

HOUSE OF ASSEMBLY

TUESDAY 07TH JUNE 2016

RAIL SAFETY NATIONAL LAW (SOUTH AUSTRALIA) (MISCELLANEOUS NO 2) AMENDMENT BILL

Second Reading

Adjourned debate on second reading.

(Continued from 25 May 2016.)

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (11:04): I rise to speak to the Rail Safety National Law (South Australia) (Miscellaneous No. 2) Amendment Bill 2016. This is part of a range of bills that we have had in regard to Rail Safety National Law. I note that back in 2009 the Council of Australian Governments agreed to implement national rail safety reform so that we would end up with a national single rail safety regulator. In so doing, we would develop a rail safety national law which would, obviously, be administered by that rail regulator.

The aims of the reform are to support a seamless national rail transport system, not reduce the existing levels of rail safety (so you would hope it would augment better levels of safety), streamline the regulatory arrangements, reduce the compliance burden for business (which can only be a good thing) and also improve national productivity and reduce transport costs generally.

In regard to the operation of the regulator, it has successfully discharged its obligations under the law in the first two years of operation. That included facilitating the safe operation of rail transport in Australia by providing a scheme for national accreditation of rail transport operators and promoting the provision of national policies, procedures and guidance to industry.

This bill is the second amendment package, which is administrative in nature, and it will improve the operation of the Rail Safety National Law (South Australia) Act. It will do this partly by clarifying issues around infringement penalties and court-imposed penalties so that they can be paid into the regulator's fund; this, as I indicated, provides clarity to an existing provision. It will also maintain currency with relevant national systems for the delivery and assessment of competencies relevant to rail safety workers and provide flexibility to recognise those different systems if changes are made in the future.

Certainly, there is talk about allowing authorised officers to secure the perimeter of sites for compliance and investigation purposes, but that would not explicitly restrict access to rolling stock. There is a requirement for a third party to notify a rail infrastructure manager before carrying out any work near a railway that threatens or is likely to threaten the safety of the railway or the operational integrity of the railway.

This is really an administrative matter to keep up with national law. When you go into the history of rail in Australia it would have been nice to have a national law way back in the 1800s so that we did not end up with so many gauges which have had to be either fixed, changed over, or in some cases we have just had to live with. We note over history the number of times people have had to change trains, whether it is during the Second World War heading to Darwin or just travelling interstate.

In the early nineties, I worked on the Melbourne-Adelaide rail standardisation program (the MARS project, as it was called). It was an interesting project, where contractors

joined in the work alongside the few remaining rail gang people who were still left back then. We used to have quite a group of rail gangers who lived up and down the railway line, wherever they were in South Australia, and these people did excellent work maintaining the rail. It was a mix of experienced gangers and contractors, or, like me, a lot of farmers or people from local towns. We were working on the section between just north of Coonalpyn down to the other side of Keith.

It was an interesting project where, for a few weeks, before the main shift happened at Easter time, we had an unclipping machine which was taking the clips off the rail. You have to understand that we still had trains running on it because this was the main Melbourne-Adelaide line. You would unclip every other clip, then on the corners you might do one in six and then take out every other one again on the straight. The corners obviously needed better stability for trains to come round. Train speeds were reduced as we made more progress over time, and in the end they managed to run the trains right up to the Easter when we did the full move.

It was interesting that we were using equipment that was built for maintenance and not for major projects like this, so inevitably it would break down. It certainly highlighted the fact when we did the big shift—and I am just glad I was put on the little machine, which was like a little trolley with a Honda motor on the back. You roared along and set the unclipper in place, snapped the clips off, and your workmate picked up the clips and threw them in a pile to be picked up. It was good work and it was fascinating.

One day, I sat in one of the supervisor's Toyotas, when my machine was being repaired. One good thing was that we had a repair crew so that if anything went wrong you just waved to them. You did not have to do your own maintenance—up they came and fixed it. I looked at the program for the works and asked, 'What's this? It says we only need to do eight kilometres a day.' He said, 'That's alright.' I said, 'We're doing 16.' He said, 'That's even better.' It was interesting work. I met a lot of people, and they were going to take me on and have me work on the next section north of Murray Bridge through to Adelaide, but I had to get home and help with the seeding.

It was certainly a good project to standardise the rail. I take my hat off to the guys who were in the middle of the crew because, when they did the rail before, any of the work started had concrete sleepers installed with two lots of lugs so that you could go from the broad gauge, which it was, back to standard. The rail was lifted about three feet in the air (a metre in new terms) and people would turn items around on the rail and then put the rail back. It was a lot of backbreaking work. I was very fortunate to be part of that for only about an hour for the whole main shift. This does exemplify the fact that it is better, especially with national rail, to have a national law so that we can have better management and better safety procedures, and that is essentially what this bill is about.

