

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

WITNESSES

Jennifer Rivera-Gonzalez, Research Lead, Amy Gillett Foundation;

Nick Hannan, Executive General Manager, Government Strategy, AusCycling; and

Stephen Hodge, Director, National Advocacy, We Ride Australia.

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

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

While all evidence taken by the Committee is protected by parliamentary privilege, comments repeated outside of this hearing, including on social media, may not be protected by this privilege.

Witnesses will be provided with a proof version of the transcript to check. Verified transcripts and other documents provided to the Committee during the hearing will be published on the Committee's website. I will just remind everyone to mute their microphones when not speaking to minimise interference.

I will give you all a few minutes to talk to your submission and maybe some extra information you would like to share with us today, and then I will hand over to a variety of Committee members to ask questions just to unpick a little bit about your submission. If there is something further you would like to add after today's conversation, we are more than happy for you provide further written contributions to the Committee, so thank you for doing that. I am not sure who would like to speak first, but if you would like to make an opening statement, I will hand over to you.

Jennifer RIVERA-GONZALEZ: Thank you very much, Chair and Committee members, for the invitation to appear. My name is Jennifer Rivera-Gonzalez, and I am Research Lead at the Amy Gillett Foundation. Today I am presenting with Nick Hannan, Executive General Manager of Government Strategy at AusCycling, and also with Stephen Hodge, Director of National Advocacy at We Ride Australia. We want to briefly introduce each of our organisations and then what we bring to this hearing.

The Amy Gillett Foundation, or AGF, is Australia's leading cycling safety charity. Our mission is for safe cycling in Australia, and our vision is for zero cyclist deaths and a reduction in cyclist serious injury crashes. We champion an evidence-based approach to safe cycling. We support research, create education programs and advocate for safe cycling.

AusCycling, represented by Nick, is the national sporting organisation responsible for the development, facilitation and growth of all forms of cycling in Australia. It currently represents over 54,000 members and 400 cycling clubs throughout the country, forming one of Australia's largest cycling communities and representing all levels of the sport, from grassroots to high performance.

We Ride, represented by Stephen, empowers decision-makers and inspires all Australians to choose cycling. Their mission is to build a healthy and sustainable future through advocacy, program development and research around the bicycle's role in environment, health, infrastructure and safety. They organise the Parliamentary Friends of Cycling in the Federal Parliament and regularly publish the Australian cycling economy report.

We appreciate the invitation to present today. With increasing participation in cycling during recent years and a worsening road safety situation, we know this Inquiry is not only timely but also has the power to prevent road trauma and save lives. Our message is: bicycle rider injury and death are preventable, but in order to achieve it, it is required that governments fully adopt the accepted Safe System principles and make urgent investment in the collection of, coordination of and public access to better data as well as the implementation of safe road infrastructure. Nick, Stephen and I are happy to answer any questions the Committee may have. Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you so much, Jennifer. That is a great start for us to now ask some questions of you, Stephen and Nick. Anthony, I might head to you to ask the first question.

Anthony CIANFLONE: Thank you, Jennifer and Nick, for appearing and for your submission. I very much appreciate it and thank you for your work. My question is around the cycling action plan: your submission talks about and supports the development of a cycling action plan to accompany and complement the Government's *Victorian Cycling Strategy 2018–28*. Just talk a little bit about why you think it is important for the Victorian Government to develop a cycling action plan on top of and in addition to that strategy, and what measures should be included in this action plan?

Jennifer RIVERA-GONZALEZ: Thank you for your question; yes, absolutely. We have the strategy, but at the moment we do not have a clear indication of how that strategy will become a reality, and that is what an action plan is. It will not only give us clear guidance in the set of actions that are required to achieve this goal but it will also help us not only in execution but accountability. That is the essence of an action plan: it is the logical steps that need to be followed for the strategy to be achieved. If Stephen or Nick want to add anything else, they are more than welcome to.

