




Speech By
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PERSONALISED TRANSPORT OMBUDSMAN BILL

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (3.41 pm): I rise to make a brief contribution to the debate of the Personalised Transport Ombudsman Bill 2019. As outlined in the explanatory notes, the main policy objective is to create this office to deal with complaints relating to personalised transport. Why do we see an increase in these complaints? Ultimately, it is because over the past few years property rights have been stripped away from people in the personalised transport industry. Taxidriver and limousine drivers had their property rights stripped away. Those rights were protected by regulation which is now gone. We now see lots of complaints arising. It is an issue that needs a solution. The question is: is this the right solution?

One of the things politicians should do is listen to people in the industry and in the community generally when forming policy and legislation. As an example of stakeholder feedback, the Taxi Council of Queensland wrote to the government to say that the PTO presents as a 'toothless tiger' and that the idea is a waste of money. Mr Davies, the CEO of the Queensland Taxi Council, said—

Give the ombudsman some more teeth. Give them some real investigative powers. Give the ombudsman the ability to make binding conditions on mediated settlements and, I would think, expand the role to be able to look at the way the department is administering the compliance scheme.

It may be a good idea to listen to the Taxi Council if we are going to bring in a piece of legislation dealing with personalised transport that is there to serve and help people deal with personalised transport issues. Maybe the CEO of the Taxi Council would have something to add. Some people might be of a different view. Let us look at the Taxi Council's main opponent in the personalised transport industry. The secretary of the Ride Share Drivers' Association, Mr Johnson, said—

As you read through the legislation, the reality is that the ombudsman will have no power to compel any party to do anything, apart from appearing before the ombudsman.

We are going to spend taxpayers' hard-earned money that has been put in the charge of the government to create this office, but the two main stakeholders either do not think it is a good idea or, if it is a good idea, think the ombudsman needs powers to do something more than just tell people they must come and have a meeting. I think there are cheaper ways for people to have meetings than to set up an ombudsman's office. This really is just a bit of window-dressing around the issue. If the ombudsman does not have any powers to solve anything, we have to ask ourselves why the government would spend money and spend this parliament's time debating a bill that has this outcome.

Mr Norris, the legal officer with the Transport Workers' Union, said this 'is merely another public service SES position for some public servant to fill'. It does not sound like he is a big supporter of the bill, either. These people out there operating in this industry find it difficult to find things in this bill to support.

Principally, the problem is that this office does not have any power to compel people to do anything. The LNP's alternative is a statutory personalised transport commissioner with some real powers to investigate issues as well as a plan to consolidate all personalised transport functions with

TMR into a new office of personalised transport—a department that could have some real power and control and an area where we could solve problems as they came up, as opposed to this piece of legislation, which is window-dressing. It makes people feel good. They can put in a complaint to the ombudsman and eventually they will hear back. The likely outcome will be that the ombudsman, with great regret, cannot actually do anything apart from ask people to come and talk about the problem. Ultimately, I have to ask myself why we are here debating this legislation. If this ombudsman has no power to do very much, why waste time, money, energy and effort on setting up it up?

In relation to ticketing, I think it is high time that Queensland had an updated ticketing system. One of the ministers opposite tells me that Toowoomba is no longer regional; we are part of the great metropolis of Brisbane now. Certainly when it comes to giving us a discount on payroll tax we are now part of the great metropolis. As part of that great metropolis, I have been complaining that Toowoomba does not have go cards. Obviously, everybody else in the great metropolis has go cards. Toowoomba, being no longer a regional town, is looking for the same level of public transport service. I look forward to the fast train pulling into Toowoomba station shortly. If we cannot have those things, then let's be honest: Toowoomba is a regional town—a proud regional town, a central hub for the Darling Downs—and Toowoomba deserves to get the payroll tax discount.

In terms of the technology for ticketing, it will help some of the people I represent. When they travel to Brisbane and catch the bus locally, at least they will be able to use some sort of facilities. That part of the bill has some merit. In terms of the ombudsman, I think we are really kidding ourselves that there is anything worthwhile in this particular office. Unless the government proposes some late amendments to give it some teeth, I suggest it is probably not a great thing to be supporting and I will not be supporting the bill.