



Speech by

## Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard Thursday, 27 November 2008

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### TRANSPORT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

**Miss SIMPSON** (Maroochydore—LNP) (11.38 am): I continue my contribution on the Transport and Other Legislation Amendment Bill. Other significant parts of the legislation are the government's open road policy and issues related to congestion. We strongly support seeing motorists having a fair go on our roads. The real issue is not whether the government has legislation before the House; it is infrastructure. As we have seen, there has been a lack of timely infrastructure built by this government over the decade that Labor has been in power. That is the real reason Queenslanders are facing unprecedented traffic congestion, particularly in south-east Queensland. It is one thing to have a rapid response unit attend an accident—we certainly need rapid response units—but if the road infrastructure is not in place so they can get to that accident then nothing changes. The design of our roads needs to incorporate enough of a road verge to actually allow for rapid response units and emergency service vehicles to get to accidents rapidly to help people in trouble.

It is also clear that so much attention has been given to issues such as fixed speed cameras and the revenue of government through speeding fines, but not enough attention has been given to the technology to provide timely information to motorists to avoid hot spots. While there has been a move to bring about more signs with the technology to advise motorists to avoid certain areas, there is still a long way to go with the technology to give timely advice to people of alternative routes that they can take. In addition to signage, we need plans that provide a true road grid where there are alternatives. As we have seen with the upgrade of the Gateway—the upgrade that was so desperately needed and so desperately overdue—when there is a failure in one piece of infrastructure, the impact upon the remaining infrastructure is exponential.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Hoolihan): I want to acknowledge in the gallery students and teachers from the Booyal Central State School and the Givelda State School in the electorate of Burnett, which is represented in this House by Mr Rob Messenger.

**Miss SIMPSON:** There needs to be a true road grid that has alternative plans for people to be able to reasonably divert around some of our major arterials and not have a situation like we saw when the South East Freeway was in dire disrepair and closed in the CBD with the resulting huge impact it had upon the balance of the network. That is something which still has not been adequately addressed within government plans and true good planning for the future.

I turn now to the problem of congestion on our public transport rail lines. It seems to be that everything this government does is too late. It does it in a hurry or does it in a crisis and people are still left waiting for trains and waiting for adequate public transport access. Getting reports out of Queensland Rail and this government is like pulling hen's teeth at times in terms of understanding just the sheer extent of people that they are pushing into overcrowded rail carriages. On a number of the lines in south-east Queensland within the Citytrain network, the overcrowding has got to the point where people are complaining that it is unsafe. On the Ipswich line over 21 per cent of the services are overcrowded, and it is a similar figure on the north coast line. We have asked for the counts for some of these trains, but obtaining that information from the government has not been straightforward.

I note that there has been talk that QR will start doing quarterly passenger surveys. I would like the minister to table in this House not just percentages but also the actual numbers that come out of these surveys. It has left it so late that we know there has been a huge problem. It is time for transparency with the figures that the government already has and all figures that are collected in relation to addressing this issue in a timely and satisfactory way. It seems that south-east Queenslanders and Queenslanders in general have paid a great price for this government's inaction, which means that people are finding that the public transport they are being asked to catch is not only inconvenient but also failing the test as a basic public transport service.

The go card, though, continues to be an issue about which the complaints flood in. People want to see technology that works and serves their needs and not just serves the PR campaign that the government has launched for the go card. This money would have been better spent fixing the problems which continue to plague this service. Parents have contacted me in the last few days complaining about experiences their children have had with failures with this system. Commuters have continued to flood my office with complaints about the difficulties they face when they are overcharged and try to be reimbursed. At the other end of the spectrum, we also hear stories about trips that are not necessarily recorded on the go card and therefore people are getting free travel. The implementation of the go card seems to be an absolute dog's breakfast still.

In terms of some provisions with the go card, I note that the government is proposing to push out the time frame, probably until after the next election—February or March next year—with regard to the increased penalty for people who have problems tagging on to the system. Is the minister going to give a guarantee today that he will fix the problems of the go card whereby people who are being penalised and having interminable problems getting refunds will have a quick and timely turnaround? Will he guarantee that the problems will be fixed? It has dragged on for so long, and spending money on publicity to tell everyone that it is fine is just a joke.

