



Speech by

**Shane Knuth**

**MEMBER FOR DALRYMPLE**

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## **TRANSPORT (RAIL SAFETY) BILL**

**Mr KNUTH** (Dalrymple—LNP) (3.40 pm): In speaking to the Transport (Rail Safety) Bill, it is very important that we acknowledge the significance and importance of safety, not just in Queensland Rail in general but in all facets of life. I believe rail safety is a very important issue within Queensland Rail. We have seen the deaths of two workers who were struck by a track machine at Mindi in the coalfields, we had a death at the Mundoo level crossing at Innisfail and we had a tilt train incident at Rungoo about 30 or 40 kilometres outside Cardwell. Obviously, these incidents have caused a lot of distress to the families and have cost a lot of money. There have been a lot of inquiries. If we can implement strategies to prevent these incidents, we will reduce that cost and take away that terrible stress factor.

I acknowledge that the government is playing a role in upgrading these crossings. I would also like to acknowledge the union's role, especially the RTBU, and their passion to see these improvements to rail safety. They have been powerfully lobbying the government. They are lobbying for a program called Operation Lifesaver. I fully support this program and I have supported it publicly. Operation Lifesaver began operating in Canada as a public education program. I know the minister has heard about this. The program is jointly funded by the Railway Association of Canada and Transport Canada and it began in 1981. It works in cooperation with the Canada Safety Council, provincial safety councils and leagues, railway companies, unions, police, public and community groups and more than 550 certified presenter volunteers. The program promotes public awareness across Canada about the dangers surrounding public highway and railway crossings and trespassing on rail property.

Operation Lifesaver aims to join all provincial and federal authorities in a nationwide effort to reduce deaths, injuries and property damage resulting from railway related incidents. To achieve this union, Operation Lifesaver—in cooperation with businesses, governments, railways and civic leaders—produces printed material, films and audiovisual presentations to assist in all stages of planning, implementing and evaluating. This program has significantly reduced level crossing deaths in Canada.

While I acknowledge the state government has embraced recommendations by level crossing working groups in Queensland, I have to say that I do believe we need rumble strips or rumble mats. This part of that Operation Lifesaver program has not been implemented but it has been embraced in Canada. These rumble mats have been successfully used in Victoria over the last 12 months and they work by warning motorists that they are approaching a level crossing.

The Travelsafe Committee talked about the importance of those rumble strips and about how effective they have been in preventing deaths. As motorists are travelling along, those rumble strips do give them a warning. The RTBU has been powerfully lobbying for this initiative. A lot of those union members are train drivers and they understand the situation. I know that every time those train drivers approach a level crossing they are virtually packing death. It is very unsettling for them. Yes, we have warning signs and sometimes we have flashing lights, and there are boom gates at Rungoo siding where the tilt train incident occurred—and the boom gates are very important—but sometimes there is a malfunction with those gates. Those rumble mats would play a big role. It is good that we will have an overpass in 2012, but those rumble mats would make a difference now. It is the same at the Conn level crossing, which is in between the Rungoo siding and Cardwell. They would also be good at the level

crossing at Innisfail. But I am not just talking about those level crossings. I believe they need to be implemented at all level crossings; they all need to be upgraded. In time, I think we will see those rumble mats.

This bill is about safety. We have been talking about the level crossings, but there are also issues that relate to track work safety. Sometimes when we are looking at safety, we can go a little bit overboard to the point where safety provisions hinder the work performance of those workers who are trying to operate and maintain the track. I will give the House an example of that.

Work in the Brisbane district is done differently from the work out west. The workers completely block the track here, they work at night and they direct the train onto another track. Employees can then get in there and do the job without worrying about having a lookout. Sometimes in rural and regional Queensland—like the western line—a workforce has to do a particular job, such as lifting a hole in a track or pulling out a sleeper. Those workers can see two kilometres one way and two kilometres the other way, but they need to have a work site briefing, they have to draw a diagram of their point of safety, they need to have a flag person and they need to have the train information. That is all very well, but the job could have been done in 20 minutes with four or five men and instead it takes two hours.

Safety is important. When doing a job like that, providing there is a flagman who is looking one end and a flagman who is looking the other, they can virtually cut out that red tape that prevents those workers from doing their job. The unions are concerned that people will lose their jobs because they are getting less maintenance work done. It is very difficult to implement a safety program and for there to be flexibility in it. I believe there needs to be an element of flexibility. I will use what occurred at Mindi as an example. That is a very touchy subject, but there were two issues. One was fatigue and the other was the fact that if there had been a flag person there those deaths could have been prevented. There is a concern that staff reductions can result in a loss of safety. That is very important and I would like to stress that.

Another issue is to do with QRNational and what it is now calling a track occupancy authority. In the past, track gangs could get what they called WSO1 forms where they get information from the train controller. Now they need to give 24-hours notice and they would block the track to do their job. I was talking before about flexibility. You do not have to block the track—it is a different story in Brisbane, but I am talking about Western Queensland—provided you have a workforce with a lookout one way and a lookout the other way. When they are on a curve, they would have a site lookout who is about 400 metres further on with a whistle and a flag to warn them. You do not have to go through all this regulation to get the job done. I wanted to bring that to the attention of the House.