

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ENVIRONMENT AND PLANNING COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Growing Populations

Melbourne—Wednesday, 31 March 2021

(via videoconference)

MEMBERS

Ms Sarah Connolly—Chair

Mr David Morris—Deputy Chair

Mr Will Fowles

Ms Danielle Green

Mr Paul Hamer

Mr Tim McCurdy

Mr Tim Smith

WITNESSES

Ms Marianne Richards, President, Town and Country Planning Association; and

Mr Peter Hughes, Walking Club of Victoria.

The CHAIR: I advise that the sessions today are being broadcast live on the Parliament's website. Rebroadcast of a hearing is only permitted in accordance with Legislative Assembly standing order 234.

Thank you for joining us here today for this public hearing into the Inquiry into Environmental Infrastructure for Growing Populations. On behalf of the committee I acknowledge the traditional owners of this land, and we pay our respects to them, their culture, their elders, past, present and future, and elders from other communities who may be joining us here today. I also extend a very warm welcome this afternoon to any members from the public and media who are watching us.

This is one of several public hearings that the Environment and Planning Committee will be conducting to inform itself about the issues relevant to the inquiry. Before we begin, I need to point out a couple of things to you all. All evidence taken today will be recorded by Hansard and is protected by parliamentary privilege. This means that you can speak freely without fear of legal action in relation to the evidence that you give. However, it is very important to remember that parliamentary privilege does not apply to comments made outside this hearing, even if you are just restating what you said during the hearing.

You will receive a draft transcript of the evidence in the next week or so to check and then approve. Corrected transcripts are published on the committee's website and may be quoted in our final report.

Can I please remind everyone to mute their microphones when not speaking. This will help minimise any interference.

Thank you again, Marianne and Peter, for joining us. We might start with some introductions. My name is Sarah Connolly and I am the Chair of this committee. I am also the Member for Tarneit, and for those that have not been out to Melbourne's outer west, Tarneit is sitting around 30 or 40 k's from the CBD, but most importantly it is sitting within one of Victoria's and Australia's largest growth corridors. Will?

Mr FOWLES: Thank you, Sarah. My name is Will Fowles. I am the Member for Burwood. And Burwood, you probably know, takes in a bit of Camberwell and Glen Iris, the suburbs of Burwood, Ashburton, Ashwood and Box Hill South.

The CHAIR: Danielle?

Ms GREEN: Hello. I am Danielle Green. I am the Member for Yan Yean and Parliamentary Secretary for Sport and Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Victoria.

The CHAIR: I am going to throw over to you, Marianne, to introduce yourself.

Ms RICHARDS: Okay. My name is Marianne Richards. I am the President of the Town and Country Planning Association. The association has made a submission to this inquiry, and I point out that I do not propose to go through it in any detail but will pick out some key themes and perhaps talk more about sort of active transport with that particular focus, given Peter's interests too. The Town and Country Planning Association is actually a non-political public—

The CHAIR: Marianne, can I just quickly interrupt you? I will come back to you to do a little bit of a spiel and a presentation.

Ms RICHARDS: Okay.

The CHAIR: If we can go to Peter. Peter, could you just introduce yourself and who you are representing today?

Mr HUGHES: Sure. My name is Peter Hughes. I am representing the Walking Club of Victoria. At the time that we made the submission I was the secretary of the club, but I am now taking a well-deserved break and someone else is in that role.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Peter. I feel like I should have joined the Walking Club of Victoria during the COVID lockdown. I have never walked so much in my life.

What we tend to do as part of these committee hearings on Zoom is that—if you want to give a 5- or 10-minute presentation. It does not matter if you do not have PowerPoint slides; if you just want to talk, that is fine. It is just to give a little bit of an overview and summarise your submission and anything extra that you want to add. Then I will throw to Peter, and then I know that Will, myself and Danielle have some questions for you.

Ms RICHARDS: Excellent. I had hoped that was the way it was going, and no, I am not going to test the technology with a PowerPoint presentation either.

The CHAIR: Good.

Ms RICHARDS: The TCPA advocates for integrated planning of land use and transport for ecological sustainability and a healthy living environment, so the work of this committee is definitely within our scope. It is a non-profit public organisation, established in Victoria in 1914, and is independent of any party political organisation. The role of green spaces has been a consistent theme throughout the TCPA's existence—going back to words attributed to our founder, Sir James Barrett: 'Bringing a bit of the town to the country and a bit of the country to the town'.

