ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll

Melbourne — 21 October 2004

Members

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Witnesses

Mr R. Scoular, government affairs manager; and
Mr B. Bridgens, senior engineer, safety and environmental engineering, Ford Motor Company.

Necessary corrections to be notified to executive officer of committee
The CHAIR — As you are aware, this is the parliamentary Road Safety Committee. We are conducting concurrent inquiries at the present time — one into the country road toll and the other into crashes involving roadside objects. This morning we are operating under parliamentary privilege or procedures, so what you say cannot be used against you in the future. Hansard is also reporting the proceedings, as you can see, and we will provide a copy of the transcript in due course to you and the Ford Motor Company. We appreciate your time and input, and I will hand it across to you.

Mr SCOUlar — Thank you very much, Mr Chairman. My name is Russell Scoular, and I am government affairs manager at the Ford Motor Company. With me is Bill Bridgens, who is a senior engineer in our safety and environmental engineering department in Geelong. We welcome the opportunity to participate in your inquiry and hope we can add some value to your deliberations.

Ford Motor Company is a significant vehicle designer, engineer and manufacturer. We produce some 120 000 vehicles a year — primarily Ford Falcon and Ford Territory vehicles — in Geelong and Broadmeadows. We employ about 5600 people presently, including 700 engineering staff in our product development operation. We also have an annual turnover of approximately $3.9 billion, so we are a pretty significant player in the Australian automotive industry. We would also like to think that over a number of years we have established a leadership role in our approach to vehicle design and road safety in particular.

From our perspective we see road safety as being an interaction of a number of elements, including obviously the vehicle, the road environment and the driver. I notice that in the terms of reference for your review you have sought to cover it from those perspectives. We have put in a letter-type submission in the last few days to the committee. Essentially what we have sought to do in that is really just say who we are and also highlight and give a broader understanding of some of the activities we have been involved in in more recent times, some of the philosophies and design and engineering initiatives that went into the BA Falcon, which is the current model, and some of the further things we have done in that area with the new Ford Territory. We have also sought to explain a little bit of our involvement in the SafeCar project with Monash University Accident Research Centre (MUARC) and the Transport Accident Commission (TAC). I am sure they have also discussed it with you when they appeared before you.

We have also alluded briefly to a couple of more industry-wide initiatives that we are currently very much involved in. One of those is seeking at an industry level to develop a pilot training program for young drivers, which potentially over time, if we can get it right, could be rolled out on a national basis. There is a proposal that there will be a significant financial contribution to the pilot leg of that project from the automotive industry. We have also been very much involved in the development of phase 2 of an automotive advertising code which has taken effect in the last couple of months. In summary form that provides a little bit of background, and we would be happy to take any questions you may have.

The CHAIR — In your letter you talk about it — and you have just mentioned it as well — the Intelligent SafeCar project that you are working on with the TAC and MUARC. Could you elaborate a little bit more on that project and Ford’s involvement in the project?

Mr SCOUlar — Primarily TAC is the leader in that project with MUARC and ourselves. We are very much — I hesitate to use the words — ‘the junior partner’, but they are certainly the lead partners. Our involvement has really been the provision of the vehicles, the discussions with them on the types of vehicle features or possible features that should be incorporated in the trial and the activity, and the evaluation of those features. We are very interested, and obviously we have taken a very active role in following it through. It has been going for some time in its various phases and iterations,
and we are quite interested now as we go through the phase that is seeking to collect some real-world data from extensive field driving experiences of people in those cars.

The CHAIR — As part of that project, what types of things are you looking at that would make motor cars — Ford cars or any cars — safer into the future?

Mr SCOLUMAR — The project itself, from memory, is focused on three or four particular features. We are very interested in getting the real-world feedback from that. Obviously from our perspective when we are seeking to design and engineer a new vehicle, we can gather information from a number of sources on how a particular individual feature may contribute to the overall safety performance of a vehicle, and being able to get some of that real-world driving experience in Australia in our own local conditions is a very valuable opportunity.

Mr BISHOP — I notice in the notes you sent the committee — and thank you for those — that you talk about the seatbelt reminder system in that particular study, as I understand it. My Ford car tells me if I have not got my seatbelt on, but I am not sure if all model Fords do that?

Mr SCOLUMAR — From memory it is a standard feature now on all Falcons and Territories.

Mr BRIDGENS — Falcons and Territories have what we call a beltminder, which is a sophisticated reminder system. The other vehicles in the Ford range have simpler systems, but they do have some sort of seatbelt warning system. It is only the Falcon and Territory that have the beltminder system.

Mr SCOLUMAR — In that case with that particular feature we really have not waited for the final outcome of the study before deciding it is probably a good thing to have in a vehicle.

Mr BISHOP — So what you are saying in this note here that describes the seatbelt reminder system is that it is now in all Ford cars?

Mr SCOLUMAR — No, it is in all Ford Australia manufactured cars, which is Falcon family and Territory. It is not in some of our imported vehicles.

Mr BISHOP — And that is this particular reminder system mentioned here?

Mr BRIDGENS — Yes.

Mr HARKNESS — I wanted to follow up on that. When the committee visited Canberra and met with one of the peak road safety organisations, they gave examples of vehicle manufacturers and importers in Australia importing vehicles and putting them into their product line-up without an array of features that are installed in the same vehicles in Europe or in America. I am wondering whether that is because of a cost factor or some other factor and if there is some reason why a particular model sold in Europe has a whole range of road safety features which are not installed in the vehicles which are then sold in the Australian market.

Mr SCOLUMAR — I am aware there has been some discussion in recent times on that issue. Firstly let me say that vehicles vary significantly from market to market in different parts of the world, and even though they may have the same name and look the same, they can often be very, very different. One has to be very careful in looking at a particular vehicle and saying, ‘If it does not have this feature, is it as good as another one?’ or that type of thing. You have to look at a vehicle as a whole rather than on a feature-by-feature basis. We import some vehicles from Europe, and in the Australian marketplace it has been said that the Australian market is the most competitive automotive market in the world. There are 50-plus brands represented here, there are
350 different base models in the Australian marketplace, and at latest count there were 17 to 18 different source countries. So in terms of competitiveness, we are probably the most competitive market in the world. Obviously from the Ford Motor Company’s perspective, primarily with regard to safety, we have to ensure and be absolutely satisfied ourselves that, firstly, our vehicles totally exceed regulatory and corporate safety and performance standards, which all our vehicles do, and secondly, that they are competitive in a marketplace.

