CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into the Country Road Toll and Crashes Involving Roadside Objects

Melbourne – 4 October 2004

Members

Mr C. A. C. Langdon  Mr B. Bishop
Mr J. Eren  Mr A. Harkness
Mr T. Mulder

Chairman: Mr I. Trezise
Deputy Chairman: Mr G. Stoney

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms A. Douglas
Research Officers: Mr Graeme Both and Mr Peter Nelson

Witnesses

Mr K. Gardner, Chief Electrical Inspector
Mr W. Greenland, General Manager, Supply Safety – Office of the Chief Electrical Inspector

Necessary corrections to be notified to executive officer of committee
The CHAIR – This is the Parliamentary Road Safety Committee. My name is Ian Trezise and I am the Chair of this Committee. To my left is Alistair Harkness, Member for Frankston. Alex Douglas is our executive officer and Craig Langdon is the Member for Ivanhoe. The Member for Geelong Province, John Evans, shouldn’t be too far away and so we will kick off, given our time.

First of all I would just like to welcome the Office of the Chief Electrical Inspector and the newly-appointed Chief Electrical Inspector, Mr Ken Gardner, and also Bill Greenland from the Office of Chief Electrical Inspector.

As you are aware, we are currently, as a Committee, running two concurrent inquiries, the first being the Inquiry into the Country Road Toll and obviously a related inquiry, Crashes Involving Roadside Objects. These are public hearings. We are therefore also taking transcript for the proceedings, which will be used for our internal purposes and will provide a copy of the transcript to your organization. It will also be posted on the web. We are operating under Parliamentary privilege and so what you say today will be taken in the transcript but it also means that what you say today won’t be used against you legally, so feel free. Having said all that, what we want to do is try to keep these hearings informal so please relax and again, thank you for your time and your input. We do appreciate it and I will now hand over to either Bill or Ken for their presentation.

Mr GREENLAND – Thank you very much for the opportunity to speak to this Committee, the Road Safety Committee, as our safety operations as an office and ours is selected safety and so we are fairly interested in the way the infrastructure is built and maintained today to try and avoid these unfortunate accidents occurring. What we have done is to look at the way our infrastructure is generally built, that is the electricity infrastructure and it has existed for a number of years in that way where the poles are located in the road reserves and whether that would be applicable today in regard to the increased volume of traffic which we have on the roads. What I have done is a small presentation to go through some of the issues that we perceive as concerns and to even put forward some positive ways forward.

The first thing we have looked at is the statistics. These statistics relate to information that is supplied to the office and so they will relate to electrical information, accidents where there has been some sort of electrical involvement, vehicles hitting poles. That number in the electrical pole area on the total there would be in the metropolitan area and we have something like 25 per cent of the accidents occurring in the rural areas. That is very minimal in regard to our observation because we have to have something like electrical high voltage input into the homes or something occurs for it to be classified under our jurisdiction. So there would be a lot of cars hitting poles that we wouldn’t report. This will give you an indication that our information says there is a high level of this.

Mr EREN – So do you have a breakdown of injuries sustained or fatalities involved?

Mr GREENLAND – For all of those we would have a report and we can provide that and so if you would like to look at that we could get it out for you. Sometime ago there was a Streetworks Coordinating Committee that existed back in the 1980s. There was a code of practice set up for that. The purpose of that was to provide related works, reinstatement and all activities related to the safety of the public and employees during any works related to street works. That would obviously be replaced today by the new Road Management Act, and of course we will see that being replaced or some form of new committee being established under that Act. That is no longer active, being replaced and works will have a coordinator with local authorities, road managers and other authorities. There was a high level of coordination where locations needed to be for infrastructure, in particular where there were concerns about accidents and things like that. It was not applicable to freeways that were declared under the big gauge. This applied more to separate streets other than the normal main freeways that would come under a different division.
In rural areas the freeways or highways vary according to the requirements for locations. They can be two, three or four lanes. Arterial roads are predominantly 64 metres and 54 metres in width and rural access roads are generally 3 metres. That may change a bit but that is the information we have been able to research in regard to that. The previous designs did not really facilitate, in our opinion, avoiding crashes by people leaving the road. What I will do is go through the examples to show you this and research that we have been able to get from various locations to show what is needed and what is not there today.

The infrastructure was built a long time ago when the road traffic was actually much less and so if we take a typical arterial road, which is type I, a standard arterial road. We have a service road, we have a carriageway, we have separators, and we have a median strip. In the median strip you would probably have public lighting and you would have flangible type poles for this. You go to the separator area or to the service road and you will find they are not flangible poles, they are standard wooden poles or concrete poles and their offset is not very high. The offset is not in relation to the road traffic use; the offset is closer to the road. The offset from the boundary is quite large to keep them away from the properties and they were built very close to the roads. Everyone can see we are looking at 1.6 metres, 1.45 metres and research shows that for 80 km/ph and the information we have been able to get shows that that is far too close to avoid cars being involved.

If we go to another type of arterial road, clearly to keep the properties from onus from the boundary, they have plantation reserves, once again we are seeing in a type II arterial road which is more likely to be the type we are getting out of rural locations, we are getting a carriageway, we are getting 3.6 metres but once again that offset from the road is still considered for a pole based on research in today’s standards to be too close. We are looking at something in excess of 4 metres to 5 metres for it to be safe in a clearway.

The CHAIR – Sorry, Bill, are you saying that the diagram we see there is the current standard?

Mr GREENLAND – They are the current standards I have been able to research, but I will have to check with VicRoads.

The CHAIR – They are the current standards.

Mr GREENLAND – What we are seeing is more effort put on plantations to screen the infrastructure away from the property owners rather than bringing the poles away from the road structure. So the clearways, 3.6 is quite large, but that is still fairly low. If you look at the standards that are in our design manuals, they are even close than 3.6 and they are on corners, so this is the area we have been able to research from our standard design manual. That is the biggest closeness; they are much closer than that in the way streets are done today.

If we go to a rural access road where people will travel at high speeds, unfortunately, they are able to travel at 100 km/ph on rural access roads. We have the typical shoulder, we have the open drains and then we have 3.8 metres and you will be very aware there are traffic lanes which could be up to 100 km/ph and when you consider that the shoulder and the drain come into play, we haven’t got much removal from the road where the electricity pole is. Of course these poles are not flangible poles, these poles just don’t move. That is the issue we have today with those designs.

If we also have a look at some bad designs – this is a typical one where we have a rural-type road where vehicles travelling in and out in a bend. Research done by Monash University has shown that’s where most of the accidents happen, on bends, and that is evidenced here. If the infrastructure is that way, then cars leaving the road will certainly hit that infrastructure anywhere up to 6 metres, according to their research. That would be typically a bad design but that is predominantly what we would have out there in today’s rural roads.
A more sensible design would be to look an example where you would pick that vehicle travelling in that direction and you actually divert the infrastructure to the other side of the road and divert it away. That would be a good design where there is not likely to be contact with the electricity infrastructure. Of course, trees would always be there but you would have to take a stand on removing the trees and that would be something that has to be done in the context of the trees protecting the infrastructure.

Mr LANGDON – How many bends would have the infrastructure like that, compared to the other?

Mr GREENLAND – I couldn’t give you a full answer on that. There would be a number where that has occurred. We would have to do more research to find that out. There are some good examples of good designs out there and a number of examples of bad designs. In many cases that has been done also to avoid tree-clearing, so there are tree-clearing and other issues.

The CHAIR – So, Bill, where you give an example of that pole we have just talked about, the bad design.

Mr GREENLAND – Do you want me to go back to that?

The CHAIR – If you could, yes. What processes are in place if, for example, a council identifies that the poles are in the wrong area for a driver or whoever? What processes are in place for that to be changed?

Mr GREENLAND – Basically there are no processes that would require that they be changed today, not in relation to road accidents. But I will go on and show you what could be done, but that is the direct answer to your question and that is unless the Electricity Department takes up the decision to make that change. It might decide to build that design into the infrastructure in which case they would be required to widen roads or to replace poles or upgrade the infrastructure. The opportunity is there for the infrastructure to be upgraded. What we would say is that we looked at the manual, which is current today, we held the SEC design manual and most of the information about pole locations and I have a copy of that to leave with you. More consideration is given to the design of the infrastructure and the infrastructure rather than the growth of the location. A good example would be that there is only one occasion where you get things like putting a pole on a corner and that is an absolute disaster whereas once again there is a design to go across and that is where we avoid crossing properties. There are these issues with properties. The electricity companies themselves do have issues to address and that is the design practice today.

Some of the rectifications put forward in design would be crash reducing barriers could be put to avoid that or, as I said, the use of flangible poles, to put them in these locations but there is another problem there that the electricity infrastructure may not disconnect so if someone is injured and touches there is a risk of electrical injury. It is not easy to address that issue. There are a number of electricity services that would be abandoned out there today but the pole structure would still be there so there would be a lot of poles out there that probably have no electricity but they remain on the side of the road. This would be the case with new lines being installed today, we will have a lot of new lines being installed, a lot of wind farms, as you know, which is a big topic and a lot of those wind farms will require 35 kilometres to 50 kilometres of lines into the wind because the wind is not strong enough as it is today to take it to a location where they are, so they have to connect to the nearest point of strength. They will have to use road reserves, which is a big issue because it is too difficult to get across easements today. People will be raising a lot of issues with easements and if I were an electricity company I would be going up the road reserve because it is easier to get the line in rather than to negotiate an easement with the radar.

The CHAIR – Is there another option of putting the lines underground?
Mr GREENLAND – It is a fairly costly option. There are a number of techniques today which can be used in regard to ploughing in, and all that, but you are looking at three or four times the cost of the infrastructure. The electricity companies, if they replace them, don’t get that back in their pricing. The structure of the pricing, and we can confirm that, I think that is the case, they don’t replace line for line so if it cost $300,000 they would only get $100,000 return on that investment. That is an issue that obviously needs to be looked at, the way the infrastructure is built.

Mr LANGDON – The way forward, with the poles being abandoned, is the policy that if they are no longer in use they should be removed or can anyone disconnect them.

Mr GREENLAND – There is no policy that requires them to disconnect that I am aware of. It is good practice to disconnect them because they have to be maintained and there is a cost to maintaining them because they have to be inspected and tested every three or four years or whenever they go around. The electricity on the top needs to be looked so it is not going to cause an electrical fault and a bushfire or anything like that, so if it breaks down it is not going to cause a problem. I think we need minimum safety rules. Probably the way forward would be some form of coordination and that may clearly come out of the work that has been done on the road mentioned. We do need to have set minimum rules to apply for new infrastructures and they have to carefully design safety areas that are accident-reducing types of designs of infrastructure. As we mentioned previously, they need to be brought in as rules.

The CHAIR – with the Coordination Committee, what type of organisation should sit on that committee?

Mr GREENLAND – It would involve councils – safety agencies like ourselves and other people – and a road management safety group, the electricity distribution companies that own the assets and anyone else who can coordinate that activity for road maintenance issues; also Telecom, because there are technical issues with Telecom and where the Telecom assets can be located in regard to the electricity, the main bodies and the user and safety person who manages the public land.

Mr LANGDON – When you say councils, are you talking more about the engineering section of councils than the road safety section.

Mr GREENLAND – Yes, we are talking about the main engineering area and technical area. But there could also be other people who could sit on it from time to time, part time or whatever.

Mr EREN – How would you feel about establishing a hazardous poles committee?

Mr GREENLAND – I think it is something that today we would have to consider as an option to looking at infrastructure. We have to go through that point because they are there and there is exposure. We are not going to stop people changing their behaviour in the way they drive. We can try but we don’t.

The onus on user-pays, and I will explain what I mean by that. The highly stressed areas involving utility infrastructure, that sort of picks up some of the work you are suggesting and we should identify those areas and put them on the list of works to be done as a priority when the opportunity comes up.

New components, wind farms must pay a safety contribution. I think they are getting a benefit out of putting in the wind farms and they are getting a benefit out of the infrastructure being put up and connected to make money of it. Obviously they should be contributing to these safety aspects when connecting to existing infrastructure that needs to be improved so they may have to upgrade that and there is an opportunity to use some safety measures at that point in time, or new designs must apply. We obviously have an opportunity to think about how these new people would come into the system.
and how they contribute to the safety on our roads. There is an opportunity there, obviously the electricity companies are always looking for extra funding so there should be some consideration for their funding to improve infrastructure as part of their price every five years. I’m not happy about that but as I have said one good thing, but that is something we need to consider.

All our used lines on road reserves must be removed at the electricity company’s cost, that should be a mandatory requirement. The government should set those rules because the infrastructure today was set many years ago. Farms need higher use of electricity for freezing or in milking areas and obviously they have put high cost extensions in and so obviously the infrastructure could be better.

The CHAIR – Would you have any idea of the percentage of lines unused that currently sit on rural or regional roads?

Mr GREENLAND – No, I wouldn’t but I would say it would probably be in the order of 10 per cent to 15 per cent.

The CHAIR – Of poles that still sit there for no purpose?

Mr GREENLAND – Of poles that could be removed with regard to changing the infrastructure, I think 10 per cent would be a fair figure, but that would be a guess.

The CHAIR – Just to go back to that, at the present time those poles are unused and it is really up to the company to decide whether they remove the poles or not. There are no compelling –

Mr GREENLAND – The companies have varying policies as to whether they remove infrastructure or not. There is no compelling law that says they have to be removed. Obviously we need to look at anything out there that is not necessary.

Mr LANGDON – They still have to check them occasionally.

Mr GREENLAND – They still have to do that. They must check them from the point of view of testing them to see that they are still of sound wood.

Mr LANGDON – If you do that a few times it might be more economical to remove it.

Mr GREENLAND – They do it on about a three to five year inspection cycle, so it is not a big area but if it is a pole that is not needed, it should be removed at every opportunity when they inspect it.

Mr LANGDON – Eventually they might be removed one day.

Mr GREENLAND – Yes.

Mr LANGDON – They don’t last forever.

