



Speech by

**Mike Horan**

**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH**

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## **TRANSPORT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL**

**Mr HORAN** (Toowoomba South—LNP) (5.23 pm): This is an omnibus bill covering a number of aspects of transport. I want to speak about the issues of transport-generated environmental emissions, the disqualification of drivers and the trial of high-occupancy vehicle lanes. Other speakers, mostly from my area, have spoken about some of the problems associated with the Toowoomba bypass road and, more particularly, the fact that there is no such road. In her second reading speech the minister talked about how often people built their homes close to public transport facilities that were handy for travelling to town. I grew up in Brisbane and I remember that most of the good homes were situated along main roads and close to tram stops, particularly on Beaudesert Road, Ipswich Road and the like. We used to admire those houses. Nowadays, people cannot get far enough away from those corridors because of the intensity of the traffic that uses them.

In Toowoomba, James Street forms part of the Warrego Highway. It is the heaviest freight-carrying road in Australia. Every day, 4,000 B-doubles travel down that street, carrying freight to the north and south of Australia. In recent times the volume of traffic has greatly increased because of the massive amount of coal that is being carted by road, particularly from Acland but also potentially from further west, because Queensland Rail is unable to carry it. Massive amounts of grain—up to 10,000 tonnes a day—are carted through this main east-west street of Toowoomba because Queensland Rail cannot carry it on its trains. In addition, recently Everal Compton announced the imminent start of the border railway, which will be a four foot, 8½ inch line running from the Boggabilla area up to Charlton in Toowoomba. That will mean the development of a major freight terminal on the western side of Toowoomba, which will mean more and more trucks travelling through the centre of Toowoomba. One day that freight terminal could well develop into the Singapore of eastern Australia, if the dream eventuates of the Australian inland railway continuing through to Gladstone and maybe one day to Darwin. It would be far cheaper and more efficient for containers to go to either of those ports to be double stacked onto very long trains, so that they do not have to deal with the problem of bridges and so forth closer to the cities. It would be a very efficient system of major bulk cartage. Of course, the trucks also cart cattle to major processing works in the Dinmore, Beenleigh and Brisbane areas. Therefore, James Street, and also Tor Street and Taylor Street, which is mostly residential, have to cope with a massive amount of transport.

However, the problem is not just the volume of transport; those trucks have to negotiate 16 sets of traffic lights and some of those traffic lights are on steep inclines. The trucks have to pass a primary school and a secondary school. The secondary school sits on an intersection where there are traffic lights. The trucks travelling from west to east are always loaded. If they stop at the lights at that intersection, they have to take off from a standing start and probably change through about 12 sets of gears before they can get up the hill. This has become a serious problem. It is a social blight on our city. It makes it very difficult for people to traverse the main east-west route of the city, particularly mothers taking their kids to school. James Street is an important access road to a number of schools. If you are in a little car, jammed between B-doubles carrying cattle, grain, coal and general freight, it can be quite frightening. At any time in James Street, if you stand at the traffic lights you will see six or eight B-doubles on either side of the lights. They only make it through to the second set of lights and have to stop again.

In terms of the generated environmental emissions through our city, this is a big concern. Some people are also worried about Q fever, as urine can splash from the cattle trucks that stop at the lights or attempt to take off on steep inclines. It is not only a social blight. There are other issues. There is a problem with the noise caused by jay brakes. When trucks travelling from west to east get to the top of the range, they have to apply proper breaking so that they can crawl down the range at a safe speed.

In this parliament I have probably spoken over 30 times about this road, which is the most important road in Australia. It carries 70 per cent of the exports that go to the Brisbane port. The goods that generate so much for our state travel through the main street of Toowoomba, passing through 16 sets of traffic lights. It behoves the federal government to put forward money for this bypass road. It is a nation-building exercise, because the produce from the north and the south of this country is carried on this road. I join with my colleague the member for Toowoomba North, who spoke on this issue during the debate on this bill, in saying that this bypass is not only a Commonwealth matter. It is very important that the state recognises its importance. Under the national infrastructure fund, the state government determines the priority of a project. This road will only be built if it is given No. 1 priority. It is always in the top 10, but it never gets the money because top 10 is not enough. It will not get there. It has to be No. 1 or it will never get there. I hope that the Queensland government can make it the No. 1 priority because that is the only way that this project will ever come to fruition.

Another important transport issue that I would like to touch on is the fact that, whilst Toowoomba is on the edge of South-East Queensland, people in Toowoomba—particularly pensioners and people who need to use public transport to visit relations or attend medical appointments in the south-east—are unable to access the go card. The go card should be extended to Toowoomba so that those people who catch the bus from Toowoomba to one of the intermediary stops, such as Gatton or Ipswich, could then use the go card to get on the train and go to where they want to go—visit relations, go to hospitals, attend medical appointments and so forth. They could also use the go card to get a bus service that connects to the Queensland Rail service that runs to Helidon. It is not actually a train; it is a bus but it goes under the generic name of Queensland Rail. So the go card would be very important to people in those circumstances.

I mentioned the two schools that the 4,000 B-doubles go past each day. They also go past a cathedral and they go through parts of the CBD. It is very difficult for people to do business along James Street because of the sheer vibration from the trucks taking off at each of the 16 sets of lights. The road is falling apart before our very eyes. With a freight weight of that dimension, stopping and starting at lights and turning the corner from Tor Street into Taylor Street, you can imagine the damage that occurs.