Mr HARKNESS — The example that comes to mind is Opel cars, which are sold as Holdens here. Passenger-side airbags and side curtain airbags are installed in the Opel cars sold in Europe but not on the relevant car sold here in Australia. I cannot comprehend why, if they are all coming off the same manufacturing line, you would remove particular features in different markets and not just include them, unless it is because the market is so competitive here and it would cost an extra $500 or whatever.

Mr SCOULAR — Obviously in seeking to sell a vehicle into a particular market one has to be competitive, but certainly from Ford’s perspective in being competitive I do not think a manufacturer could be seen to be compromising the necessary standards in that market.

Mr HARKNESS — In that example, how many of the vehicles in your line-up — I am not sure how many different models you retail here in Australia — would have passenger-side airbags in addition to the driver airbags and also the curtain side airbags?

Mr SCOULAR — In terms of the passenger-side airbags, let us begin with our Falcon family and our Territory vehicles, which are the vehicles that Ford Australia designs and builds itself. Passenger and driver airbags are standard across the range in those vehicles.

Mr HARKNESS — In the larger cars?

Mr SCOULAR — Correct. With regard to our imported vehicles, I would have to take that question on notice. We have a number of them, and I have enough trouble keeping in mind the specification list of my own car that I drive.

Mr HARKNESS — I appreciate that. That would be good.

The CHAIR — With some of those airbags, did Ford actually develop and test its own airbags or are they bought in?

Mr SCOULAR — The Falcon, incidentally, was the first Australian car where an airbag was fitted as a standard feature some years ago. When we first introduced the airbag we developed it in conjunction with a US supplier and imported the airbag from the US, but in parallel with that we worked very closely with an Australian supplier company, Autoliv Australia, which is our supplier now. So we introduced as a standard feature into Australia an overseas-supplied component, but we worked with a local supplier to develop their capability, and we now source it from them. They are located just down the road from us at Campbellfield.

Mr MULDER — There was some discussion some time ago that a lot of the fleet purchases always end up fairly quickly back on the second-hand market and back out in the community with individual owners. Is it standard practice for fleet purchasers to go for all available safety features and add-ons in a vehicle?

Mr SCOULAR — It varies very much from purchaser to purchaser as to what their practices tend to be. What you have seen over time and in recent years is a very substantial increase in the level of features and content in our motor vehicles, and what we thought were our up-market luxury versions only a few years ago are now our base...
or middle versions. Also what you are finding very much in fleet markets is that not many years ago the purchasing manager of an individual organisation bought the cars, whereas now individual employees — particularly in many corporate organisations — can actually make a choice within a financial band, and there are a lot of novated leasing arrangements. It varies very much, and the individual choice and influence in that decision-making process is a lot more marked than it was, but generally speaking it reflects the broader market now.

Mr STONEY — You would be aware of the debate centring around the instability of some of the heavier four-wheel drives. There was an accident up near Canberra, and there was a debate raging about a year ago.

Mr SCOUCHAR — Is this the accident that occurred in the early Christmas–New Year period?

Mr STONEY — Yes. The family were in a four-wheel drive, I am not sure what model it was. I have not heard any criticism of the Ford Territory, but I was wondering how you address that problem. In the literature you hand out with the Territory, do you warn the drivers that it may not be as stable as your family saloon and things like that? How do you address those sorts of problems?

Mr SCOUCHAR — The Territory is a very unique vehicle. Unlike many of the all-wheel drive and four-wheel drive vehicles in the marketplace today, which are based on commercial vehicles, the Territory is actually based on a passenger car platform, Therefore many of the inherent safety features in the Falcon passenger car have carried over to the Territory. In terms of the Territory itself, it also has electronic stability control — a very advanced electronic feature which we have developed in partnership with Bosch — as a standard feature in the all-wheel drive vehicle. In a sense we have tried to ensure that the safety features inherent in that vehicle are totally appropriate for the type of vehicle it is and the type of use it will be put to.

Mr STONEY — I suppose the crux of it really is that it is an off-road vehicle — or it can be if you want it to be, but it is also certainly a highway vehicle — and in that there is an inherent risk that the driver may not be aware that it is a little heavier, a bit more top heavy, than a car.

Mr SCOUCHAR — We have been having discussions at a federal government level with the Department of Transport and Regional Services and the Minister for Transport and Regional Services as to whether there are some appropriate things that can be done on an industry basis to ensure that individual drivers totally understand the characteristics of the vehicle they may choose, whether it is an all-wheel drive, a light truck, a van or a passenger car. I think the industry has some ideas there.

Mr STONEY — How is that going forward? Through what process is that going forward?

Mr SCOUCHAR — Those discussions are mainly being had at a federal level by our national association, the Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries, which represents the automotive industry in Australia, with the appropriate authorities in Canberra.

Mr MULDER — In relation to navigational aids and instruments in vehicles and the issues that are now being raised in relation to driver distraction, what does Ford see happening with those types of issues into the future?

Mr BRIDGENS — A lot of research work is being done by Ford in the US on that issue. They have come up with a laboratory which is designed to measure whether these features do distract drivers. It is obviously a topic that is getting a lot of attention currently. It is a trade-off between the benefits of these features to the driver versus any
disbenefits. That is still being studied. Obviously we have a duty of care to make sure we do not put anything in the vehicle which is going to cause an adverse effect on driver behaviour.

Mr BISHOP — You mentioned younger driver training. I note you have included a section headed ‘Driving training initiative’ in the document sent to us. Can you explain what your initiatives are there? I understand you are doing it through the Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries. Do you include pre-licence training as well as post-licence training in that?

Mr SCOULAR — We have very much an open mind. The starting point for that discussion at an industry level was really, ‘Are younger drivers today as well trained as they need to be, whether pre-licence or beyond licence?’ I think there was a view across our industry that perhaps more could be done or needed to be done or there were some opportunities. The industry had some discussions with the federal Minister for Transport and Regional Services, Mr Anderson, and his people about that. The current status is they are working on developing a pilot program which may run to devise first, what is a training need, and second, what would be an appropriate and effective training program that could be implemented nationally.

Mr BISHOP — If that comes to pass, will the Ford Motor Company be enthusiastic about that?

Mr SCOULAR — At this stage our commitment is to the pilot program. The industry has agreed to put a very significant amount of money onto the table to facilitate that. The Federal Chamber of Automotive Industries subscriptions are generally based on market share, unfortunately, so we will be a significant contributor to that as well. I think the original idea that the industry do something in this process actually came from our previous president, Geoff Polites, so I suppose in that context we are very supportive of it and will be a significant contributor.

The CHAIR — Could you comment on Ford Motor Company’s participation in the motor vehicle advertising voluntary code?

