

Walk on Merri-bek
11:35 9/8.

Pauline

Notes for Parliamentary Inquiry on Vulnerable Road Users – 9/8/23

Introduction

We are representing Walk on Merri-bek – a group of residents advocating for the safety and amenity of walking, particularly in our municipality.

We are Andrea Bunting and Pauline Galvin.

Per capita Merri-bek is one of the most hazardous metropolitan municipalities for pedestrians. About three quarters of Merri-bek's road deaths are vulnerable road users, mainly pedestrians. This may explain the large contingent of concerned community members.

Over half of Merri-bek's pedestrian deaths are aged over 70. And nearly all our pedestrian deaths are occurring on arterial roads, controlled by the state government.

Merri-bek Council's submission showed the location for the 29 pedestrians killed and seriously injured since 2020. All but 2 pedestrian casualties occurred on state government roads or Lygon Street Brunswick, which is a Council Road in an activity centre.

We have one Council road of major concern – This is an activity centre that it is very busy at night.

We believe road safety should be evidence-based. The evidence is that arterial roads are the main issue. As to Lygon Street, half the pedestrian crashes are occurring at night-time. Most are at intersections. We believe that street lighting requirements in such activity centres should be greatly improved, particularly at intersections.

There is clear evidence that at 30 kph, most pedestrians would survive a collision. Yet most of our arterial roads are double that speed.

Merri-bek has shopping centre strips with 60 kph speed limits. At the Glenroy shops (a pedestrian crash hotspot), it is 60 kph much of the weekend.

We believe the warrants used to justify new pedestrian crossings are not appropriate. VicRoads expect that a pedestrian crossing is justified if a large number of pedestrians are already trying to cross a busy arterial road with cars going at 60 kph. Are people meant to put themselves in such danger to justify a crossing? In Merri-bek there is a longstanding campaign for a pedestrian crossing to access a supermarket. To reach a safe crossing point up the road would add another 20 minutes walk to the return trip. Indeed, I could give you a dozen locations in Merri-bek where pedestrian crossings are badly needed on arterial roads.

So the government speaks of people being able to move around safely and efficiently. But if pedestrians want to be safe, their journey can take much longer. Our time is not valued.

We also have concerns about this notion of "balance" that VicRoads refers to. Last year in an article on pedestrian road trauma in The Age they were quoted as saying "When setting speed limits we need to carefully balance keeping everyone safe on our roads and keeping people moving around their communities". Firstly, it seems that they want to keep people in motor vehicles and public transport moving around. But if you are walking? Does your time count?

Also this idea of "balance" reads as though some pedestrian road trauma is inevitable because we have to keep people moving. Surely safety is an absolute. Governments' vision is for zero road deaths and serious injuries by 2050.

Regarding access to data – advocacy groups like us would benefit from having access to good and recent data on road trauma.

We also suggest that the range of data being collected and published should be expanded. For example, pedestrian casualties in carparks are not counted in the road toll. We have to rely on media reporting. Already this year there have been 2 people hit and killed by vehicles in Victorian carparks. Carpark crashes are low speed but they can involve people being crushed, as happened recently in Warragul.

We would also like to see data collected on crashes into buildings and on footpaths where people congregate. In the USA, data on storefront crashes is collected. They say that about 4000 people are seriously injured each year from being hit. Is it a problem here? How do we know if we don't collect the data.

Some carpark and building crashes are caused by pedal confusion. Drivers confuse the accelerator and the brake. I understand this confusion is more prevalent in older drivers. But we need good data.

Finally we believe that penalties for at-fault drivers who kill or seriously injure pedestrians need to reflect the seriousness of the crime. There needs to be a significant deterrent for such behaviour. There is also an inherent bias in how police collect information after a pedestrian crash. Usually, the driver is not injured and can give their side of the story. It's different for the pedestrian. One of our members was critically injured by a driver who seems failed to give way when the pedestrian had the green walk sign. Our member was solely focused on staying alive and had no mental space to pursue the case. So the driver was not penalised.

How road design and infrastructure currently prioritises drivers over pedestrians and how this could be turned around.

We discussed earlier the bias in how road infrastructure values the time of different types of road users. Pedestrians' time is poorly valued. Keeping people in motor vehicles moving is deemed more important. So there are few pedestrian crossings, particularly on the roads that need them the most.