Stephen HODGE: I would just add: I think, Anthony, that the ability to leverage data relating to interventions, like what the actual impact is, is vital to be included in an action plan. There do need to be accountability measures built in; we need to use data to assess interventions. That is why when you have a clear and programmatic approach to delivering a strategy, the action plan becomes the vital element of that. That is the on-the-ground delivery and evaluation, because as we know in road safety, if you do not have the data, you cannot evaluate and change strategy. We know that the road safety Safe System approach has delivered zero fatalities in cities over a whole year, like Oslo in Norway. So this works, and that is why we are very keen for the Government to deploy the best tools at their disposal.

The CHAIR: Nick, do you have anything to add to that?

Nick HANNAN: I would simply echo the comments of Stephen and Jennifer. I think we have done a tremendous job in this country over the last 50 years of reducing the annual road toll; I think it is roughly a 70% reduction in 50 years. That is a triumph of public health policy, and it is an example of what can happen when you look at the data and you use the data to drive your policy implementation. As well as the action plan, we have made recommendations around data collection and the use of data. I think that is a critical part of what goes into the action plan, both in terms of how we go about implementing the Victorian strategy but also reviewing steps that have been taken and how effective they have been. As Stephen said, we know that this approach works; we just need the commitment to do it.

The CHAIR: Thank you for that. Wayne, I might head to you next.

Wayne FARNHAM: Thank you, Chair. Thank you everyone for coming today. I suppose I want to talk about the infrastructure; there have been a lot of submissions that have touched on infrastructure. Your submission states that road infrastructure interventions need to match the recent increase in the number of bike riders. What specific infrastructure interventions are needed now and into the longer term?

Nick HANNAN: I am happy to lead this one off, Jen. I think if we look at the data, it is pretty clear what is necessary, and that is that only about 5% of the Victorian population want to share the road with motor vehicle traffic. The vast majority of people either refuse to ride on the road with motor vehicle traffic, or their preference is strongly to be separated from motor vehicle traffic. So the clear message from the data, and this is replicated throughout the country and indeed in most countries around the world, is: can we have protected infrastructure? So that means protected on-road bike lanes, it means separated bike paths. That is what we need, both to respond to the increase in people riding but also, if we want more people to ride and more people to access all those fantastic health and environmental and economic benefits of riding a bike, that is clearly the type of intervention that is needed. We know what best practice is in this space, and I will leave that to colleagues in the Amy Gillett Foundation, because this is their real bread-and-butter work. But we know what best practice is. If we have got the data to then match best practice to on-the-ground realities, then that is really where we need to be focused.

Stephen HODGE: To add to that very quickly, there are two aspects. Clearly, we cannot afford to put separated infrastructure in wherever we perceive there might be demand not only through cost but also through road surface area, but there are many ways. I mean, speed reduction is a well-established way of creating an environment that would respond to what Monash research has shown us, that, surprisingly, in greater Melbourne 78% of people would consider cycling for transport if the conditions were better.

The only other point I would make, and I am sure Jennifer will want to add to this is that, you know, your own VISTA research in Melbourne shows an incredible number of trips that are of a cyclable, walkable or public transport distance. You know, over 50% of all trips for all purposes every day in greater Melbourne are 5 k's or less. An incredible 41%, in some earlier VISTA studies, are just 3 kilometres or less.

Now, this is a surprise to many people in regional, and I know some of you represent regional electorates. In the greater regional centres the distances that people travel that are 3 k's or less are up around half of all trips. Now, we all think, 'Oh, well, we're in the country, we do big kilometres,' but the people living in your regional centres, their trips are even shorter than in greater Melbourne. So it is a surprising statistic that we forget, just how big this opportunity is to make the conditions better for people to have that choice.

Now, you know, none of us will say, 'Well, you should be cycling because it's better for you and better for the environment,'—no. We know people would like to do it, and if we can just crack this nut of a shift in the conditions, then we know the uptake will be quite substantial and then of course respond to health, congestion, environment concerns and all the rest of it, which we know are government priorities.