Mr GREENLAND – They last about 30 years, 40 years or maybe 45 years. A lot of them would be getting to that stage but it just depends on whether any poles like that that were there were in relation to risk areas. I think that is the point, we need to identify the risk areas, we need to identify what infrastructure is there, how it is designed and how it might contribute to an accident and whether there are any areas that might have unused poles or infrastructure that is now out of use and take the opportunity to look at that. I think what we are really trying to say is that we need to take a holistic look as to how this infrastructure exists there today, is rebuilt or new designs and are they to stay. We can’t go out and just fix everything up because we wouldn’t have the dollars to do
that but we should put in place sets of rules that will contribute towards that sort of activity in the long term.

That is what I have done. We have done research information at Monash University but there is a lot of information on accidents and where they occur and basically that is all we have to say.

The CHAIR – Thank you, Bill.

Mr HARKNESS – When a vehicle hits a pole, who is responsible for the costs of replacement or repairing the pole? Is it the driver, the driver’s insurance company, the electricity company?

Mr GREENLAND – The answer to that, I suppose it would be depend on what the outcome of the accident is, and obviously if it is fatality that is the end of it, they walk away from it. If there is injury or damage to property or something like that, the company may go down the path of trying to find out whose fault it was. It depends on the circumstances.

Mr HARKNESS – The other thing I am interested in is, what proportion of poles are still the old wooden poles and what proportion are the new flangible poles?

Mr GREENLAND – The flangible poles are very minimal. There are only occurring where there are lighting standards and mainly in the centreway. All the poles in new estates would have flangible pole designs or underground. Anything that is new and which is underground power will be the flangible design. The infrastructure is not installed on flangible poles. They are much more costly than the current wooden poles are.

Mr HARKNESS – These are the ones that just sheer off?

Mr GREENLAND – Yes, they just crumble. That is mainly for the light in the centre.

The CHAIR – In general terms, where there is a wooden pole it is termed dangerous and therefore needs to be removed but replaced.

Mr GREENLAND – Its replacement would do the same thing basically as a wooden pole. A wooden pole or a concrete pole, it would depend on what is available. If it is more costly you go to a more conducive design that is built into the company’s price sets.

Mr HARKNESS – When we visited Geelong, and a couple of the Geelong members may be able to speak about this more than I can, they would know more about it, but at some of the intersections in the residential streets the pole was actually built into the concrete corner. What efforts have been made by you, the companies or your own office to do something about those? They seem very, very dangerous.

Mr GREENLAND – I wish you wouldn’t say it to our office. It is an interesting point because what is happening is that over the years road widenings have occurred and in fact we haven’t had the coordination and what should have occurred is that that cost of replacement and putting them underground should have been incorporated, and so we are stuck with something on the curb and obviously it is quite dangerous. You will find a lot of the road widenings at the intersections have poles which are in that position because that coordination over the years when we have gone to a different way of operating our companies, hasn’t been as good as it should be. Obviously it has been picked up under the new Road Management Bill, which is the issue today, and I think that will pick up a lot of that type of thing.
The CHAIR – Bill, in your first slide you showed us some statistics. What does the office do with those statistics? Do they actually collect them for later?

Mr GREENLAND – We look at those statistics for a number of things. We look at them from the point of view of whether there are federal issues in relation to our legislation, or whether there is a trend or whether some of the initiatives we have put in place have caused any change. For instance, I showed you the one about the No-Go zone and in the No-Go zone we have seen an enormous reduction in the number of accidents involving building sites and contactable overhead lines which was a serious issue with fatalities and regarding serious injury. That slide was showing the enormous reduction since they were introduced in 1999.

Once the rules came in you start to see a change in the way things are. That is what we tend to do is to gauge whether our legislation is working or whether we need to be stronger with our legislation. But I have to say there is stuff we have already done about that, involving vehicles. We get information and we try and look at the situation.

The CHAIR – Are there any further questions? If not, thank you Ken and thank you, Bill, for your time and input. We do appreciate it. As we said we are taking transcript and we will provide a copy of the transcript to the office in due course.

Witnesses withdrew
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Mr M. Czajka, Road Safety Research Officer
Mr R. Summerhayes, Motorcycle Rider – Motorcycle Riders Association

Necessary corrections to be notified to executive officer of committee
The CHAIR – Welcome to the Motorcycle Riders Association of Australia, the Road Safety Research Officer and also Rick Summerhayes, a motorcycle rider.

This is a Parliamentary Road Safety Committee. We are conducting two concurrent inquiries at the present time, one is into the country road toll and the other is crashes involving roadside objects and related subjects. These are public hearings and we are taking transcripts. We can provide a copy of the transcript to the MRA in due course, which we will do. We are operating under Parliamentary privilege so what you say cannot be used against you legally in the future which also means speaking under oath as well. Having said all that, again welcome. We do appreciate your input and I’ll hand over, but before I do that I will introduce our Committee.

We have Alistair Harness who is the Member for Frankston. I am the Member for Geelong and also Chair of the Committee. Alex Douglas is our Executive Officer. This is Mr Craig Langdon who is the Member for Ivanhoe and John Eren is the Member for Geelong Province. Again, welcome to our inquiry. We do appreciate your time and input and I will hand over to you, Michael.

Mr CZAJKA – Thank you. You have already introduced me as the Motorcycle Riders Association Road Safety Research Officer. I am also the MRA’s Victorian Motorcycle Advisory Council representative or the ATSB motorcycle rep and the Australian Motorcycle Council rep which represents most Victorian Motor cycle clubs. One of things I have been doing in my spare time is setting up networks for motorcyclists to tap into and also picking out ways to get to communicate better with government about issues like this. I have written an article called Safe Roads: A Motorcycle Perspective, which I dropped off to you this morning. I was involved with Austroads 15:Guide to Traffic Engineering Motorcycle Safety and I have the latest edition of this. This has relevance to your inquiry because it sets out guidelines for road construction and that includes not producing dangerous hazards by the sides of the roads.

We are also working with VicRoads to produce a series of motorcycle notes and I am involved in the review of those. We were in the Coroner’s Court once about a fatality in Albert Park, which was obviously a national … and I have also worked on the ALP Roads Subcommittee. We, the MRA, have been to hospitals to visit injured motorcyclists. I also run, an international forum for the discussion of motorcycle safety research. We are also tacked into the community road safety council so we have worked at grass roots right through. I have been doing this for about 15 years. Why are we here? Because too many road users die on or because of …

The CHAIR – Can I just ask, Michael, would you say you are principally employed by the MRA?

Mr CZAJKA – No, this is all voluntary. I am actually a consultant specialising in IT. I’ll give you a card later on. My background includes nursing, accounting, majors in economics and law, … some analysis if you like, computing and education. I’m here because I feel too many road users die, because of roadside hazards that could be simply and cheaply removed. It is frustrating and unnecessary. It simply requires a little bit of thought and certainly with some of these items, maybe some guidelines because we notice that a lot of road authorities tend to buy … into guidelines if they are given an opportunity. That is why we created this (Austroads 15). We just pushed the federal government to make this available freely in an electronic version because we find that although we created this, it costs $33 every time you buy one. This Committee probably hasn’t got one as a result. I can make this one available for the Committee to look at.

In summary, the MRA has Victorian, Australian and international ties and we focus very much on road safety. We are more a political organization with a road focus on road safety. I want to give you a few examples of what happens when somebody runs into a roadside object. If we were standing across the road and see that Rick had been involved in such an accident, maybe we could use Rick as an example. Tell us how you had your accident.
Mr SUMMERHAYES – I have been riding motorcycles for 30 years. I got my license in 1988 but was riding around before that. I have been driving for 32 years and I am 44 now. In 1993 I had a major accident and I have had a couple, none of which were my fault, and they were either due to road conditions or another driver. Both times I have hit signs. The last major one was in 1993 when I was knocked off a motorcycle. Luckily there was me cartwheeled on a 60 kilometre sign; I smashed my elbow and wrist. They had thought at that time that basically they would have to chop it off but they put it all back together with nails and pins and things. But that 60 k sign was mighty close to the side of the road and I was only going 40 ks at the time. That was one. In another one I came off on corners … were the directionals but I don’t think people realise people drive in a straight line and most of the trouble happens in a corner, on gravel, oil, crap, whatever, on the roads, and you would end up sliding into the pole. You slide into the corner, people can’t steer and you go straight off that way, if it is corrected they come back around and head straight off that way. Those two positions are bad anyway. Basically that accident put me onto a disability pension, I can’t work because of back injuries and all sorts of stuff. But there is a lot of stuff I see, not only on a bike but in a car that could be dangerous it is sort of a catch 22, it’s a necessary thing but there has to be some way to make it more safe.

The CHAIR – Can you describe to me, and I don’t ride motorbikes, what are the major hazards that you confront on the road, the regional rule road, as a motorbike rider.

Mr SUMMERHAYES – Sheep, livestock, gravel, pot holes.

The CHAIR – When you say gravel, how do you mean gravel, the shoulder of the road or a gravel road?

Mr SUMMERHAYES – Gravel on shoulder, gravel roads, more so on a motorcycle gravel roads, gravel as in roadworks and repairs in the middle of roads or on curves and corners especially. Gravel on the straight is fine.

Mr CZAJKA – VMAC spent a lot of money recently sealing a lot of driveways, particularly on curves. What we found was even with repeated cleaning this wasn’t keeping the gravel off the roads.

The CHAIR – You have a bitumen road but then you have the loose gravel coming off the shoulder of the driveways onto the actual roads.

Mr CZAJKA – We found the simplest way was to just seal those driveways and that stops most of the gravel from ending up on the road, and so the cleaning which was never done frequently enough, and sometimes not at all, doesn’t need doing.

Mr SUMMERHAYES – It is like trying to walk on marbles. If you are on a motorcycle and with physics and gravity, and blah, blah, blah, if you hit all these little marbles you are going to lose your balance.

Mr CZAJKA – That is actually a very simple solution and a fairly cheap one too, but there is no list of motorcycle-type interventions that you can use in locations where motorcyclists are having accidents. That is the problem. What is worse is the number one motorcycle black spot was No. 70 in the general black spot program. We weren’t getting a look in and we actually had a levy imposed on us – a $50 levy – which we have been using to improve motorcycle safety but this is being driven by a group of motorcyclists. That is unusual as it means that the solutions are motorcycle solutions not car solutions.
The CHAIR – With regards to that one example where driveways are being sealed, what processes took place for that to occur and where have we seen that before it has been done. Did you have input into government organizations?

Mr CZAJKA – Our VMAC secretary is provided by VicRoads. We operate out of VicRoads offices and we have VicRoads’ officers sit on the committee. We also have representations from the police and TAC, … for the research end of it, an independent researcher. We look at where the accidents are occurring. It is based on an easy cost but benefit ratio to justify where the accidents are occurring, where the fatalities are occurring and then we look at whether we can see a common pattern and what could we do to solve these problems.

The CHAIR – For example, the driveway situation came as a result of those examinations.

Mr CZAJKA – We have quite good cross-benefit ratios. We can often tell, despite fairly low official injury numbers that there are an awful lot of motorcycle bits and pieces scattered on certain corners – and there is no way people have walked away from all of those without any injuries. Not all motorcycle accidents get reported. Some of them are just waiting to become more serious accidents. That is certainly the case in certain locations at certain parks. I highlighted Albert Park and we are highlighting parks in general because they don’t have to meet road design guidelines and yet in some instances they would be very high volume roads. That can be quite dangerous.

The CHAIR – What other items are of concern for motorcyclists whilst riding on a rural or regional road?

Mr CZAJKA – There are an awful lot of trees very close to roads. The issue of wire rope fences which has come up and we have recently highlighted this issue because it has the greatest number of closely spaced posts that we can find in any fence system. We have asked VicRoads if we can put it down the middle of the roads down the medians because there is usually nothing there. Sometimes they do, often they don’t. They say drainage isn’t an issue but they are placing them close to roads and grading the landscape when they put in even one row. We are not sure why they do not make these safer by moving them further away from the traffic; that would also decrease maintenance costs. They could also make the posts more frangible.

I have visited a guy in the Western Hospital who had lost his leg on a No Standing sign. Likewise I don’t think he was tearing along very fast. He was going down a hill at Barnsworth Avenue in Footscray, a sweeping right turn going down a steep hill towards the river. That post could have been moved further back or it could have been a branch or material of some kind. We have given Albert Park a series of plastic posts that look exactly like wooden posts but are a quarter of the cost and a nice and soft but strong enough not to break…. They won’t use them and we don’t understand why. They would be safer, they would be easy to replace because they could be replaced once a year during the Grand Prix. Why is it safe to have those kinds of posts?

Mr CZAJKA – There were two fatalities on that particular location in Albert Park where both of the riders hit the posts and in fact the way they approached the corners where they had the accidents was probably affected by the closeness of the posts to the road. Motorcycles lean and can have something like 1-1/2 metres width when they are leaning. They lean into a corner and the post is 20 cm from the edge of the road they cannot go near those posts or otherwise they will have an accident. So the way they approach that curve is totally different. It puts them towards the centre of the road and the first example I talked about which was Grant Forsythe, two motorcyclists actually had an impact … one guy was obviously in the wrong but the other guy was just going along at about 60 km. There was no reason he should have died. Those posts were responsible. It was a very unusual accident for a motorcycle. Motorcycles do not hit motorcycles; it is very rare.

Mr SUMMERHAYES – It is usually cars.
Mr CZAJKA – Seventy per cent of the accidents with cars are the cars’ fault. We train ourselves to try and avoid cars.

Mr LANGDON – Looking at the roadside objects, you have the wire ropes and how many reported accidents … are on the wire ropes.

Mr CZAJKA – We have listed about three but our point is that as you install more wire ropes you will have more accidents.

Mr LANGDON – Are they fatalities?

Mr CZAJKA – Yes, three fatalities.

Mr LANGDON – Compared to, say, the posts or the signs, which is causing the most number of accidents?

Mr CZAJKA – We are not sure. We know that cyclists look at posts, poles and trees and you get up to about 30 per cent of the fatalities from those three. They should be considered together as a group because then it becomes significant. If you consider any one type of barrier by itself, this only constitutes a small percentage and those figures may not add up to a lot. It is only when we combine them that they start to look dangerous. Thirty per cent is a large number.