Over the last decade the TCPA has pursued the role of green spaces in allowing the population to be as active for as long as possible and particularly what that might mean for active ageing. Membership has always been underpinned by people who have had professional experiences throughout their careers in all areas of urban and regional planning, whether through town planning, civil engineering, economics or social and environmental sciences. The TCPA does not act alone. It has collaborated with other organisations, including, during my time, the University of Melbourne through the school of infrastructure engineering and mentoring final-year undergraduates in their capstone projects, some of which have looked at the urban heat island effects at the local neighbourhood level rather than the more general, broader metropolitan-wide models; the impacts of hard and green surfaces on walking corridors—that is, roadsides versus parkland settings; and the differences between activity on road corridors and in parkland settings on brainwave activity—and that is basically due to the really cheap pieces of equipment you can get and connect to your iPhone or Samsung these days to actually monitor brainwave activity. We also supported those students in presenting their findings at conferences and other public forums. So it has certainly been a mentoring role for the association.

We are currently in a joint project with the Rail Futures Institute, considering the role of rail transport in accessing regional centres in an environment, particularly post-COVID, of increasing regionalisation—so a shift of population, tending to want to move away from the metropolitan core. The institute of transportation engineers—it is a global group—Australia and New Zealand Section is also keen on the safe separation of pedestrians and cyclists; again, that is particularly with experiences coming out of COVID and what might be now the post-COVID normal. All these collaborations have provided forums for broader conceptual discussions and indeed debates that might otherwise occur in other provisional institutes whose foci might be more on accreditation and ongoing technical training for their members, which is very useful, so we are not critical of that. We often work with the likes of the planning institute or Engineers Australia as well, so it is certainly not a competition; it is more a complementary role.

Our own submission covered a whole range of issues, and, as I said earlier, I do not propose to go into great detail, but some of the things we noted initially are that the term 'environmental infrastructure' itself has got a long history. It started back in Victorian England as really being the development of infrastructure such as water and sewage and pollution treatment systems for what were considered health outcomes. Then of course during the industrial revolution in cities and towns, particularly in the UK, which tended to lead it, the health impacts and congestion and population densities led to the spread of diseases, so that is where you first get sewage treatment and water treatment plants and later pollution management.

The committee's terms of reference seem to go a little bit more broadly. They seem to include what we might otherwise call natural assets in the environment, so the green spaces, the river corridors, that whole wider thing. So in our submission we pose the question, and it is half question, half statement:

Can it be assumed that "environmental infrastructure" is man-made (either built or ... governed) and managed to enhance green infrastructure and natural assets?

We think that is fair enough, but it was a little bit unclear. Having a few engineers on our committee, once they had stopped asking, 'Do these politicians understand what engineers mean by "environmental infrastructure"?' I said, 'Well, they do, but I think it's self-explanatory'.

Mr FOWLES: I am sad to report, Marianne, that our resident transport traffic engineer and Member for Box Hill is not with us this afternoon. I am sure he would be leaping to our defence, but we absolutely accept that there is some tactical imprecision here. But we are very interested to hear about what your views are in terms of what we can be doing going forward.

Ms RICHARDS: Yes. Absolutely. And the Member for Box Hill used to work with me, so it is probably just as well he is not here.

The CHAIR: I think it is really sad that Paul is not on.

Ms RICHARDS: Yes. Paul is a very good engineer, and I am sure he is performing well. I am not in his electorate, so I do not get to see much of his activity. But what I have seen I have certainly been impressed with, as are the members of his profession.

The CHAIR: We will have to take a recording—well, it is being recorded, so we can send him that.

Ms RICHARDS: Yes, send him the link—g'day, Paul!

In terms of some of the issues, in responding the TCPA looked at the question of the benefits of accessing and using different types of environmental infrastructure. What we did note is that in order to identify benefits you have got to have some sort of measurable objectives of what you are trying to achieve, and we suggested four: enhanced physical and mental health through access to environmental assets; protection of environmental assets; enjoyment of environmental assets, equitable access, public safety; and providing for passive and active use. And that is quite important going forward, because there are potential conflicts between passive and active uses that can either be reduced or exacerbated by infrastructure itself. We gave a couple of examples, but the most notable one is actually at Point Nepean, which is in the Mornington Peninsula shire, which is now a public park, but there are areas that have to be restricted due to unexploded ordnance. There are areas that cannot be cleaned up, so it is providing an open space value or environmental value from that perspective, but you physically cannot access parts of that site due to other risks.