A regular commuter said to me that they had a go card but they are not using it now. We still hear the government say that there has been a surge in the number of people using the card, but there has also been a surge in the number of people who have used the card and who then have put it to the side. This continues to be an issue because there are still failures in the system. People who know what good public transport should be have given up on it and are still saying that it has problems such that they do not want to use it. They simply do not have the time to keep on going online and checking whether or not they have been properly reimbursed or credited with the overpayment that the government has taken from their card. It is time we saw this system fixed rather than just more spin about what the government is going to do with it.

I want to go back to the issue of transit officers. We value the work that transit officers already do within the system but we continue to have concerns expressed to us by those who represent the workers in this area that what they are being asked to do under this legislation presents real problems and issues for workers and also potentially for public safety. We are calling for the government to boost the police Railway Squad to improve safety on the rail network and to ensure that there are adequate police numbers to integrate with the transit officers. Some of the figures show that there have been 114 assaults and a number of armed robberies across the Citytrain network in the six months leading up to April. People continue to have grave concerns about safety or hold negative perceptions of how safe they are travelling on certain services, and ultimately it is having more police who are able to support transit officers that will provide that real, as well as perceived, increase in public benefit through greater safety.

There was only one officer added to the police Railway Squad in the past four years—that was in answer to questions we put in this place to the government—despite the number of passenger trips growing from 48 million to 62 million during the same time. The assault figures drive home how important it is to get serious about crime in and around the rail network. We believe that the Beattie-Bligh government needs to rethink its stance on safety and immediately boost police numbers on the rail network to increase commuter confidence and to provide that real backup support to the transit officers on these services.

There were 53 officers in the police Railway Squad in 2004, and this figure has only increased to 54 in 2008. This dismal increase really calls into question the Bligh Labor government's commitment to providing a safe public transport system for commuters. If the state Labor government is serious about ensuring more south-east Queenslanders catch trains to ease traffic congestion, it needs to provide a reliable and safe service, and that means having an appropriately resourced police Railway Squad. Queensland Rail is already suffering from serious safety culture concerns and overcrowding issues. This government cannot allow passenger safety problems to grow, adding another deterrent to the struggling public transport system. We support a public transport system that is properly integrated and properly resourced.

I want to respond to the minister's continual attacks on me with regard to another public transport issue in my own electorate, and I draw to the attention of the House that he still has not answered as to when we are going to get a safe upgrade to the Maroochydore bus station. This is probably the No. 1 safety issue and public transport issue within a range of issues on the Sunshine Coast. I have talked to the

bus company and I have talked to passengers, and they have advised me how worried they are about this. They have told me that this is in fact creating a cap on future increases through this station, because there are only five bus bays available there and there are 40 bus movements through those five bus bays in Maroochydore.

That is an urgent issue. It was in the government's budget—a couple of budgets ago; at least 18 months ago. The government was saying that it had allocated funding for this matter. Has it been spent? No. Is it causing a problem in regard to safety? Yes. There has to be additional staff employed—and I understand that has received government assistance—to try to watch these buses as they back out and then pull out again in what is a very busy area.

I have written to the minister asking him to visit my electorate and see the area with me, to understand the on-the-ground safety issues and also to address the priority points of this upgrade of public transport on the Sunshine Coast. Perhaps the minister has been badly advised in regard to the issues relating to CoastConnect and the transit lanes through Alexandra Parade. The minister's current proposals are about extending that particular section of the roadway through Alexandra Parade and Aerodrome Road to six lanes. That is the concern that has been expressed by the community and the businesspeople. It is amazing the wide range of people who are concerned about this issue. That concern cuts across party political lines and it cuts across socio-demographic lines. I have talked to young surfers who are outraged because they know what this extension will mean for their access points to the beach.

The public wants to see a treatment change to this road so that it becomes no longer a state controlled road. The public wants the road to go back to council control. They do not want an expansion of this particular corridor. The minister can mislead this House about what he believes in regard to the increased bus numbers and access to public transport, but he has to understand—

**Mr MICKEL:** I rise to a point of order. I take offence to that. I have not misled the House and I ask for that to be withdrawn.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Hoolihan): Order! The minister has asked for a withdrawal.

**Miss SIMPSON:** I will withdraw what he finds offensive, but I will state again: he has misled the parliament.

**Mr MICKEL:** Mr Deputy Speaker, I asked for an unconditional withdrawal.

**Miss SIMPSON:** I withdraw and I say the minister has not told the truth to this parliament in regard to CoastConnect and the six lanes through Alexandra Parade.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Maroochydore!

**Mr MICKEL:** I rise to a point of order.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I have not ruled on your original point of order. Member for Maroochydore, you have been asked to withdraw the comments. A withdrawal in this House is unconditional.