Jennifer RIVERA-GONZALEZ: An excellent point made by Stephen. When we think about the use of the bicycle both for short trips and long trips, we need to look into the detail. There is also complementary research coming from Monash University about: what if we look at the trips made by bicycle not only from A to B as it has been traditionally done, by transport, and what is the purpose of those trips? Then we will see that the need for separated bike lanes that are wide enough, that are clear to identify with good and current wayfinding, is a determinate element for someone who is deciding to make a trip for a specific reason.

Then we add, as Steve and Nick were saying, the fact that we do not always ride by ourselves. When we are part of a group of friends or a family, we start to do it with our children, our friends, and then it is the most vulnerable ones that will be the ones that somehow determine whether we make this trip by bicycle or not. So it may be children, 'Is the bike lane wide enough for me to ride with a child?' 'Is it safe enough for me to ride on a cargo bike if I'm going to get my groceries?' It is all of these things that we need to understand and that are currently considered in the most recent design guidelines in countries like the UK or in some cities in the US, also France. They have taken into consideration all these aspects when they create the design guidelines, and it is with data and these documents that then they start to create a comprehensive and safe network.

Wayne FARNHAM: Thank you.

The CHAIR: Thank you, all, for that contribution. John, do you have a question?

John MULLAHY: I do. Thank you to all three of your organisations for your submission and your evidence this morning. I think in the last three answers to our questions you have mentioned data, and we have had other witnesses as well before our Committee discussing what they want for a data collection service. So my question to you is: what do you think would be a good system for collecting information on low-severity crashes and near misses to inform future road safety policy?

Stephen HODGE: It is probably one of the most difficult areas that can be tackled. There are a lot of data-matching projects underway to look at the difference between police reporting of crashes and hospital admissions. Jennifer is probably a lot more qualified than I am to speak to this, but we know that with cycling crashes a large proportion go unreported because people go to their GP or they just nurse their bruises and their scrapes at home. Jennifer, you probably would like to come in on that one.

Jennifer RIVERA-GONZALEZ: Absolutely. There are great examples around the world of what cities and metropolitan areas are doing to take advantage of what technology offers now: different tests and pilots with cameras and sensors that allow us to record and even to a certain extent predict near misses and high-risk incidents. Then at the same time it is not only governments and transport departments that can take a step forward in seeing new ways to use technology, but also there is currently a lot of data that we all as road users are recording every single day—so to create new avenues to make use of this data, of course respecting privacy. But it is there—it is being recorded every day—and cities and governments could make use of this information to save lives.

John MULLAHY: Just on that, would that be to do with reporting functionality in health apps and things like that? We have all got a watch on us, we have all got a mobile phone—so being able to access that data and have reporting in it if we have had an incident?

Jennifer RIVERA-GONZALEZ: Yes, there could be an option also for people to come to the police, or if there was an email or a social media account when we decide to report a high-risk incident. If we had this type of information and we chose to provide it, it could be taken into account in what could be an exploration of

‘Hey, what’s going on in this area?’ or ‘What happened with this type of vehicle?’—what can be done to improve something that is clearly a high-risk situation.

Stephen HODGE: And you know, we should point out the Amy Gillett Foundation has a BikeSpot app, where people can just tap where they are on the spot and they can post a black spot. There are a number of simple ways and applications that can be deployed for these use cases, for getting more data on incidents, absolutely.

The CHAIR: Thanks for that. Perfect. Dylan, I might head to you next.

Dylan WIGHT: Thank you, Chair. Thank you, everybody, for the evidence today, and thank you for your really comprehensive submission. We have heard a lot throughout this Inquiry around changes in behaviour of road users. To what extent, from your perspective, have negative interactions between bike riders and drivers increased since 2020? I see in recommendation nine of your submission you speak about the development and delivery of critical public communication and behaviour change campaigns. Do you think that that is the easiest measure to implement to minimise these negative interactions, or does it go further than that?