The next two things were the impact of population growth in Melbourne and regional centres and the differences in the availability between different suburbs and different regional areas. The sort of point we were really suggesting there is that certainly the benefits and the impacts need to be considered quite regionally, not just on adjoining property owners and landowners. But in order to do that you probably need to first of all take a stocktake of each region's natural assets to get a baseline. What have we got now? What do we understand the purpose of all those various assets is? And then you need some basic standards as to the requirements for the amount of and accessibility of the environmental assets. So what is their purpose? Is it an area of archaeological significance that should not be disturbed? Is it an area of scientific interest or maybe an interest that has an educational role or a research role which might preclude wider public access? And then you need some sort of reconciliation for each region between the planned population and the provision of the assets and infrastructure perhaps to support the needs of those populations.

The effectiveness of current legislation and planning provisions—when we prepared our initial submission the EPBC Act was going through a somewhat similar tortuous process, so we made quite considerable reference to that and perhaps the disappointment that the Australian government seemed to be moving forward in a way that seemed to delegate its international responsibilities to state and local governments without addressing its own responsibilities. The role of funding was another matter under that. You can have legislation and planning provisions in place, but they just set the framework; you actually need the dollars to back it up to provide either new infrastructure or ongoing maintenance for infrastructure.

The existing delays are obstacles to securing environmental infrastructure. We talked a little bit about mostly proposing new infrastructure, so how do you deal with the issue of affected landowners? Because sometimes it is not always a straight reservation and public acquisition; it can be something that is built as an offset for something else. So it is not always purely public land you are dealing with. And the impact of COVID on the importance and use of environmental infrastructure—that almost goes without saying, but certainly I will refer to it in a couple of examples that I might just throw up.

We listed a number of examples, but the one that really stands out is the *Yarra Strategic Plan*, which is a process that I will go into in a little bit more detail in terms of its detail and the way it engaged with communities. So that was an example of a strategic plan, a project-driven plan. So you have got the suburban parks program through metropolitan Melbourne, you have got Victoria's Great Outdoors for regional Victoria, but when you look at that they are sort of a collection of individual projects, and what seems to be missing from those is the overall context: why are we investing in those projects? The sky rail, the Level Crossing Removal Project—just looking at the sky rail project on the Dandenong corridor, it has seen the creation of new green infrastructure supporting pedestrian and bicycle movements as well as passive social gathering, whether it is just for people to sit and rest as they are walking along the corridors, which are very attractive and actually draw benefit from the rear gardens of adjoining properties—generally you get a lot of trees and shade, something not all new infrastructure projects can provide first up.

So that is a transport infrastructure project providing some sort of environment and community health benefit.

Some of the key themes that come out of them are the roles of green-slash-blue places. I live in the Bayside municipality, so our green spaces are largely blue or golf courses from where I am. But you do not want to forget the role of foreshores and in fact beaches as part of the same sort of environmental infrastructure.

On the accessibility of infrastructure, as we found through COVID, parks within 5 to 10 minutes walk enable some sort of reasonable exercise—a couple of laps around an oval and back in an hour—exacerbating the importance of it. With cycling again it is what is available in a 10- to 15-minute distance of your start base, whether that is a home or an office. And there is the role of public transport in accessing some of the key pieces of infrastructure. This becomes critical when you start moving up the hierarchy from the local park into what might be a metropolitan park or a major sporting park—Elsternwick Park, for example. So how accessible is that by public transport? You could almost have said for regional cities, 'What is the role?' and, again getting back to the work we are doing with Rail Futures, 'Can the public transport network support parklands and regional infrastructure away from metropolitan Melbourne or in other regional cities?'. One question of concern is: what proportion of the population can only access these green or blue spaces by driving? Are there limitations because people actually have to drive to get to some of these restful places? And that becomes a situation particularly for the elderly, who are perhaps not as mobile or are on the verge of losing their driver's licence—that sort of thing. How can that group of people, as well as the disabled of course, get the benefit of particularly infrastructure that is provided at a regional or submetropolitan level?

I mentioned earlier the *Yarra Strategic Plan*. This is probably in our experience the best, most recent example of emerging best practice. Firstly, it was coordinated across several agencies. It was led by Melbourne Water with Parks Victoria and local government. It embraced the Indigenous groups. It embraced community organisations such as Yarra keepers. It primarily considered the values and needs of the Yarra River across all its reaches, right from the Yarra Valley down to the river mouth. It considered the contribution of the qualities of the river to parkland opportunities for the growing population for active and passive users—the active users walking and cycling and doing sporting activities and the passive sitting and resting in nature and studying in nature. And it recognised, perhaps, the emergence of new data collection via citizen science, which is certainly within TCPA's scope. That was, certainly over my 40 years experience in town planning, an approach that was very different.