Mr SCOULAR — Yes. I suppose I have to go back about 18 months to two years, when there was a view that perhaps motor vehicle advertising at times was not necessarily appropriate with broader road safety messages. Industry on a national basis worked closely with the Australian Transport Safety Bureau and other government organisations to develop a code that was implemented to be administered by the Advertising Standards Bureau. A number of ads fell foul of that code. It was agreed at the initial stage when the code was introduced that there would be a review after 12 months or so to see how it tracked. I suppose everyone was a novice in a sense in the process and the project.

That review was conducted. It was felt that there had been some significant experiences that had been learnt out of the first iteration of the code, I think particularly from an administrative perspective in terms of the relationship or interaction between the words of the code itself and the explanatory words that went with it. As of 1 July, code 2 was implemented. It had been accepted by transport ministers in April or May of this year. That is now up and running. There have been a small number of complaints against various advertisements. One got knocked over, I think a couple have been dismissed and there are a couple where we are still waiting to hear.

In terms of Ford Motor Company, we have had no ads knocked over as part of the process. However, we are extremely mindful of our obligations under the code. When the new code was finalised we had two or three workshop sessions with our senior management, our advertising agency and our marketing staff so they totally understand...
what their obligations are under the code. To put it bluntly, we cannot afford to produce an expensive ad and have it knocked over on day 1.

Mr MULDER — I suppose where I am coming from is driver fatigue and driver comfort and what level of work is done by Ford and any other companies you are aware of in terms of seats in cars. There are some passenger cars on the market at the moment where the seats are quite clearly terribly uncomfortable, which I believe adds to driver fatigue. Personally there is only one car I can drive — I have had to get out of two different types of cars and into a car that had a comfortable seat to fix up my lower back problem. What I am wondering is what does Ford do in relation to research into driver comfort?

Mr BRIDGENS — There is no regulation in that area so it is internal, sort of corporate requirements. We have extensive testing using juries and different types and sizes of occupants for extensive periods in the development process to make sure we do not put anything into the vehicles that is going to cause problems with customers. However, it is a very subjective thing — it is hard to measure it scientifically.

Mr HARKNESS — The Transport Accident Commission this week launched a campaign on mobile phones. Knowing I was coming here today a constituent asked me to ask you about the fact that in some cinemas now they have a block so you cannot use your mobile phone in the cinema. His proposal was that when vehicles are manufactured some sort of shield is installed so mobile phones cannot be used in the car. I wonder whether you could comment on that and also any other safety initiatives or safety features which you see coming through the process and which might be standard features or additional features in cars in Australia in the next few years?

Mr SCOURLAR — I am aware of the mobile phone issue. I think we would be supportive as an industry, and certainly as a company, that people should not carelessly use handheld mobile phones when they are driving; it just does not make sense to do so. Whether the problem is such a significant one that it would require the cost and complexity of designing them out of being able to be used in a motor vehicle, I do not have sufficient technical knowledge to really be able to add a lot of value to that perspective. However, I think it would be a somewhat novel but unusual solution. I have not heard of it being done anywhere.

Mr HARKNESS — What about other features or initiatives in the Australian market over, say, the next five years?

Mr BRIDGENS — There is a lot of publicity given to features or the absence of features. What is clear is that, particularly in the past five years, there has been huge improvement in the occupant protection provided by vehicles. That is really as a result of improving the vehicle structure. The vehicle structure is now much better in terms of protecting occupants in a frontal impact and a side impact. The additional features are just, if you like, supplemental to that. As I say, there have been huge improvements in terms of structure. I think one of the most significant things that could be done is to lower the average age of the Australian vehicle fleet. The problem we have in Australia is the average age is high.

The best thing that could be done is to encourage people to get into newer vehicles to enjoy the benefits of the newer safety regulations that vehicles have to meet and the design improvements vehicle manufacturers have made in terms of structural performance, crumple zones and so on. The addition of safety features is secondary to the benefits gained by, first of all, the improved structure, and obviously the most important safety feature is the seatbelt.

Mr BISHOP — That sounds like a sales pitch from a motor company.
Mr SCOLUMAR — That is always one of the difficult things we have when we talk about that as a possible solution to it. It is always a very sensitive issue. People do not, generally speaking, drive and own older cars because that is what they want to do — it can be a very significant socioeconomic issue as well. However, if one looks at car sales in the last three years, they have been running at record levels in Australia. There are a number of factors that have driven that but I think in terms of getting newer, safer vehicles into the vehicle fleet, that is making an important contribution. In the past three or four years we have seen the ageing of the Australian car fleet, which has been going on for many years, hopefully peaking and coming back down again.

The CHAIR — In what year were airbags consistently put into Ford cars?

Mr SCOLUMAR — I think when we first put them into the Falcon it would have been about 1997–98.

Mr BRIDGENS — Earlier than that; we will need to get back to you with the date.

Mr SCOLUMAR — Mid-1990s, approximately.

Mr BISHOP — Chasing up Alistair’s question, we saw a fair bit of the intelligent speed adaptation in Europe. It was excellent technology, really good stuff, but most people were saying to us that it will be 10 to 15 years before it will come. Do you have a view on that? Some of us believe that given the advancement in technology we have seen in Australia and the world, it could be earlier than, say, 15 years.

Mr BRIDGENS — I think it will be sooner than that but I would not like to put a figure on it.

Mr SCOLUMAR — Generally speaking we find when we try to put a call on future vehicle trends, designs, environmental features or whatever, some things come sooner and some things do not come as quickly as you would think. I think it will be sooner than the 15 years or so that you are referring to.

Mr BISHOP — That is the full house we are talking about. However, you have another couple of issues in here: the forward collision and the reverse collision, which helps those who cannot get their heads around where they are backing into. Would they be likely to be fairly quick?

Mr SCOLUMAR — Could be. They could be at the earlier end of the scale.

Mr LANGDON — Following up the Chair’s question about the advertising standards, you cannot watch a television ad for any motor vehicle these days without speed being the device they try to sell the cars on — from people distorting their faces and looking strange to the ads for utes, they have been going berserk on the speed. What is your comment regarding that? This government, its predecessors and other governments around the country are saying, ‘Speed kills’. You are having two different arguments, one to sell and we are saying, ‘Don’t’.

Mr SCOLUMAR — With respect, I would not accept totally your proposition. When we were going through the review period of the advertising industry code we put together quite a comprehensive video of ads pre-code and post-code. It is quite interesting if you look at the significant changes that have taken place in recent times in the type of vehicle advertising in Australia. I would not accept the proposition that speed is necessarily the predominant, lead sales factor in advertising. In fact, I would argue quite strongly that it is actually price.

