

# TRANSCRIPT

## LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY ECONOMY AND INFRASTRUCTURE COMMITTEE

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

Shepparton—Wednesday 13 September 2023

#### **MEMBERS**

Alison Marchant—Chair

Kim O’Keeffe—Deputy Chair

Anthony Cianflone

Wayne Farnham

John Mullahy

Dylan Wight

Jess Wilson

#### **WITNESSES**

Luci Garner, College Captain,

Fabian Mucullori, College Captain, and

Katy Paton, College Captain, Greater Shepparton Secondary College.

**The CHAIR:** Welcome to this forum for the Legislative Assembly Economy and Infrastructure Committee's Inquiry into the impact of road safety behaviours on vulnerable road users, and thank you for your participation today. Well, we will run this pretty informally. We will ask some questions and just have a general chat.

I just need to note that today's forum is being recorded by Hansard. 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.

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I just need to make sure mobile phones are turned to silent.

Thank you. I will just quickly introduce the Committee, then if you would like to introduce yourselves and then we will just have a general chat. I am Alison, I am the Chair and I am the Member for Bellarine.

**Kim O'KEEFFE:** Hi, everyone. I am Kim, the local Member for Shepparton and Deputy Chair of the Committee.

**John MULLAHY:** John Mullahy, Member for Glen Waverley.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Dylan Wight, Member for Tarneit.

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** Anthony Cianflone, Member for Pascoe Vale.

**Jess WILSON:** Jess Wilson, Member for Kew.

**The CHAIR:** Do you have an opening statement or something you would like to read out to us first?

**Luci GARNER:** No, I think we are all good.

**The CHAIR:** We are all good just for some questions?

**Fabian MUCULLORI:** Yes.

**Luci GARNER:** Yes.

**The CHAIR:** Well, thank you. It is good to have young people at this Inquiry as well, so that is a really good insight, also to understand how your community works and the safety in your community. We will go around and we will just have a chat, and we will ask some questions. But if you feel like you need to jump in or add some things to the discussion, please do. It is just a general conversation. Kim, we will start with you.

**Kim O'KEEFFE:** It is great to have you here. Thank you so much for coming. It is really a great opportunity to share perhaps some of the challenges that have been faced as far as the transport network at the college, and I know there are also connections to TAFE and to the Notre Dame College as well as far as transporting students goes. First of all, do you use the bus transport network yourselves?

**Luci GARNER:** Yes.

**Kim O'KEEFFE:** Okay, great. So what do you see as some of the challenges in regard to managing the big change, and has there been support around that?

**Luci GARNER:** I am probably not the best person to ask, because I am a regional student and I catch the regional bus service. But there is a lot of support around the free bus service and getting as many kids on the bus to reduce road traffic. That is pretty much all I notice, though.

**Fabian MUCULLORI:** I think it is pretty successful in terms of getting students on buses instead of on the road. It is just that we face a bit of trouble towards the end of school, when students are getting on, because you have got probably more than a thousand students trying to get on the buses, and the infrastructure is a bit light around the school. You just have these little shelters. Especially on rainy days, you are fitting maybe

50 students under each shelter, so most students are standing out in the rain, trying to get on their buses, and it is a bit of a rush to get on as soon as the bus comes. So any improvements I think could be around that sort of thing, having maybe a bit more room or a bit of a nicer area for students to wait and having that a bit more structured.

**Kim O'KEEFFE:** But you feel it is safe?

**Fabian MUCULLORI:** I do think it is safe. The students are off the road. The traffic is pretty slow around school, so I think the students are safe.

**Katy PATON:** I think it would provide families with a bit of comfort as well, because they know that their child is not trying to find their own way home; there is a direct path for them. They know the routes that they are taking, so that service being provided does help families in regard to safety.

**The CHAIR:** John.

**John MULLAHY:** We have had some evidence about young people being distracted. Are you guys currently learning to drive? Have you got your Ls or Ps?

**Katy PATON:** We all have our Ps.

**John MULLAHY:** Excellent. What types of messages for road safety campaigns do you think we should be targeting young drivers with?

**Luci GARNER:** Using your phones while driving.

**Fabian MUCULLORI:** Yes, that is a big one now.

**John MULLAHY:** So the evidence is true?

**Luci GARNER:** Yes—oh, not me personally, no!

**Katy PATON:** Probably overloading as well. I understand it can be easier in certain situations, especially when you are trying to do something as a group or if other people do not have their licences. But when you are with a group of friends who are disruptive or will distract you from the road, then it does become a problem in itself because you are endangering yourself, your friends and those on the road around you.