Jennifer RIVERA-GONZALEZ: Thanks for your question. We see it as a crucial part of the approach that we take from the Safe System principles. In some of our recommendations we focused on data and some others infrastructure, but in this one, where we talk about campaigns and education, we mainly focus on the fact that there are studies that show that there is a need for empathy and even humanisation of bicycle riders on the road. Even local studies here, coming once again from Monash Uni, show that there are attitudes that need to be changed for the concept of shared responsibility on the road to become a reality. There are excellent examples overseas, and I am sure Stephen can share some with us, where they have focused on creating empathy and humanising not only road trauma but the fact that what we call road users are in fact people—human beings, all of us—and it is programs like that and campaigns like that that have achieved some changes in behaviours. Also, there are different types of activities, such as role-playing, that can help us all—in our human experience—experience what someone else sees and goes through and then start to create that empathy, but I am sure Stephen can jump in and add a bit more.

Stephen HODGE: Nick is going to add a perspective because he deals with so many people that are out on the roads a lot. But just quickly before that, clearly what Jennifer has said is that there are some great international examples of campaigns that simply portray vulnerable road users—different road users—in a positive, humanistic way. There is a Bike Is Best campaign. It has the big highway boards that show positive images of people that you can relate to—not ‘those bloody cyclists in lycra’ on the road that are blocking your way, right, but mums with kids and families and people going to work and so on.

What is really interesting too is that clearly there is no one thing that has to be done. It is a whole raft of things. There was a wonderful campaign done by the West Midlands Police on enforcement of safe passing. Now, here I have addressed the national road policing commissioners group about this, and they will not put their police on bikes to do a similar thing because: well, they cannot because it is too dangerous. Well, hello—that is the whole issue that we are trying to address. The police have been very successful over there. They have had a bike and a following police bike. They have actually pulled over people who have passed too close, right? That is the whole idea—they are enforcing the safe passing. But rather than fining them, they have pulled them over and they have had a chat. There is a video, and I can supply that to the Committee Secretariat if you would like, where we actually interviewed the policeman in West Midlands and he explained from an enforcement point of view how and why they do what they do. So there are many, many opportunities to make a difference here, but clearly legitimacy of transport cycling in the eyes of other road users is a vital aspect to this, and that is essentially everything that Jennifer was talking about. But Nick, I know, you get harangued by your members across Australia about this all the time.

Nick HANNAN: Indeed. We do not have a lot of hard data. We have a lot of anecdotes, though. What is important is that the A Metre Matters rule is not another opportunity for police to fine people. It is about: how can we use this to change behaviour; how can we use a change in the law to get people to understand that this is an important part of road safety? To Stephen’s example, enforcement is important but really the goal here is to get high-risk drivers—and we know that is not everyone; we know it is a small group of people—to understand their behaviour is dangerous and to change. We have examples around the country of police taking a really proactive approach in this, particularly with cyclists. It is quite common to have a camera on the front or back,

or both, of your bike. You have an experience. Most high-risk driving occurs out of the eye line of police of course, but you have got a little bit of a video that you can then send the police. Whether that results in a fine or prosecution is actually probably not the point. The police can then go and have a talk with the driver and explain to them why that behaviour is high risk and dangerous. It is very uneven across the country. Some local police commands are pretty good on this stuff. Some are, I guess, just completely absent. They do not see it as a priority. I think we all understand that police have an awful lot asked of them. There are a lot of competing priorities, but we would love to see, I guess, a more collaborative approach across the board that allows us to really try and get to these drivers and have a conversation and explain to them why they are endangering people—who could be their family members, their friends or someone they care about.

The CHAIR: Thank you for that. We have had another couple of hearings where they have talked about that humanising of cyclists. It is a really interesting point that you have made and reiterated today, so thank you. Kim, I might head to you next.