**Miss SIMPSON:** I withdraw.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Thank you.

**Miss SIMPSON:** In regard to the issue of CoastConnect, the minister has been badly advised—

**Mr MICKEL:** I rise to a point of order. The member also said that I told an untruth. That is offensive and I ask that that comment be withdrawn.

**Miss SIMPSON:** I withdraw, and I ask the minister: will he come today and—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! Member for Maroochydore, I have been fairly patient. I can find nothing in this bill that deals with CoastConnect on the Sunshine Coast.

**Miss SIMPSON:** Mr Deputy Speaker, the bill has public transport provisions and it also deals with safety issues.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Please bring it back to dealing—

**Miss SIMPSON:** And transport infrastructure.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Thank you.

**Miss SIMPSON:** In regard to the public transport issues, I take offence to the minister's comments in parliament this morning, because they are not true. We want express bus lanes on the Sunshine Motorway, but when he talks about expanding—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Maroochydore, you were just asked to withdraw a comment that the minister had told an untruth. You withdrew it unconditionally and in the next two to three sentences you then made the same suggestion about an untruth. Once the matter is withdrawn, would you kindly not refer to the matter again. Thank you.

**Miss SIMPSON:** I withdraw. Let us get this quite right, or else I am going to be censored in this place. I need to be able to talk in this place about public transport safety issues and infrastructure. What the minister told this House I disagree with, because—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Maroochydore—

**Miss SIMPSON:** What the minister has told this House—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Maroochydore—

**Miss SIMPSON:** With respect, Mr Deputy Speaker. I withdrew the comments the minister found offensive and I want to address public safety issues.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Order! I am on my feet.

**Miss SIMPSON:** With regard to public safety and transport infrastructure issues—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Maroochydore, I will call it as order, or you will wait until I give—

**Miss SIMPSON:** I seek your ruling, Mr Deputy Speaker. Am I able to talk about—

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Member for Maroochydore, please resume your seat until I have made a ruling. You are quite free, as is every member of this House, to refer to public transport safety. You are not referring to public transport safety in what you say; you are referring directly to the minister in terms of some personal disenchantment. If you bring your comments back to the bill, then there is no difficulty. I would also remind you that there are standing orders that govern when a member takes their seat.

**Miss SIMPSON:** This issue relates to public transport. Perhaps I can clarify it, for the benefit of the minister. If buses back over people, it is a public safety issue. That is the No. 1 problem with the public transport system on the Sunshine Coast. At this point, we have a situation where the major bus interchange for the whole of the Sunshine Coast is five bus bays, 40 bus movements within an hour. In addition, we have the Kawana Shoppingworld where there are also real safety issues with bus movements. Priority points need to be addressed. These issues are the ones that need to be implemented with solutions, not just today—they were, in fact, due to be implemented several years ago. Now, we have a real safety issue. Resolving the real problem has been delayed because of what the government is doing in regard to a poorly thought through approach as to where it puts bus lanes and as to where it wipes out substantial numbers of businesses and access points to the beach, which creates the other public safety issue of pedestrian safety.

I appreciate that the minister may have been poorly advised on this matter, but I invite him—and I have invited him before in writing and I have not had a response in regard to that invitation—to come with me, meet with people, see the issue and understand the issue. The minister may think that he can turn around and say that we are against buses and public transport, but that is not true. We are about investing in appropriate infrastructure that respects the amenity of an area and delivers good outcomes for the whole of the public. That is what it needs to be.

It is time there was an integrated transport network that took account of all of the issues and not just this situation where there is a continuing safety risk to the public with un-built infrastructure in the priority points, which are the bus interchanges. Let it be put on the record that the community has also lodged an e-petition on this issue. Once again, the government may continue to tell untruths to this House and misguide people as to the nature of the concerns, but I urge the government to put down its weapons, or its partisanship, and listen to the people—people who do not necessarily hold to one side of politics or the other, people who are united in their concerns. These people say they want enhanced public transport, but they want it to provide an enhancement to the amenity of their community as well.

That is also going to be true in regard to many other communities. The transport minister and this government do not understand that you have to listen to communities. They do not understand that when bringing in additional services they have to also take into account the social and environmental impacts to ensure that the services meet all the criteria and that people are not just steamrolled and find themselves literally run over by a bus without any care or concern from the Bligh government.

As I have said, this bill makes amendments to 11 acts. I have raised areas of concern and amendments that the opposition supports. I will address those issues further in consideration in detail.