So what, then, will the opportunities be for regional cities? Since lodging the submission TCPA has started to consider the input and significance of regional cities, particularly the 10 cities identified in *Plan Melbourne*—that is, Mildura, Horsham, Warrnambool, Geelong, Ballarat, Bendigo, Shepparton, Wangaratta, Wodonga and Latrobe City. What we find there is that there is probably no consistent approach to the planning for open space parklands and environmental assets. They tend to fall out of interpreting other strategic plans. There are some public open space strategies, but you also sometimes have to look at a walking and cycling strategy, a foreshore plan, a catchment management plan and then back at the council's own municipal strategic plans to get some understanding of what the big picture is. There is no way of sort of drawing the big picture together. Some of

the existing strategies are over 15 years old. There are a couple that are being reviewed, and pleasingly, I think, the reviews that are currently underway in Mildura and Wodonga seem to be following the Yarra strategic plan model in terms of identifying the values of the environmental spaces and in terms of engaging broadly across the community, so perhaps there is hope. But the problem is that it is not an approach that is being applied consistently. As I said before, unlike planning for a road network or a water catchment—you can define your boundaries and you know what you have to accommodate—in terms of the approach taken to environmental infrastructure, including the broader definition, for regional Victoria at this point we cannot seem to see a consistent pattern, which might make it more difficult going back to setting your measures and defining your objectives. I will probably leave it at that. I am sure you probably have other questions, and I am happy to take them on board.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Marianne. Peter.

Mr HUGHES: Hey. First of all, the club very much appreciates the opportunity to speak with the committee and have our views as a community organisation taken seriously. The other thing I should probably say is that I am not an engineer and do not have a town planning background. My background is basically as a social scientist.

I will just quickly go through a few of the points that we made in our submission and try and draw out some of the key points. I am speaking on behalf of one club of many walking clubs in Victoria. I cannot remember off the top of my head how many there are, but there are quite a number. The other thing that I think is increasingly important is that there is a growing number of young people who are not joining clubs but are becoming quite active walkers through meet-up groups and other similar groups. So this means that it is actually very hard to quantify the number of people who would be involved in the sorts of activities we are talking about, but anecdotal evidence suggests that they are growing significantly. The second thing I want to point out is that we have talked in our submission about both urban areas and what I have called peri-urban areas—regional areas. Some of the things that I am going to talk about apply more to urban areas than to peri-urban, but it is important to recognise that we see both these areas as very important.

We argue that walking in general has three benefits: physical and health benefits; social cohesion and social capital, so social benefits; and economic benefits to the community. And since some of the points we make later on will involve cost I would also like to argue that many of these benefits defray at least some of the costs of provision. That is particularly evident, I would argue, in rural and regional areas.

We also suggest that walking has benefits for people in a number of different age brackets. So for younger people it has the potential to build long-term recreational activities. While many young people are involved in sport, and I have no problem with that at all, having been involved in sport when I was younger, one of the issues for many sports is that people's activities tend to decline as they grow older. The sorts of activities we are talking about have the potential to last, as one of our members demonstrates, into your 90s. For older people walking and similar activities have the benefit of providing social cohesion and mitigation of loneliness, which is identified increasingly as a significant problem for older people, and I think lockdown particularly demonstrated that across a range of age groups. We argue that these benefits apply in both bush locations in rural areas and in urban and peri-urban areas, and by peri-urban—I am not a town planner or a geographer—I am referring to those areas that surround the city as the city moves out. So Tarneit would have been a peri-urban area at one stage; it is rapidly becoming urban now.

So walking has a number of benefits, we think. An increasing number of citizens are living in more dense environments, particularly in apartment environments where people do not have any space of their own except in local areas, so local parks and regional parks are becoming particularly important for urban residents as well as for other people. Walking in parklands provides a greater humanisation of the urban environment, which can improve social capital. There is research conducted, for example in Scandinavia, that suggests that people perceive the city to be more safe when there are more people on the streets, and it is actually not just a perception; it is a reality: the more people who are out and about in urban spaces, the safer those spaces become. Research suggests that there are the following benefits for walking in urban areas: improved general mood, stress reduction, better mental health and an increase in social capital. We would argue also economic benefits, and I do point to a study by Transport for London which points to those economic benefits for urban and suburban areas in particular. We are arguing that some of the recommendations we make would provide a useful way to rebuild the economy and have long-term benefit both in urban areas and I would argue probably more so in regional areas, which have been hit by a decrease in tourism over the COVID period. Bushwalkers

contribute to regional economies in a number of ways, particularly associated with accommodation and hospitality, and I do detail some of those a bit more in the submission itself.

