




Speech By
Samuel O'Connor

MEMBER FOR BONNEY

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PERSONALISED TRANSPORT OMBUDSMAN BILL

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (4.16 pm): I rise to speak in opposition to the Personalised Transport Ombudsman Bill. It is clear from key stakeholders, and even from the committee report, that this bill has major flaws. It will end up being a waste of money to establish such a weak position as the Personalised Transport Ombudsman. The committee's recommendations include calling on the minister to reconsider matters relating to the Personalised Transport Ombudsman's ability to make binding decisions, publicly report on systemic issues and complaint statistics, as well as the reporting arrangements for the ombudsman and asking the minister to clarify whether representative bodies will be able to access the services of the ombudsman.

The Ride Share Drivers' Association of Australia summed it up well. It said—

It is a very poorly drafted piece of legislation. I have stated publicly elsewhere that this legislation is nothing more than a smokescreen and a waste of taxpayer funds. The person appointed to this role will have no real power to adjudicate a satisfactory outcome, nor will he or she have the power to make persons or corporations comply with the legislation.

I could spend my whole contribution quoting the different industry bodies and their negative views about the bill—there are so many to choose from. This shows the resounding negativity to the view that the ombudsman will have no real value to many of the people it is designed to be set up to serve. The bill is designed to address the host of operational and enforcement issues that have emerged in our growing gig economy. With the advances in technology we have seen in the last decade, the new business models—particularly around ridesharing—have brought forward issues that need to be resolved by archaic legislation and regulations.

Industry and consumer complaints, along with the ongoing fights between rideshare and the taxi industry, have yet to be fully addressed by the government. The establishment of the Personalised Transport Ombudsman position with the limited scope it is being given under this bill will not help address these issues. It will end up becoming a scapegoat for the government to shift blame to. The limited powers assigned to this position suggest these issues, including complaints about government policy and legislation, or even alleged offences under other relevant transport legislation, will not be investigated. The changing landscape of transport requires people to be able to bring forward holes in legislation and issues relating to those changes. To not be able to do so is unacceptable.

The Taxi Council Queensland submitted that the Personalised Transport Ombudsman will be a toothless tiger and a waste of money, which is something that many of my colleagues have already quoted. The council also expressed the view that the substantive and pressing issues confronting their sector appear to be outside the purview proposed for the new role. The Limousine Action Group (Queensland) Inc. also expressed concern that safety was not a priority of the bill and that the proposed role of the Personalised Transport Ombudsman posed little to no benefit to the industry. They concluded that the service will be similar to the current ineffective taxi complaint hotline.

If we are going to create this new office and if we are going to spend money to set it up, let us make it effective and responsive to the current reality of the market. Key stakeholders have no faith that anything is going to happen under the ombudsman. An ombudsman needs real powers to investigate

issues and for their decisions to be binding. If, as the minister has said, that would be a duplication of scope, perhaps we need to ask whether the office has any purpose at all. I was pleased to hear that at least the minister has heeded the recommendation of the committee to have the reporting of the ombudsman available to industry bodies and the public so that systemic issues can be identified and the government can be held accountable. It is surprising that that was not in the legislation prior to today. Nonetheless, I am pleased that there will be accountability, at least in this respect.

The bill seeks to protect fare revenue under the new ticketing solution. The growing trend in fare evasion is costing the government \$25 million each year. We will face more risk as the government attempts to keep up with the technology that other states are already employing around ticketing. I welcome the adoption of contactless ticketing and the amendments to the existing legislation to allow for that. That change needs to happen and is already being demonstrated in other jurisdictions. Anything that makes using public transport easier will help to encourage people to use it.

I have no faith that this legislation or the government will get fare evasion under control more broadly. The government's record speaks volumes, as fare evasion on buses has jumped significantly in the past few years. Several of my colleagues have already shared some of the statistics and, indeed, found them through answers to questions on notice. On the Gold Coast during school runs, fare evasion has jumped from just over 400,000 in 2016-17 to nearly 800,000 in 2017-18. I see it all the time on my local bus services. I see kids walk straight past the driver and into the bus. Paying for a ticket does not factor into their thinking. Therefore, there is little reason to think that Labor can change that through the bill that is before us today. I believe we need to look at different approaches.