

TRANSCRIPT

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the impact of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users

Melbourne—Thursday 24 August 2023

(via videoconference)

MEMBERS

Alison Marchant—Chair

Kim O’Keeffe—Deputy Chair

Anthony Cianflone

Wayne Farnham

John Mullahy

Dylan Wight

Jess Wilson

WITNESS

Jim Giddings, Chair, RoadSafe Westgate Community Road Safety Council.

The CHAIR: Welcome to the public hearing for the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee's Inquiry into the impact of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users. All mobile telephones now need to be turned to silent.

All evidence given today is being recorded by Hansard and broadcast live on the Parliament's website.

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I just remind Members and witnesses to mute their microphones when not speaking to minimise that interference. Jim, I might come to you in a second, and I am happy for you to have a few minutes, maybe 5 minutes, to talk to your submission or if you would like to add anything extra to start today's conversation, and then we will get the Committee members to ask you some questions.

I will just introduce everyone first for you, though. I am Alison, the Chair, and Member for Bellarine. We have Wayne Farnham, Member for Narracan; John Mullahy, Member for Glen Waverley; Dylan Wight, Member for Tarneit; Kim O'Keeffe is our Deputy Chair, Member for Shepparton; and Anthony Cianflone, Member for Pascoe Vale. We also have Jess Wilson, who will join us in a moment, the Member for Kew.

Jim, I might hand to you if you would like to give us a little bit of a summary of your submission.

Jim GIDDINGS: Lovely. Thank you for the invitation. My name is Jim Giddings. I am the Chair of RoadSafe Westgate. RoadSafe Westgate Community Road Safety Council is an independent incorporated not-for-profit organisation. The council is run by volunteers with no direct paid personnel. RoadSafe Westgate has been active in operation for over 30 years and has very strong local government representation from the municipalities of the cities of Hobsons Bay, Melton, Maribyrnong and Wyndham. There is also a high commitment from the local police officers, including highway patrol. RoadSafe Westgate is a community group that educates, advocates and promotes road safety to reduce road trauma and save lives. So that is a little bit of a brief introduction of what we are.

We did put in a submission and raised quite a number of things in the submission. The one I would really like to reinforce is the reduction in road safety program uptake in secondary schools in Victoria, and I am talking about programs like Fit to Drive and Looking After Our Mates. They are for year 11 and for year 12 students. Over the years, and more since COVID, there has been a dramatic decrease in secondary schools and colleges taking up those programs, and it is for a number of reasons. One is that staff at the schools move around. They get new coordinators that are not aware of the program. Another one is the cost. The costs of the program, even though Fit to Drive have reviewed their costs and reduced them, are still quite substantial, and each session used to be funded or subsidised by the TAC. That has been the practice for many, many, many years, and then since COVID they have withdrawn that subsidy and redirected it somewhere else. So that has made a big impact on schools in taking up the program.

Those are the things that I really wanted to get across to the Committee this morning. I hope you have all read the submission. There is a lot in it. I welcome any questions.

The CHAIR: Wonderful. Thank you so much for that, Jim. I am going to head straight to Dylan to ask the first question.

Dylan WIGHT: Thank you, Chair, and thank you, Jim. Thank you for the really comprehensive submission from RoadSafe Westgate. As the Member for Tarneit, which is, as you know in Wyndham, I just want to thank you for all that your organisation does in my community and throughout.

This morning I just wanted to ask you about drug driving. Your submission mentions the growing use of recreational drugs and an increase in positive roadside detections, and we also know from previous evidence a couple of weeks ago that drug driving contributes disproportionately to serious incidents on our roads. So from the opinion of RoadSafe Westgate and yourself, what measures and resources are needed to discourage drug driving and curb this sort of upward trend?

Jim GIDDINGS: Right. I think there needs to be greater education on the effects of drugs while driving as well as how the substances remain in the body for quite some considerable time afterwards—and it can be up to over a week, I am led to believe. A lot of users are just not aware of that. I am talking about recreational users. They are just not aware of the fact that they might have had recreational drugs on the weekend and then drive on Monday and have still got them in their system. There needs to be greater education and awareness followed by increased enforcement activities in general.

The CHAIR: Thanks so much, Jim.

Jim GIDDINGS: There is no magic bullet; that is what I am trying to say.

The CHAIR: Yes. I think if there was a magic bullet, we would have it, Jim. Hence why this Inquiry is really important—and to hear your views. John, I might head to you for the next question.

