

PUBLIC TRANSPORT (Area Rights) – April 2, 2008

Mr VENNING (Schubert) (11:03): I move:

That the Environment, Resources and Development Committee inquire into the current and future public transport needs for South Australia, and in particular—

- (a) the development of an efficient and integrated public transport system incorporating all forms of public transport and necessary infrastructure improvements;*
- (b) the needs of metropolitan and outer metropolitan regions; and*
- (c) the opportunities and impediments to increasing public transport patronage with a view to reducing greenhouse emissions.*

Mr PEDERICK (Hammond) (11:51): I rise today to support the motion of the member for Schubert; I believe it is an excellent motion. I believe the member for Giles has just made the motion as broad as it was, and all relevant matters should be picked up, but I am really concerned with regional passenger transport needs.

Years ago, as a child we could catch the Bluebird through to Adelaide from Coomandook; you cannot do that any more. You can catch the train coming either way from Melbourne to Adelaide if you get on at Murray Bridge; so, you are halfway to Adelaide by the time you can access it if you are heading towards Adelaide.

One thing that does cause a lot of angst in regional communities is the subject of **Area Rights**. I note the minister is in the chamber at the minute, and he and I have had various discussions about the issue of area rights for a regional operator to take over the right of passenger services in a region.

If the operator wants to run hard and fast to the rule, this can make it very hard for any one else to supply a run, even if the operator who owns the area rights does not wish to operate that run. At the end of the day, one of the things that happens with Area Rights is that, if the owner of the Area Rights does not operate the run and another bus service operates a particular run, the original operator gets the concessions. I find that a ridiculous argument, which can cause serious harm to the income of the person who is actually out there supplying the service.

You realise just how unprofitable some of these services can be when the owner of Area Rights gets to operate the run and starts dictating how far down the road they will go and how much more they will charge.

There are certainly issues in my area with people accessing schools in Murray Bridge in particular, whether they be private or public. The Liberal Party is a party of choice, and I believe that the whole Area Rights shemozzle is championed by bureaucrats in the Department of Transport, who obviously do not know much about private enterprise to realise that if Area Rights were open to public tender—if the whole regional bus service was open to public

tender—private operators would fill in the gaps, because that is how it works in the private world.

People take the opportunities to supply those services. Last year I was stunned when Area Rights came up for renewal, to see that, I believe, a five-year plus contract was signed in around August or September, which put impediments on the freedom of choice for operators in areas. It works all right where there is a little bit of goodwill between operators, but if people want to play hard ball, as I said before, as I believe happens in my area, it makes it very difficult and inequitable for a lot of people who want a decent bus service just to access, for example, their school of choice.

So, that is the main reason for my angst. However, I must remind people that, per head of population, city passenger transport users receive, I believe, about 14 times the subsidy of those in the country. Public transport in the country is just a joke.

I commend the motion.