Mr LANGDON – The form of post you are considering is a type of plastic post. Do you have statistics for, for instance, the kilometre signposts?

Mr SUMMERHAYES – In theory it is unrelated what the signs say.

Mr CZAJKA – Yes. The posts we are looking at for Albert Park are fairly firm but probably strong enough to hold up a sign … I think that any post that is hit by a car, even the metal ones, falls down. Some of the plastic ones are actually more resistant to that type of impact … so we have been engaged in trying to do a little bit of sign repairs. We have been trying to specify safer roadside barriers where possible. One example of that is that one with one rail and it has a second rail at the bottom. It is not a full rail, which is an important point to make as that makes it less expensive and all it is designed to do is to stop the motorcyclist from hitting the post, or other road users from hitting the post. That is very effective and is concentrating on areas that are the most dangerous first … or on curves. Those are the places where the people are most likely to end up in an accident. To motorcyclists those kinds of barriers are dangerous in about three different ways. The first is the post at the bottom, the second is the post on the top – about 37 per cent of the motorcyclists in accidents go over the top of that which is an awful lot of accidents. The third step there is that if there is something behind that barrier, the rider is more likely to hit it.

Unfortunately a lot of times people just fail to recognise that and that is a good example of stuff behind the barrier and that (shows picture) could cause injury, especially as it is bigger (points to tree). We see no reason for the barrier in the first place; it should be moved as far back off the road as possible because even the barrier itself constitutes a hazard. VicRoads guidelines state the first option be to create clear zones. If you create a clear zone anywhere, in the country or in the city, a 9-metre clear zone will result in 85 per cent of vehicles just coming to a safe stop. We have fairly broad shoulders on a lot of our freeways, there is no reason why we need to put either wire rope or any kind of barrier so close to the road if all we have to do is remove a few trees.

The CHAIR – Coming back from Stawell on the weekend, there were more than a few trees with the wire rope.
Mr CZAJKA – Let’s concentrate on selective locations. For example, here is a good example of one (shows picture). On this one they have started planting trees in front of them. I have check on these streets … according to VicRoads guidelines. Last time we checked the VicRoads approved planting list, every one of those trees is going to grow more than 10cm in diameter. Ten centimetres in diameter is, according to VicRoads, the size that should be unsafe.

The CHAIR – Whereabouts is that, Michael?

Mr CZAJKA – That is on the Eastern Freeway on the way out. That is all the way along. It is nonsense.

The CHAIR – Does VicRoads, or anyone, have any guidelines to advise them that they are putting these barriers in?

Mr CZAJKA – For instance, down the Western Highway they have put up these great barriers and you can hardly see them from a car because they blend into the foliage and if it is wet you just can’t see them anyway. Of course visibility is restricted on a motorcycle with a smaller headlight and the beam size. We need guidelines on the lighting places; they need to be lit for these sorts of things.

The CHAIR – We obviously can’t talk to VicRoads.

Mr CZAJKA – No, I know that.

The CHAIR – If I could just get onto another subject, and that is probably driver behaviour, excess speed by motorbike drivers and the fatigue is also another issue, especially on long organised rides. Coming from Geelong, I know a lot of riders like to use the … road, for example, but fatigue does then become an issue. Does the association recognise speed and fatigue as issues? If so, what is the association doing to reduce those concerns?

Mr CZAJKA – Okay, speed and fatigue. Fatigue came up as an issue when a behavioural psychologist contacted the MRA a while ago and was looking at why accidents occur and in particular the issue of fatigue. What he highlighted was also the ability of stuff to measure what kinds of people are prone to this kind of fatigue. It appears that not everyone has the kind of lapses of attention that are going to result in accidents. Some people are particularly prone to them and if we could measure that we would have some way of preventing or warning those people and preventing some accidents.

Fatigue is something that in New South Wales they have taken on with great enthusiasm. Here in Victoria we are setting up areas for coffee breaks because we feel that does the best good for motorcyclists as well as cars. That is part of the program there. I don’t have a general panacea for fatigue. I can say that a lot of riders don’t ride over large distances. I am one of the few exceptions. I think Rick rides a few kilometers, I have ridden over a million kilometers. I am approaching two million and we are debating how many. That is a lot of kilometres for a rider. The average rider is riding 4,000 to 6,000 kilometres a year. That is about is about a third of a car driver. It is not that much.

So the opportunity for fatigue, especially for a weekend rider, is much reduced. And they are not doing high numbers of kilometres over long periods of time. Sometimes they are. I suspect that some of these riders are internationals. They seem to figure prominently and they might be doing higher numbers of kilometres than you would normally expect them to be doing.

The CHAIR – These are international visitors you are talking about.
Mr CZAJKA – Yes. Another thing we find with motorcycles is that we have a large number of illegals. In 2001 we had 37 per cent unlicensed. That is significant.

The CHAIR – That is one in three, or more than one in three.

Mr CZAJKA – The figures vary between 20 per cent and 37 per cent but some of those figures probably inaccurate. The only figure I can really trust is the one for 2001 when they really dug down into it. What happened was that with a lot of the international and interstate riders, their licences were not checked. They were simply put down as unknown and in 2001 they checked the licence status. Thirty seven percent of the riders weren’t meant to be on the roads. Mind you, about 50 per cent to 80 per cent of those riders probably have a car licence. We can warn them of the dangers but it has to be done with the car system. Trying to get everyone as part of the motorcycle system doesn’t work because they are not part of it. Neither are they fully insured. What else?

The CHAIR – Speed.

Mr CZAJKA – Regarding speed, the Australian Motorcycle Council put in a list of five priorities for motorcycling in Australia. Speed was one of them. What we highlighted was appropriate speed because we find that the distinction is rarely made between appropriate and inappropriate speed. By that I mean it may be too fast to be doing 80 kilometres on a 100-kilometre road. A lot of the accidents we see are put down to speed and are simply described as those kinds of scenarios. It is not excessive speed but it is too fast for the conditions. Where there is gravel on the road perhaps? Where the rider hasn’t allowed for oil or diesel spill on the road and these occurrences are quite common … these kinds of accidents.

We have looked at various studies around the world about how fast motorcyclists travel. In general traffic motorcyclists are travelling slightly above or slightly below. So I would say at about the same speed as traffic. One thing that stands out that confuses some road users is when we get to an intersection we often move to the front of the traffic because that is safer for us. A rider was killed recently in front of the Coroner’s Court when he was hit from behind and catapulted off a bridge and into oncoming traffic. That can’t happen if you have put up a barrier, say between you and the traffic behind you. Moving to the front at an intersection means that you control that intersection.

The CHAIR – What you are saying, Michael, is that you would use a stationary car as a barrier?

Mr CZAJKA – You move slowly through the traffic, it is called filtering and lane splitting. Lane spreading is done at speed. Filtering is done at low speeds, hopefully walking speed and by moving to the front of an intersection you control that intersection when you take off. That means that intersections for motorcyclists, and for most vehicles, are the most dangerous places. If you are in front and can’t be hidden by vehicles, you are in the safest possible position. The other thing you do when you take off from an intersection is take off quite hard and build up a little distance between you and the vehicles behind you. That gives you a safety barrier. Then you hit the speed limit and slow down. Some people mistake that for exceeding the speed limit. It is not. You use fairly rapid acceleration. Motorcycles accelerate rapidly, but if it is through an intersection you have established there is nothing in it. Speed is seen differently by motorcyclists.

We throw in the issue of unlicensed riders here again because the worst offenders are the riders who are doing silly things with speed. With alcohol and speed. With anything are all unlicensed. The .05 motorcyclist fatalities: 20 per cent to 25 per cent of fatalities are over .05. That is usually slightly lower than cars. When you take out the illegals, you find that only about 15 per cent of licensed riders are over .05 and the same percentages apply with speed. The unlicensed are doing the really dumb things when you look at speed. They are not part of the system. If you were to try and book them, take pictures of them or whatever, it is not going to work because they don’t have licences.
How are you going to find them? It is a problem but the problem is possibly one of education and certainly one of educating car drivers because virtually all of these guys have car licences.

**Mr SUMMERHAYES** – If I can just touch on – and I don’t know if there is any relevance – but the noise levels of motorcycles, and I know as a car driver as well, we are always getting pinched for noise. The number of times the noise or loudness of the motorcycle has saved my butt because they have gone to go out and heard it, that has something to say for getting stabbed by law when I am trying to be safe. It is more so with a motorcycle, some of the Japanese motorcycles you can’t hear at all and they just whiz straight past.

**Mr LANGDON** – Apart from the noise, is there something else we could do for the …

**Mr SUMMERHAYES** – The headlight thing worked for a while but didn’t work. – it caused a lot of flat batteries and a lot of frustration. It seemed to be targeted by the police. If you have a headlight on you are visible or if you are coming up over a rise and you have a headlight on and see it.

**Mr EREN** – Not if you are not speeding.

**Mr SUMMERHAYES** – No, but in the years I have been on the road, since 1978, the number of times I have been pulled over for nothing as opposed to when I am driving a car and been pulled over greatly outweighs. I mean you get, dare I say, picked on on a motorcycle. You do. I mean it is commonplace. We are just perceived as breaking the law.

**Mr CZAJKA** – What is audible conspicuity is one tool for making people look. In a previous Parliamentary road safety inquiry, they found in one of the pieces of research they dug up said that motorists don’t actually look for things they don’t expect to see. That is very much what we experience. Car drivers do not see trucks, trams, trains and motorcycles with equal frequency. It is what they don’t expect to see. The way we can improve that is to make them a bit more aware of motorcyclists. We have tried to get the TAC to include motorcyclists in a meaningful manner in their Drive Smart CDs and we are currently doing a Ride Smart CD for motorcyclists. We want others to be looking for motorcyclists because they see them every day as part of their training. There is also a good chance that as the number of motorcyclists on the roads increases because we are getting a lot of scooter riders at the moment, that the increased frequency will have a positive benefit for motorcyclists in general. More bikes mean that they will be looked for.

**The CHAIR** – Can I also ask about inexperience, not only inexperience for younger riders but also inexperience for older riders, middle-aged fellows who have decided to get a motorbike.

**Mr CZAJKA** – There is kind of good news there. ATSB do a really nice monograph summarising much better what the state of play is with age. There monograph 12 compared the under thirties to the over thirties and then over the over forties. When you compared the risk factors, you found the over thirties were 350 per cent safer and the over-40 to 45s were 600 per cent safer than the under-30s. I’ll have to look up that figure but that is a massive difference. As you get older you seem to have a better ability, particularly in hazardous situations and you are responding to them more effectively. Even if you have spent much of your life as a car driver, you bring a lot of that anticipation with you. I think as you get older you are just better.

**The CHAIR** – You are saying you can transfer the skills?

**Mr CZAJKA** – Some of the skills.

**Mr SUMMERHAYES** – I think it is about the reading of it.
Mr CZAJKA – Particularly the defensive ones. We are currently trying to train motorcyclists and car drivers to be more defensive in their approach. Motorcyclists certainly are because we have a lot to lose if we have an accident but we can’t improve that further because currently the defensive component of any training is quite light and we can’t agree about what should be in there. It is a very new area and Victoria is one of the few places in the world that has had a serious look at defensive riding. VMAC is certainly sponsoring that kind of research because all research indicates that general skills training is not sufficient. Riders like it, which helps. I saw a huge reduction in the number of hospitalisations when we introduced rider training but for whatever reason that didn’t show up in the statistics. I am not sure which statistics we are talking about because mostly we talk about fatalities but the TAC could really do us a favour if they did a much better examination of their injury statistics because they often farm out all this to third parties and the research isn’t being done. I saw that as a person visiting riders in hospital. It went from being a lot of riders to being very few and today a lot of the riders we see in hospital are off road riders. And 37 per cent of hospitalisations are off-road riders.

The CHAIR – When you talk about off road, you are talking about trail bike riders?

Mr CZAJKA – Yes, of various kinds. We are still trying to get handle on them but we recognise that 37 per cent is a very large figure. Some of the roadside hazards are just as applicable to them because VicRoads redefined many of the tracks as roads and so a lot of previously off road riders would now be relegated to our road statistics. We are not sure how many.

Mr LANGDON – On the rural roads, what works have the councils done on the roads to make them safer do you believe have made them more hazardous to motorcycles?

Mr CZAJKA – We have been asking the councils to make sure they get their contractors to adhere to the clean-up requirements in their contracts. Every contract has a clean-up requirement. Most of those clean-up requirements are only to clean up gravel. A lot of contractors fail do that, in fact a number of other motorcycle groups who probably submitted to this Committee have taken a number of people to court over these issues. You can’t just leave that on its own and expect them not to fall over, especially motorcyclists. Some councils are doing funny things, like putting yellow bricks, concrete blocks, tiles on the road. Some of those concrete blocks, rubber blocks, can be quite dangerous. In my report on Safe Roads and motorcyclist safety, I think I have two examples. This one is in South Australia (shows picture); they are about that tall. These kinds of things don’t help. If you were to hit one of those in a car or on a motorcycle at that speed, that is a 100-kilometre zone, you will damage your wheel, lose control, blow a tyre, and on a motorcycle these are dangerous. These things shouldn’t be there. We should be looking at all road users, not just some. These are not that cheap to put down either and they can come up quite regularly. We used to have them in Elizabeth Street until we made a point of showing the government how they were popping up all over the place. Then we posted them back to the government, using a loophole in the postage laws that required the government to pay the postage.

That is why we are working on stuff like Austroads 15, because it is a set of guidelines for state and federal governments to follow. The only thing is that we can’t get this out to enough people. We hope that by producing it electronically we will be able to break that barrier down. It is a very, very poorly distributed publication. The MRA is a non-profit organization so we don’t have a budget for this and most engineering departments do have a budget. We have run a number of workshops to make councils aware of what is in here and they have been well received. Really, if someone asked me what they could do about this – what I want to do is email a copy to them so they are not required to buy one. They can buy a paper one if they want but I am trying to make the point that I want to be able to send them off. We helped produce this thing, which will not be a charged publication. Certainly not electronically. Paper, fair enough.
Can I highlight a couple of accidents that have occurred as a result of roadside objects? A friend of mine, Helen Hawthorn, in 1984 had an accident on Princes Highway, Geelong on a curve coming out of Geelong. We think she was nudged by a car into a series of small trees. They were small until they grew up and then had big bole sizes like this ` 20cm.. They were on the median in the middle of the road. She wouldn’t have died if those trees weren’t there. We had previously asked VicRoads to remove those trees so it was very sad that another rider died for no reason. VicRoads told us they couldn’t cut those trees down yet when they put the wire rope fence in they cut all the trees down. They said it was too expensive. I think with the wire rope fence they went 100 per cent over budget. It was a lot more expensive to put in than they had budgeted for.