John MULLAHY: Thanks, Chair. And thanks, Jim, for being here. Your submission mentions the fact that we have had over 200 e-scooter accidents since 2021. What I was going to ask is: what policy measures and infrastructure are needed to make e-scooter use safe for vulnerable road users?

Jim GIDDINGS: As you know, there has been a new review into that at the moment. When I wrote the submission, that was not announced, so there are other factors that have now been incorporated in the review that were not there before. However, with e-scooters, there is a big demand for them—a lot of use—and unfortunately there are a lot of accidents and near accidents. We have really got to get on top of how we can manage the use of these e-scooters. One form is a basic sort of registration followed by some sort of insurance, so that if there is an incident or an accident, there is no issue with coverage as far as injured people are concerned. The reason I raise it that way is we have to try and ensure that the users—and I am talking about the e-scooter users—know what their obligations are when it comes to the road rules and their limitations on their scooter use. But more importantly, there has got to be separation from pedestrians. The new review talks about how they are definitely not to ride on the footpath, and we support that wholeheartedly. But we have got to get that message across to the users, and how we do that is a real challenge. That is why I am suggesting maybe some form of registration, more insurance and a process that the user has to go through before they can use their scooter.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Jim. Kim, I might head to you for the next question.

Kim O'KEEFFE: Sure. Hi, Jim, and thank you so much for your submission and for joining us today. My question is just around complacency. How do we encourage road users to be more respectful of others—which is a big question—and less complacent with road safety?

Jim GIDDINGS: Yes, how do we do that? It is more apparent since lockdowns and COVID. I think what we have got to do is—we really need to remind road users of their obligations and their responsibilities and drive home the theme that driving is not a right but a privilege. We have got to try and reinstall that thinking because, as I said, during lockdown and with COVID people just seem to have thrown respect out the window and appreciation of road rules. How do we do that? That is a hard one, but, as I said, the only thing I can really think of off the top of my head is just to remind them of their obligations while driving.

Kim O'KEEFFE: Sorry, can I just follow on from that? So, Jim, in regard to being complacent though, we know people using the roads are acting differently. How do we get it front and centre? That is probably my question. How do we connect that messaging to the drivers? Is it billboards? Is it social media? How do we do it?

Jim GIDDINGS: Yes, social media is one way or advertising on the TV.

Kim O'KEEFFE: Are billboards the answer? Just something in their face to remind them that they have to concentrate and be relevant when they are driving.

Jim GIDDINGS: Yes. That is right.

Kim O'KEEFFE: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Jim. Jess, we will go to you next.

Jess WILSON: Thanks, Chair, and thanks so much, Jim, for being here today. I am just keen to get a sense of what you think the role of the community is when it comes to actually being able to report dangerous behaviour and dangerous driving. We know that the police are there to respond to incidents that they see, but what is the role, I suppose, of community reporting and could it be linked to Crime Stoppers or something like that?

Jim GIDDINGS: When it comes to the reporting of dangerous driving, we currently have a system called Crime Stoppers, as you are aware of. People are aware of Crime Stoppers, and I see there are new ads about reporting taking drugs and things like that that have been on the TV this week. That is very good because what I was going to say is it is poorly advertised, so I am very pleased to see that they have identified there is a need to promote Crime Stoppers more.

What I was thinking was, with your question, when it comes to reporting dangerous drivers, that needs to be publicised—using Crime Stoppers to report dangerous driving and hoon activities. To duplicate another reporting mechanism like the UK one really would only cause confusion. We have got a good system now. Let us publicise it and make people aware of how to report and what to report as far as registration numbers, time, date, colour and those sorts of things. But for urgent issues, you should always ring 000.

The CHAIR: Thanks, Jess, for that question. And Jim, do you know of a UK version? Was there a UK version that would have this reporting kind of platform?

Jim GIDDINGS: I had a look at the one on their website. It is good, but it is limited to road use whereas Crime Stoppers gives you a much wider picture of reporting.

The CHAIR: Right. So their version is just dedicated purely to road behaviours, road driving.

Jim GIDDINGS: Yes.

The CHAIR: Yes. Okay. Jim, thanks so much. I am just mindful of time, and I am really sorry we have to wrap that up there now today. But can I just say if there is anything further that the conversation has sparked, something that you would like to add to your submission or from today's conversation, we are more than happy to receive any further information from you to the Committee. You can do that by writing to us. So thank you so much for your time, Jim, today and answering our questions. It is much appreciated.

Witness withdrew.