We have found during the COVID period that the concept of shared spaces is problematic. Many people who have been walking on urban pathways during lockdown have reported that they have had some scary moments dealing with cyclists racing past, and I am sure the cyclists think exactly the same thing about walkers getting in their way. So we would argue that there needs to be some sort of separation or increasing separation between walkers and cyclists in particular, and in fact that applies both in urban areas and in bush areas. We recognise the role of state and local government in some of the recommendations that I am going to make. Many of these areas are probably more local government responsibilities; however, we would argue that the state government has a role in fostering or promoting these sorts of changes at a local government level. So we would recommend first in urban areas more attention needs to be paid to creating spaces where walkers and cyclists can be separated, and that may be by physical separation or it may be by what I am calling virtual separation, which could be through things like different surfaces, different colourings on surfaces and so on. They could be supplemented by improved signage, and signage of course also needs to be enhanced by both regulation and further information. So we have suggested the creation of television campaigns to effectively educate both walkers and cyclists on how to cooperate more in spaces and increasing numbers of rangers—maybe that is not the best word for them, but people who would serve some sort of regulatory function which is not actually a policing function but would assist in the separation of walkers and cyclists.

Another area of recommendation is increasing the proportion of space given to passive use. This is not necessarily at the expense of space that is allocated to sporting activity, and my use of the word ‘passive’ is possibly a little bit different from Marianne’s because I am not talking about not doing anything but I am talking about activities that are not organised by clubs or in a competitive manner but which may be, for example, community or family oriented. One of the things I have noticed is in my local park—and I live in the Essendon area—a huge increase in the number of large groups having picnics in Queens Park, and that could well be a significant long-term shift. We need more spaces where that can occur without either those people getting in the way of sportspeople or sportspeople infringing on their space.

We recommend the increasing use of walking corridors joining suburban areas and urban parks and joining suburban areas to the city to encourage more people to use both walking and cycling as ways of getting from outer areas into the city. Cyclists are using roads and some pathways, but we would argue that the number of people walking can also be increased by good planning through linking these transport hubs and so on.

In bush areas some of the same sorts of issues apply: the need for some separation of walkers and bikes, and to a lesser extent four-wheel drive vehicles—and when I say bikes, I mean both motorised bikes and non-motorised mountain bikes. We find as walkers that increasingly we are confronted by bikes as we are walking, and I am sure that they find it a pain in the neck to come around a corner and find a group of people walking down the middle of a track as well. We would argue that there needs to be, again, better signage, allocation of rangers to police this, particularly at weekends when most of this sort of activity occurs, and that such expenditure would in fact increase income flow into regional areas where most of the sort of bushland that I am talking about is located. We are not arguing that bikes should not be allowed in bushland areas, but we are arguing that there needs to be a sensible separation between both walkers and people who are using wheeled vehicles, largely for safety’s sake.

We also believe that money needs to be spent on maintaining bush tracks and roads. This will have the benefit of decreasing erosion in regional and rural areas. I have not discussed this with them, but I imagine the CFA and other fire agencies would like to see services improved in some of these areas, because they were originally designed as fire trails and are increasingly becoming recreation spaces and they degrade as a result. Again, we would argue that this sort of expenditure would increase local employment, attract more people to regional areas for this sort of recreational activity and therefore have benefits for both hospitality and accommodation services in regional areas, building back the economies in towns that have been damaged by problems with falling tourism. I think that basically summarises most of the key points we made. Thank you.

The CHAIR: That is great. Thanks, Peter. I would say, first up, Marianne and Peter, that the information you have talked about this afternoon to us just now really falls within some common themes that are starting to come out of this inquiry. We just recently heard, Peter, today, others talking about shared user paths and walkers and cyclists, and those walking paths becoming very congested, particularly during COVID. I am going to kick off with the first question, but I want to throw to Marianne for this one. Just in relation to the sorts

of things we were talking about with active transport, are you able to provide or point to some examples of innovation or best practice from around Australia or maybe overseas and the promotion of active transport through environmental infrastructure? Is there kind of a benchmark that we should be hoping to get to?

Ms RICHARDS: I think you could ask this question in many jurisdictions. It is a little bit horses for courses. There are a lot of references, certainly to Scandinavian countries, where walking and cycling—cycling in particular—is very much part of their culture. We find through the institute of transportation engineers, our association with them, that the same sort of discussions are being had in the US and Canada at the moment. What is typical of that is that these are countries that post World War II developed a strong automobile culture, whereas perhaps in Europe they were still sort of in that post-World War II restriction time, so the bicycles by necessity became more part of their culture and more part of their day-to-day activity.

