




Speech By
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TRANSPORT AND OTHER LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (4.08 pm): I rise to make a small contribution to the Transport and Other Legislation Amendment Bill 2023. This is a pretty simple, logical, sensible sort of bill. Its main objective is to transition the regulatory services to the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator. That has happened in all of the other states. Queensland is the last state to get to this point.

This is about interstate freight services. Toowoomba has a lot of logistics hubs and a lot of companies that are driving interstate all the time. They are very used to this regulator. Having consistency for people who are crossing state borders on a regular basis—a couple of times a week basis—I think is only sensible. In doing this, some 135 TMR staff, I am advised, are planning to go across to the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator. This bill gives the authority to do that. I think it is all very sensible with regard to the heavy goods side of things.

There are a couple of things I would like to say about heavy goods vehicles, particularly in and around Toowoomba. As I said, Toowoomba is very much a logistics hub not only for people who are trying to get goods to the port for export but also for people who are trying to distribute down to Melbourne and up to the Northern Territory. A lot of that traffic will come through Toowoomba, so our main freight network is of critical importance. Through the neglect of this government over a long period of time we have seen that the Bremer is now a bottleneck. Heavy goods vehicles can only cross one side of the four lanes at 60 kilometres an hour. It is restrictive and it is difficult. It is slowing down all of the traffic from every part of Western Queensland into the capital and all of the traffic from the capital interstate and into Western Queensland. It is causing issues. I would encourage the government to get on with doing its job and maintain the freight network to a high standard. Multiple years of neglect have landed the heavy freight network in this situation and it adds to every single thing we buy, move and sell. The cost goes up just a little bit, but it compounds every time a vehicle has to slow down to get through the bottleneck that has been created as a result of this government not maintaining its critical assets.

Whilst we are talking about not maintaining critical assets I also want to talk about the Toowoomba bypass. This road network was designed to take out over 20 sets of traffic lights for heavy goods vehicles. It was supposed to improve the capacity of our freight network to deliver and improve its efficiency. For an extended period of time now we have seen that because the eastbound lane was not built correctly traffic has to slow down, and again this adds to the cost of every single product that moves. You would think that if it is eastbound it is only products we are moving to the capital. It is not, because the same vehicle has to get to the capital to come back. Every time you add minutes to the journey you add to the cost of the product, and the cost of the product is borne by every single person who consumes just about everything that is delivered via truck all over Western Queensland. In a cost-of-living crisis, having a government that maintains its road assets at peak levels is critical. This government has been terribly negligent in doing that, particularly in and around Toowoomba and west of Ipswich. These two examples compound and affect every single fuel truck and every single delivery that comes into my community and other communities out west. It adds cost because of the inability of

the government to maintain those things. I would call on the government to expedite their efforts and get both of those things back as they should have been if they had been correctly maintained as quickly as possible.

There are a couple of other things I want to mention around the heavy goods freight network, particularly as we head west from Toowoomba. Toowoomba is a service centre for gas fields, grain trucks and beef and cattle movements, and a lot of these heavy goods have to go over bridge networks out there in Western Queensland. As they repeatedly take heavy goods vehicles over those bridges—with a permit—the life of each bridge reduces. What has been happening is that with the heavy goods vehicles and wide load vehicles that are required—and it does not matter whether we are talking about wind turbines or other things—as you try to move these around eventually bridges reach their engineering capacity and they say, ‘You can no longer cross here.’ Then all of the traffic gets funnelled to another bridge and slowly, as more traffic gets funnelled to that because they cannot use the previous one, it shortens the life of that bridge. If you do not fix and upgrade these crossings, eventually you are going to run out of the ability to distribute these things. These are all things we are depending on for energy and export, so the minister needs to focus and have a serious look at what is going on in Western Queensland when it comes to our heavy goods vehicle network and its capacity to do its job.

As the new regulator comes into place there will be different widths, heights and different carrying capacities. All of that needs to be calculated in order to work out how many times these permits can be issued to cross certain parts of the network, and a maintenance program that keeps the network open and operating needs to be put into place.

There are a couple of other things I will talk about very briefly. It is interesting to go from the National Heavy Vehicle Regulator to the CBD BUG and users of e-scooters. There was a diverse set of views from various stakeholders. The Queensland Tourism Industry Council talked about better communication for tourists who come up here and use e-scooters so they understand the rules that exist here in Queensland and do not cop fines simply because they are naive to the legislation that will now govern their use on our road network. I think it is important that the government listens to that and provides some level of capacity for tourists to understand. We do not want people coming to Queensland, breaking the laws and endangering themselves or other people—that is the worst-case scenario—or even copping a big fine, going home and telling everybody how rubbish their holiday in Queensland was because they copped a big fine for doing something that may be legal in another jurisdiction but is not legal in ours. Therefore, as it changes these things it is incumbent on the government to make sure it communicates that to users.

Overall, the bill is noncontroversial. It empowers TMR to transfer staff. I think it will help logistics companies, many of which are based in my community, to comply in a more simple and convenient manner because it aligns across all of the state borders. I think all of that is good. I would just reiterate to the minister that our heavy goods road network needs serious investment so we can maintain the productivity and efficiency of Queensland road users who are exporting and bringing wealth into the state. They need to do it efficiently and in a productive way. Other road users import goods for us to buy and distribute them into our community, and we also want them to do that as economically as possible. We do not want the government’s inadequacies to add to the cost-of-living crisis which has been caused by this government.