we have to pass legislation of this type in the House to protect our citizens who are waiting in a cab rank. We all like to drink, and I have had my share in the past, too, but we are Australians and I think we have to respect each other. Whether that is at a cab rank or somewhere else, it does not matter.

In relation to the taxi industry, there are many drivers—and no doubt the minister has received comment on this, too—who will not drive at night-time. They would rather leave their cabs at home than drive at night-time. I think this is a sad indictment on the industry, because at the end of the day those people are losing dollars through fare evasion or whatever. I think we have to be tougher on fare evaders and people who abuse cabbies. There are many people who take advantage of using cabs. Elderly people

are a prime example. I was at Toowong one day and there was an old lady standing there on the rank who had baskets of groceries and God knows what, and she was trying to yard the trolley. I was flat out driving the damn thing because I could not steer it.

I asked her where she was going and she said she was only going up the road to a unit. It was my turn next to get into a cab and I told her to hop in and we would run her up there. The cabbie drove her to her unit and then said we were going to help her take the gear upstairs. I thought that it was damn good of him to help her carry it. That sort of thing gives the cab industry a good name. I believe that that is exactly what a lot of people do not understand about the cab industry.

I would also like to touch quickly on the issue of cross-border operation at the Tweed. This is a very fair situation. We cannot have demarcations with state borders. Those cabs should be able to come in from New South Wales and vice versa. The only thing I will say to the minister in relation to this is that it has to be absolutely watertight so that it is not abused. Corporate decency is probably covered somewhere in the legislation. No doubt the minister will comment on that. I know that there have been comments such as, 'What are we doing letting taxis in?', 'How far are they going to come into Queensland?' and 'How far do we go into New South Wales?' The minister might like to elaborate on that in his response.

The other aspect I wish to touch on is disabled access taxis. I think that is one of the most significant introductions of modes of transport for the disabled that we have in this state. Many people say from time to time that they book a cab and a disabled taxi comes. What we have to point out to the general public is that while they are riding in that disabled access taxi they should think for a minute, 'Thank God I am not disabled, too.' These taxis are of great benefit to many people. It is very important that we recognise the disabled members of our community. Those cabbies are doing a damn good job. Many times it might be little kiddies or old people using those taxis. There are probably people in this House who have a disabled member of their family or a friend who are directly affected. I salute the great work that those cabbies do by putting in place and driving those disabled access taxis. They are a very important and integral part of our public transport system for disabled people.

There are not too many other forms of transport where at any hour of the day or night a disabled person can get to and from their home or place of work. A disabled access cab allows those people to enjoy a quality of life that normally they would not have. Many of them do not have a car that they can drive, but they can get a cab to travel to their workplace or somewhere else. I think this is very important. I salute those cabbies who operate those cabs and those people who man them because they do a damn good job. It gives me great pleasure to support this piece of legislation. I congratulate the minister on those initiatives because they will be very advantageous to the people of Brisbane and south-east Queensland. The taxi industry must be protected. We must have respect for the great work that it does in protecting and providing that sacred form of public transport that so many of us use on a daily basis.