So there is certainly emerging work in New Zealand in terms of altering road infrastructure to prioritise bike lanes, like we are starting to see in the cities of Melbourne and Geelong in particular, where the bike lanes are physically separated from the traffic lanes. I think it is very much an emerging thing. Certainly I could take on notice, but maybe it would be interesting to get some information through our colleagues at ITE Australia and New Zealand, because New Zealand in particular in the COVID era has done quite a lot of work in this space. I am happy to get back to the committee in due course on that. It certainly will not take until the close of business today; it will require some trans-Tasman conversations. But there is certainly good practice emerging in those areas, particularly Auckland, which is starting to draw some international attention, particularly in North America. Yes, certainly I could get back to you with some examples of that, if that is acceptable.

The CHAIR: That would be really interesting. I am really keen to also see what it is like in the outer burbs, because out in areas like I represent there is a lot of road infrastructure and not a lot of people on bikes. It is very different to the inner city, so it would be very interesting to see that sort of comparison of best practice when it comes to outer suburbia.

Ms RICHARDS: Okay. We will see what we can find for you.

The CHAIR: If you can find it.

Ms RICHARDS: Yes.

The CHAIR: Will, I will throw to you.

Mr FOWLES: My first question is to you, Marianne. You said in your submission that there was a lack of strong advocates for both environmental assets and the provision of environmental and green infrastructure, and in the absence of government action, changes are driven by private individuals seeking profit. I am not sure I agree with the sentiment, but I am wondering if you could explain that for us? That was on page 6 of your submission, under heading 5.

Ms RICHARDS: Yes, under heading 5. Okay. I think this is getting back to the question of—obviously a section that was not written by me—an absence of designated open space. So if you are sort of looking to develop new areas, how do you protect the open space and even retarding basins and things like that, without having to preserve the land, which seems to be the way that communities are designed. There is an overall concept plan that deals with the residential development, the commercial centres and schools and what have you, and then at the end of the day you have a precinct structure plan. The zoning comes much later, if you know what I mean. So you are actually getting a concept out there that says, ‘This particular part of this precinct we think is going to be great for open space’—and there are usually good reasons for it; it is following a drainage line, it might be a flood plain, there may be a need for sporting facilities and what have you. But the actual mechanism by which you can compensate the affected landowner occurs once the zoning is in place, which is not always at the same time as the precinct structure planning. So you get the strategic planning sending messages before the actual zoning and regulatory arrangements are finalised, and I think that is what that is getting it, whereas back when I joined the board of works in 1982 there were vast areas that were proposed for public purposes and people knew and you could actually start a process at that point in time to either have the government acquire by negotiation or compulsorily—you know, the process was in place. I think there is a lag in the understanding of at what point in the process you can get fair compensation and move on with your life.

Mr FOWLES: Sure. You go on to argue, or the submission goes on to argue, that there be a land conservation rent paid by the state to landowners who have been asked to give over their land for a different purpose—to use your example, say, a retarding basin needs part of the use and then there is this rent paid as a differential. That is a reasonably radical concept; it is not quite the impression I had of the TCPA, reading a bit of your background. That is almost neo-Marxist.

Ms RICHARDS: I said we had some economists. But the issue is one that has been festering in planning systems for a long time; it is not something that is specific to TCPA. It is an issue that needs to be addressed. During the 80s and 90s, into the 90s and early 2000s, this sort of planning certainty with flexibility came in. What the certainty-with-flexibility model said was, ‘Look, you do a broad strategic concept plan and then you sort of work out the detail as you go along’. What it does not seem to do is as you are going along you are not dealing with the owner who wants to move on. Now, in greenfield areas, in new growth areas, quite often it is not an issue because a single landowner owns the whole square mile, more or less. So it is less of an issue there. But it is where you have got fragmented parcels of ownership that it becomes complex, because you are dealing with multiple landowners, some of whom will see their neighbours getting a benefit that they will never see; they will get the benefit of an uplift of residential development. So it is a festering issue, and I think it is just something that has got to be borne in the back of the mind. Back in the old days there used to be restructure planning, where a local authority, the government or a council, would acquire a whole lot of land. Usually they were old paper subdivisions that were drawn up in London or somewhere like that for residential lots which could never be sewered and could never have septic tanks because there was not enough. So there have been models in the past, but I think that is what they are getting at—it is not so much delays for the process as delays for the affected landowner.

