




Speech By
Christopher Whiting

MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA

Record of Proceedings, 24 May 2017

TRANSPORT AND OTHER LEGISLATION (PERSONALISED TRANSPORT REFORM) AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr WHITING** (Murrumba—ALP) (5.43 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Transport and Other Legislation (Personalised Transport Reform) Amendment Bill. The minister and the chair have already dealt with many of the outstanding issues addressed in the bill, so I wish to add some comments on only a few of the more pressing issues.

The issue of cameras, which has been addressed here, has been a vexing one for both sides—taxis and rideshare—and is also a complex issue for both sides of parliament to tackle. I will give two examples to show that it is not straightforward. I visited one taxi licence owner specifically to inspect his camera setup. I was impressed. Cameras can record the front seat, the back seat and what is happening outside the driver's door. The unit is very tough—the whole car can be incinerated and the recording unit installed on the vehicle will still survive. The recordings cannot be broadcast. They are encrypted and can only be read by the home or mother computer. You have to take out the disc and plug it into the home computer to get the recordings. The member for Kallangur and I both saw this and were very impressed. It is a good outcome for protecting privacy. The cameras are unobtrusive and can cost \$2,800 to supply and install.

If you are picking up people you do not know and cannot trace and the driver is handling cash, cameras are an important part of your business model. That is why the state government in about 2005 spent about \$8 million to install cameras in Queensland taxis, at a cost of about \$3,000 each. On the other side, cameras may not add much for the security of rideshare drivers and their passengers. Last Saturday I met and talked with two local rideshare drivers—Alex and Heath. Heath only drives on his way to and from work in the city—that is only eight hours a week. They agree with the general rule of thumb assessment that only 20 per cent of Uber drivers drive full-time. These drivers' vehicles return to private use if they are not on duty—they carry kids around and people do the shopping. Sometimes they use leased vehicles for rideshare, so it is not practical for them to drill holes in the car to install a camera system.

The other feature of their business model means that they do have some extra security built in. There are no cash transactions—the passenger has to use their credit card to pay. That means that you can be traced if you do the wrong thing. It also means no runners. The driver and the passenger know each other. The driver's profile and all of his necessary documents can be found on the app. You can see the driver's rating by his passenger and testimonials. The passenger's history as a paying customer is also on display. The driver can rate the passengers. One of the drivers said he has the option of not making himself available if the customer has been rated only 3.5 out of five as a passenger. This discussion shows why we have arrived at where we have on the issue of cameras in rideshare. However, as has been stated, we do have the mechanism to review the need for cameras if it arises.

On the matter of the \$237 annual fee for a booked hire service licence—that is for the car—and the \$140 annual renewal fee for driver authorisation—that is for the driver—let me note this: taxi owners and drivers say it is too little. They believe that rideshare drivers are starting a small business and that these are reasonable start-up costs. On the other hand, rideshare drivers say it is too much. Many of them say that they do not drive enough to warrant that kind of expenditure. They pointed out that New South Wales rideshare drivers only pay \$40 or \$50 a year to register as a rideshare driver.

The question is: do we have it right? I believe that we have landed in the middle. I think that we have arrived at the right position on the issue of these fees. It was interesting that none of our witnesses at the hearings had an issue with the register of disaffiliated drivers. We heard that the Queensland system of driver authorisation, with its thorough police record checks and medical checks, is one of the best in the country in maintaining safety standards in the industry. The register of disaffiliated drivers will extend our system of keeping passengers and drivers safe.

Another issue that I think deserves comment is that of employment conditions. We have heard about issues regarding the bailment system. The bailment system has worked very well, but if you talk to a lot of taxidriviers they feel that more needs to be done in terms of protecting their employment conditions. This bill marks the start of steps to address employment conditions of drivers. One of the biggest areas of concern for all of us on the committee was how taxidriviers and rideshare drivers can make a decent living and make a living in a safe way—how to make sure that they can come home at the end of their shift. This will be an ongoing process.

Recommendations 7 and 8 of our report seek to establish ways to manage driver fatigue, which is a very important issue in this industry. Recommendation 12 sets out a process to establish industry standards for driver conditions, including reviewing bailment conditions and contractor arrangements. As I said, the bailment system is a traditional model of employment or contracting in this industry. Essentially they are contracts that deal mostly with the income split between drivers and owners. Yet Queensland is the only place in Australia where such agreements are regulated through transport legislation. I think that this review and the creation of an ombudsman or equivalent will be the first steps in creating a better employment environment for our personalised transport drivers and taxidriviers as well.

I believe this bill goes a long way towards sorting out the incredible disruption that we have seen in this industry through the arrival of this technology, but I know that this technology is here to stay and we do have to deal with it. Rideshare is incredibly popular throughout many parts of Queensland and it has been embraced quickly. I think this bill is the best way forward to preserve and build this industry. I commend the bill to the House.