Kim O'KEEFFE: Thank you for that. And yes, a really great submission—I was really keen to read that. My husband is an avid bike rider, an avid cyclist, so he is constantly on the road and whingeing about some of the behaviours that he sees.

Stephen HODGE: You come from a home of cycling in Shepp.

Kim O'KEEFFE: Yes, absolutely, and for a lot of the community as well it is such an important one. I was on council for nearly six years and often had lots of feedback, so thank you so much for this submission. It is so important. It is the future—it is only going to grow. More and more people, hopefully, will cycle, but it has to be safe. We have touched on most of the things I was going to ask, but I suppose one of my questions is: how can legislation be perhaps more protective of vulnerable road users? Do we need to have stronger legislation in place, such as minimising, as you have talked about, the distance laws? How do we better enforce this legislation? How do we work through a better system? What you have been telling us is there is still a lot of collaboration that needs to happen. What is perhaps the best way forward?

Jennifer RIVERA-GONZALEZ: Thanks for your question. As we presented in the joint submission, it is about taking the accepted safe-system principles into full adoption, to take them and consider the infrastructure that is required—data. We have already mentioned and repeated that a couple of times. But it is also in the sense of creating new channels and creating new systems for people who do not feel safe on the road to report. As we were saying, there are new technologies and new tools that we have that can help us collect information to then bring to the police and to have something that is already in legislation be enforced. That will help all bicycle users on the road feel a lot more safe. And in terms of infrastructure data, it is about knowing what is already in the strategy and having that become a reality through our action plan that helps us in execution but also accountability.

Stephen HODGE: The really funny thing about a lot of legislation is it could serve its purpose, but the great thing about some of the things we have been talking about is they respond to quite diverse priorities. That is a curse as well, because it means that no-one really has carriage of legislation within a government or within a party, but I think the commitment to making the option to ride a bike easier and more convenient for your citizens and the people in your electorates is that you are responding not only to government priorities but you are responding to improvement of your local environment. You are giving your population a chance to be more physically active. And it is incidental—we are not talking about people getting out and being a cyclist in lycra, we are talking about people doing those short trips which I mentioned before. The issue for national groups, perhaps like me and, to some extent, the others, is that we want to create social licence for you to do something that is economically very beneficial for congestion. For your health portfolios it is something that not many people like talking about. You have got all the preventative health benefits in non-communicable diseases, because physical activity in and of itself is about the third most important risk factor in chronic disease—in and of itself, cancer and heart disease and everything. But this is quite a good thing to be doing. Our job is to try and create licence for your ministers to get their heads up out of the trench. Even in country areas, communities are better when people can walk and cycle safely. That is what people loved about lockdown—apart from being locked down, there were some benefits to it. We saw speeds increase and we saw danger increase because there was little enforcement and no congestion. The best thing for walking and cycling and public transport is congestion, in a weird way, because it forces people to have other options. Now, if those other options are not available, then Houston, we have a problem. I had better stop there.

Nick HANNAN: I would probably just say that enforcement is one side of the coin for behaviour change. There also has to be the campaigning around it. We know how to do this in Australia. We have a fantastic approach towards drink driving, and the thing that really reduced our drink driving levels was not RBTs, even though they are important—the enforcement is definitely important—it is that drink driving is no longer as socially acceptable as it was decades ago. It is that social pressure to change your behaviour. So that is what we need to do. And we still see drink driving campaigns; it is not that we have solved the problem. We still need to reinforce the message and make sure we are putting the effort in. I think what is probably missing from the Metre Matters campaign is that we have got the legislation in place—we can talk to police about how we can better enforce and prioritise compliance with the law—but we need to keep the effort on for public information, humanising cyclists and making people realise that this is not an acceptable behaviour and they should be changing.

The CHAIR: I am just mindful of time, and I am sorry that we have to wrap it up now. But I appreciate your time, your submission and answering our questions today. It really helps our Committee going forward, so thank you so much for being part of it. I really appreciate it.

Witnesses withdrew.