




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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RESOURCES SAFETY AND HEALTH QUEENSLAND BILL

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (11.46 am): I am pleased to make a contribution to this important debate. I support the bill. Living in the seat of Gregory, a part of Queensland where driving is a necessity, the people I represent would support anything that improves road safety. The LNP will always advocate for sensible measures to reduce our road toll. Road safety is always going to be an ongoing effort because the population of drivers renews and refreshes each year. In the process we are getting better at it. There was a time when the *Courier-Mail* was running a campaign to reduce road fatalities to 550 people per annum. This would horrify us today, but it would have been a major achievement back then. Improvements to road design and signage design, improvements to how we educate and test our learner drivers and improvements to the safety design of our vehicles have all played a part in reducing that road statistic.

Two of the biggest road safety initiatives have been the compulsory wearing of seatbelts and random breath testing. Young Australians when they start seeing the world are often shocked to discover seatbelts are not compulsory in every country around the world. Due to good habits, most young Australians when they are overseas still put them on even when they are optional. Australia was and is a world leader in passing seatbelt laws. The laws were based on scientific studies that proved seatbelts made a major difference. At the time many people resented the change, but statistics do not lie. The wearing of seatbelts is not only widely supported now but it has been a major factor in the rapid adoption of child restraints. Indeed, it is not uncommon for families to have child safety restraints in all their vehicles and the vehicles of the grandparents.

Similarly, Australia is a world leader and continues to lead the way in RBT programs. Again the outcomes are measurable. As a University of Queensland study reported in 2015, not all RBT programs are equal. RBT programs in Australia vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction. This particular study rated the New South Wales RBT program as No. 1, with Queensland coming a close second. In presenting the findings to a conference the same year, researcher Dr Jason Ferris commented that RBT programs may benefit from being tailored to the population size and geography of each jurisdiction. This is highly relevant to Queensland because our population settlement patterns create very different contexts for drivers: going from wide open spaces to unsealed roads to multilane roads to urban motorways. Dr Ferris also said the findings of the study suggested that RBT ratios in alcohol related traffic crashes are also influenced by factors such as education programs, RBT publicity, penalties and rehabilitation programs.

We have made some progress since the days of campaign 550, but in 2017 there were still 247 people who lost their lives on Queensland roads. A further 6,462 people were seriously injured, many whose lives will never be the same due to permanent injuries. This may impact every aspect of their lives, from mobility to employment opportunities to physical and financial security and, of course, mental health. Many crash survivors struggle with survivor guilt and with chronic pain. This can lead to further issues, all caused by road accidents.

Drink-driving has been shown to be a significant factor in 20 per cent of fatal road crashes, so we continue to maintain and improve the measures we take to deal with it. Those include RBTs, fines, licence disqualifications and government advertising. Queensland has also introduced alcohol ignition interlock programs for high-risk drink-driving offenders with blood alcohol concentrations of .15 or more. In my opinion, the interlock program is successful because it is a very powerful tool. It prevents further offending in the most practical way. It also gives the driver education through feedback on their condition. For many people, that is a powerful learning tool. However, we cannot rest on our laurels just yet.

I was very concerned to read that, in the five years to the end of 2017, almost 25 per cent of drink-drivers involved in a fatal crash had only mid-range blood alcohol readings, that is, readings between .1 and .149, yet research tells us that those drivers have a crash risk 20 times that of someone who has not had a drink. Sensibly, the bill will extend the interlock program to include mid-range drink-driving offenders. This is a practical step and I congratulate the minister.

I am also very pleased to see that the bill will introduce education programs for first-time offenders and repeat offenders. I hope that such programs will help offenders to consider whether they have an alcohol addiction and assist them to reach out for help. Drink-driving convictions can be an indicator of deeper problems and the programs offer an opportunity to help that type of offender. This is potentially a powerful force for good.

The bill also addresses another serious contributor to our road toll, which is speeding. Members will know that as the member for Gregory I spend a lot of time in the car covering a large electorate of 460,000 square kilometres. I have had to work seriously hard to resist the temptation to speed and to resist the temptation to drive tired. Both of those could easily be fatal. While doing my rounds, the most frequent drivers I share the roads with are our heavy transport drivers. They are champions who keep regional Queensland operating. We give little thought to how heavily supervised they are in terms of regulations and logbooks, which aim to prevent both speeding and driving tired.

The challenge in urban settings is different. Speed cameras do play an important role, but this is where the LNP differs. We look at the desired outcome and what it achieves. If the desired outcome is to reduce speeding, then fixed and permanent speed cameras with clear warning signs have been shown to work. Placed at road safety black spots, they permanently reduce speeding. Like cardboard cut-outs of police officers and police cars that are used in many countries around the world, the permanent fixed speed camera works better when signs warn drivers that it is there. It reduces speed even when it is switched off or is not issuing fines. Indeed, you have to wonder if the signs alone would work. My first caveat on the use of point-to-point speed cameras is that they should be used with clear warning signs telling drivers that their speed is being monitored from point to point.

The second caveat is a plea for clearer signage for variable speed limits on roads. Many people from my part of Queensland get caught driving through Toowoomba to the Gold Coast for Christmas holidays. They go from the M7 to the M2 to the M1 and the speed changes constantly. People will tell you that they panic because the signage is not frequent enough to tell them what speed they should be doing. I have no objection with point-to-point monitoring. It is the equivalent of a truckie's logbook. It is the only way to enforce the speed limit and will educate people in better driving. However, I stress to the minister that neither point-to-point nor fixed speed cameras should be seen as revenue raisers. Their purpose is actually to reduce the road toll by reducing speeding. We will certainly see the evidence when we see the road toll continue to go down.

Finally, these are fantastic initiatives and we need to do everything that we can. However, another initiative that we need to look at is improving our roads. When the Department of Transport and Main Roads is telling the Auditor-General that it has calculated the backlog for the renewal of its road network at \$4 billion, it is clear that we need a government to invest in those roads. We need proper funding and road maintenance for our road construction. Many Queenslanders, including those in North Queensland, use our roads on a continual basis. We need to ensure that we continue to invest in the maintenance of those roads. It will be interesting to see how the maintenance backlog will be fixed, because if the current funding level continues the underfunding for road maintenance will grow to \$9 billion over the next decade. That outcome will be measurable, both in statistics and in road fatalities.