Mr HARKNESS — Something that intrigues me on speed and the manufacture of vehicles is that the speedometer goes up to 240 kilometres an hour or
260 kilometres an hour. The maximum speed that you can go, 100 kilometres an hour or 110 kilometres an hour, is actually in the first third of the dial. Why can’t manufacturers have a speedo dial which only goes up to 120 kilometres an hour or so instead of up to 260 kilometres an hour and speeds which are impossible to do on any of our roads? Why can’t the speed dial be redesigned to add to that message that speed kills, picking up on the things that Craig has mentioned there?

Mr SCOULAR — Generally speaking, in terms of design and design standards of motor vehicles, Australian design standards are aligned with EEC or global standards.

Mr HARKNESS — That does not make it right, though.

Mr SCOULAR — No, it does not make it right, but I am trying to give you an explanation.

Mr HARKNESS — I cannot see the purpose of having a car with a speedo that goes to 260 kilometres an hour when only Brockie and some of these other guys can do that sort of speed. I am just intrigued. Why can’t an Australian car manufacturer take a leadership role here? You have that space there on the dial, you can have the numbers bigger and if you are going fast, your needle will be at the right end of the spectrum, not one-third of the way from the left.

Mr SCOULAR — It is always something we can look at and consider. There is no reason why we cannot carefully look at it. It is probably a lot more complex as an issue than it superficially appears.

The CHAIR — In Europe a couple of car manufacturers do exactly that, where the 110 km/h mark was well around.

Mr HARKNESS — I do not see the challenge; the red is on the facia panel.

Mr LANGDON — Following that point, one of the criticisms in the press and other places is that when the speed limit is 50 km/h and people get caught speeding at 55 km/h, one of the problems motorists constantly point to is that they are constantly looking at the speedo. The difference between 50 km/h and 60 km/h on the speedo is less than 1 centimetre. Picking up Alistair’s point, if there was a larger screen you could pick up far easier that you were going over the 50 km/h.

Mr HARKNESS — You go 40 km/h in a school zone and the needle has hardly moved off the bottom.

Mr SCOULAR — With no disrespect to that road rule, the car hardly moves.

The CHAIR — How accurate are the speedos?

Mr SCOULAR — There is a design rule requirement that requires them to be within 10 per cent, but I think in practice they are a lot more accurate than that.

The CHAIR — Do you have a percentage figure of how accurate Ford speedos are?

Mr BRIDGENS — It is tighter than that; it would be within 3 per cent.

Mr LANGDON — As the vehicle gets older, does that variance increase — for example, a 20-year-old vehicle compared to a 12-month-old vehicle?

Mr BRIDGENS — I am not sure how long we have had that requirement for 3 per cent but I know it goes back a couple of years. I am not sure if a 20 or 30-year-old vehicle is less accurate, but it has been 3 per cent for a long time.
Mr LANGDON — The age of the vehicle will not vary that?

Mr BRIDGENS — The accuracy would be affected if you put non-standard wheels and tyres on because that would have change the rolling radius, so we cannot control what happens after the vehicles enter the market. The customer can make changes to the vehicle that will affect speedometer accuracy, the main one being putting on non-standard wheels and tyres.

The CHAIR — As part of the committee’s inquiry it has also been asked to look at cruise controls. Could you comment on cruise controls and your thoughts on how they may contribute to crashes through driver vigilance or fatigue?

Mr SCOULAR — Personally I find cruise control to be a very useful feature. I travel between Broadmeadows and Geelong reasonably regularly for work purposes and it is a handy thing to have on the Geelong Road. It is a very useful feature. Personally I do not think it is a feature that drives to distraction or has negative features which outweigh the positives. The positives are very much in its favour. We get very positive feedback from our customers and the buyers of our vehicles that it is a welcome aid.

Mr HARKNESS — I like cruise control myself, especially on long trips. One of the criticisms a few people have made to the committee is that it leads to fatigue. Someone will sit on the Hume Highway and they are somewhere between here and Albury, it is late in the evening, and they are starting to feel tired, and because they are not having any interaction with the driving other than holding the steering wheel it leads to some sort of fatigue. Can you comment on that as well?

Mr SCOULAR — I cannot comment in any great detail as to whether that is a negative. From my own personal experience of using cruise control, generally speaking you do not go kilometre after kilometre with the vehicle in cruise control. You will go for a number of kilometres, but generally speaking you will come across some traffic, a corner or whatever, and you will tap the brake. I have not personally found that to be an issue.

Mr BISHOP — We have had that brought to the committee’s attention, though, that people set the cruise control on, say, 100 km/h, and they come up to a corner and they try to steer around it. There has been some research done on adaptive cruise control processes. It seems to be fairly well out at this point in time, but that has been brought to the committee’s attention.

Mr LANGDON — Picking up the point about cruise control, obviously if you put your foot on the accelerator or the brake slightly the cruise control disconnects. Is there any design where if you turn your wheels to a certain degree the same thing could occur?

Mr SCOULAR — I would imagine that technically something of that nature could be possible. Whether it would be necessary or add real inherent value and safety benefits to the feature, I would have to take a lot of advice on. Cruise control is a fairly long-established feature as a motor vehicle feature in Australia and overseas. I am sure your suggestion obviously has merit from a study perspective, but I am not sure if a lot of research work has been done on that type of thing.

The CHAIR — There is obviously an upside to cruise control as well. I travel up and down the Melbourne–Geelong Road and it is terrific on the open road because it keeps me back to 100 km/h, because once you get on to such a road you soon creep up to 120 km/h without realising it. So cruise control has a good safety advantage to it as well.

Mr HARKNESS — What proportion of your national budget would be spent on road safety, research and development, product development and those types of things?
Mr SCOURLAR — It is very hard to say. We do not, if you like, necessarily budget or account for safety, performance or design. It is really product development. We would say almost all our product development activities have an inherent safety component to them. If I could mention that we have 700-odd engineers in our product development operation in Australia doing Falcon, family product, Territory and some overseas design service work that we do. Our budget is pretty significant. In terms of the Territory itself, that was an investment of some A$500 million to bring it to market.

Mr HARKNESS — From drawing board to showroom it was $500 million?

Mr SCOURLAR — Correct.

Mr HARKNESS — You would have to sell a few cars to get that back!

Mr SCOURLAR — We do.

Mr BISHOP — When we were in Europe we found a lot of priority was put on making the cars internally safe, with airbags, seatbelts and various other collision collapsing processes on the front of cars. Can you tell the committee where your priorities are in relation to passenger safety, where the weighting is in making the car internally safe or avoiding the accidents, as you have in a number of issues in the paper you put to the committee?