Ben Forsythe at Albert Park ran into a post. Ricky Carlesso at Albert Park, the same thing. He ran into a post. That guy wouldn’t have been dead if those posts weren’t so close to the road or if they were made of a frangible material or soft material. On Princes Highway near Millers Road there is an impact there. We actually saw a section of that, that is the one with the barrier with the trees behind it. There is a location there where there was a motorcyclist killed. There is the bike struck the tree. I suspect that he was actually nudged off the road by a car because he seems to have taken off on a very sharp angle. That doesn’t happen very often.

On the Western Ring Road, Westfield Drive entry ramp, Keilor West, on the outside of the kerb sweeping onto the freeway there is a light post. Not a very thick one. It is not going to hurt a car, it has to be a motorcyclist. On the Yarra Boulevarde Michael Theodosiadis lost it and was going a bit fast. Slid down the road, slid up a mountable gutter. The gutter in this case was a mountable gutter, which is very important for a motorcyclist, and a lot of the gutters around town now are mountable so that you don’t hit them and break your bones, you slide over them. Unfortunately he then hit a concrete seat, he may still have been alive at that stage, but then he hit a post behind the seat and the whole thing came to a sudden stop and it is the sudden stop that kills motorcyclists. That post is huge. That post does not serve any purpose other than an aesthetic one. You could easily use a frangible post there and once again this is a Parks Victoria installation and we can’t get anywhere with Parks Victoria. On high volume roads they really need to be brought into line with general road requirements. They shouldn’t be putting in stuff that can kill people. If it is killing people not very frequently it doesn’t happen often enough to warrant the attention of the authorities. We try and highlight these issues.

What are the common features? Most of these accidents I have highlighted are on a curve. Trees, posts and poles are quite commonly involved and many of them are purely aesthetic or decorative. What can be done? We can remove the obvious. You can put the items on the inside of curves. In fact I would like VicRoads to put out a guideline where they suggest that things like this be put on the inside of curves. There are no guidelines for this and it seems really sensible. They could create clear zones. Underground power. That works well. A lot of suburbs have underground power now. They could be proactive, fix high-risk locations before they kill somebody. We usually wait until after a fatality or an injury, mostly a fatality. We could create guidelines for motorcycle friendly interventions. A lot of the interventions we see are all car-related and they are not always applicable. We could give motorcycle safety a budget. We don’t have a budget.

We do currently by VMAC but this is the first time we have ever had a budget. This should be a standard thing. If you are serious about motorcyclists, make sure there is something there to do this with. You could engineer for all road users. Many of the barrier systems create hazards for motorcyclists. There are safe and unsafe barrier systems. It is usually the posts that create hazards for the motorcyclists and you can ameliorate the hazard by simply doing things like covering the posts. That is one way. Or making them frangible. One of the pictures shows some tires around the posts (shows picture). That is a very simple solution and it is not expensive to put an impact attenuator around a post. It is about $3. Safe engineering solutions tend to be cost effective so we are actually talking about a reduction in most of these budgets, not an increase. It needs a little more. Thought is the only place where it will take extra time.
We tend to like solutions that are good for both cars and motorcyclists. We are not asking to be treated differently. We are only asking to be included in the process and we are quite angry because many of the traditional safety solutions have a negative effect on motorcycle safety. There is no reason to keep hanging it on motorcycle safety if you are not doing the things it takes to reduce motorcycle accidents. Some of these things are only small things but they add up. As the number of wire rope fences in Australia increases, the number of fatalities on those fences will increase.

There was a fatality in New South Wales where the rider hit the barrier. There was one in Tasmania where a lady who worked for the police was pushed into a barrier and there was in Frankston where a barrier was involved but the Coroner came to the conclusion that it wasn’t relevant. I think the rider would still be alive today if he hadn’t been catapulted into oncoming traffic. There was a twofold problem with the barrier. He hit the back post. He suddenly stopped. There is the first injury. The second injury was when he was catapulted over the top and into oncoming traffic. Between those two it would have killed him. But maybe if it was a concrete barrier and he had just slid along it, it wouldn’t have been a problem.

The reason that concrete barriers are a good solution for us in most instances is because mostly we hit at very shallow angles of about 15 to 30 degrees. If it is a higher impact angle, yes, they are very dangerous but until that time we don’t have that problem. Whereas a post by comparison, no matter what angle you hit it from, it is going to be head on. You can’t slide along a post. You saw some of those pictures; there are an awful lot of posts.

**The CHAIR** – I am mindful of the time, so we might wind up now, if you don’t mind. Thank you Michael, we do appreciate you and Rick coming in. We will provide a copy of the transcript for the association in due course.

**Mr CZAJKA** – If you could email that to us, we can get it around to all of our members.

**Witnesses withdrew**
CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Country Road Toll and Crashes Involving Roadside Objects

Melbourne – 4 October 2004

Members

Mr C. A. C. Langdon  Mr B. Bishop
Mr J. Eren  Mr A. Harkness
Mr T. Mulder

Chairman: Mr I. Trezise
Deputy Chairman: Mr G. Stoney

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms A. Douglas
Research Officers: Mr Graeme Both and Mr Peter Nelson
The CHAIR – Welcome to the Parliamentary Road Safety Committee Inquiry, the Yarra Ranges and to officers, Mark McGuire and Kevin Kalwig. As you are aware the Parliamentary Road Safety Committee is running two inquiries at the present time, the first being an inquiry into the country road toll and obviously a related inquiry which is crashes involving roadside objects. The hearings are public hearings and we are taking transcripts. We are also operating under Parliamentary privilege and so you are under oath but at the same time what you say can’t be used against you legally in the future.

The members of our Committee, to my left we have Alistair Harness who is the Member for Frankston. I am the Chair and also the Member for Geelong. Alex Douglas, who you have met, is our Executive Officer and Craig Langdon is the Member for Ivanhoe. John Eren, to Craig’s right, is the Member for Geelong Province.

Again we appreciate your time and input and I will hand it across to Mark or Kevin to lead the way.

Mr KALWIG – Thank you for this opportunity. We have presented you with our submission in writing as well. There are some characteristics but we won’t go through all that now but at your leisure you can go through that. It talks about our community, our road network and our road safety program. We will be brief so that you can get on with the next people.

Predominantly if we go straight into the country road toll, some of the points that we have brought out under your point (a), incidence and causative role of speed, drugs, alcohol and fatigue, we present the following points. Other things that need to be considered is the driver onus in a lot of the investigations that the shire looks into and in conjunction with the police we find that there is a lot of blame on infrastructure and other things, not much so on the driver onus. That is one of the points that we wish to raise.

The other things we have in our shire are wildlife. They are part of the cause. We have massive state forests in our area, significantly their migratory patterns and their food deprivation over the last few years has led them to get onto the roadsides which is virtually one of the unmistakable courses for some of these incidents.
The CHAIR – When we talk about Yarra Ranges, what area are we talking about?

Mr KALWIG – Generally it is a rural sort of area. The shire is made up of partially residential down through the Mooroolbark area and we extend out to the back of East Gippsland and we are mainly talking rural sections.

The CHAIR – Monbulk?

The CHAIR – Monbulk partially but predominantly Warburton Highway and Maroondah Highway, Woods Point Road, out towards the back end of our shire where there is little or no control with police. It is mainly those areas. Monbulk itself is partially rural and I will come to that shortly. It has developed in such a manner at the moment that it is getting very close towards a residential type aspect even though we do have main roads running through those areas. Getting back to the points, we see roadside vegetation as having significant problems associated with the country road toll. Also high speed limits in our area, we have strong demand from the community and our area for lowering the speed limits throughout our municipality.

Under point (b), the role of the road and roadside. In the investigations that have been undertaken by the shire, we find that maintenance is a massive task throughout our area and we feel that some of the results are that the material that is left on the road is hazardous and we feel that if we can improve our maintenance regime and put in signage and delineation, we can encourage a better aspect for the road user and in doing so, lessen the road toll.

The CHAIR – Does the shire actually carry out road safety audits or road structure audits?

Mr KALWIG – Yes, we do. We have them on our main roads and our local roads as well. The shire is one of the last remaining authorities that does have VicRoads roads under their maintenance control at this stage. That is about to disappear come 1 January but I think we are still progressing as if it is our road.

Mr EREN – Just on page 6 here, you have a paragraph which shows a number of different signs of which one sounds very technical, regulations 1990 have applied beyond this point. What is that?

Mr KALWIG – It is a VicRoads sign, beyond that point is the snowfields and the intent of this photograph is really to show you, if you can see the road, how it actually narrows right next to strong tree vegetation. In actual fact, we couldn’t get a photograph that could represent that.

Mr EREN – So is there a high incidence of accidents on that particular stretch of road?

Mr KALWIG – Generally yes. It is a 100-kilometre road and we will get into that in a moment because we did an audit and we have done a lot of signage work for the motorcycle safety side of it.

Mr LANGDON – That VicRoads sign, if I drove past that I would have no idea what that meant. I would be more cautious but I wouldn’t actually know what it meant.

Mr KALWIG – That’s right. That area is up in the snow line and it is really to make trucks and buses aware that it is narrow, slippery and treacherous.

Mr LANGDON – Why doesn’t it say those things?
Mr KALWIG – You would be right there as well. You must understand that that is a VicRoads road. Under the extent and effectiveness of enforcement, police presence has played a major part in our area. We have had the Smart Car and covert Motorcycles up in our area as well as unmarked vehicles and in those particular areas where they have been used, it has been reported through our roadwise committee that there has been a significant change in manner of the drivers up there. However we understand that once they disappear it will all come back again.

Mr LANGDON – Do you disagree with the Herald Sun assumption that it is only revenue-raising?

Mr KALWIG – Yes, I do.

Mr McGuire – In particular, the covert Motorcycle, which only runs during the summer period for the motorcycles most motorcyclists know what it looks like and it creates that sense of paranoia about, is that the bike? It just generally slows them down. Also it is out there and you can see it on the side of the road when those motorcyclists are just going like bats out of hell.

Dr ANDREA – Is there a reduction in the selected routes that have the motorcycles?

Mr KALWIG – Yes, it works very well. The other things that the shire is utilising are speed advisory trailers. We have purchased two trailers, one through the roadwise committee as a pilot study and we utilise those throughout our main roads and local roads. They are pretty effective for the first 200 metres and after that people have decided that it will be hell for leather. While they are in place we are at least encouraging them.

Mr LANGDON – To obey the road signs.

Mr KALWIG – We have been doing tests either sides of the signs and on roads and we have traffic counts as well. The trailer certainly slows them down while they are in the vicinity but we have the evidence to show that they just go back up to their top speeds about 200 metres down the road.

The other thing that the shire has with the local police is that we generally place speed counters out on the road to judge whether there is a speeding problem, then we go out and put the trailer out and we wait three weeks and then get the local traffic manager comes out and puts some enforcement on those streets.

Mr LANGDON – Has that been effective.

Mr KALWIG – I think it has been effective because they are telling us that the revenue is going down.

Mr McGuire – Certainly also in local streets we hand out to residents the 50-kilometre stickers to put on their rubbish bins as a reminder for that particular street. Our flyer is associated with encouraging the residents to look after the trailer. Also to let them know it is there and also to let them know there will be enforcement two or three weeks down the track at the police discretion about exactly when.

Mr KALWIG – A lot of this sounds pretty good in theory but it costs. We found the speed trailer on its side with wheels missing, smashed panes. We are missing two traffic counters and we have to get them replaced but the shire has taken on the duty of keeping records and encouraging lower speeds and safer areas.

Mr EREN – What would be the point of cameras on certain stretches of road where you would have a camera at certain distances where if they speed anywhere along that distance.
Mr KALWIG – Similar to the ring road and stuff like that. I think anything is useful. We have an area down in Mooroolbark where we have a fake speed camera and that worked and still works because the police go in there occasionally. But it is pretty well smashed up and they get used to it. I would say having speed cameras out regularly is good but in our terrain it is very difficult to put them into place. We have one area where we have 75 per cent of the vehicles speeding in a 50 kilometre zone but we can’t get a car in there to get them. We have actually been asking the police to patrol and they can only do so much.

The CHAIR – I would be interested in your comments where you refer to the road on page 6 where I presume it is 100 km/ph. In South Australia in the Adelaide Hills they have introduced a speed limit of 80 km/ph. What are your thoughts with regards to this?

Mr KALWIG – New South Wales also has an area up over the mountains where it is 60 km/ph and that is to discourage overtaking and speeding and from what I hear, it is fairly effective.

The CHAIR – Is this something we should be considering, especially in areas such as the Dandenong Ranges?

Mr KALWIG – The whole of the Great Ocean Road from Geelong and the whole of the Mt Dandenong Tourist Road is virtually 60 km/ph now and it is unfortunate that road is under disrepair at the moment because we are still losing motorbikes and a few vehicles and it is windy and treacherous and they have virtually dropped it down to 60 km/ph. The other situation, too, is that there is a lot more development occurring up in that area and therefore the necessity is there to do that.

Mr EREN – I would assume that you would have a lot of gravel roads, so what about default.

Mr KALWIG – We are actually doing a study at the moment and I have some results if you want to go to that level. We will come back to that.

