

VEHICLE AND TRAFFIC AMENDMENT BILL 2008

Second Reading

Mr Speaker, I move –

That the bill now be read the second time.

I am pleased to present to the House today the Vehicle and Traffic Amendment Bill 2008. This bill is introduced to ensure the continued enforcement of speed limits in areas controlled by new electronic speed limit signs.

Mr Speaker, the Government's new Tasmanian Road Safety Strategy launched last year provides for the installation of electronic speed limit signs in school zones and for the installation of variable speed limits at high crash locations. Both of these measures aim to reduce the risk of serious casualty crashes in Tasmania.

The Government started installing electronic speed limit signs at school zones early this year. The first signs commenced operation at three locations at the start of the school term on 14 February 2008. The signs use latest technology light emitting diodes to make drivers more aware of the reduced speed limit outside schools. The signs will only operate during those times when the reduced 40 kilometres per hour speed limit applies in a school zone so that there is no confusion about the speed limit that a driver should be travelling at.

Children are our most vulnerable road users. Unfortunately they can also be unpredictable, unaware of road risks, difficult for motorists to see and they have poor hazard perception skills. Their smaller frames and body weight also make them more vulnerable to injury when struck by a motor vehicle. Pedestrian injuries are the leading cause of death among children aged one to 14 in Australia.

Forty km/h speed limits were introduced to improve road safety outside schools, while taking into account issues such as high traffic volumes, peak school pedestrian hours and school holidays. Whilst the majority of motorists want to comply with the reduced school zone speed limits, some report that they are confused when the limit applies or fail to see the existing static signage.

New electronic speed limit signs presently operate at three locations across Tasmania; Perth, Spreyton and Margate. The signs illuminate and flash, to alert drivers when the speed limit of 40 km/h is in operation. Outside of these times, the signs are blank. The signs are configured to look like normal regulatory speed limit signs.

The roll out of electronic speed limit signs at approximately 240 school sites state-wide is to commence in mid-2008 and it is expected that all will be installed by mid 2011. This initiative is part of the new Tasmanian Road Safety Strategy 2007-2016 and is

being delivered under the safer travel speeds strategic direction. The signs will be paid for from the Tasmanian Road Safety Levy.

Mr Speaker, the levy will also fund the installation of variable electronic speed limit signs at high crash locations activated during heavy traffic periods or adverse weather. These signs will have the ability to change the speed limit so that vehicle travel speeds match the inherent features of the road or the environment.

Variable speed limits are in common use on highways around the world. They have had great success in improving traffic flows and reducing casualty crashes. The use of variable speed limit signs in the Netherlands and in New South Wales during adverse weather resulted in reductions in mean vehicle speeds and reductions in all crashes by up to 28 per cent. Studies in Germany show that variable speed limits in areas of heavy traffic flow have reduced the number of all crashes in those areas by up to 30 per cent.

Mr Speaker, each of the electronic speed limit signs will feature back-to-base self-reporting technology. That means that from a central computer, the Transport Commission will be able to monitor the operation of the signs, including what speed they are displaying and at what time. This information will be held in a central storage system and can be used to confirm the operation of a sign whenever necessary.

Mr Speaker, this bill will assist with the task of enforcing the speed limits shown on these signs. When enforcing speed limits, police cannot always see the face of the sign to determine whether it was operating. The Vehicle and Traffic Amendment Bill 2008 enables the issuance of an evidentiary certificate by the Transport Commission certifying that an electronic speed limit sign was operating on a specified date at a specified time, at a specified location, and was displaying a specific speed limit. The evidentiary certificate will be admissible in legal proceedings as evidence of the facts set out in the certificate in the absence of evidence to the contrary.

Mr Speaker, the use of these signs in school zones and at high risk sites is a further demonstration of the Government's strong commitment to road safety and I commend this bill to the House.