Mr BRIDGENS — As I mentioned earlier, there have been huge improvements made particularly in the last five years in terms of occupant protection. The current vehicles, the current Falcon and Territory, are very safe vehicles for the occupants. What we are seeing now is that, like the law of diminishing returns, any further improvements will be very expensive and it becomes a trade-off as to whether you would be better spending that money in other areas. What you are talking about is really active safety in terms of accident avoidance. That is an area that will be receiving more attention in the future.

The other aspect is part of the infrastructure. We have to look at the improvements in terms of roads and roadside furniture, because we cannot design vehicles to cope with some of the roadside furniture in terms of poles and trees inappropriately placed. You cannot design a vehicle to cope with that sort of collision.

There is driver behaviour in terms of fatigue. The driver has to play a role in that area in terms of not driving when they are fatigued. It is an education process as well. But yes, active safety for the vehicle manufacturers is something we will be giving increasing attention to in years to come.

Mr HARKNESS — The committee is also looking at the country road toll as such. We have gone out to the bush and a lot of people we have talked to speak about the golden hour, where if you do not receive hospitalisation or some sort of medical attention within an hour of the crash there is a problem. One of the suggestions — I do not know if I read it in one of the papers — is putting some sort of electronic device into the airbag so that if the airbag is inflated it automatically dials the ambulance service so you do not have to wait for an hour for a passing motorist to see you have crashed. Is this something that is currently being investigated? Will we see these in the next generation of airbags?

Mr SCOURLAR — I have seen media coverage to that effect as a possible feature that could be incorporated in vehicles. I am not aware of our airbag supplier in particular doing any detailed work in that area.

Mr HARKNESS — Do you have a strong dialogue with the manufacturer, or do you buy the products off the shelf, as it were?
Mr SCOUMLAR — We have a strong interaction with all our suppliers in terms of, if you like, determining this is what we want. We really try to bring together our expertise and their expertise as opposed to just buying off the shelf.

Mr BRIDGENS — Particularly with airbags, you do not buy airbags off the shelf. The airbag design has to be integrated with the vehicle structure design right when you start with a clean sheet of paper. You cannot just buy them off the shelf. They have to complement. First you have to get the vehicle structure right and then the airbag complements that structure.

Mr HARKNESS — I was keen to see what sort of interaction you have in their product development as well as your own car. Can you go off to them and say, ‘We would like these particular things in the next generation of airbags’, rather than them coming and saying, ‘These are all the different airbags and this is the one that works well and complements best this particular model of car’?

Mr SCOUMLAR — It is really a partnership, bringing together our expertise and their expertise to deliver a good end result. There is very little take it or leave it.

Mr STONEY — Following on from what Alistair was saying about bullbars and airbags, and bullbars per se, do you fit bullbars to the Territory and if you do how do you interact with the airbag?

Mr SCOUMLAR — I suppose the issue of bullbars and compatibility with airbags is a challenging engineering issue for us. We have marketed bullbars, roo bars, those types of things, that are compatible with the airbags that we have in our vehicles. All we can do is encourage motorists where if they want to fit that feature, they fit the appropriate feature.

Mr STONEY — You do have something to offer with the bullbar and the airbag so that it still works pretty well?

Mr SCOUMLAR — Yes.

Mr BRIDGENS — We have just launched the intelligent bullbar for the Territory. We launched it at the Sydney motor show a couple of weeks ago. What we found was it was a very difficult development exercise to come up with a bullbar design that did not interfere with the complex computer systems that control the airbags. We found we had to develop a unique computed-controlled module, so if you fit the Territory bullbar you have to change the computer module so that the sensors take into account the fact that the bullbar is affecting the sensing system. It is a very complicated area to try to develop a bullbar that does not interfere with airbag triggering.

Mr STONEY — So if a customer has fitted an after-market bullbar they would need to know that they need to change the computer chip as well.

Mr BRIDGENS — That is a very difficult issue for the customer to know.

Mr STONEY — That is where I was leading.

Mr BRIDGENS — The after-market bullbars, so far as I am aware, they do not do that.

Mr STONEY — So it would be wise for a customer to buy one as they bought the vehicle?

Mr SCOUMLAR — Correct.
Mr MULDER — In relation to the intelligent bullbar, who takes priority in that, the airbag and the passenger and the driver of the car, or the pedestrian in terms of the design of the bullbar?

Mr SCOUlar — It is not always a pedestrian that is hit.

Mr MULDER — Or a cyclist. There is a real debate running, particularly in metropolitan areas, as whether or not those vehicles should have bullbars fitted to them because they are guaranteed to maim or kill a pedestrian or cyclist if they hit them. What we are saying here is the intelligent bullbar is designed to work in sync with an airbag and to protect the occupants, no doubt, of the vehicle. The question we are asking is what about the person who is going to be collected by the bullbar, the pedestrian or cyclist; what consideration is taken for them in relation to an intelligent bullbar, if any?

Mr BRIDGENS — Customers who demand these devices are customers who believe they need that extra protection when driving in rural areas. They have a genuine fear of being stranded at night, so we felt we had a duty of care to them, and if we do not supply them with a product that satisfies their need they will go to the after market. So we felt we had a duty of care to provide them with a device that gave them that sense of protection. We addressed it purely in terms of protecting the vehicle from an animal strike and making sure the product was effective for that purpose. But equally we had to make sure that it did not interfere with the occupant protection systems.

The pedestrian-friendly aspect is a different and separate topic. We obviously had to make sure the design of the intelligent bullbar was as friendly as possible. But it is a challenge to come up with a design that is not going to hurt pedestrians.

Mr MULDER — This is an ongoing debate. We understand people in rural areas who are likely to hit a kangaroo or a cow on the road need to have a bullbar fitted, but in terms of the Melbourne metropolitan area and the need for a bullbar, they really need to take into strong consideration the safety of pedestrians, motorcyclists and general cyclists. That is why I raised the question of how the industry in general views that whole debate.

Mr BRIDGENS — It is a very delicate issue, and we know we have strong customers who demand these devices.

Mr BISHOP — I am interested in the issue that you commented on, and we found was a concern overseas, about the level of protection inside the car getting to probably a bar; it is uncertain how much further it can go, and no doubt it will with better technology. Then you get into, as we discussed, the other issue of either avoiding accidents or having the roadside furniture, as you said, and other issues made more acceptable to motor car traffic or truck traffic. Does Ford liaise with authorities like VicRoads? It puts up the fences along the side of roads; do you have any liaison with organisations like that?

Mr SCOUlar — We have a dialogue with VicRoads on road safety issues. I think it would be fair to say in recent times, and hopefully looking forward, that that dialogue is building between our organisations. I would not necessarily say we get right down to the nitty-gritty of commenting on each individual new additional road proposal, or that type of thing, but certainly at a working level and at an executive level we have fairly regular dialogue and contact with them. We would like to think it is really useful to both organisations.