Mr FOWLES: Yes. I am conscious of time. I think we are going to be wrapping up this session by 3. Peter, if I could ask you quickly: if there was just one thing you could change about the provision of infrastructure for walkers in Victoria, what would it be?

Mr HUGHES: I think if I had to choose one, I would say greater separation between active land users both in the urban area and in bush areas.

Ms RICHARDS: TCPA would certainly agree with that.

Mr FOWLES: Well, then, quickly for both of you, you make reference in your submission paper to the valuable urban parkland given over to sports fields, which you have contended are only used a few hours a week. I am not sure that that is right, but in the balancing of these various uses, how do you see at the moment the division between the various competing blocs—sporting users, passive users, bicycle, walking, dog, other?

Mr HUGHES: I think that one of the things is that I did make the point that I do not want to take land away from sporting uses, because I think sporting uses are very important, particularly for younger kids and teens developing, but I think what we were suggesting is we need to allocate more space which does not necessarily have to be of the same sort—for example, you do not have to have absolutely flat areas for passive use, you do not necessarily have to have it as well cleared; it could be around sporting areas. That should not be seen as a waste of space but as a valuable use of space. It might be more like ribbon space that joins sporting areas, and I can point to some roughly in the area that I am living in, but these should not necessarily be seen as wasted space to be gobbled up by, for example, housing. A number of these spaces that I use are actually ribbons behind housing areas along creeks, which amongst other things probably provide some barrier against bushfires to those houses.

Mr FOWLES: Yes. Did you have anything to add to that, Marianne?

Ms RICHARDS: I do not think so in particular. It gets complex where you are playing in the boundary between private and public ownership or instances where there might be a major football club or cricket club that is sort of sharing a site with school ovals or something like that. During COVID I know of one where a club expressed extreme concern as people started picnicking on the centre pitch and things like that, which they were trying to prepare for the upcoming sporting or cricket season, whatever it was. That was a concern. But I think that these are lessons that we will probably take out of COVID, and the importance of having an appropriate management arrangement so that not only do the users of those facilities understand but the community itself can understand—and getting back to Peter’s suggestion of assistants or rangers who are there

to help guide people in the right direction is probably a positive community outcome rather than the sorts of threats of legal action and what have you. I think that is a better way.

Mr HUGHES: This might not be quite what you are thinking of, but another example I could give is that I live very close to a sporting field which has a number of grandstands. Over the COVID period the football oval was not being used for organised sport, but an increasing number of people were using the grandstands for exercise, so people were running up and down the stairs to do exercise. It was also being used for nefarious activities by people at night, so as the period went on there was more and more broken glass and other things in the grandstands, which actually meant that people were inhibited from using those grandstands for actually very useful purposes. Presumably because it is not in the remit of the football club, and the local council did not see it as being in their remit, that space was actually being quite wasted at a time when it would have been very valuable for the fitness activities of people at an informal level.

Mr FOWLES: Thank you, both. I am done, Chair.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Will. I think, Danielle, you can hear but you are struggling to get off mute. If you did have a question that you wanted me to ask on your behalf, Danielle, just send me a text.

I have a question for you, Peter. I want to talk about the easements. I thought that was really interesting, particularly in areas like mine, as we do PSP planning and these types of developments. It strikes me that the pavement there next to the nature strip has largely sort of got cars and everything over it because there is not in these newer areas and new developments a great deal of room between the nature strip and someone's home. There is not a lot of front yard and frontage. I have lived in areas where they have had I think you call it walk-in corridors, and I am thinking of Canberra. I do not know if that was what you were thinking of when you wrote this.

Mr HUGHES: I worked in Canberra for a number of years, so I do know those, yes.

Mr FOWLES: Commiserations.

The CHAIR: I was about to say I got married down there, Will, but now you have made me feel terrible.

I am really interested to hear your thoughts about that, if you were thinking of Canberra and other places maybe in Victoria or across Australia. I will state that the suburb that I lived in in Canberra, Charnwood, had these. They were not popular with local police because of crime. It was very difficult to chase someone down these walking corridors because there were quite a few of them. So obviously cars could not go down them and it just sort of created a problem of people jumping over the fences into people's backyards and homes, but I am really keen for you to talk a bit more about that.

Mr HUGHES: Okay. I had not heard that complaint from police. I can understand it, because although—I know where Charnwood is; I lived further down in Cook—

The CHAIR: Charnie was rough. That is why I know.