Some of the measures we are looking at is speed reduction, signs and delineation and clear zones. Also there is a suggestion that the P-platers have a greater licensing system, in other words, having children of my own under the L-plate system, I found that absolutely encouraging with the 120 hours minimum and it has been a bonus for my children in the fact that it has given them confidence and not too much confidence. They seem to be driving within what I call the law. Who knows when they are on their own, but they seem to be behaving themselves. Also I think another additional thing to encourage them to live a little longer is to give them the 80 because when they are on their own they need that 80 kilometres on the open road as a restriction to give them the skills to lead into the following years. Once again that was under my terms, I used to have to sit on 80 and I thought that was pretty useful and I don’t know why it was taken away. I found that very encouraging.

I don’t want to go into too much detail there, you can read the information. If we go into the roadside objects side, Mark did most of the roadside objects but one of our appendices is from our environmental and … area by Owen Gooding, and what Owen and I have been doing over the last few years is that I am making him understand my needs in regards to road safety and he has been educating me in his needs with regards to environmental things. What we have come up with is a blend and I am highly supportive of what he says. He talks about clear zones, the same as we do, but also from our perspective, vegetating that clear zone so that we have soft impact sorts of vegetation rather than what we have at the moment.
Mr McGUIRE – It is really referring to that photo on page 6, which shows trees. That is a natural feature of our area. Within half a metre of most of the rural roads within the shire you have trees, sometimes half the size of this room and you have a speed limit of 100 km/h happening through that area. That is why to go back to 80 km/h is at least some form of counter measurement.

The CHAIR – What you are saying is that you would support a default of 80 km/h in particular areas where there are heavy tree lines.

Mr KALWIG – Yes, the minimum. There are two savings here and I have written them, lowering the speed limit on some of the roads that they have actually designed or are existing, and you have to remember there were coaches in those days so they don’t have those sorts of things. It also reduces our costs as well because of the signage side of it. You don’t require as much. We still need the 50s or the 60s to reinforce, but I see a fairly significant benefit in signage and costs by reduction of signage in all the advanced warning signs. Not only that, aesthetically it is much more pleasing than seeing all these signs.

One thing that I just need to say and I forgot to mention when listening to the motorbike people before. We have done a trial case up along the Woods Point Road and down on York Road using frangible poles and we found them fairly successful. We did a test before we installed them – this is a joint VicRoads project. We did some test cases out on a farm in Chirnside Park and although we didn’t use a motorbike or a rider, we used a bag of sand acting as a rider at a certain height. These poles are basically plastic; we tried three different sizes of plastic. The medium was the most effective, it sheered straight off at the bottom, the thinner plastic just bent over and we felt that even though it bent over, the sign itself would cut them in two whereas we found that the medium plastic, once it sheered off it just flew off into oblivion.

Mr LANGDON – Could they survive vandalism?

Mr KALWIG – No. We have motorbike burns on the signs and stuff like that, so they virtually do vandalise them. It is a matter of time. At the moment we have steel posts and we would like to replace them with something better and like everything that is new, they will vandalise it until they get sick of it. We just have to be strong enough to keep supporting it if we want to go along that line. We have put in flexible guideposts as well; they get into them, too. It is a safety issue so you have to go one step further. VicRoads spent $25,000 on diode (to be verified) raised markers and they went missing in three days, all $25,000 worth. They were found in Selby in a bag up on top of a roof. The initiatives are there but it is very costly.

Mr McGUIRE – To go with those signs, we took the guide posts that had the CAM signs, the directorial arrows, a couple of instructor motorcycle riders had to do a pre-run to make sure all the signs were facing the right direction because they just come down and turn them around quite easily and then the arrows were pointing back into the bank or around off the edge. We have also had some drivers coming through and just knocking them over. They think it is fair game. Unfortunately in some cases there have been replacements of steel ones and we know that they will at least last longer.

Mr KALWIG – VicRoads and ourselves did a full safety audit on Woods Point Road, Marysville and Maroondah Highway and that is where we have the motorcycle instructor rides and the upgraded signage and also the motorcycle warning signs. We have big, 3 metre signs and then repetitive signs up through the valley to warn the motorcyclists that this is a fairly slippery area for them.

Mr McGUIRE – Certainly still talking about the country road toll in relation to Woods Point Road and a section they call the reef and run, it is 20 kilometres of left-rights, left-rights and about 200 metres of a straight piece of road, and it is a time trial from the bottom to the top and the top to
the bottom. It is an 80 kilometre zone with an 80 kilometre sign but they don’t look at that and they don’t listen to us.

The CHAIR – Is this motorbikes you are talking about?

Mr McGuire – Yes, motorbikes in general. This is number two. Number one is the Great Ocean Road. Number two is up the Yarra Valley. When you talk to local police they just say to tell them to slow down. We are trying other ways of getting them to slow down or at least have some knowledge about the road because if they run off the road there is 60 feet before you hit the bottom, if you don’t hit a tree first, and we highlight these facts.

The CHAIR – How do you do that? How do about informing people of this?

Mr McGuire – We do that on our instructed rides. It is through communication with those riders that it is good to ride these roads, but think of the consequences: if you run off you may not be found, especially if you are on your own; always ride with someone else; let them know that it will take 20 minutes to get to the police station or to a phone because there is no communication up in that area at all. We call it the dead zone and it is likely you will have to get the air ambulance and it will take you at least an hour for it to arrive at a certain section and for the services to be provided to them. That first hour is what they call the golden hour. We highlight those facts, that the phones don’t work, we can’t get you out of anything up there and to just be aware of all the other factors that come into play.

Mr Kalwиг – There is also the sign outside the CFA as well. There is a big sign there that says, dangerous curves and then it has 20 cars, 52 motorcycles and these are the deaths and they are just trying to encourage them to be careful.

The CHAIR – But it is still an ongoing issue at the present time. Is it mainly on the weekends?

Mr Kalwиг – Yes. Saturday is probably a little quieter; Sundays more so. It is heavy just after winter when they come out of hibernation. Some parts of the road don’t see sun all year round, so there are always those weather conditions or road conditions with moss on the road. It is a ride and it is an area, like the Great Ocean Road, that they just like going to and they just go for it, testing it out. We are going to the clubs and just letting them know, it is tourism.

The CHAIR – You proactively go out to the clubs and speak to them about the confusion.

Mr McGuire – Just through club members and they go back to their own clubs. I have a set of motorcycle volunteers from one particular club that help me on the rides and they are members of other clubs and so it is just letting the network happen.

Mr Kalwиг – We also have the road lines and we have a meeting with the motorcycle club. They come along and are part of the meetings, and we discuss any issues across the shire relating to safety.

Mr McGuire – Regarding roadside objects, we talk about inappropriate speed but I also want to hold open the fact that where freeways are set at 100 kilometres we have the Warburton, Maroondah and Melba Highways. They are set at 100 kilometres and are very different to freeways. Certainly on some parts of the Warburton Highway there are trees within two or three metres of the road edge. Another one is shoulder sealing, I think there is quite a lack of that throughout the whole of our particular area on the major highways and major roads. That certainly helps with at least some control. I don’t know the correct name for it, but even the tactile edging would help. We don’t have that on our roads or even our major roads. It is mainly the buffer zones.
The CHAIR – Why don’t you have those on the roads?

Mr McGuire – Because of the costs. The other thing, too, is that the area is below the snow line and so we can’t put raised markers or anything in there because the blades of the snow ploughs just take them all away. What we have been doing is yellow line marking the centre lane and the edges just to try and give them clear definition between the two. We have a test case up on Ridge Road in Mt Dandenong, which has been going for a while, and it has yellow raised markers as well because it is very foggy up there. This is to encourage and make the delineation better and we have worked with VicRoads on that one as well.

The CHAIR – We have just been to Sweden, and in Sweden where you have snow covering, they have actually dug out little holes along the side of the road so the actual rumble strip is actually an indent in the road. I don’t know if the Motorcycle Riders Association would like that.

Mr McGuire – Kevin is going to talk about the lack of clear zones. He has talked to our environmental people, our parks and gardens should just clear all the trees away from the road and create buffer zones but of course they just shake and say, no way.

Mr Kalwig – One of the difficulties we have is that our shire is a very environmentally sensitive shire and as such road safety sort of falls to second and in some areas we actually have trees right up to the edge of the road. A typical example is to travel on the Maroondah Highway through our shire and then go over the top. Over the top there are 30 metre clear zones whereas in our shire it doesn’t. They are right up against the road. That is where Owen and I have been working together.

The CHAIR – What is that telling us?

Mr Kalwig – Basically he feels that there is an area, what he calls the sacrifice zone where we can sacrifice some of the roadside vegetation for the sake of safety. In doing so there is an area outside of that that is untouchable and you have to preserve that to the best of your ability. I have been looking at this for some time and I even feel that by creating shrubs and stuff like that along the roadside edge, it becomes a soft impact as well and so it acts on a dual purpose. Therefore the need for high intense fencing, wire rope and stuff like that may not be required, but there is no guarantee in any of this. I have seen cars flip the fencing. It is at least a start. The thing is that we keep the attractiveness but we also get the protection. It may look too structured in some aspects but if we blend it properly.

The CHAIR – In practical terms, are we seeing the implementation of that within your shire?

Mr Kalwig – Not at this stage. They are extremely strong in preserving trees to the utmost.

Mr McGuire – We have a tree task force committee. They basically look at all applications relating to trees, even for road construction. We are looking at a rural road now and at the inside of a bend there is a massive tree so the whole intent here is that they want to preserve the tree so the only real champion idea that it can come down is to reduce the speed limit down low enough that cars don’t have to negotiate it. It is virtually an S-bend in the middle of a long straight stretch. It is silly but that is the way the council’s hands are and they wish to preserve as much as possible. Of course the end result is that the engineering costs are extremely high. There has to be a balance and the balance is coming. They are beginning to understand and give them another few years and we might be fortunate enough to win, who knows? A change of leadership and that is all back out the door.
Mr KALWIG – What I would like to talk about is that we have some initial studies in the area of Macclesfield, rural roads – virtually unsealed roads. We have a sealed road down this side and down this side and all these roads you see here are basically dirt roads. There is a strong community pressure in here that something needs to be done so the shire decided to do a study and so we have had traffic counters out.

The CHAIR – Something needs to be done about what?

Mr KALWIG – About the speed. They are all going too fast on the dirt roads. There is minimal off road accidents in there. We have checked the crash statistics and it is mainly up around that area there. They are minimal, basically just serious injury at the most, for one of them but the rest are just injury.

This is a sealed road here, this is another sealed road and, as I said, that is sealed and so is that. This is the Healesville-Koo We Rup Road, which is VicRoads’ jurisdiction. That is also the Shire of Petimere, which is our partner to the south. This is Macclesfield Road, which the shire sealed two years ago. Based on that, what we found is where we had traffic going out that side and this side, where the traffic originally spread-eagled both sides we now have indications that there is a massive influx of movement over here because we built this road. The fact that it has been built means they are all using that road now.

Mr LANGDON – … of 80 kilometres on dirt roads.

Mr KALWIG – The results are that basically the…is down around 50 kilometres or 65 kilometres at the most. So on those roads generally 65 might be the highest, on dirt roads. Because of corrugations the road gets graded occasionally under the normal program but we have found that even with the grading it is still around the 60 mark. We have also done a study in our local area, which is probably telling you to suck eggs in one respect, but basically the road was gravel. We took counts, the speeds were 52 at the top end and 63 at the bottom end of this unsealed road. We sealed it, put the counters out again and low and behold, it is 62 at the top end and 70 down the bottom. So we had permission from VicRoads to put in 50 signs this week. We will wait another three weeks, unfortunately, and then we do the counts again and see if there is any impact. We can forward those on to you at the end of that part. They are the two areas we are studying at the moment.

The main demand in this area is speed. They said it is dangerous, it is high speed and we don’t have the information to tell us that and so the demand is that they need the road sealed for safety. The underlying part there is that when they are sealed, obviously it is going to be faster so they will want the speed dropped. To put any particular speed sign in those areas would be encouraging them to probably go a little harder. That is the dilemma we have. While we are doing it, we either post it at around the 60 mark and leave it like that so that at least we can keep them down below that speed, make them feel safe but the end result is that they seem to be behaving themselves, in a sense. It is unrestricted out there but once again I come back to the driver onus as well which is a big gripe of mine, that the drivers don’t drive to the conditions. There is not enough education as well. They have to learn to read the road and drive accordingly.

Basically this graph here shows that predominantly 56 per cent of the vehicles are travelling at 50 or below. The next 26 per cent are between 50 and 60, so in all we are talking about that 80 per cent of them are below 60 which comes up to the 85th percentile anyway.

The other thing I did before I came here today was that I did a quick check on fatalities across our shire. From 2000 to 2002 we had a 17 per cent coverage of local roads having fatalities, and that is not including pedestrians, that is just straight driving fatalities. In 2001 to 2003 we have gone up to 25 per cent. The reason I bring that up is that I feel we are certainly spending a lot of money on the
main roads but the local roads are starting to get serious and fall behind with money and support. I think that will show the more these black spots come up and the more VicRoads use the black spot money to support their main roads and the local roads will not get a Guernsey. We may have to look at a nice dividend for each, so much for VicRoads and so much for local councils instead of bundling them together.

The CHAIR – I take that point. Are there any more questions?

Mr LANGDON – The debris on the road, how often do you clean that up or do you just watch it closely and also, were you present when the motorcycle riders representative said that one of the problems is the contractors. They are supposed to clean up after themselves and they don’t, and the councils aren’t policing it. Were you here then?

Mr KALWIG – No, I missed that one.

Mr LANGDON – What is your opinion on that?

Mr KALWIG – In answer to the first point, after the audit we did on the Woods Point Road, we actually spoke with our maintenance people and we have a maintenance regime in there. We have lichen, moss and organic matter that actually breeds on the road so they go through and flush the roads. There is a stack of debris that gets into the table drains as well which then eventually comes onto the road, which is gross. Part of the contract is that they have to go through and occasionally blast it with a high pressure hose to get rid of some of that material and try and bring it back to a quality that is useful, especially for the motorcycles, they lean over and they have no grip and they are gone. Motor vehicles have four wheels and a little more stability and are not as reckless, one would say, but that is not for me to say. When you see a car end up in a tree you often wonder how it actually got there and why. Yes, we do have a maintenance regime in place due to the fact that we had to go back and redo the whole road, clean it up and then spray it again with edge lining and raised markers and signs. We did the whole lot and that was through the black spot money and once again it is on a main road.