Mr BISHOP — There is a reasonable school of thought that in Australia, in Victoria in particular, we have done a lot in the driver behaviour area, but we have slipped behind in the infrastructure area, which is roadside furniture, roads and all those sorts of issues. That is where the question came from, because really it is a joint venture
between the manufacturers of the cars and the people who supply the roads and the roadside furniture to make them as safe as possible.

Mr SCOUAR — We would totally agree with that observation, that it is, if you like, a tripartite or three-way issue.

Mr BISHOP — But you do not do that formally?

Mr SCOUAR — There is dialogue and discussion. I do not know quite what would make it formal and informal.

Mr BISHOP — But you deal with the federal organisation on a number of issues?

Mr SCOUAR — We do.

Mr BISHOP — Perhaps that is where it might be better driven from?

Mr SCOUAR — Probably it could come from both arms. In the automotive industry we are fierce competitors with different companies in a sales sense, but on issues that have a broader industry-wide national significance we can work pretty constructively together with the relevant bodies.

Mr BISHOP — What level does Ford put on its marketing in relation to passenger and driver safety? We had the discussion about the speed, the speedometer, and perhaps that is a marketing issue as well. Do you feel that the road safety issues are becoming more predominant in a buyer’s mind now than they were, say, 10 years ago?

Mr SCOUAR — Yes, I do.

Mr BISHOP — And you are obviously responding to that as much as you can?

Mr SCOUAR — We are responding and in particular areas I would like to think from an industry basis we are leading.

Mr STONEY — You mentioned earlier in your comments that you were concentrating on passenger safety and the passenger cell — I think that is what you were talking about. When the committee visited Volvo it was told it had designed a Volvo that can withstand an impact with a 350-kilogram moose, and that is without a bullbar — they said bullbars would not be of much use in that situation because a moose would come across the top of the bonnet and at least a part of it would generally end up in the cabin. How do you think Ford compares at this stage in its development of passenger capsules and other things that assist in passengers being able to walk away from such an incident? How do you think Ford compares on a worldwide standard?

Mr SCOUAR — Pretty good.

Mr BRIDGENS — World class.

Mr STONEY — Pretty close?

Mr BRIDGENS — The locally designed Falcon and the Territory are world class now.

Mr STONEY — For major impacts with camels, horses, or other animals in the outback, or whatever?

Mr SCOUAR — Yes. We think the structure and the design integrity of the Falcon and Territory passenger cells are world class. We have put a lot of work into them. Our own team has done an enormous amount of work, because they are Australian designed and engineered vehicles. We have also been lucky in being very much part of a
global organisation and company, so that when necessary we have been able to work with other affiliates of the Ford organisation, including Volvo.

Mr MULDER — What is happening with Ford in Australia in relation to black box technology? When the committee was overseas it had several discussions in relation to black box technology in Volvos, so that if a vehicle is involved in an accident a team goes out to recover the black box and that provides a whole host of information about what happened at the crash site, what the vehicle was doing, how it was being driven, and so forth. Do you think we are heading down that path in Australia?

Mr BRIDGENS — Some companies are already doing that. But issues are being raised in terms of privacy. That is the difficult issue with that one: how the customers would react if they knew all this data would or could be used against them. That issues still needs to be grappled with.

Mr MULDER — Is Ford moving in that pathway? Is any work being done in relation to that?

Mr BRIDGENS — Not in Australia but in the United States of America.

The CHAIR — From driving on Melbourne roads, as I do on a regular basis, there is still a problem with the blind spot over the right shoulder, when trying to come out into the next lane to overtake a vehicle. Are you aware of any work being done to resolve the issue of the blind spot over the right shoulder?

Mr SCOULAR — Personally I do not find it to be a significant issue. I think I know what you are talking about and I think it really demonstrates the importance, if you like, of making sure when you hop into car that your driving position and the position of the drivers mirror is calibrated totally to your needs.

Mr STONEY — Even with that there is just a split-second where when you look behind you cannot see the car and you cannot see it in your mirror, but it is just in between. It is really part of the design, I think. The mirrors need to be redesigned so that they are a little bit wider and a bit more encompassing or something. There just seems to be an issue there even with the most modern cars that in certain circumstances there is a blind spot, just as the Chair was saying.

The CHAIR — The reason I raise it now is that when there the committee was in Europe visiting one of the motor car companies — I cannot think which one it was — was still doing ongoing work to resolve that issue. I know from my own experience that there is definitely a blind spot over my right shoulder in the Ford Fairmont.

Mr SCOULAR — I am happy to talk to our engineers and ascertain whether we are doing anything in particular.

Mr BRIDGENS — Up until recently the Australian regulation required a flat mirror on the driver’s side. The regulation was recently amended to allow convex mirrors. Most of the vehicles in Europe have convex or aspheric mirrors, which give a much wider field of view.

Mr STONEY — I notice that trucks have the two: the little one that looks downwards and the big one which gives the full view; and often drivers pulling caravans have the same type of thing. I think it is an issue that perhaps we have not looked at properly yet.

Mr SCOULAR — Sure.

Mr LANGDON — Following from that, are you expecting later models of the Ford to have the convex mirrors?
Mr BRIDGENS — No. It is still the subject of some debate because within Australia there are still a lot of people who do not like the idea of convex mirrors. It is common for them to be convex on the passenger side and flat on the drivers side. There is still a fairly strong feeling that they like their flat mirror on the drivers side, but the penalty you pay for that is that you have a limited field of view.

The CHAIR — Thank you, gentlemen. The committee appreciates you time and input into its inquiry on behalf of the Ford company. As I said, your comments have been reported by Hansard, and we will provide a copy of the transcript to Ford in due course. Once again, thank you very much.

Witnesses withdrew.
CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Crashes Involving Roadside Objects

Melbourne — 21 October 2004

Members

Mr B. W. Bishop  Mr T. W. Mulder
Mr J. H. Eren  Mr E. G. Stoney
Mr A. R. Harkness  Mr I. D. Trezise
Mr C. A. C. Langdon

Chair: Mr I. D. Trezise
Deputy Chair: Mr E. G. Stoney

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms A. Douglas
Research Officers: Mr G. Both and Mr P. Nelson

Witness

Mr N. Gray, National Vice-President and Public Liaison Coordinator, Ulysses Motorcycle Club.