**Fabian MUCULLORI:** I guess P-platers just do not really have enough experience to be able to deal with those distractions yet, so I think that is a big one, for sure.

**John MULLAHY:** Just clarify for me: do we have rules around how many people can be in the car with you as a P-plater?

**Fabian MUCULLORI:** Yes. P-platers are allowed one peer-aged passenger. I think that is between 16 and 22. I am not 100% on that, but I think it is around that range.

**Katy PATON:** If they are family or a partner, then you can have this many, but it is just one who is not blood or does not have a relationship to you.

**Fabian MUCULLORI:** Or does not live in the same house.

**The CHAIR:** I hope you do not mind if I just jump in there, but when you were going through to get your licence, what kinds of programs or support did you have before getting your Ps?

**Katy PATON:** Personally, I joined the L2P program, which is run through our school in partnership with Berry Street. Whenever I had my free periods, which was Friday mornings, double, they would take me on a driving lesson, so I was able to use my school time—I was not away from home; it was not severely affecting my study or anything. But I was still with a variety of different teachers, learning different techniques from all of them, and then just mainly distractions as well, because they make a point of talking to you at different stages as well. They will see how many hours you have, and if you have a fair few then they will start to do

little distracting things in the car to make sure that you are not overly focusing on the road—like, you are aware of what is happening but you have that sense of control at the same time.

**The CHAIR:** To make you feel more confident in your driving?

**Katy PATON:** Yes, and you also form a good relationship with your drivers. I got congratulated by all mine. They all reached out and contacted me, and the program was very supportive in that they paid for me to actually get my tests done. I had a driver take me there, and he was in the car on the way and on the drive itself, which helped with anxiety a lot as well, because you are with someone familiar. It makes it easier.

**The CHAIR:** Wonderful. What about yourselves?

**Luci GARNER:** I had driving lessons, but that was not through the school.

**The CHAIR:** Through private.

**Fabian MUCULLORI:** I was the same as well; I did one lesson and then just did my test. But a lot of students do use that program at school. Most mornings there is a big list of names to read out of the people who have their lessons that day. So yes, it is well utilised I think.

**Katy PATON:** It is not just for those approaching year 12, either. If you are of age, then you are able to apply. It does not matter what year level you are in. So it is not just a main focus on a certain group, it is very shared. Also our school throughout the year have done little presentations. I remember at one point we had a man come in, I do not remember from what organisation, but he was talking about car safety and how old your car is as well and talking about a program that the Government used to offer.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, to upgrade your car to a safer car.

**Katy PATON:** Yes, that one. And he was demonstrating the crash zones on the car and just general information. That was useful.

**The CHAIR:** Very good. Any other programs that your school would provide?

**Luci GARNER:** I know there is one for Indigenous kids. I am not Indigenous, but I know there is one that is run for them. And we also had a paramedic come out to our school to talk to us about the dangers of drink-driving and that kind of stuff as well.

**The CHAIR:** Excellent. Thanks. Dylan.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Thank you, and thanks for appearing today. Good luck with your exams, and good luck with muck-up day as well. Do you still have muck-up day?

**Luci GARNER:** I think it has been banned.

**John MULLAHY:** That is outrageous.

**Dylan WIGHT:** Well, that was my question; that is it. No, I was just curious: what is the school crossing infrastructure like around your particular school? Do students that are walking to school have safe crossing access, does it need to be improved and how can it be improved?

**Katy PATON:** At the front of our school at the moment we have two major crossings. They are both towards the end of the school there. There is one where—what is it called—there is some parking, and the road kind of sections off, which is a major one I suppose. But then there is another one down towards the roundabout as well.

**Fabian MUCULLORI:** Yes, I guess they are meant to be so you are never too far away from one crossing, but a lot of kids end up leaving through the main entrance of the school, which is right in between them. You have kids crossing the road away from the crossings because no-one wants to walk 150 metres down that way and then across again, so you get a lot of people walking through the middle. So I think something should probably be done about that. Even just a zebra crossing with speed humps or something to keep the traffic speed in that middle zone low would be pretty effective I reckon.

**The CHAIR:** Jess.

**Jess WILSON:** Thank you so much for appearing today. Maybe taking a step back away from school time, but more use of the road, driving on the weekends and road safety on the weekends, we had Victoria Police in this morning, and they were talking about a program they run here called Cool Heads; I am not sure if the school has done anything with them. But one of the points they made before was around the limited number of passengers you can have in the car as P-platers: does that sometimes actually result in more car trips because you are ferrying people to and from things on the weekends and therefore there are more cars on the roads? I am keen to get your thoughts around whether that does happen. And Luci, you mentioned that you do not use the bus network here in town, but you are a regional student; I am keen to get your thoughts on public transport in a regional sense and how you think that takes people off the road. Could it be improved, and what could the Government do in that space?