Mr McGUIRE – With regards to cleaning up after works, being a motorcycle issue, I talked to our works managers. I also talked to a manager of road maintenance about the contracts that they have with roadworks and cleaning up after and it is a continual job of talking to the guys about whether they are still doing those things. When I see things like that not being done, I just jump on their backs and ask why. Two years ago we ran an education program with all of our contractors so they would clean up after the maintenance. It hasn’t been done for two years and so it needs to be revisited again just as a reminder.

Mr LANGDON – Did you find after the last workshop that they cleaned up more?

Mr McGUIRE – Yes. It is just an education component. Sometimes they either forgot or were in a hurry or had to go to another job, or whatever. As far as I am concerned they are just excuses.

Mr KALWIG – One of the other things that Mark and I haven’t actually mentioned, and it is only through discussions now that we think of it, and that is fatigue. We did approach VicRoads to put in a wayside stop because it was found that the motorcyclists were getting tired and we felt that that was a detriment to our area. Because they travel from Melbourne it takes them an hour and a half or two hours and then they have to ride through the hills. So wayside stops, in particular, but I don’t where we are with that. I think it has been abandoned because of lack of interest.
Mr McGUIRE – Not just lack of interest, but it just seems a little harder to get this to happen with what the guidelines are.

Mr LANGDON – To get a wayside stop in areas like that you would have to remove a few trees.

Mr McGUIRE – Not in this particular case. There is a designated stop. It is quite clear, it is on an intersection where there are trees, but it is just where motorcyclists and a lot of other people stop in general. As you say, if you develop some of these wayside stops there might be some detrimentation to the environment but they would have to be planned and if you go over the top and go towards Matlock, Parks Victoria actually have a large area and toilet block in there as well. It is not very well signed; but they do have a large area in there where you can pull over and have a stop. What we are saying is that really I don’t think there are enough wayside stops around. Most of our freeways are virtually straight now. There is only the Geelong road that has the off ramps that I have seen lately. I haven’t been along the Hume lately. Geelong now has the two mid-block service stations where you can have a stop, which is good.

My last comment is that under the road toll and motorcycles, the shire has instigated with the shire of … to form, I suppose, an allegiance with them and Wittlesea and Murrumdindi and the four municipalities will form a group or strategy to look at the motorcycle issues across those four municipalities. They don’t come to ours but they come through the other three to get to ours and vice versa. We are looking at a bigger picture and trying to create a regional aspect of that particular problem. It may end up going down into Baw Baw because they are certainly coming from that area as well but at this stage it is just the four municipalities. Certainly our shire has committed some funding towards getting the project up and running and the other shires will do the same.

The CHAIR – Thank you for your time. We will provide copy of the transcript to the shire in due course.

Witnesses withdrew
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Country Road Toll and Crashes Involving Roadside Objects

Melbourne – 4 October 2004

Members

Mr C. A. C. Langdon
Mr J. Eren
Mr T. Mulder

Mr B. Bishop
Mr A. Harkness

Chairman: Mr I. Trezise
Deputy Chairman: Mr G. Stoney

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms A. Douglas
Research Officers: Mr Graeme Both and Mr Peter Nelson

Necessary corrections to be notified to executive officer of committee
**The CHAIR** – Welcome to the Municipal Association of Victoria and specifically to Peter Walsh and Simon Holloway. As you are aware this is a meeting of the State Parliamentary Road Safety Committee. We are conducting two inquiries at the present time, the first on the country road toll, which is a very broad inquiry. The other is a related inquiry which is basically involving roadside objects. These are public hearings and we are also taking transcripts of the proceedings and we will provide the MAV with a copy of the transcript in due course. We are acting under Parliamentary privilege today and so what you say today can’t be held against you in the future. You are also under oath.

The members of the Committee are myself as Chairman, I am also the Member for Geelong. Alistair Harkness is the Member for Frankston, Alex is our Executive Officer. We have John Eren who is the Member for Geelong Province and he is not here at the moment. Craig Langdon is the Member for Ivanhoe.

Having said all that, we thank you for your time and input into inquiry and I will hand over to either Simon or Peter to commence the proceedings.

**Mr HOLLOWAY** – I am the policy adviser of the MAV. The MAV itself hasn’t provided formal submission to either of these inquiries and so this is the first presentation to this Committee. The way we thought we would structure the presentation is just to give you a brief overview of the MAV and the MAV’s role in road safety … and being able to have an influence on road safety, followed by the identification of a couple of key issues that we see as being strategic sector-wide issues facing all councils in rural Victoria under the relevant terms of reference of this Committee. Then from there we are happy to take any questions on specific issues as you see fit.

As you would all be aware, the Municipal Association of Victoria is the strategic peak body for local government. It was created under a State of Victoria Act in 1907 and through that piece of legislation we represent all 79 municipal councils. As you would also be aware, it is largely a policy and advocacy organization, working across a fairly broad range of issues of which transport and community safety and a derivative of that, road safety as well.

The MAV does a lot of work with both state and federal governments and their agencies and we work fairly closely through the safe roads partnership with VicRoads, Victoria Police, Transport Accident Commission, the RACV and other local government bodies as well and the local government sector. We do have a range of involvement in road safety but it is probably important at this point to stress that the MAV itself isn’t a road manager and has no jurisdiction or responsibilities for road safety per se, other than protecting and advancing the interests of our constituent members, being all 79 councils.

The role of the MAV in terms of road safety, we work fairly closely with those agencies that we earlier identified and also with local government on a periodic basis in relation to specific road safety issues. It is not necessarily a core issue that the MAV does a great deal of work on a week-to-week basis, but certainly there are a number of state level forums that we are tapped into and provide strategic advice on behalf of councils into those forums.

Just in terms of our perception of the role of local government in road safety, and I guess there are three opportunities for local government to have, from our point of view, an influence over road safety. They are based around the safe system that VicRoads is now adopting as the backbone of its road safety campaigns that we understand. This is a Swedish model that takes into account a whole range of variables that need to, I guess, all line up in order for road safety to be advanced. They are specific to local government: improving the road infrastructure network. That in itself is a fairly significant task, given the extensive road network that councils are responsible for under the Road Management Act. Councils are responsible municipal roads and also roadside areas for state arterial roads within the urban environment. Given the context of these inquiries, it is really only municipal roads that we are focusing on.
The second point is the role of local government in influencing driver behaviour. That is really through local education programs and working with the local community with their support and in conjunction with the state authorities such as TAC and VicRoads and the RACV.

The third is probably something that local government I don’t think has done a huge amount of work in, but there is a real potential there for driving improvements in road safety through demand on vehicle manufacture specifications. If you think of 79 councils across the state and the purchasing capacity of those councils, there is an opportunity there, we see, for some improvements in road safety to be driven through those purchasing specifications.

They are really the three areas that we see that local government does have an opportunity to have an influence, and I guess the presentations that you have had to date would all broadly fit in under one of those areas.

The focus of the key issues that we will identify really relate to the road network itself. Councils certainly are doing a lot of work locally in improving driver behaviour through local education programs and, as I said, there is an opportunity, perhaps largely untapped to date, for driving better changes in the vehicle design. I guess on that point it might be important to note that we are of the understanding that some of the major vehicle manufacturers have technologies available and ready to go that could significantly increase the safety of cars that are out on the road but there could be a reluctance for those to be introduced without that demand pressure coming from the purchasing community.

I thought that at this point in time we will just run through a couple of key strategic issues that we see for the sector and then perhaps we will go to open dialogue.

The first is around road management and liability. I guess this wouldn’t be anything new for the Committee but obviously there have been some fairly significant reforms through the introduction of the Road Management Act, the abolition of the nonfeasance policy defence for local government and the introduction of the new regulatory regime whereby councils will establish policy defence through development and implementing road management plans. This is a fairly important area for local government. We are certainly doing a lot of work at the moment in progressing councils through to having in place road management plans that are implemented and will hopefully stand the test of scrutiny within the court system come 1 January 2005.

It is probably important to note at that point in time that with the abolition of nonfeasance I think we are going to see a tightening up across the local government sector in the way that local roads are managed. Through the road management planning process councils will have to identify which roads are under their jurisdiction, set out performance specifications for those roads and then maintain the roads in accordance with those standards set by the council. It is important to consider that the Road Management Act provides for councils when establishing their road management plans, to take into account budget capacity, community expectations, expected level of use on the road, etc. There can’t be one single factor that overrides any of the others, and certainly rural Victoria’s budget capacity is going to be a major constraint in what is possible to improve the road network.

On that point, the second key issue that we see facing local government – and this is probably the key issue for the MAV – is around financial capacity of councils to maintain the local road network. Without going into specific details, I think it is well understood by the members of this Committee the work that has been done over the last few years in identifying the spending gap for maintaining that critical infrastructure. Certainly the Auditor-General’s report a couple of years ago highlighted the magnitude of that gap for local government spending on local roads.

This is an area where the MAV is probably most active in terms of road safety in advocating for sustainable funding to the local government sector through federal roads recovery funding which has
been extended and promised to be extended on both sides of government and importantly around black spot funding. That is a point that is worth noting, the importance of black spot funding to local government. We have seen at a federal level the commitment to extend black spot funding to at least 2006 on both sides of government, I understand, at $45 million per annum and within the state government, the $240 million program has now expired and there has been a $130 million program provided for a two-year period.

Whilst that is welcomed and that will certainly go a long way to improving road safety, the major concern that councils have around that new program is the lack of access for councils to tap into that funding for spending on local roads. With the backdrop of 7 out of 10 accidents occurring on the local road network, so we have 70 per cent of accidents occurring on municipal roads and the black spot funding not being available to councils. Certainly that has been of major concern to councils across the state that we have heard of and we have made those points of view known to government and certainly would call on the state government to consider the spending needs on the local road network in subsequent budget developments.

On the funding issue it is fair to say that there are significant gaps. There are major constraints for local government, particularly in rural areas with the decline in populations and struggling rate bases with a string of other priorities and also given the backdrop of legal liability and legal uncertainty from January 2005 onwards. That said, we have every faith in the process of councils developing and implementing road management plans and that that should provide councils with the same level of protection afforded by the blanket nonfeasance. That will certainly require a strengthening up of council processes and how they set standards for roads and manage that road infrastructure. There are two other issues that I thought were worth noting for this Committee: one is roadside management and I am sure you have heard about this fairly extensively in your travels around the state.

The dual objectives of retaining and protecting native vegetation and providing safe community environs is a real challenge for local government, particularly in rural areas where there are extensive tracks of native vegetation and certainly the native vegetation controls and the framework that is in place does create for a number of challenges to councils in managing their responsibilities, both in terms of protecting the environment and also providing a safe travelling environment for motorists. That is an issue that I think needs more work and exploration of how to streamline the process of councils being able to meet those dual objectives.

The fourth and final key issue that I raise for this Committee is the issue of speed limits. Again this is something that would not be new to the Committee. There has been a strong push for some councils to introduce lower speed limits on gravel roads. We have also been privy to findings of the State Coroner over the last few weeks, who has made some recommendations that local government consider how it sets speed limits and uses advisory speed limits on gravel roads. This is a really complex area and I know is an area where there is a lot of discussion going on within the state and other agencies at the moment in the role of advisory speed limits. That is certainly an issue for the councils, particularly in rural Victoria with large tracks of gravel roads, how to manage and influence driver behaviour through the setting of speed limits and the messages that go with providing advisory speed limits.

That probably covers my summary of the four key issues that we see. Did you want to add anything to that, Peter?

Mr WALSH – No, not really. I guess what Simon is identifying is that some areas of responsibility that local government has, there are inherent tensions in getting a better road safety outcome with some of the other obligations. The two key ones are speed signs, particularly on gravel roads, and how you might go about doing that to deliver a better safety outcome without creating some problems as an outcome of that. The other one of course is the native vegetation. There are just
inherent tensions in the obligations on local government. If you took a very strong safety view of things then you compromise on some of the native vegetation. That pretty much covers the local government involvement in those issues.

**The CHAIR** – With the various councils being present on developing the road safety management plans, what role does the MAV have or what is occurring to ensure there is a coordinated approach to road safety across the state with those various plans?

**Mr HOLLOWAY** – I guess it is probably important to differentiate between road safety plans and road management plans. In respect of road management plans created under the Road Management Act, the MAV is playing a really active role in that process through the MAV step asset management program that has been in place for a number of years. That is being led by the MAV to ensure that those road management plans both comply with the Road Management Act but also provide a policy defence framework for councils. Certainly the MAV is playing a very active role in the establishment of those road management plans that have indirect road safety links but are not road safety plans.

In terms of council road safety plans, that is an area that the MAV hasn’t been overly involved in. That effort is being coordinated, I understand, through VicRoads Safe Roads partnership initiatives. So there are resources within VicRoads that work directly with the councils and I understand in the past there has been some seed funding to councils to run initiatives and undertake planning exercises. Certainly there are efforts to ensure statewide consistency with the road safety aspects that are being coordinated by VicRoads.

**Mr MULDER** – Sorry to be late. Simon, can I ask in relation to the road management plans, you mentioned earlier in the piece that municipalities were tightening up their road management plans as a result of loss of nonfeasance. As we understand it, and we have had a number of discussions with councils around the state, and what we have been told is that they will develop their road management plans around available resources and funds. Therefore you may have a municipality in the north which has thousands of problems on main roads that is going to develop a road management plan, not around best practice, not around what they see as being a safety issue but around what moneys are available. The closer you get to Melbourne the less road network you have for councils to maintain. The stronger their road management plans may be, the more regular their maintenance may be, the more regular their upgrade of roads may be. We have some concerns in relation to how they stack up when it is challenged in a court of law whereby 10 road management plans are put in front of one that quite clearly appears to be deficient in terms of the routine maintenance that is carried out.

**Mr HOLLOWAY** – That is certainly a pertinent point and is an issue that has been considered by local government throughout the development of the Road Management Act. I think there are a couple of aspects to that point. I understand that the Road Management Act provides that a council will be tested against whether any other council would have undertaken something that would be that unreasonable, so I think that will certainly be scrutinised within the courts and I guess time will tell as to how that stacks up in terms of the reasonableness of one council’s plan compared to the neighbour’s plan.