Necessary corrections to be notified to executive officer of committee
The CHAIR — I welcome Mr Neville Gray, the national vice-president of the Ulysses Motorcycle Club. I know that your club’s motto is ‘Grow old disgracefully’ — I will not comment any further on that! As you may have heard earlier, the committee is working under parliamentary privilege, so what you say this morning cannot be used against you legally into the future. As I said also, the proceedings are being reported by Hansard and we will provide you with a copy of the transcript in due course. I am aware also aware that you have come way over to Melbourne from Adelaide, so we thank you for the time and effort you have put in to making a presentation to our committee this morning. I invite you make your introductory remarks.

Mr GRAY — I am here to represent 6000 Victorian members of the Ulysses Motorcycle Group that we have here. I had prepared a submission, but seeing that I did not quite realise the level of informality of this hearing I will throw that in the bin. I start off by saying that the previous witnesses from the Ford Motor Company probably hit it on the head: motorcyclists have special needs. We heard about crumple zones, the upmarket seatbelts and all the wonderful devices that cars have, so that when you go spearing off the road — and the subject of this inquiry is hitting roadside objects — your primary safety is in the hands of the vehicle manufacturers. As a motorcyclist you do not have those privileges or advantages. Our lives are virtually in the hands of God when we go spearing off the road. It is virtually a matter of luck if we get off with a scratch or are fatally injured when we do impact roadside objects. I guess I will leave it at that. I reiterate that we do have special needs. They are listed in my submission in detail. I am happy to answer questions.

The CHAIR — If you want to for the purposes of Hansard, the committee is quite happy for you to go through that submission, and members can ask questions as you go along.

Mr GRAY — I have my statement here, which is virtually a précis of my submission that gets down to the important details. The fatality rate for drivers of motor vehicles has dropped dramatically in the past few decades. The advent of airbags, crumple zones and safer cars in general has seen to this. However, the fatality rate for motorcyclists has not really changed in the past 30 years.

Motorcyclists have special needs, as they do not enjoy the safety advantages of other vehicle owners. A motorcyclist who crashes needs an element of luck as to whether he or she survives with minor injuries, major injuries or is fatally injured. The ‘space’ in which the motorcycle rider experiences a crash is the wider road environment. This space has not enjoyed the same degree of engineering attention as the passenger vehicle has over the past 30 years. There have not been commensurate improvements in the road environment to the benefit of motorcyclists. Road design, maintenance and road furniture that ignore the special needs of motorcyclists create serious hazards and traps for them.

Motorcycles are more likely to be involved in single-vehicle crashes than cars. Approximately 42 per cent of Victorian fatal motorcycle crashes are run-off type accidents with many vehicles hitting roadside objects. These crashes can be primary, where the motorcyclist simply loses control and leaves the payment at a tangent to the original direction of travel; or they can be secondary crashes, where the motorcycle is involved in a collision with another vehicle and as a result is forced off the pavement.

These types of crashes can be caused by a motorcycle losing traction because of gravel, diesel spills, slippery road markings, or simply poorly maintained road surfaces in general. Motorcyclists may have been travelling too fast for the conditions or could have been involved in a collision with another vehicle and as a result have been forced off the pavement and into the roadside verge.
What is a major concern, and the subject of this submission, is the fact that the out-of-control motorcyclist is more than likely to hit a roadside object. The use of protective clothing when motorcycling is not sufficient to prevent injury when hitting the edge of a steel beam, signpost, tree or fence support. Motorcyclist protective clothing is useful to protect against minor injury, but is of little value in a severe impact. Impacts with trees, poles or crash barriers will more than likely result in severe and life-threatening injuries.

Wire rope barriers, when impacted by motorcyclists, in the majority of cases will result in the amputation of limbs and heads caused by the non-frangible, small-diameter posts that go to make up the construction of these barriers. It is recognised, however, that impacts with these barriers by cars and trucks will more than likely result in the errant vehicle being returned to the pavement with minimal damage to the vehicle and a very small chance of life-threatening injuries to the driver or passenger. Wire rope barriers are the most motorcycle unfriendly types of barrier, with W-beam barriers being a close second, and continuous concrete being the best so far as motorcyclists are concerned.

Crash barriers of the wire rope and W-beam kind are often used to protect fixed objects, but will produce a higher injury outcome for motorcyclists than hitting the actual fixed objects themselves. In motorcycle collisions with fixed objects the chances of injuries to the spine are trebled, while the chances of injuries to the thorax are doubled, and those to the head are increased by 50 per cent above the chances of similar injuries in motorcycle accidents in general.

The CHAIR — Can you tell the committee why concrete barriers are safer than other barriers?

Mr GRAY — When you impact any barrier the average angle of incidence is about 15 to 30 degrees. If you would like to look along a wire rope barrier you will probably see no gaps; you will see a continuous line of poles holding up the actual wires themselves. That is a major concern. It is similar with the W-beam barriers. When motorcyclists have crashes they usually skid across the road and they go in feet first or head first, so this is where they impact. With a concrete barrier there is a continuous smooth surface, so you do not have these limb-removing objects tearing at your body as you slide along the road. That is not possible with a concrete barrier. When I say continuous, I mean the ones that are continuously slip-formed in one big lot, not placed with gaps between them. That is of major concern to motorcyclists, and the concrete barriers have been proven.

I did add another submission entitled ‘Motorcycles and crash barriers’, which I hope all committee members have, which goes into that in a bit more detail. That also comes out in favour of continuously formed concrete barriers. I realise the concrete barriers are a bit more expensive to put in in the first place, but when you realise that if wire rope barriers are knocked down they are often inoperable for quite a while until they are fixed; and the cost of fixing them plus the original cost of putting them in is way above the cost of concrete barriers. The concrete barriers are there for 100 years virtually.

Mr LANGDON — What percentage of road users are motorcyclists?

Mr GRAY — About 2.5 per cent generally in Australia are motorcyclists. There are many, many more motorcycle licence-holders — about 1.25 million — in Australia.

Mr LANGDON — Which is what percentage?

Mr GRAY — Do you mean motorcycle licence-holders, or actual riders?

Mr LANGDON — Both — or the holders.
Mr GRAY — It is 1.25 million out of a population of roughly 20 million, so that is about 12 per cent. A lot of motorcycle licences are dormant for various reasons.

Mr BISHOP — On this subject, a number of the municipalities that the committee visited, particularly in the hill country, were concerned about the incidence of motorcycle accidents, and I suspect it was recreational riders, the age of whom we have noted has gone up substantially — I think the figures went up from 25 to 35 years of age, or something like that. So is it a lack of education in motorcyclists now as well as other issues that are coming into play? Are they well aware of the curves, the descents and the rises in those mountain roads, which are pretty attractive to ride on for a weekend?