**Luci GARNER:** There is no public transport where I live; I live in Invergordon. There is a bus service through Public Transport Victoria that does go all the way out to Strathmerton, I think is as far as it goes, but it does not go through a lot of those minor farming communities like Invergordon or Katandra West. So there is not a lot of public transport that goes out there. But that being said, there is probably not a big demographic of people who would use it, because it is majority farmers and a lot of older people who have retired. But my daily commute is on the Shepp–Katty main road, and that is not up to par at all. There are potholes everywhere; there are trucks that use that main road instead of taking the GV Highway because it is faster. There are not a lot of bypasses through as many towns. The Shepparton–Mooroopna bypass I know has been in the works for a while, but as soon as that gets on the road I think that would be really beneficial to the safety of those roads.

**Jess WILSON:** And more broadly, using the roads on the weekends, outside school hours, what are your views on what could be done there to improve road safety? Do you get a sense that there is that sort of ferrying behaviour because you are limited in the number of passengers you can have? Obviously we know why that rule was put in place, but has that had consequences more broadly?

**Fabian MUCULLORI:** I think the point that Victoria Police brought up of having to do more trips—that is definitely true. That is just your only option sometimes, unless you want to, I guess, pay for a taxi or something like that, which is not really a great option for students anyway. The school road itself I do not think is the safest, actually, outside of school hours. Usually people go down there pretty quick. And it is a residential street—there are houses along there—so I could see that people would definitely complain that it is unsafe outside of school hours when I guess there is no-one really on the road. You are not looking out for kids necessarily, so people can just go down there at 60 or even more than 60 sometimes.

**Katy PATON:** The quality of the road there is also very poor. There are a lot of potholes or just the road is not connected properly; the concrete in it will just stop and dip. And it is not just in one section, it is throughout it as well, so people who are speeding do not take that into account and that causes a lot of damage as well. Also, it affects the traffic because you are having to slow back down when you get up to that point because you do not want to damage your car at all. So you do have to take that into account, and it can be quite difficult, especially if you are going slow up to one of those areas and other people around you who are not familiar with the road do not know to do the same thing. It can lead to accidents as well.

**Jess WILSON:** Thank you.

**The CHAIR:** Thanks. Anthony.

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** Thank you. Thanks for appearing, and thanks for all your good work. Well done on your presentations too. You are doing your school community very proud indeed, so I just want to commend you on that. Earlier today—Jess just mentioned this earlier too—we had Victoria Police here from the Cool Heads young driver program. One of the things they pointed out was that young people between 16 and 25 years old have the highest risk of being injured or tragically associated with accidents and killed on our roads in the state, which is very sad indeed. I guess my question then goes to: you guys are members of that age group and of that community. What is it that the Government can do? What is it that this Inquiry can do to help educate younger people around driving safely, being more aware on the roads, being less distracted in their cars, as you pointed out earlier on—things around drink driving, things around drug driving? Genuinely, what is it that we can do to get the message through the young people's channels and communities, whether on

TikTok, social media, traditional media or other means, that driving safely is actually a good thing and a necessary thing to live? What do you think we can do more of in that space?

**Katy PATON:** You could touch on the media side as well. Probably TikTok or other options would be beneficial. But when you are targeting it you need to make sure that it is not just informative but also informal, because if it does present itself as too formal then most people will just ignore it or not really take it into account. You see most places like Optus or Telstra will make jokes or incorporate memes into their advertisements and stuff, and it does work, so I think that could be taken into account. Otherwise you could maybe offer or start a program, because most people as well do not have access to driving resources. They do not have people who can help them get up their hours as well, because there are a limited number of spots. Especially in the L2P program that I was in as well, you cannot have everyone in it, so maybe the Government could open up a program that does do that and throughout it you can teach them different knowledge points as well. You could teach them about road safety itself or how to handle distractions or even just facts about getting insurance, paying your rego and stuff and what your insurance does and does not cover. If people are taking into account that it does financially impact them as well if they are not doing the right thing, if they get into an accident and they have done something wrong, they are accountable for it. So that may be one way to target people, because they are saying ‘Well, it will actually impact me’ in a way that they did not consider beforehand.

**Luci GARNER:** I think the seminars at school were really helpful. They were quite confronting as well, which I think is probably the best method of teaching kids: this is the reality of drink driving, driving on your phone, drug driving. I do not want to call it the shock factor, but having those really confronting things being shown to get the message across is probably the best.