Mr HUGHES: A lot of those easements went underneath roadways, for example, and I can imagine that they would be an ideal place for people to hide if they were being pursued, and so that could become a bit of an issue.

One that I am thinking of that I think is an interesting one in Melbourne, though, is that it is possible to get from basically Footscray down at the bay all the way to Craigieburn on cycleways, and these are often in easements where there is sufficient space that it would be possible to add to that, somewhat separated from it, a pathway for walking. It would not necessarily even need to be an absolutely solid pathway but something that designates this as a space where people can walk so that they are not in the way of bikes. Now, I recognise that in older suburbs and in some developing suburbs there is not a great deal of space, but one of the things we have suggested is that it might be possible to change planning regulations so that, at least in the future, developers could be given an incentive to release some land for those sorts of easements if they were allowed to have, say, slightly greater density in between those spaces—so a bit of a trade-off between having slightly greater density but allowing some space between those areas of high density which would be permanently set aside for some space for walkers and/or pedestrians. That does not solve the problem of older suburbs where the density already exists.

Part of the advantage that Canberra did have of course is that it was—at that stage, when we were both there—a planned city. The National Capital Development Commission planned for those sorts of easements. So it may be too late in some areas for us to do that, but I think there is the potential to do that in the future if we think ahead. Certainly if we could get people coming from some of the outer suburbs into the city without having to use public transport or roads—and I recognise there is never going to be a majority, but if we can reduce the number of people using both public transport and roads—we do ultimately cut costs for state governments of whatever persuasion.

Ms RICHARDS: I mentioned the TCPA's history on the emergence of the garden city movement in the UK. Garden City down near Port Melbourne is actually modelled on that very principle of footpaths on the roadways but also pedestrian pathways throughout Garden City. Now, I have not been down there for a long time to see the state of them, but there were certainly remnants of them during the period of time I worked in that part of Melbourne. That is probably reflected more than you think in suburbs that were developed post-World War II in that first flush of development. So down where I am in Beaumaris that is the same sort of thing. That was the mid-50s and 60s. They are not as prevalent as in Garden City, but there are elements that flow through.

I mentioned also the level crossing removal along the Dandenong corridor. I mentioned the sort of shade of trees from back fences, but along the rail corridor some of the back boundaries of the houses are not that far from their back porches, and you get the sense of people being there and people being able to sort of do what they take as surveillance, as they call it, which is a sort of a comforting factor too. So the more you have a sense of people being able to see what is happening in these pathways, the more comfortable people tend to be in them. But if you think about suburbs that developed, say, in the 1970s and the 1980s, and if you drive out, Will, in your area on Burwood Highway, where the back fences face the road—and they are very tall back fences—if the bus stops sort of mid-block, you have got a very unsafe walk from the bus stop back into the residential areas, particularly at night, because there is no way you can be seen and traffic is not going to stop to help you in a thousand fits, I do not think, if you are being attacked.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Marianne. I think it is an interesting concept and one of the first discussions we have had about that. Walking corridors—I like the sound of it.

Mr HUGHES: Can I just add one other point? We do have what we call 'Wednesday walks' as well for older people in the club, and many of these are actually walks through spaces that can be connected. With a bit of imagination by the leader we can connect a number of these spaces. So part of the answer to this is that in some areas—and it is particularly evident in the eastern suburbs and in the southern suburbs—with a bit of imagination you can actually walk for up to 15 kilometres in areas that are basically urban open space. So part of this would actually be more about just making these better known and possibly signposting them more so that people realise that they are there and it is possible to walk some distance without going onto roadways or other more dangerous spaces.

The CHAIR: Thank you. I am just mindful of time. I am going to have to be a bit of a timekeeper and call it. We have got people that have just entered the waiting room. But I want to say to you, Peter and Marianne, on behalf of the committee, thank you so much for talking to us this afternoon. It has been really insightful. Peter, I feel like going for a walk now or in another hour. You have inspired me.

Ms RICHARDS: On behalf of the TCPA, we wish you well in your deliberations. It is a huge topic, and we are happy, as I am sure others are, to get back to you. We will on the issues you have raised, but in general, if other issues arise that you want our input on, that is fine too.

The CHAIR: Thank you.

Mr HUGHES: And thank you very much for the opportunity to talk. I find it a really exciting area, and I look forward to seeing the final report.

The CHAIR: Well, hopefully you will find those recommendations just as exciting. Thanks again.

Mr HUGHES: Thank you very much.

Ms RICHARDS: Thank you very much. Bye.

Witnesses withdrew.