Another issue in this bill is about those people who have been disqualified to hold a public transport driver authorisation because of a previous offence. A number of members have spoken about this. I certainly hope that we do not have any weakening of arrangements. It is a big responsibility to drive a public transport vehicle, particularly when very often children and families travel in those vehicles. I just wonder how many cases there are. Are we looking at just a handful of cases that bob up? Is it that important that it has to be included in this legislation? There was mention of the fact that someone who has been involved in some form of sexual offence when they were under 17 can make application to have the exceptional circumstances around that considered. But I do not want to see any weakening of these arrangements.

One of the things about transgressing and committing an offence, whether you do it in your youth or when over 17, is that people have to understand that there are ramifications and implications and a punishment system. It is not as though life after the offence is easy. There are these difficulties. Our shadow minister will move an amendment with regard to this so that there is not simply a reference to consulting with the children's commissioner. The amendment provides that if the children's commissioner advises against the public transport driver's licence being provided in the exceptional circumstances then that licence is not given. I commend our shadow minister for that particular amendment, which I think will strengthen this issue.

We do not want to send the message that you can commit an offence and because you have committed an offence you just run along and get some sort of absolution that will allow you to drive public transport vehicles in the future. We have to look at the heavy responsibility of driving public transport vehicles. We want people with as good a reputation and as good a past history as possible, whilst applying some degree of natural justice but under very strong and careful scrutiny.

This bill also provides for a trial for public transport inspectors to undertake enforcement of high-occupancy vehicle lanes. I have a lot of personal concern about providing powers that would normally be provided to police to other people to travel the roads and pull people up. I think that sort of power should remain with the police and only the police. Very often when police pull people up for committing an offence—they might be speeding or they might be in the incorrect transit lane—they check other things as well. They might check the tyres. They might check the licence. They might check whether they are

carrying anything that they should not be carrying, such as a weapon or drugs or other things. It might be matters to do with the muffler. As occasionally happens, when they check the person they find out that the person is wanted for some other reason. It might be a SPER offence payment or so forth. I have great concern about providing police powers to transport inspectors who normally are involved with heavy vehicles, with issues of the weight load that is being carried and all of the quite complex rules involved with heavy transport.

There has to be some danger involved in this because multi-occupancy lanes, which are designed for cars carrying three or four people or at least more than one person, are generally in the centre of the road. So, if it is a six-lane road, these lanes are in the centre. The minister might be able to explain this. Are these transport inspectors going to be driving in a patrol car?

**Ms Nolan:** Yes.

**Mr HORAN:** Are they going to have flashing lights and sirens?

**Ms Nolan:** Yes.

**Mr HORAN:** Are they going to pull people over from the middle of the road, through two lanes of traffic to the side of the road or are they going to pull them up in the middle of the road?

**Ms Nolan:** The HOV lane is on the edge anyway.

**Mr HORAN:** Regardless of that, they are going to be pulling people over?

**Ms Nolan:** Yes.

**Mr HORAN:** I would like to suggest—

**Ms Jones:** The police do it now.

**Mr HORAN:** I will take your word for it because you live in the south-east corner where those lanes are. My recollection is that quite a few of them are in the middle of the road. I am quite sure that they are.

**Ms Jones:** No, they are not.

**Mr HORAN:** I will take your word for it. You live in Brisbane. I am sure when you drive down the coast they are in the middle of the road. I am quite sure of that in fact. It is a freeway. They are in the middle of the road.

**Ms Jones:** It is on the edge.

**Mr HORAN:** I think you will find that they are in the middle.

**Ms Nolan:** They are on the edge. Our confusion is that, when you are saying 'in the middle', you mean near the centre.

**Mr HORAN:** When I say 'in the middle', I mean in the middle of the road.

**Ms Nolan:** I am saying not in the centre lane, with lanes on either side.

**Mr HORAN:** I was right, then; the lanes are in the middle. The transport inspectors are going to have to chase cars in those lanes. In the middle of peak-hour traffic they are going to have to put the flashing lights and the siren on. Someone will look in their rear-vision mirror and they will not see a blue-and-white police car; they will see a maroon or whatever colour transport car and they will be saying, 'What the hell is this? Is it just the ambulance? Do I move over?' They are going to be forced to move over through two lanes of traffic.

I also make the suggestion that in this day and age of technology, and seeing that these lanes are in set areas on some of the busiest highways in the south-east, a camera type system would be able to do the job probably better. There are sophisticated cameras available these days. At the Sydney Olympics they were able to read the name tags on people from 2,000 feet up in helicopters with the sophisticated cameras that they had. A camera set up in the middle of the road, in the protected area where there are concrete buffers, and set at the right height that it could record vision of the number of occupants in a car—something similar to a speed camera—would do the job safely and probably more efficiently. With such a shortage of transport inspectors, they could then be freed up to do their other particular tasks.

I will conclude by saying that this issue of trucks travelling through the city of Toowoomba has become horrendous. No other city in Australia has to cope with it. I hope that the transport minister, along with others, can put forward the case for the Toowoomba bypass road because it is so important to South-East Queensland, to the people of Toowoomba and to Western Queensland. The No. 1 priority should be this bypass being built.