




Speech By
Bryson Head

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

Record of Proceedings, 14 February 2024

TRANSPORT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr HEAD** (Callide—LNP) (3.50 pm): I acknowledge the new Minister for Transport. I certainly wish him all the best in the role and look forward to working together with him and all members of this House to improve things for Queenslanders. The key policy objectives of this bill are: to facilitate the transition of regulatory services from the Department of Transport and Main Roads to the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator; improve road safety; and improve administration and legislative processes.

Under the National Services Transition program, the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator, NHVR, has progressively assumed responsibility for direct delivery of heavy vehicle regulatory services in states and territories other than Western Australia and the Northern Territory. The authorised officers of the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator have the power to enforce and monitor compliance with the heavy vehicle national law. Impacted staff have been involved in the engagement process through this bill to ensure the continuance of regulatory services. This bill proposes to allow the minister to create ministerial transfer schedules for transferring of employees, with the intention to preserve employee benefits, entitlements and remuneration. To maintain efficient and quality service delivery, it is critical that support for employees is continued in Queensland post transition to the umbrella of the NHVR. This, in turn, will minimise the effect on those employees and also heavy vehicle operators.

For the most part, this transition does assist heavy vehicle carriers working across borders, with them now to have a single central regulator to deal with. There does, however, need to be an informative and inclusive education campaign included for all stakeholders.

The further amendments to be moved by the new Minister for Transport are implementing changes that the federal government recently signed off on as part of the Safer Freight Vehicles package. This changes the Australian Design Rules requirement for heavy vehicles. These changes certainly deserve elaborating on. These changes come from the impact analysis of options for maximum overall width—analysis completed by the federal Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts in June last year, *Safer freight vehicles*. This is a whopping 154-page document that I have been trying to flick through since the new amendments were made.

The Safer Freight Vehicles package increases the standard legal truck width limit from 2.5 metres to 2.55 metres for new trucks fitted with the latest safety technology. This brings us into line with general trucking widths in Europe, where the limit is 2.55 metres. I note that European refrigerated transport is allowed to be up to 2.6 metres wide. Meanwhile, in America the limit is 8½ feet, or 2.59 metres. The analysis states—

The supply of safer heavy goods vehicles is further restricted by the absence in the ADRs of exclusions for various types of devices for indirect vision (i.e. mirrors and cameras) and blind spot information systems (e.g. for the detection of vehicles, bicyclists and/or pedestrians) from the measurement of vehicle width and/or length.

This purpose of this IA is therefore to consider the case for increasing the maximum allowable width for freight vehicles in Australia, together with changes to allow various devices for indirect vision ... and monitoring devices to detect other road users ... to be excluded from vehicle width and length measurements.

This consideration is now for the most part being implemented, which I certainly support and is a good move. That said, I formally request the Minister for Transport consider working with his interstate colleagues to further get us in line with the United States and fully in line with the EU. This will increase the supply of trucks available for purchase and use on Australian roads. In turn, this will make freight businesses more competitive, helping with the current cost-of-living crisis. I note, as was raised in the impact analysis, that there are concerns for the Australian manufacturers of trailers by doing this. That is proof that Australia is drowning in red tape, restricting our manufacturing abilities in this country, which is a shame. Let's reduce red tape and other costs, including electricity, so that we can be more globally competitive and so that we do not need government intervention to keep our manufacturing alive.

In our move to continually improve road safety, I place on record further requests to improve and widen rural roads. Many local and regional roads across Callide and Queensland are well overdue for upgrades. This week we learned that the federal Labor government is kicking the can down the road, delaying important heavy vehicle route upgrades which would no doubt improve road safety and allow for wider freight vehicles. They have pushed \$400 million in funding for our beef roads out into the never-never. This funding would have certainly made these roads wider and safer for freight vehicles.

Of this \$400 million, \$300 million was to seal 457 kilometres of roads across Central Queensland, including the Fitzroy Developmental Road. The remaining \$100 million was to expand heavy vehicle corridors along the Burnett, Leichhardt and Dawson highways. These are major highways that cross the electorate of Callide. All I can say is: let's get on and build these beef roads. You only need to drive those roads once to know how far behind the government is on maintenance and critical safety upgrades. On the one hand we have Labor governments making big announcements on heavy vehicle safety, and on the other they are cutting funding on critical heavy vehicle routes.

I place on record my thanks to all truck drivers across Queensland and Australia who have to drive along all of these roads—and any road for that matter. I might hold my multicombinational licence but, as members can imagine, I do not have much time to put it to use these days. With the NHVR changes, I hope that the expanded organisation uses its powers to advocate for these routes to be upgraded. I also note that the Monto Mount Perry Road and the Mundubbera-Durong Road could be significant heavy vehicle freight routes if they received the road and safety upgrades they need. I formally request the Minister for Transport to allocate funding to get these roads upgraded with priority.

This bill and amendments are a step in the right direction and, as foreshadowed by the shadow minister for transport, the member for Chatsworth, the LNP will be supporting this legislation that has many critical and much needed changes. That said, there is a long way to go to reduce red tape within the heavy vehicle industry. Many trucking companies share with me their frustrations in getting freight permits to go down rural roads and across bridges that they travel very regularly. These permits are issued by the NHVR.

A specific example of red tape in the heavy vehicle industry is encountered every day by Biloela company Lee Crane Hire. This company has around 350 employees and about 100 cranes supporting industry, including government projects. They travel far and wide across Central Queensland. For many of the bridges they use, a single-use heavy vehicle permit must be applied for each crane for every trip. Lee Crane Hire has tried hard to work with the Department of Transport and Main Roads and the NHVR for a more suitable arrangement over the last few years, to no avail. This process is a huge burden on this business, and they spend many man-hours to ensure they have cranes ready to go to the various jobs they have.

The other thing of note is that they currently have eight cranes out at the Callide Power Station working on repairs to the C3 and C4 generators. When their larger cranes are required to go out to the power station, they need to apply for these permits which can take up to a month to get—and we wonder why the Callide Power Station rebuild has had so many delays! It can be directly linked to Labor's own red tape in this instance.

A report by CICA, which is the Crane Industry Council of Australia, in November 2021 measured some of the delays with this crane permit system which showed that between June 2020 and September 2021 there was a cumulative 365 years spent waiting for these single-trip permits to be approved in Queensland. I will say that again: companies spent a whopping 365 cumulative years waiting for these permits in Queensland. In talking to crane companies, there has been no notable improvement in this process since. I implore the minister and the staff transitioning across to NHVR to work to make significant improvements to this process.

Further on road safety, unfortunately in Queensland the road toll remains high. As a result, it is vital that transport related legislation continues to evolve with emerging technologies and changing risk profiles and that road users are given every opportunity to correct their behaviour through more timely notifications. Road safety is vitally important and any measure to genuinely improve road safety I wholeheartedly support.

Changes to technology were one of the requirements in this bill, but as I am running out of time I will just say that I am looking forward to working with all members of this House to continue to make Queensland a better and safer place in all aspects of life.