**Katy PATON:** And you do see a difference in whether students are taking it into account or not, because we have had some people present and kids just want to leave the room but when we had one guy come and he was actually showing the crash zone of cars—he played videos of two different models of cars crashing into each other, and you could see how it impacted the car and the individuals in the car itself—people really took that into account, because they can see the impact that it does have and then the impact that it has on the individual as well. It is a visual aspect.

**Fabian MUCULLORI:** I think most of that stuff is a cultural issue as well with the younger year level. I guess younger people tend to be a bit more ignorant of the actual risks of drunk driving and drug driving. As Luci mentioned before, those programs that show the actual reality of what is going on—I think they hit closer to home for people. Also, as Katy was saying, make sure that the sort of advertisements that are educating young people are actually on places where young people are present. On social media would definitely be a good way to get that message out.

**Katy PATON:** And actually target it at young people. Keep up with trends that are going on. Find a way to directly target them.

**The CHAIR:** We need some younger people on social media to actually do the social media.

**Katy PATON:** Exactly. I think that is half the challenge.

**The CHAIR:** We need you guys to design that. Anthony, is that –

**Anthony CIANFLONE:** No, that is it.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you. I would like to ask: we have all gone through a pandemic, but you have seen it maybe in a different way to us. It has affected your schooling. It has affected lots of your life. Have you seen changes since the pandemic, maybe in your confidence about driving or just being on the road? Do you feel there is more risky behaviour? I just would like your experience since COVID. Have things changed, do you think?

**Fabian MUCULLORI:** Our school has only formed since the pandemic really, so our traffic situation has just been the same since then. But I think more broadly after the pandemic there has been more risky behaviour on the roads, definitely. I think my dad loves to point that out—how after COVID people sort of lost their skill. But maybe just having that break from driving made people a bit rusty behind the wheel, I guess.

**Luci GARNER:** Also, a lot of parents are not putting their kids on the bus anymore because of that close proximity. That puts more traffic on the road, which in turn makes it more dangerous as well.

**The CHAIR:** Have you seen more risky behaviour, or do you feel like things have changed or attitudes have changed?

**Katy PATON:** I do not really know. I think people are just more careless in it because they have been faced with a thing that affected everyone globally, so people are kind of just over it in general. They are not in the same routine that they were in, so that has disrupted them and their actions. But I do not know. I was not really driving when COVID was happening. I did not have my Ps or much back then.

**The CHAIR:** Do any of you cycle or walk or have any other modes of transport?

**Fabian MUCULLORI:** I walk every now and again, yes, depending on when I can get hold of the car. For most of my way to school, as I am walking, there are separated footpaths, and that is pretty good. But I know cyclists would not really have that option usually. Going down Verney Road there is a separated bicycle lane, but after that you are forced onto the footpath with a lot of other kids—either that or on the road, and neither of those options is really good for cyclists.

**Katy PATON:** Particularly out the front of our school—the road that our school is on—we do not have a bike lane there, and there are many students at our school who do use bikes, but they do not have that.

**Fabian MUCULLORI:** Yes. I think a separated lane would go a long way for those students actually. It would encourage a lot more people. I think parents are sort of hesitant to let their kids cycle as well, because you do not want to throw your kid on the road. So I think separating them from car traffic and also foot traffic would encourage a lot more people to do that.

**The CHAIR:** Yes, excellent. I will just open it up to any other further questions, if anyone –

**Jess WILSON:** Just one. Just talking again about education campaigns: how impactful do you think personal stories are as part of that? When I think back to some of the TAC ads over time—you often remember the ones where someone is sharing a story about what happened to them because they were in a car accident. I think probably something that was very prominent when I was growing up was the anti-smoking campaigns—probably less so now because we have hopefully got past that a little bit—and listening to people who were suffering from cancer as a result of smoking. It really sticks with you to hear those stories. How impractical do you think that would be, to make sure there is greater sharing of those stories, whether that is through social media or actual education programs in the schools?

**Katy PATON:** I think it would be practical. The way that the interview is happening or the way that they are telling their story is a big part of it as well. If the guy sounds like he is not a person that you would get along with or just someone that does not really know what he is doing, people do not take it fully into account. They are not really going to listen. You have to have someone who speaks to people, because otherwise you are just looking at and you are like, ‘Okay.’ But if you get someone that can target a group or people in general, then it will help.

**Luci GARNER:** I also think having someone local from the area who has been impacted makes a really big difference as well so you can relate to their story a bit more.

