




Speech By  
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**MEMBER FOR TRAEGER**

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### **PERSONALISED TRANSPORT OMBUDSMAN BILL**

 **Mr KATTER** (Traeger—KAP) (3.31 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the debate of the Personalised Transport Ombudsman Bill 2019. I sat on the committee, so I had exposure to some of the contributions in this respect. I will focus on some particular points. I am fairly ambivalent about the new ticketing system. Ticketing and public transport are important, and I see the value to people in Brisbane in that it gives them connectivity to services in terms of how they get around, but what about applying the same thing to people who live in remote areas? We in parliament are debating and making an effort—and a lot of effort has gone into making that system work better for people—but those in remote areas have been struggling with airfares for the last four or five years. I would like to see the same amount of effort put into improving our connectivity with services.

My second observation in terms of having an ombudsman, personalised transport and the rollout of rideshare—and I watch very closely the growth of that industry and whether you are a fan of rideshare or a fan of taxis—is to park those ideologies aside for a moment and look at how that rolled out. Rideshare services moved into the market. At that point, department of transport officers were issuing fines to operations operating outside of the law. Some operators started blocking the phones of transport officers trying to issue fines. I thought that was pretty rude and pretty bold of any company coming in. When the rideshare representatives fronted the committee they said, ‘Well, you had better change the laws to keep up, because we are here to stay.’ I thought that was treating our role as legislators with absolute contempt. I apply that situation to an ombudsman where there is a fundamental problem. It is a real problem when rideshare representatives say, ‘Look, we know there is a law there, but we are still breaking it. Come and sue us if you like.’ That was their attitude. You could put in 100 complaints, and my office could field those complaints every day and feed them to the ombudsman, but nothing was done then about that action and nor would I expect anything to be done with an ombudsman in place now.

I am sure there would be some value in having ombudsmen in other areas. More often than not when we pass something to the ombudsman, there should be more conversation between me and ministerial staff of the department in trying to resolve something in that that is what we are paid to do. That is where we can really provide a good service to constituents—by providing another layer between us and the decision-makers. I do not think that is really helpful or where we want to be. I see this as another cost, another layer of bureaucracy, between us and the decision-makers. I apply it to that scenario with the rollout of rideshare.

When we identify structural problems that will emerge through the rollout of these technologies, I do not think there is the capacity to capture those or, if there are, they are fed to the minister, which seems to me to be a polite recommendation. I cannot demand to see that and there is no other pathway for the ombudsman—after offering that advice to the minister—to say, ‘I still need to action this beyond that, because there is no action here.’

I return to the rolling out of rideshare. Thousands of fines were issued to Uber drivers but the ombudsman said, ‘Nothing is being done. What do I do with this?’ The issue falls dead, in which case we wasted money. I challenge anyone to replay that scenario in terms of how it would be better with or

without an ombudsman. I could not think of a better example of why we need an ombudsman than that example. It happened. That is fact: history. I am very sceptical about where it will count in relation to the substantial issues that we are trying to address. Often these can be used as a tool to give someone another door to knock on. They ring an electorate office with a problem. Often if the situation is not resolved by going straight to the department or a ministerial office people will engage and use the ombudsman. Will that resolve things? I hope it does, but I would approach it with a fair level of cynicism based on my experience with the rideshare industry. We have some extreme cynicism about its effectiveness and about whether this is good use of Queensland taxpayers' money.