My understanding is that councils will be required to develop a road management plan, taking into account what resources are available and certainly in doing that are inherently stuck between a rock and a hard place. I think you are right in drawing the assessment that the further out into the country, the larger the road network is in general, the more maintenance that may be required and the more stressed budget capacity to meet that. I guess that feeds back into the MAV’s advocacy role around the need for more sustainable funding models for road management.
In terms of whether that is appropriate in terms of preparing a plan around best practice or around available resources, I think it is a reality that councils have to plan it around available resources. The community can’t expect every back country road with low usage levels to be maintained to any high standard. It is a reality that councils have very finite resources and will need to prioritise their spending. I think through the road management process that will certainly highlight the deficiency in the spending on the local road network.

Mr MULDER – A second question, in relation to advisory speed limits on main roads, I am not sure what the discussion has been around this. My electorate is the Otways and the situation has always been in the past that you drive as per the conditions on the day. Has there been any discussion in relation to advisory speed limits, that they may in fact work against the safety of motorists in that if I see an 80 kilometre speed limit on a gravel road and I am a visiting tourist, I would believe that it is safe for me to travel at 80 kilometres on that road at any time of the day or night. I see that on some of those roads that we go over, you all of a sudden find there is a soak coming out on the road and pushing the clay to the surface, creeks are overflowing onto the roads, and I just raise the question about whether or not it would work against road safety.

Mr WALSH – We were talking about tensions and it comes down as much to driver education as it does to the actual sign. The essence is with the driver education and the interpretation of what the signage is which becomes a critical part of this. The Coroner’s inquiry reflects that as what the sign is actually attempting to inform the driver of and if you put up a 80 kilometre sign on a gravel road, then the assumption is that on the gravel road you should be able to do 80 kilometres. That is clearly as it is from a local government perspective. That creates a risk. You then move to the next point, if you don’t put a sign up at all or you end up with a meaningless sign that says, “Driver Beware”. That is the inherent tension in whether the arguments are around this.

Mr MULDER – The locals understand how their road conditions vary. Visitors to the area who don’t understand an 80-kilometre speed zone would indicate to them that it is safe to travel at 80 kilometres on that road irrespective of weather conditions.

Mr WALSH – If you wanted to push the argument further, if you had a sign that said, “Gravel Road” and the driver education was such that here was a series of responsibilities on you as a driver when you see that sign and you see a school zone or a 40-kilometre zone, you know exactly what that means. You see a 100-kilometre sign on a freeway and you know exactly what that means. If you have a sign on a gravel road saying 80 kilometres, the interpretation is that you can do 80 kilometres. Should you have a sign that has a specific legal interpretation that would address the concerns that local government have in putting up that recommended speed sign.

Mr MULDER – An advisory sign that says you can do 80 km/ph on this road.

Mr WALSH – On a lot of the old private tracks, particularly logging tracks, etc. you would have a great big sign up saying that this is a private track and you are on this road at your own risk. That is the intent of trying to have a safer road given that it is going to be of that quality and that quality is going to change due to various climatic conditions. What is the appropriate signage you put up?

Mr HOLLOWAY – On that note it might be worth adding that there certainly is a sense of tension and perhaps even apprehension within a number of councils, given the seemingly two schools of thought where out of the Coroner’s office the recommendation was that councils consider the use of advisory speed limits, particularly in relation to gravel roads that have recently undergone some maintenance work and the surface might be less than it normally would be. Conflicting with that would be the school of thought that says that there should just be that state-wide outside the urban areas if by default a 100-kilometre speed zone and the responsibility is back on the driver. This has certainly been the school of thought that has prevailed for some time. There is a degree of
confusion and perhaps even apprehension within a number of councils across the state as to which direction they should be going, bearing in mind liability issues and council contribution.

**Mr MULDER** – In relation to black spot funding whereby you raise the issue that councils may not have the same level of access to funds … what you include in this?

**Mr HOLLOWAY** – To my understanding the $130 million rural road safety program which was announced in the 2004 budget in a two-year program at $65 million per year, the criteria for the spending of that to my understanding and that would need checking, is that it is applicable only to state arterial roads and the local roads are not eligible for use of those funds. That being said, I understand that that particular program is geared to addressing specific issues on the state arterial network; it is not formally a Black Spot program. I appreciate that but in terms of state road safety funding that is available for council access to address known hot spots it is a real concern that there is currently no funding. The pool is available for application on the same terms that black spot was.

**The CHAIR** – In our region in Victoria, a consistent issue that was raised by the majority of councils was the issue roadside vegetation, gum trees, etc. and the process of having those trees removed; the balance of environment versus road safety. Is the MAV aware of that issue and, if so, what are your thoughts on the removal of roadside trees that are identified as a safety hazard.

**Mr HOLLOWAY** – I think, without taking one side of the argument which clearly can’t be done, local government has statutory responsibilities and duties of care for providing safe environments for the community and safe road environments as well as protecting the local vegetation. Therefore I don’t think it is an either/or response. Councils have to balance that on a case-by-case basis. I think councils can manage that process and can, within appropriate parameters, find an appropriate balance between conservation of native vegetation and providing a safe envelope for the motoring public.

I think the key concern for councils is the administrative process for obtaining approval to do that. My understanding at the moment is that councils need a permit process through DSE to effectively lop or remove any vegetation. Obviously a council that has large tracks of road and roadside vegetation, that in itself would be a massive administrative burden to be required to have a site by site permit on every occasion. I understand that this issue is being looked into and I think what I would advocate is for an administrative process that enables councils to get on with the job of both protecting the environment within appropriate parameters but also having the ability to provide a safe road environment. I don’t think there is an easy answer and I don’t think that one of those objectives necessarily has to prevail at the entire expense of the other. Administrative mechanisms need to be approved.

**The CHAIR** – You mentioned a step plan before?

**Mr HOLLOWAY** – The step asset management program. This is a program that I haven’t had direct involvement with, but to my understanding it is an MAV initiative. It is a program that was set up by the MAV in response to some publicly available documents that highlighted some, I guess, deficiencies in local government asset management and it is a program that is geared towards taking the entire local government sector through a structure process to improve their asset management. It is certainly progressing extremely well. The end point of that program will be council that are involved will have municipal asset management plans that are, I guess, the equivalent of road management plans but across their entire asset base. That is going through a more structured process rather than an ad hoc approach to asset management whereby councils will identify their asset base, identify the standards to which that asset base needs to be maintained and establish a structured process for maintaining it to those standards. It is an MAV initiative and it is certainly going very well.
The CHAIR – How would that inter-relate with, say, road safety? We take your point before that there is a difference between a road safety plan and a road management plan. How would this step process begin with road safety and road management?

Mr HOLLOWAY – The roads obviously constitute part of local government’s asset base so I understand that councils are developing road management plans in parallel with their broader asset management plans. From what I understand, road safety plans are more around what local government can do to influence road safety within the municipality. That is where councils might pick up on initiatives around driver behaviour and fleet purchasing initiatives as well. They are certainly complementary processes with the step program and the road management planning process being driven within councils in a parallel line.

The CHAIR – Across Victoria we also saw the employment of road safety officers, not consistently but there were a number of councils who did employ road safety officers or joint ventures between councils. However I would say that the majority of councils haven’t employed road safety officers. Are there any statistics to something that we can look at to see the results of employing a road safety officer, any marked improvement in road safety in those particular areas.

Mr HOLLOWAY – I am sure there is. Measuring road safety is a fairly difficult thing to assess and to assess changes in road safety. Obviously the road toll is one measure but I am aware that even within the road safety unit at VicRoads there is a string of other measures that can be used to assess road safety. It is an area that the MAV hasn’t had a great deal of involvement with, other than being aware that many councils are taking the initiative to employ dedicated road safety officers. I understand that many of those are fully funded by the council itself with dedicated resources to that position, obviously in those municipalities where road safety is a critical issue. I think that a piece of work like that, or those statistics, could be developed or obtained through the safe roads partnership and the safe roads partnership initiative that is being sponsored by VicRoads where there is dedicated support to assist councils to go through that planning process. It is something that the MAV doesn’t have.

The CHAIR – I suppose by comparison, in New South Wales every council employs a road safety officer. It is actually required by the state government. I would venture to say that there would be a direct correlation between funding capacity within the council and the employment of road safety officers. Obviously some of those councils that are stretched to just make ends meet on a week-to-week basis aren’t in a position to employ road safety officers.

Mr WALSH – I think you will find that some of the small rural councils prefer to spend the money on the roads rather than road safety officers.

The CHAIR – Thank you Peter and Simon for your time and input. We will provide you with a copy of the transcript in the future.

Witnesses withdrew
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Country Road Toll and Crashes Involving Roadside Objects

Melbourne – 4 October 2004

Members

Mr C. A. C. Langdon  Mr B. Bishop
Mr J. Eren  Mr A. Harkness
Mr T. Mulder

Chairman: Mr I. Trezise
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Executive Officer: Ms A. Douglas
Research Officers: Mr Graeme Both and Mr Peter Nelson
Witness

Mr M. Tziotis, Group Manager, Transport Management Safety – Australian Road Research Board

Necessary corrections to be notified to executive officer of committee
The CHAIR – Welcome to Mike Tziotis from the Australian Road Research Board (AARB). As you are aware this is the Parliamentary Road Safety Committee. We are conducting two inquiries: the first is into country road toll and the second is obviously related and is about crashes involving roadside objects. We are operating under Hansard and we are taking a transcript. We are operating under Parliamentary privilege so what you say today can’t be used against you legally in the future. You are also operating under oath. Thank you for your time and we look forward to your input. Members of our Committee are Mr Terry Mulder, Member for Polwarth; Alistair Harkness, who is the Member for Frankston. I am the Member for Geelong and the Chairman. Alex is our Executive Officer and John Eren is the Member for Geelong Province.

Mr TZIOTIS – What I would like to do is talk about the major AustRoads project that we looked at and the safety of the remote areas of Australia. AustRoads is an organisation owned by all the State Road Authorities. As part of the study we looked at road safety in all of the states and we have tried to identify what some of the trends were in terms of road trauma in those environments, what some of the cause factors were and what are some of things we can do.

Trying to get a report finalised during that process with AustRoads can take a while because it goes to all the State Road Authorities to sign and when they receive it they can distribute it through their particular structure to make sure they are comfortable with it. This is still going to print and what I have tried to do is give you a general picture of rural remote road safety.

The CHAIR – Sorry, Mike, when you say still going to print, does that mean it has passed through that process you have just described?

Mr TZIOTIS – It is in the process at the moment. It is doing the rounds.

Mr EREN – Can I ask how this organisation is funded?

Mr TZIOTIS – It was the Australian Road Research Board and up until about eight years ago, which coincided with the time that I joined them from VicRoads, it was totally funded by the State Road Authorities. It included also the ALGA and other bodies like that. Up until that time, as I said, it was fully funded and then we had to become self sufficient like other organizations and departments so we went to self funding and so we have to apply for projects like any other consultant. There has been a slight swing back the other way and we do get some base line funding now but we still have to compete. That is the background.

What I have tried to do is to provide you with some of the general nation-wide data and then I have extracted out of the report those bits that would be of particular interest to Victoria. As I said, we have tried to look at trends, crash characteristics, identify contributing factors to crash occurrence and crash severity. We also looked at what national strategies were in place and action plans and have tried to identify some new counter issues.

The times there seem a bit dated and the reason is because various states had various levels of completeness on crash data basis and to try and bring them under the one graph we would have to have been confined to that period for this particular graph. I guess that what that is telling us is that Victoria is, as you would expect, one of the largest jurisdictions for crashes that occur in a particular road environment. New South Wales don’t separate their casualty crashes in terms of serious injury and minor injury and that is why they just have fatal crashes or injury crashes. The other interesting thing there is that as a proportion fatal crashes and serious injury crashes are a substantial part of casualty crashes and you would expect that because you are in a higher speed environment. The other interesting thing of course is that you are a relatively a physically small state but there is a lot of activity within that state.
What this is telling us although it is a bit dated, is that the number of crashes occurring in Victoria seems to be fairly steady and I guess what we are looking for is what can bring about that next step down, or the next major reduction.

**The CHAIR** – What it probably doesn’t reflect is the number of cars on the road as well.

**Mr TZIOTIS** – That is a good point – exposure. The more cars that are on the road, the more people driving and so by the time you take that into account it will probably show that it has gone down slightly.

**Mr MULDER** – You don’t have 2002 to 2003 figures?

**Mr TZIOTIS** – We don’t have them in this particular report but that information would be available now. They are the fatal crashes but unfortunately I don’t have 2003.

**The CHAIR** – That is the number of fatal crashes?

**Mr TZIOTIS** – A fatal crash of course is a crash where a fatality occurs. There may be more than one person who is killed and there may be other injuries as well. Again it is telling us that there is a problem … This particular disaggregation tries to paint a picture of the types of crashes that are occurring. The crash database that we have to work with varied from state to state. In Victoria we get it two particular ways. We get it for what VicRoads calls MSD, the Melbourne Statistical Division which is Melbourne’s metropolitan area and there is the rest of the state.

The interesting thing there is that we have a large proportion of casualty crashes occurring where a vehicle leaves the road. We also have a not insignificant number of head-on collisions. A car may run off to the left or run off to the right and it is unfortunate to run off to the right because if there is a car coming the other way, it is a head on crash. They tend to be the more severe crashes. If you add up off path on straight you have 41 per cent and the other almost 50 per cent are crashes that occur when the car leaves the carriageway or strikes a car coming the other way.

That is looking at the data by speed zones and, as I said before, it includes the provincial cities and that is why you have crashes in 60-kilometre zones. The interesting point there is that it is telling us something that we already know, that the higher the speed environment, the higher the severity. In the 100-kilometre zones and the 110-kilometre zones you have about half the crashes resulting either in serious injury or a fatal injury. When you look at the crashes occurring in the lower speed environment you have about a third or a quarter.

