



Speech By  
**Samuel O'Connor**


**MEMBER FOR BONNEY**

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Record of Proceedings, 13 June 2018

## MOTION

### Toll Roads

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (5.26 pm): Our road networks are vital for managing our increasing population and maintaining our lifestyle. South-East Queensland continues to struggle with traffic congestion across the network and people are spending more time in their cars gazing upon a never-ending sea of red brake lights in front of them. New ideas need to be put on the table to ensure we tackle this and manage our growth. Higher tolls deter potential users and create unnecessary congestion on other roads. That is why I support the motion moved by the member for Chatsworth.

When Transurban and their partners took over these roads there was hope for more cost-effective infrastructure for South-East Queensland. The RACQ said at the time that it could lead to cheaper travel for motorists as toll prices could fall. They believed that having all the motorways under one umbrella could lead to innovations like bundling incentives such as off-peak discounts to try to incentivise motorists to use toll roads more often. Unfortunately, this did not eventuate and as a result take-up rates in South-East Queensland have not been as large as predicted. Here we are, four years later and Labor has done nothing to change this.

If commuters continue to use other roads, we will never be able to keep up with our population growth. The attitude of Transurban has been to keep raising toll fees and send struggling commuters elsewhere. When speaking about their large half-yearly profits in February, their CEO said that commuters can always use the free alternative and save their money. If this is the attitude of Transurban we cannot be surprised that commuters are not being convinced to use these roads. Having the Transport and Public Works Committee undertake the proposed inquiry would be a fantastic opportunity see how we can cut congestion and make the most of our toll roads. After all, these are existing but underutilised pieces of infrastructure.

We also need to have more transparency from our toll road operators to make sure they are managing customer issues and complaints appropriately. One of those customers is a constituent of mine, Dean from Parkwood. He runs a small business, often having to drive along toll roads to get to his jobs. As a consequence, he has had a run-in with the operators and their debt collectors. Over several years he has accumulated close to 150 unpaid tolls. No-one would have sympathy for him not paying his tolls and Dean has admitted fault. His family were in financial hardship at the time and essentially they buried their heads in the sand about paying their mounting debts. What resulted, though, was completely out of proportion to the infringements he incurred. From his unpaid \$11 tolls he was left with a total debt of a staggering \$51,000.

Of course, I do not condone their infringements, but the burden that these operators place on families and small businesses like Dean's is excessive and a clear overreach. For each \$11 toll, the fine ended up being almost \$260. His vehicle, which was essential to keeping his business afloat, was impounded. The cycle put Dean and his young family into despair.

They told me that SPER contacted their bank asking for personal financial information, which caused the bank to change their loan again, which caused more financial strain. Worse still was the lack of response. When they made payments they still had no confirmation. When they sought to renegotiate their payment plans to something they could handle, they received no response. They contacted the ombudsman and he referred them straight back to SPER. It took a letter from me, as their local member, to the Deputy Premier and an email they sent to the Premier to get any clarity in terms of a payment plan.

This is not an isolated case. I note that the member for Bundamba has previously called out the conduct of Transurban after a constituent of hers, who had 70 unpaid tolls, was hit with a fine of \$20,000. The inquiry proposed by the member for Chatsworth is timely in order to ensure that we tackle these issues more appropriately. The tolling ombudsman has demonstrated that they cannot be relied on to actively engage with some of the most distressing cases. We have seen that they are really under the thumb of Transurban because, out of 435 complaints received in the last year alone, they did not make one single recommendation ordering Transurban to improve their services. Something has to change.

Queenslanders have been left to suffer the financial burden while Transurban has tripled its net profit in the first half of this financial year to \$331 million. If Labor can step up now and approve this committee we might have a chance to maximise the benefits of these roads rather than maintain the status quo: Queenslanders left with high tolls and congested roads.