

RAIL SAFETY (SAFETY COORDINATION) AMENDMENT BILL – 22 March 2011

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (11:42): I, too, rise to support the Rail Safety (Safety Coordination) Amendment Bill 2011. I think this bill comes before us not before time in regard to rail and road safety throughout this state. Over many years, there have been far too many accidents on rail crossings, whether they be in the urban environment, around the City of Adelaide, or out in the rural areas.

The member for Schubert mentioned how after many years of discussions finally some reflectors have been put on freight cars that go through our country regions. I remember as a member of Rural Youth many years ago that motions were put through to our state body about putting reflectors on freight cars because far too many people, for a range of reasons, do not look, hear or see and, all of a sudden, sadly, you have fatalities, sometimes multiple fatalities, at railway crossings right throughout the state.

We also have the lunacy of some people in cars or trucks who think they can outrun a train to a railway crossing and, too often, because of their impatience, it has become a major, fatal mistake which has brought premature death to many people, and it could have easily been avoided. Sometimes, you look at how these accidents happen and you wonder why it happened and how it should not have happened. You hear reports of even local truck drivers who cross certain crossings all the time in their work life who all of a sudden think they can dodge a train and, sadly, they do not, and there are more injuries and fatalities.

I note that the Australian Rail Track Corporation is running a lot of the lines now throughout the state, and some of these are operated by Genesee & Wyoming. Through my electorate of Hammond, the main lines are the south-eastern line heading through to Melbourne, the Mallee line out to Pinnaroo and also the line through to Karoonda and Loxton.

The main line is obviously the Melbourne line and there have recently been upgrades right along it for sidings to cope with two-kilometre-long trains so that they can pull off for trains coming from the other direction. On the Mallee line, there are quite a few train crossings and there are different theories as to why that is because anyone who has travelled out to Pinnaroo will realise how many times the road bends. There is a theory that, when they built the Mallee Highway, they were paid to build corners. I have not confirmed that; I need to have a look at that, but there are certainly several theories. If you drive down there, you certainly realise how many S-bends and rail crossings there are.

Thankfully, in recent years, flashing lights have been put on some of those crossings out towards Wilkawatt and Jabuk, which takes into consideration the safety aspects of crossing that line. Certainly on the Karoonda-Loxton line, there has been an increase in rail traffic in recent times with the Australian Zircon mine. That is currently not operating; we are waiting to see if that kicks into gear again. They have some rehabilitation issues that they need to clean up but they were using the rail (which I thought was a good use of the rail out there) to transport their sands through to port, put it in containers and run it through to Adelaide. They were obviously under speed restraints on that line because of the state of the line and the sleepers, but it is a very good use of rail and it certainly keeps many more trucks off the road.

Also in my electorate, we have the famous Cockle Train. I think the new word for cockles—pipis—does not quite go: 'Pipi Train' does not quite sound the same. However, the Cockle Train goes from Strathalbyn to Victor Harbor. There are quite a few crossings all the way through the Fleurieu and a lot of these do not have flashing lights. They just have rail crossing signs and, because of the infrequency of that train, sometimes people do not take enough care in crossing that line. People need to take care wherever there are lines and wherever they cross them.

I also note, with regard to the main south-eastern line through to Melbourne, that in my electorate it goes on either side of the road, but there is a road bridge that goes over the line at Taillem Bend so there is no issue there. However, there are a lot of little side roads for farmers and businesspeople to access properties and they need to take extra care when crossing these lines because the trains do not back off for towns like they used to. A lot of them trundle through at 100 km/h, and generally they can do that very safely because people are aware of how they run, but I remember through Taillem Bend years ago, they did use to slow down, but now a lot of them go through at a reasonable speed.

The member for Schubert mentioned trains going around the city and bringing the freight back in from the north, and I commend Regional Development Australia and the Rural City of Murray Bridge. They certainly have my support with the intermodal project that has been going along for several years out at Monarto where in the future, hopefully, we will have road, rail and air connect. We have quite an industrial hub at Monarto: we have mining accommodation, Adelaide Mushrooms, Scott's Transport and Big W's distribution centre. Apart from that, it is only a few kilometres from the growing metropolis of Murray Bridge.

I think it would bring many gains for city dwellers, and especially for Hills dwellers, if the rail did take our freight around to the north of Adelaide, perhaps coming in at Roseworthy. Then, any freight that had to come into Adelaide would come back in from the north and any that did not need to go into Adelaide would just bypass and go on, whether it was heading north or west. It would save a lot of the angst for trains, which are sometimes up to two kilometres long, coming through the Hills, and it is a struggle getting through the Hills.

People talk about having a fast train to Adelaide from Murray Bridge but I can tell you that it is not going to happen at the moment. I think the only way it could happen would be to build another line with the freeway and run a connector down Cross Road, for example. It would be quite a major job because Murray Bridge is two hours by rail from Adelaide, and it is just too far at the moment, and because of the logistics of running through the Adelaide Hills.

I support the future of our freight, and some of our passenger rail could divert around Adelaide and so lessen by quite a number the trains that have to come through the Adelaide Hills into Adelaide. I certainly support the direction of the bill, that is, getting rail operators, private operators, government operators and road operators together to work out safety procedures at crossings. It is vitally important, it has the potential to save many hundreds of lives in the future, and it would be of great benefit to the state.