Pedestrian crossings should therefore be provided at frequent intervals, they should respond rapidly, and vehicle non-compliance should be enforced.

Speed limits: the speed limit on many residential streets is twice the safe speed for pedestrians. Indeed, someone hit at 60 kph is likely to die.

Vehicle size and weight: the current fad of large heavy SUVs is a significant risk for pedestrians and cyclists. The heavier the vehicle the more damage to the other, more vulnerable road users.

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Street Lighting – improving street lighting will improve the visibility of pedestrians and reduce pedestrian road trauma at night. This is crucial in areas with high levels of pedestrian activity at night. I live close to Lygon Street Brunswick, where around half of pedestrian casualties occur in the dark or dawn/dusk. We need improved street lighting requirements in activity centres, and particularly ensure that all intersections and legs of signalised intersections are properly lit.

How the Victorian Government can increase public acceptance of lower speed limits.

We look to the government for leadership on this. Victoria used to be a leader in road safety. We could regain that.

Our experience is that the safety afforded by slower vehicle speeds is already accepted by most of the general public in urban areas. Rural roads may be a different matter. We have seen in our areas 40 kph is well accepted in local streets. And the support for 30 kph speed limit is growing. Brunswick Residents Network found 50% support in Brunswick.

Road safety should be evidenced-based. There is clear evidence that lower speed limits make roads safer.

In general, the relative risk of different vehicle speeds on pedestrians is not well understood. Also in urban areas, lower speed limits make little difference to travel time difference. But this is not well understood.

So these matters could be part of road safety campaigning.

How the Victorian Government should improve pedestrian crossings to make them safer.

We need far more signalised pedestrian crossings. All pedestrian crossings should have mast arms to improve visibility. We have reports of vehicles not stopping and visibility may be an issue.

They should have faster response times. Currently at some locations the wait time is excessive. This encourages risk-taking. There needs to be sufficient time for slower people to cross.

At pedestrian crossings where there are concerns about vehicles not stopping, red light cameras should be installed. Currently there are no fixed red light cameras at all at pedestrian crossings. The only one installed was recently removed. Note that South Australia has about 30 such cameras.

The particular needs of older pedestrians that road safety authorities need to consider in infrastructure design.

Given the small budget for pedestrian infrastructure, road authorities prioritise where funding is directed. Funding tends to go towards infrastructure near schools. Of course children must be safe, and we need to encourage them to walk to school. And there is still not enough infrastructure near school. But because funding is limited, there is rarely enough for other locations, particularly where elderly people may want to cross the road. And this still seems to happen at locations where elderly pedestrians have been killed.

Shopping centre speed zones also benefit older people. It seems very difficult to get a shopping speed zone, or get the hours extended. There are several shopping strips in Merri-bek where vehicles are travelling at 60 kph either all of the time, or during some shopping hours.

Older pedestrians may need more time to cross the road. There are even crossings in Fawkner where you have to wait two cycles of the lights to fully cross the road. These need to be fixed. Puffin detection signals, which adjust the green time for crossing, should be rolled out everywhere.

Older pedestrians do not want to share paths with cyclists or e-scooters etc. And cyclists must be safe. Separated bike paths should also encourage far more people to cycle, which will reduce vehicle numbers and make the roads safer. So pedestrians and cyclists need to have separate paths. Currently an excessive amount of road space is taken up by motor vehicles.

Because the authorities seem unwilling to address the bias in road space allocation, more people are riding bikes and scooters on the footpaths, making it difficult for older pedestrians.

As people age they may well lose their driving licence, or their ability to walk a distance but still want to get around their neighbourhoods, and will use mobility scooters to do so. Safe paths will be needed.

Currently a major risk for people on our roads is the weight and speed of the vehicle that impacts them. Vehicles must be slower, the consequences to other people can be catastrophic.

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Parker

How passengers can be better protected at tram stops.

Drivers failing to stop for tram passengers is a real concern. We suggest accessible tram stops be built to avoid this conflict, as has been done in High Street Northcote.

Meanwhile we understand that often tram cameras are not being used to detect such motorists. Instead the tram driver is expected to record the details of the violating drivers. We suggest cameras be used and drivers automatically fined.

Also can the committee please find out: How many drivers per year are fined for not stopping for tram passengers?

