



Speech by

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TRANSPORT LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL; TRANSPORT OPERATIONS (TRANSLINK TRANSIT AUTHORITY) BILL

Mr LANGBROEK (Surfers Paradise—Lib) (5.14 pm): It is my pleasure to rise to speak to the Transport Legislation Amendment Bill and the Transport Operations (TransLink Transit Authority) Bill 2008. I want to acknowledge the thoughtful and extensive contribution to the debate made by the member for Clayfield. He raised many issues which I do not believe have been adequately addressed by the ministers responsible for transport and roads, both in the legislation before the House and in broad policy. In spite of the smokescreen and some of the short-sightedness of the bill's effects, I will support the bills but will note for the record some reservations I have. I will address each of the bills in turn and I will endeavour to keep my contribution brief in light of this morning's ruling that shortens debate.

The Transport Legislation Amendment Bill seeks to implement a number of reforms aimed at providing better regulation of Queensland's transport and roads. One of the most significant policies this bill affects, as many of the members have mentioned, is the introduction of national heavy vehicle driver fatigue reforms. This is achieved through a number of amendments to the Transport Operations (Road Use Management) Act 1995.

The national heavy vehicle driver reforms enacted by this bill were developed by the National Transport Commission in response to the increasing problem of driver fatigue, particularly among career truckies. Heavy vehicle driver fatigue is a serious safety issue. As our economy has expanded over the years it has had a significant impact on the number of trucks and heavy vehicles on our roads. As business becomes increasingly competitive, our nation's truck drivers are under more pressure than ever before to meet deadlines. Unfortunately, in many instances this has led to unsafe practices within the trucking industry.

Truckies often drive for long, unsafe periods of time without rest. There is also evidence to suggest that some truck drivers take illegal drugs in order to stay awake during shifts. Not only does this put their own health and safety at risk, but it endangers the lives of all road users. That is why it has been necessary for governments to regulate the trucking industry and introduce fatigue management schemes to reduce the risk of road trauma through accidents involving trucks and prevent drivers from being a risk to themselves and others. To address the issue of regulation, the National Transport Commission developed a Heavy Vehicle Driver Fatigue Policy Proposal. This bill gives effect to that policy in Queensland.

In bringing this bill to the House, the transport minister has endorsed the NTC's policy on driver fatigue and adopted fatigue management plans. In its submission, the NTC advocated for a three-tiered approach to fatigue management. These three tiers can be found at proposed new section 150AB(1), which prescribes it into regulation. The rationale for the three-option approach is to provide a regime that caters to the needs of industry without overburdening it by regulation.

In his second reading speech, the transport minister made the point that the three-tier approach was necessary to allow progressively more flexibility in return for increased compliance requirements. I have read some of the NTC's policy on fatigue management and I believe that adopting such a regime will improve the safety of the trucking industry, as well as Queensland roads. However, one of the options—

indeed the most flexible—the advanced fatigue management option, allows truckies to work for up to 16 hours a day. In the minister's second reading speech he mentioned an Australian study which benchmarked fatigue induced impairment against that of drink drivers. The study found that going without sleep for 17 to 19 hours is equivalent to being over the legal blood alcohol limit. In other words, driving for prolonged periods of time without rest can be just as dangerous as driving under the influence of alcohol.

The problem with this bill is that it enables truckies to work for 16 hours without taking a break. If we are to follow the study to which the minister made reference, this is dangerously close to being drunk behind the wheel. While the NTC and the government recognise that any additional risk must be matched by the adoption of increased responsibilities and commensurate checks and balances, I question whether it is really necessary to have people on our roads who have been driving for that amount of time.

The Transport Legislation Amendment Bill will also affect the acquisition and disposal of land for future use in transport. Again, I would like to reiterate the concerns of the shadow minister for transport and member for Clayfield as well as those echoed by the member for Robina about these provisions.

I would like to turn now to the Transport Operations (TransLink Transit Authority) Bill. There has been much fanfare about the establishment of the new TransLink Transit Authority to oversee the provision of public transport in Queensland's south-east. However, for all the hype surrounding the introduction of this new authority I think it is important to note that this legislation will not add one extra bus, one extra train or one extra ferry to our public transport network. As my coalition colleagues have stated previously, the bill creates nothing more than a legislative structure to create a new bureaucracy.

The bill before the House provides an imprimatur for the establishment of a new TransLink Transit Authority to replace the current TransLink. The suggestion that it will consolidate the management of train, bus and ferry services to provide a better service is nothing more than empty rhetoric. The Gold Coast needs more services, not another bloated bureaucracy to supposedly improve the system. The minister is always talking about putting extra trains on tracks to encourage people to leave their cars at home. The problem is that it has done nothing to ease the congestion on peak-hour trains to and from Brisbane. The 'Bombay Express' is busier than ever before. People are still forced to sit on the floor or bring along a camping chair in order to get a seat on the train. The new TransLink Transit Authority may achieve better coordination between services, but it still will not ease the pressure on the current infrastructure.

I listened with interest to the minister during his second reading speech when he spoke about the necessity for better future planning, which he says this new authority will achieve. I contrast this with the Gold Coast's public transport service, where we see the failure to plan when it comes to building a rapid transit system on the Gold Coast. The minister has refused to consult with the local community and has ignored public dissent against the current proposed route. In introducing the bill, the transport minister said—

Planning a public transport network in a rapidly growing region like south-east Queensland is a considerable challenge that requires flexibility and a commitment to getting things done.

Where is the flexibility and commitment when it comes to delivering the Gold Coast's rapid transit system? Gold Coasters do not want the current route. The public consultation process over the proposed rapid transit system has been farcical.

The transport minister's proposed route is clearly not supported by the Gold Coast community, the very people he expects will be using the rapid transit system. This is a vital piece of infrastructure for the Gold Coast. It is important we get it right before we sink hundreds of millions of dollars into it. I have serious concerns, which I have already expressed, about the current proposed route through Surfers Paradise. The Surfers Paradise Traffic Management Scheme has only just been completed and it represents a marked improvement to transport in the heart of the city. The whole purpose of the SPTMS was to create alternative traffic routes through Surfers Paradise. To carve all that up and reduce Surfers Paradise Boulevard to one-way will sound the death knell for Surfers Paradise and it will make it nearly impossible for motorists to navigate their way through central Surfers. We need to be building on the progress we have made rather than undoing it in one fell swoop.

However, the minister has ignored these concerns and those of the people of the Gold Coast. Instead, he wants to force a short-sighted public transport system onto residents who he expects will use public transport. At the end of the day, the success of the rapid transit system will hinge on the people who use it. If it does not suit their needs they will not use it, the whole project will have been futile and commuters will be no better off. For example, the current proposal completely ignores the need for an east-west link, instead focusing on the coastal strip, which is already reasonably serviced by public transport. Tourists who catch the Airtrain to the Gold Coast from Brisbane Airport are forced to get off at Nerang station and wait for a bus to take them to the coastal strip.

We have a real opportunity to build something that will literally move the Gold Coast towards being a better city. Let us make sure we get it right. I urge the transport minister to work with the Gold Coast City Council and residents to ensure the best outcome for our city, and not just in the short term. The minister should be building a transport system that will stand the test of time rather than becoming deficient within the first decade of its operation because of increased population growth and congestion on our roads.