**Fabian MUCULLORI:** I think they are definitely effective. It is part of that confronting nature that you get. It must have been a few years ago at this point, but I still remember this one talk that we had. A guy came in and shared his story. He got punched at a club—it was a one-punch thing—and he had brain damage and all that stuff. That is still a story that I remember to this day. So I think they are really effective. They really make you remember the risks of whatever is being talked about. I think they are really great.

**Katy PATON:** I do think that it has to have that shock factor. You do not visually have to have it there, but just in the speech itself and how it has impacted them you do need that shock factor. You cannot really have the visual aspect that we used to have because there are many who people will have a problem with that, and then that will cause other disagreements, I guess. If you could have them just still demonstrating that through their story—like getting it out there without visually having to do it—then I do think it will be beneficial.

**Kim O'KEEFFE:** Thank you. Can I just add something. You heard we had Cool Heads in here this morning—so you were not aware of that?

**Katy PATON:** No.

**Kim O'KEEFFE:** Okay, that would be a really good one. I have actually got the flyer from today's *Shepp News*—please take it. It would be really great to get it in the newsletter, because the cohort they are trying to attract is exactly your cohort. That would be great if you could get that out. They do amazing work. I have been to it, and it is amazing. They show locals that have been severely impacted. They show some pretty stressful stuff there, and is very, very purposeful. So I would encourage you to try and get that out.

**Katy PATON:** We could also look at—I know there are programs that help with skidding and stuff as well—how to handle a vehicle if you are about to crash in a dangerous situation.

**Kim O'KEEFFE:** I think they have their speakers at that.

**Katy PATON:** They do have that?

**Kim O'KEEFFE:** I have been to it. They have all that. It is amazing. They have about eight different speakers that come in on all different—if they still do it the same; it has been about three years since I was there, before COVID. But years ago we used to have DECA—you would have heard of DECA—out on the road. You do a defensive driving program prior to getting your licence.

**Katy PATON:** Yes.

**Kim O'KEEFFE:** I did that before I got my licence. I knew how to control myself in a spin or if I lose control.

**Katy PATON:** Do they have the physical aspect of it as well—like actually putting it into place?

**Kim O'KEEFFE:** They show videos and stuff—yes, it is amazing. That would be something that I think would align so well with the schools if we can get that out more broadly, because it is a local program that is having great success. It is after hours, that is the only thing. It is at Eastbank. But I would encourage as many kids as you could to get to that. It is free; you have just got to register.

**Fabian MUCULLORI:** Could I just ask: has this been advertised around Shepp?

**Kim O'KEEFFE:** That is today's *Shepp News*—but is trying to reach people, isn't it?

**Fabian MUCULLORI:** Because this is the first time I have heard of it.

**Katy PATON:** I do not think the newspapers are very good.

**Kim O'KEEFFE:** They need to be connecting to the schools, so we will definitely follow this up today.

**John MULLAHY:** The Deputy Chair will have a TikTok go up later, I am sure.

**Luci GARNER:** We will do one together.

**Kim O'KEEFFE:** But you are right, it is getting that communication out, because it is such a worthwhile program.

**Katy PATON:** Even if you just contact the school directly about it—I know if people do reach out, our school will advertise stuff like that. Even if there are businesses offering jobs, there is always more news coming in about our community.

**The CHAIR:** John, do you have a question?

**John MULLAHY:** Yes. You are all P-platers now, and you are all obviously around the school quite a bit. What are your thoughts on the current speed limits around your school?



**Luci GARNER:** I think 40 is good, but it would not hurt it to put it back down to 35, because people will still speed through there. Especially when the lights go green, people shoot out.

**John MULLAHY:** So you would suggest dropping it?

**Luci GARNER:** Yes, especially if we implement that zebra crossing at the main entrance, that would really help as well.

**Fabian MUCULLORI:** I think speed bumps would help with that as well, because a speed limit is just sort of a number, right? If the road allows the driver to go that quick, then they will go that quick.

**Katy PATON:** It forces them to follow suit.

**Fabian MUCULLORI:** Yes, speed humps will force them to slow down, so I think that is probably a more effective way of doing it than just lowering the number.

**Katy PATON:** But a zebra crossing in front of the school would be really nice. It is a very direct path. Even the teachers themselves—because there is a whole street of parking there. I do not have if you have seen our campus, but all teachers parking is in the back corner of the school, and not everyone is towards that way. Some of the ladies in the office mainly park directly in the side streets at the front of the school. So it is more convenient than having to walk down to the other ends, because in human nature, if you do not have to do it, you are not going to do it.

**The CHAIR:** Thank you so much—we really appreciate your time—for coming today and speaking to us. We wish you all the best for the rest of the year. Thank you.

**Witnesses withdrew.**