We suggest reducing vehicle speed on tram routes.

We think the current/recent vehicle-driver education campaign on risk of phone use while driving, should be continued.

We suggest a major driver education /promotion/ campaign on stopping for a tram, perhaps as related to phone use.

We suggest trams be fitted with swing out STOP signs, like they used to.

Pauline

How the Victorian Government can improve public transport and encourage more people to use it.

Improving frequency and expanding coverage. This is key to a successful public transport system. One of the best things we can do to address traffic congestion in Merri-bek is to have better public transport in the outer suburbs near us. People will use public transport when it is there. They can't use it if it is not there. Some bus routes in Merri-bek, do not run on Sundays, or in the evenings. If you want to do anything, or even work in the evenings, the public transport system does not work for you.

The system must be available cheaply to those who need it most, children and mothers with young ones and those who are unable to drive.

The Victorian Government should ensure spending for public transport is at least 50% of the total state transport budget as per Climate Council policy recommendations. This public transport spend cannot be a single major infrastructure project on the other side of town. Money must be spent all over and particularly in areas that are currently poorly serviced, to bring them up to the city average. There is a great need for more public transport in the new suburbs to the north and the west of the city.

The Government could recognise/promote how using electrified Public Transport is the best sustainable transport option in terms of both carbon and embodied energy. Not having to own a car, and especially a second car relieves pressure on household finances.

Ensuring all public transport stops are accessible.

Ensuring journey between home and public transport is safe. That means more pedestrian crossings on arterial roads.

Pauline

you / the State Govt

A question to you: How can you ensure that funds are spent equitably, across the metropolitan Melbourne

It should be cheaper to use public transport than to drive a car. We suggest reducing the cost of monthly and yearly Myki tickets. Melbourne has one of the most expensive monthly tickets in the world. It's not worth buying a monthly ticket unless you are using public transport 4 days per week. We suggest halving the cost. Then far more people will get Myki passes and will use public transport. Also make it cheaper for families to travel together. The system must be available cheaply to those who need it most, children and mothers with young ones and those who are unable to drive.

Build public transport to new developments, particularly shopping centres. I recently requested that a bus route be extended in Warragul to include the new shopping centre. The reply was "funding is not currently available to increase the frequency or add additional stops to many bus services operating across the state of Victoria".

Challenge assumptions about how people access retail areas. We know that traders greatly overestimate the proportion of shoppers who drive to shopping areas. For example, Sydney Road. But what about hardware, where the assumption is that most people drive. I have access to counts at a large Melbourne hardware store adjacent to public transport. The number of people walking or cycling to the store was almost equivalent to the number of motor vehicles.

How driver licence tests and renewal processes could be changed to raise drivers' awareness of vulnerable road users.

There needs to be greater emphasis that drivers should be driving to the conditions, and not just be guided by the speed limit. Driving to the conditions means being cautious around people walking and cycling.

The road rules and driving training do mention when drivers have to give way to pedestrians. But too many drivers don't give way. We have a shared zone near us where virtually no driver gives way to pedestrians. So perhaps few drivers understand this road rule. Public car parks are another area where many drivers don't understand the rule that they must give way. So regular road safety campaigns focused on give way rules are needed.

Our submission discussed assessments of older drivers, some of who are more risky on the roads. Unlike some other states, Victoria does not require medical assessments. NSW requires medical assessments every year after age 75 and an on-road driving assessment after age 85. Victoria merely relies on self-reporting and on other people reporting someone. We believe this is leading to unnecessary tension within families and among older people. We note that there is a reticence to do b in people for this. Mandatory assessment would also reassure the many older drivers who are safe to drive.

More options need to be provided for older people so they do not find giving up their licence so wrenching. An example is extending options for half price taxi fares.

The Victorian people need a transport system that does not cost us the earth. We need sustainable, low carbon, low embodied energy, options to be available to our most vulnerable community members, We need equity of access over the whole metropolitan region. Equity of access should be monitored by PTV and reported to local councils and the State Government. Steps must be taken to address areas of inequity when they are found.

of vehicles
advertising
Education
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INTRO
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Pamela

Climate Council makes clear we Australia needs to halve the numbers of trips by car. Modestly is imperative to reduce our transport carbon footprint. Transition to private EVs is not enough