It does cause me angst to think that after just over 100 years the Mallee lines have essentially been shut down. They are still there, but there has been a lack of maintenance funding and restricted use on those lines. I used to look after all these lines. There is only a little bit of rail near Tailem Bend now. They are well up into the member for Chaffey's seat now, right through to the border at Pinnaroo. When you look at this rail that helped open up this state and this country, it is sad that it has now been shut down because the last users, Viterra, figured that it was not beneficial or consistent with good practice and that they could shift grain cheaper by road.

This does raise a lot of quandaries. I think more money should have been put into the maintenance of that rail to keep it up to speed instead of it only being able to operate at night or under 30° and at speeds, when it was warm, of only up to 25 km/h. It did have its own inefficiencies, but it is nothing that could not have been helped with more money being spent on the maintenance.

In relation to the Melbourne to Adelaide line, there is talk about a rail freight bypass coming in from Monarto. I know that GHD did a report on this several years ago, to do a bypass from somewhere near Monarto and shoot around to, possibly, Two Wells to completely bypass Adelaide. I think there is a lot of sense in this proposal, but there are also a lot of dollars (pardon the pun) in this proposal.

When I say a lot of dollars, it is billions of dollars because certainly it would be a multibillion dollar project. It would have to secure the access route and, to increase the viability and feasibility of it as a transport network, if it ever were to go in place—and I like to think that it would one day—it would also have a highway built next to it. Essentially, from what the studies tell us, something like at least 70 per cent of the freight that comes into Adelaide, whether by road or rail, could be diverted round to the north and completely miss coming up through the Hills.

We have had Hills rail since rail was laid down in South Australia and, in order to have efficient trains, the trains have been lengthened. We have had pull-over places of up to two kilometres long put in for the extra long trains that go along now, and that is a fact of life. I think that on the national stage it would be a great program to run that rail round from Monarto, from the intermodal hub. We already have a range of industry at Monarto: we have Australian Portable Camps, we have Scott's Transport, we have Adelaide Mushrooms right there, and we have a Big W distribution centre and a whole range of others involved in freight and industry located there.

I certainly believe it would make a lot of sense in the future. It is something that I think governments of all colours and all levels need to look at into the future so that we get these things sorted out because it would take away not only a lot of the trains, or a lot of the carriages, that would have to come right through the Adelaide Hills, past Mount Barker and through to Adelaide, but also a lot of the road freight.

I certainly acknowledge that Portrush Road is a vital part of that freight network, especially heading round to the grain silos at Viterra. A lot of those road trucks are being taken off just because a lot more trains are now hauling grain into Port Adelaide, so I think there is much work that could be done there, and it needs to be looked at. Down the track, there is also the potential for an airport at Monarto to make it a real intermodal project that would benefit this state into the future.

In line with that, people sometimes talk to me about passenger rail from down Murray Bridge way into Adelaide, and the problem is the simple fact of having to curl your way up through Mount Barker and Blackwood. Back when I was younger—and it is a little while ago now—I can remember that at Coomandook, which is an hour by train further on from Murray Bridge, it would take three hours for the Bluebird to get out there. That means it is about two hours from Murray Bridge through to the Adelaide station. If you had passenger rail, I think it would just be too much of a time inconvenience.

In the bigger picture—and this would be a big project—if you are going to run passenger rail into Adelaide from Murray Bridge, you would need to divert off somewhere near Mount Barker and run rail virtually in alignment with the freeway. You could go to light rail if you were only using it for passengers, and you would probably have to make another tunnel at the Heysen Tunnels. Again, I am heading into the billions of dollars—but you can always have a wish list.

You could connect through to the existing line that crosses Cross Road. That would make rail travel far more convenient for people coming from my end into Adelaide but, because of the cost, I do not know if that would ever happen. I think it would be far more sensible to get Metroticketing and public transport through to Murray Bridge, and it is already at Mount Barker. It would really open up avenues for people, whether they be

students, elderly or people just going about their business, to access the city, as Murray Bridge is an ever-growing place, and it would certainly benefit the community.

With those few words, I certainly support the use of rail, and I think we should be making more use of it and not less. As I said, I think it would have been good if we had had some more cohesion between the states all those years ago, back in the 1800s, when rail was going down, that we did not end up with so many gauges, whether they be narrow, standard or broad; and I believe there are some others. It would have made it far simpler for everyone into the future.