That is another interesting one in the sense that if you look at the total crashes occurring, at times when it is not daylight and you consider the amount of traffic on the roads, again it is only a fairly insignificant proportion of crashes. To me, that is telling me that we might have issues with respect to delineation, keeping the cars on the road. The drivers know the road in terms of its alignment of vertical or horizontal. There are so many ways we can put the data but I just pulled out a few that I thought you would be interested in.

This is specific to Victoria, and there we can see that motorcyclists are again a significant proportion of the crash problem, drivers of course and passengers and pedestrian cyclists and they would tend to be in the urbanised provincial areas or in the outskirts of provincial cities. We do have a unique problem there that I will talk about later.

As part of the study, as we were looking at the data, we spoke to Keith … from VicRoads and a few other people who might have an interest in road safety in rural areas. This has the whole list and includes indigenous Australians, which is more of an issue in the northern states and Western
Australia. They attend to be the groups either identified through the data or also through regional people, like those mentioned in regional VicRoads staff or community groups.

Residents and young male drivers are a problem in all of our communities, truck drivers, motorcyclists, etc. Some of the risk factors we identified and again a lot of this will come as a surprise to you and certainly the road conditions and with regards to the roads we have problems in respect to the shoulders, road surface, alignment of the road, the design of the road and varying on whether it is safer or less safe to drive on country roads, whether they are divided, the number of lanes, delineation. One of the key things in roadside hazard management, and I will talk about some of the remedial measures we have taken because the first thing we have to do is try to keep the cars on the road. That is where you look at things like delineation and making sure the road is very clear to the driver as they are driving along, that there are not curves and dips. There are various ways of doing that which I will talk about later on.

Roadside hazard management of course is basically saying that if a car does leave the carriageway, what are some of the things we can do to minimise the severity of the vehicle leaving the carriageway. Certainly the engineering people are talking about clear zones which you may be familiar with, and this is essentially saying that a certain proportion of vehicles when they leave the carriageway recover within that distance out from the edge of the traffic lane. Something like 80 per cent to 90 percent can recover within about nine metres on a high speed road but we have to bear in mind that if we have very high volume roads we are still going to get 10 per cent to 20 per cent who go beyond that nine metres and I guess that perhaps that nine-metre clear zone is inadequate. The general process is that if you do have hazardous items within that clear zone you should either remove them or put up a barrier.

They are the sorts of hazards that can happen in a clear zone, trees, culverts, embankments and another aspect is the difference between the appropriate speed limit and whether they are consistently applied. Very often on the same road a different part is zoned differently and it makes it very difficult to try and maintain some credibility to the road users.

Some of the behavioural factors that came out and again this wouldn’t come as a surprise to you, relate to the influence of alcohol and other drugs, speeding and maybe the wrong speed conditions apart from exceeding the speed limit. Then we have fatigue, failure to wear and seat belt and failure to wear helmets. Some of the basic crash risk factors relate to getting emergency services to the scene and again the medical people will argue very strongly and it is important to get these people to the scene very rapidly. They talk about a half hour or an hour as being crucial to the ultimate outcome of the severity of the collision – then the provision of rehabilitation services in rural areas. They are the factors that came out.

Some of the safety measures that we identified should be considered as part of the general improvement in safety in country areas relate to things that you are again familiar with, education, enforcement strategies that target high risk and at risk groups and unsafe behaviours such as behaviours of drinking and driving or taking other drugs and driving, speeding, seat belt compliance, helmet use and driving while fatigued.

With regard to environmental improvements that can be undertaken, there is a whole string of them and I will just list a few of them and I have noted a few from the report. We know the black spot program and mass action road safety program which are both reactive safety programs offer fairly high benefits to the community. A recent evaluation of the federal black spot program showed returns in the order of 14 to 1. There was $14 returned for every $1 spent. There has been a very large move in more recent times to have road safety auditing which takes a proactive approach to road safety and that relates very much to identifying road safety hazards and treating those hazards before a crash occurs.
One of the things from my experiences that we haven’t done enough of is why we haven’t undertaken audits and identified some of the deficiencies in the roads. We haven’t carried out the works to address those deficiencies. It is one thing to identify the deficiency that a road has guard railing that is too short, not long enough, not on the spot or whatever, but then we have the other side of the equation, which is what we are going to do about it and doing something about it.

This is a big issue for road authorities in that in taking out audits they have identified volumes of potential hazards on the road network and one of their challenges is to try and audit them in a way that is going to maximise crash reduction. One of the pieces of work that ARRB is doing at the moment for AustRoads for the road authorities is to develop a model for the roads and prioritise these potential hazards in terms highest risk to lowest risk so that where they have proactive dollars to spend they can spend them in an optimal way.

Then we have the other thing that has come out and that is the need to review speed limits to ensure that they are the appropriate speed limits, that there are no anomalies on the road and they are really supportive of the enforcement campaigns. Other things that fall out and may not even be reported are things like where you have critical slopes and critical slopes of course are deep slopes where a car would roll, particularly with things like … I know that VicRoads have that under the roadside hazard management. There are a variety of things you can do in removing hazards, putting up barriers, sealing shoulders.

Mr EREN – Mike, can you just elaborate on that last line, the review of rural roads speed limits?

Mr TZIOTIS – I think there needs to be a review in two particular areas. One is the speed limits on unsealed roads. It would not be inappropriate to perhaps make a comment … on an unsealed road. It is up for debate and I know a lot of the road authorities are considering having a lower general limit for unsealed roads. Generally unsealed roads while they fall under the default of open speed limits, they are not signed because signing them would mean people use it as a target speed. The general view of that creates what in the past was specifically for unsealed roads as they are subject to great variations conditions with changing weather conditions and so there has been a great reluctance to do anything there. I think if there was to be a lower limit consideration specifically for unsealed roads, it would need to be something that is really distinct … The other thing that came up was that there could be a case to be made for having a lower general rule speed limit of, say, 90 kilometres and that you would be considering for roads which are undivided in a rural environment. Again this is controversial. I think there is lots of evidence to show that you would make great safety gains there.

We are looking at rural roads and development where they are undivided. If you have a divided road then you would have your 100 kilometres. If it was a very high standard freeway that doesn’t have intersections and you don’t have any obstructions or hazards on the roadside, a very high quality road, then you would consider what we have now, at 110 kilometres.

The CHAIR – We have met with the vast majority of rural and regional councils over the last couple of months in our trip throughout Victoria, and as part of that, what they also raised with us was that instead of having the blank 100 kilometres on regional roads or rural roads, that VicRoads are far more specific in looking, or detailed in looking, at the nature of the various roads. You still have your open default at 100 kilometres but VicRoads being more specific about examining roads and setting speed limits for them.

Mr TZIOTIS – There is set criteria for setting speed limits. The criteria takes into account a number of variables and they relate very much to the operation and characteristics of the roads, the road development and the road geometry. For example, if you have a road in an urban environment, the business of that road is going to influence what the speed limit would be, whether it is residential,
commercial, industrial, the number of intersections, the density of the development and that criteria is fairly well spelt out in the national guide that we have. The guide is the AS1742, part 4 on the speed control.

While there is a National Australian Standard that spells out all of this criteria, each of the jurisdictions also have their own criteria and VicRoads have their own. It does take into account a range of factors and one of the factors is safety but very much they relate to the geometry, and quite rightly, if you do have a road that is open road with no development but for a sustained period of time it has lots of curves and there is a steep bend, my reading of the guides is that you have that ability to put in a lower speed limit. Certainly one of the problems I think we get into trouble with is where we do have that speed limit which is a blanket limit we have allowed to occur on the roads where you are telling the motorist things, telling him he can go at 100 kilometres and where we have a road environment that doesn’t allow him to do that. Quite often you can put in your advisory speed signs and there are some issues there as well.

Some of the other things that are suggested to look at – and again, a lot of it has come from overseas – and a lot of it we are looking at now, are things like speed advisory systems, cheap monitoring systems for heavy vehicle drivers. In fact we are trialling a lot of those at the moment with the mining industry where the drivers drive for very long periods, the device is fitted into the cabin that alerts the driver if his performance is slower because they are fatigued, etc.

The CHAIR – Using what type of system?

Mr TZIOTIS – The one that we are trialling asks the driver to perform a whole range of responses into this particular device and depending on the correctness and how responsive those responses are, then it can determine the level of performance that has changed with the driver. The mining industry is particularly interested in it because of the loss of returns with equipment being off the road, quite apart of course from the drivers being injured.

Adaptive speed and headway control systems, seat belts, running lights, emergency response systems, the training for licences and variable speed limits and variable message signage.

The CHAIR – Can you just go back to that last list again? Adaptive speed and headway control systems, can you expand a little more on that?

Mr TZIOTIS – You can have vehicles, smart cars communicating with the road environments, so that you can do it to varying degrees. At the moment the driver … depending on what the speed limit is. You can have smart cars which communicate with the environment where it is telling us that speed limit on this road is 70 km/ph. You would go from alerting the driver to that, to perhaps even influencing them that they can’t go through these thresholds. Your headway control systems are very much like your backing lights on the newer vehicles, but some cars might have them on the front bumper bar and in particular for parking in the streets it would alert the driver that they have come very close to the vehicle behind. So therefore the headway control system is just a measurement to tell if you are too close to the vehicle in front so that if they brake, you always need to brake safely rather than brake too close to the one in front.

Mr EREN – What is the electronic driver’s licence again?

Mr TZIOTIS – This relates very much to smart cars. We know that a lot of people who have lost their licences, drive. If you have the ability to have a suspended licence so that you just need your licence to start your car, then if you lost your licence for drink driving or whatever it might be, then you can’t start your car. This is all stuff that is out there and some of it is really happening now, I mean seat belts, alcohol tests, these are things now that once upon a time people would have thought it was a strange thing to do.
The CHAIR – How effective is this fatigue monitoring system that the mining industries employ?

Mr TZIOTIS – They are introducing it and evaluating it.

The CHAIR – We were recently in Sweden and we spoke to a number of organizations there about the same issue on how to measure the driver fatigue and I think they were using cameras at one of the places.

Mr TZIOTIS – There are lots of ways of doing it. From what I understand there are many systems and the systems vary from someone carrying out a routine, as we have done, that can measure that the performance is reducing through to systems that are automatic where they can measure an eye flicker – the steering-wheel manoeuvres and all those sorts of things. There are a variety of things out there. The mining industry is trying to decide which one is of the greatest benefit. Certainly they have a great interest in … and it is being implemented and trialled and, to be honest, I am not sure what the outcomes are. That is something I can find out and pass it on to your office.

The CHAIR – The ARRB is developing, as I understand it, a road safety risk management program?

Mr TZIOTIS – Yes, I mentioned that before and what that tries to do is where people conduct the audits, by looking at other factors and there are something like 70 other factors, to decide the level of risk associated with that, the calibration of risk is based on research that is sought to determine crash reduction associated with various items. I guess an example of that is that if you have a road that doesn’t have a sealed shoulder and we seal it, we now from research before and after that there is usually a reduction in run off road crashes to a proportion. So if you go into reverse, if you have a road that has an unsealed shoulder then you have a certain high risk of running off the road. If you have a road that doesn’t have an edge line, we know through research strategy that if you put an edge line on it you will reduce run off road crashes by 10 per cent. So if you don’t have an edge line we know that your risk of running off the road is whatever it is. It really uses data to measure the level of risk of a particular passage with lots of risks in combination. It then allows an assessor to at once identify the problem and considering these other factors, to put a numerical value for that hazard.

Another example is that if you have a tree or a pole right on a bend, and that is going to be marked far more less vulnerable for collision than if it was on a straight bit of road. If that road has an unsealed shoulder, it again increases that risk. It really assesses the road for safety audit through this process of putting together all this information, the volume of traffic, the condition of the road, the level of … The number of days that road might be subjected to wet weather and you know you have a higher risk of running off the roads when they are wet, so you can have an additional level of risk in one part of the state compared to another part of the state which might have 90 days of wet weather compared to 30 days of wet weather. It looks at all of those factors and tells us a program that works, so that if I have a package of road safety deficiencies, how might I audit them in such a way that when I treat them, how can I audit them to maximise my crash risk reduction. Again road authorities are starting to look very much to taking this approach because it is very difficult for someone to identify deficiencies and then object to trying to spend money to correct them one way or the other.

The CHAIR – I would therefore be interested in your comments on programs such as the Eurorap and the proposed Ausrap with regards to … road systems.
Mr Tziotis – We are doing work with the RACV and other players on using the risk approach for the road safety assessment and road management process. Again that is saying if you want a road with certain characteristics, it is more likely … Again that takes into that risk. We are a bit different, as I understand it, from the European … in that theirs is totally crash based whereas ours is more risk management approaches. It also takes into account crashes that are not purely crashes.

The Chair – The other thing I was interested in and I travel on the Geelong Road on a pretty regular basis, and the sign supports on the Geelong Road are pretty thick poles. We have recently been to Europe and in Sweden. For example, the same signs are supported by a very, very frangible type of pole. I would be interested in your thoughts with regards to the use of those large poles on the Geelong Road, or on any road as a matter of fact, as compared to what we have seen in Europe where they are obviously made of a lot lighter material.

Mr Tziotis – Road authorities do use things like frangible poles, slip base poles. Frangible poles are the ones that just bend, slip base poles fall over. We have other poles or posts that are wooden or drill holes to weaken the base so that if you struck them they would fall over. Where we have poles for sign supports that don’t collapse or are rigid when they should be, and I understand VicRoads do this, protected by barriers. I would be surprised if there wasn’t a barrier. I guess that is something that needs to be looked at. They may argue that it sits outside the clear zone and so it sits out beyond nine metres.

The Chair – As I said, when we were in Sweden, the poles were very light.

Mr Eren – It was the first thing I noticed coming back from the airport.

Mr Tziotis – I think when we have a road that has carried a lot of traffic, a certain proportion are going to leave the road and the driver can drive back on, but still 10 per cent go beyond that. I think on a very heavy traffic road you should be looking at … If only 10 cars leave the road someone is going to go out.

The Chair – Thank you, Mike, for your presentation. We will provide you with a copy of the transcript in due course. Thank you very much for your time.

Witness withdrew
Committee adjourned