Mr GRAY — I think you have hit it on the head. They are a very attractive place to ride. A motorcycle going around a curve is euphoric really. That is why a lot of motorcyclists love riding motorcycles: to go around curves. But often their training or their experience is not up to what their brain would like to do, if you know what I mean. So they are riding way beyond their ability. They often ride in groups, with various levels of competence within the group; the least competent person is trying to keep up with the most competent person, and there will be a failure.

Mr BISHOP — Does your organisation have a view on how that could be managed?

Mr GRAY — Yes, we actually put our money where our mouths are. Our club charges a $20-a-year membership fee, and when you join the Ulysses Club your are immediately entitled to the $60 rebate on advanced rider training, and you are entitled to a $60 rebate on approved first-aid training. So we do put our money where our mouths are. Mind you, not many people take up that offer because they think they have been there, they have done that and they do not need training. This is a message we have to get across to motorcyclists. It is a very hard one to push.

Mr BISHOP — That would be the next question: what is the take-up of the process you have put in place. Can you think up some inventive idea to increase the uptake?

Mr GRAY — Yes, make it compulsory by legislation. We are working on that in South Australia at the moment. I have just recently written the South Australian motorcycle safety strategy for the South Australian government, and one of the recommendations is exactly this: that older riders returning after a long lay period will have to go back to do the initial Rider Safe courses; and if you have been off for, say, five years and you are targeted you will be asked to do that before you are issued with an open licence again. It is a little bit controversial. We have to catch the right people, but it is in the pipeline in South Australia. I think South Australia is leading in that type of possible legislation at the moment, and I would love to see that all around Australia. There is a need for a national motorcycle safety strategy. I have my hand up at the moment to write it. I hope that will be one of the things that will be implemented in that.

Mr BISHOP — Does that differentiate in motorcycle size?

Mr GRAY — Not really, no. Motorcycle crash rates are really not dependent on engine size. The more experienced people have larger bikes, but they generally can travel faster and as a consequence have more serious injuries. The less experienced people have smaller bikes by legislation requirements, and being inexperienced they are subject to more crashes than other peer groups as well, so we have those two different types of reasons. Overall it does not really matter what the size of the motorcycle is.

The CHAIR — With respect to the legislation you are talking about that is being introduced or that you are looking at in South Australia, are you aware of any other legislation internationally that reflects what you are talking about in South Australia?
Mr GRAY — When I say the over-40s, they are the baby boomers, and they are responsible for about half the number of riders on the road at the moment. That is why the Ulysses Club is booming; we actually get our members from this group. The older motorcyclists are a worldwide problem. Really, the only way to target them and to get them to do the training is to do it compulsorily, and that is a very hard thing to do. First we have to find out who they are, and they can make claims like, ‘I have had a motorcycle licence for 20 years; I have been riding bikes for 20 years’ when maybe that is not true, and yet it is very hard to prove that they have not been doing that. They may have had the motorcycle registered for 20 years and have not ridden it because it is something in the shed for conversational purposes, and we find that is happening a lot, too. So it is a bit of a problem to find out who these people are. The idea is to make enough reasons to implement its use that people will do it under their own volition and the legislation will not be needed, but we need both edges of our sword to be sharp for that.

Mr LANGDON — On the issue of the wire barriers, picking up on what you have said and I think I have heard it before, I have always assumed that the wire aspect was the most dangerous part; but you are saying it is those continual poles that are the worst aspect?

Mr GRAY — That is correct. As I said, when a motorcyclist hits the barriers he is usually sliding along the road after a previous impact or after losing traction, and the first thing you do is hit the road and you slide in feet first, head first or whatever; so hitting the wires is fairly rare unless you are still upright, and that is a rare occurrence as you will see in the paper I gave to you as part of my submission. So the posts are the biggest problem: they are non-frangible and they are fairly small in diameter, and those two parameters do cause trouble.

The CHAIR — Did you want to continue on through your submission then?

Mr GRAY — Sure. Probably the crux of the matter is what we can do about it. One of the best ways to help the motorcyclists’ cause is to implement the use of road safety audits, which is a formal examination of an existing or planned road done by an independent qualified examiner who reports on the crash potential of a particular section of pavement. In the motorcycle case, Austroads released some five years ago a publication *Traffic Engineering Practice Part 15 — Motorcycle Safety*. I can show you that publication. Has anyone actually seen that or been aware of it? That is great, I see a few nods around. It is one of those publications that collect dust on road engineers’ in-baskets, unfortunately; and one of the things we are doing at the moment with the federal government is to get that pushed out to all jurisdictions that design roads.

Unfortunately, at the moment it is a guide only, not yet a standard, and we are working on that. It contains all the relevant information needed to design road environments with motorcycle safety in mind. In conjunction with these road safety audits additional vital information can also be obtained from more detailed police crash data and accident forms that highlight areas of high motorcycle crash risk.

I would like now to briefly mention some specific examples of roadside objects that affect motorcycle safety, but, firstly, I would like to state that there is no way known to effectively soften the impact of roadside furniture or objects. Step-up barrier kerbing is bad for motorcyclists. Semi-mountable kerbing should be used, as lips or kerbs can snag a motorcycle foot peg and create instability when ridden over. Tree planting and landscape use should be carefully done to avoid unnecessary hazards to all roads users. A tree which may be frangible to a 1000 kilogram car may act as a rigid barrier to motorcyclists.

The placement of poles should be avoided on right-hand sides of kerbs. Pedestrian refuges, especially those located in the median strip, are a particular hazard to
motorcyclists. I still do not know why pedestrian refuges are actually used. Signs should be kept clear of traffic lanes, especially on the inside of kerbs, because sight lines are an important aid in the observation of motorcyclists by drivers of other vehicles. There is no existing type of sign which is frangible when hit by a motorcycle yet is strong enough to support a sign under normal conditions.

Guide posts must be frangible or flexible. Material must not be brittle as it can spear a motorcyclist. Crash barriers in particular are an emotive issue for motorcyclists. They are seen as hazards in their own right, but are sometimes necessary in potentially dangerous locations. Crash barriers should only be used where the likely damage of injury from hitting the barrier is less than that of hitting the hazard it shields. Selection and placement of crash barrier types requires considerable new thought. All barriers must comply with Australian Standard 3845, and I am a member of the committee that deals with that. It is noticeable that many barrier installations in Victoria do not comply with this standard. My written submission to this inquiry goes into further detail on the types of crash barriers that are more motorcycle friendly — we touched on that earlier.

In conclusion, there are three main needs that have to be addressed in order to reduce the incidence of motorcycle impacts with roadside objects. Firstly, there is the need to avoid collisions with roadside objects in the first place. Examples of the way we can fix that is to question the need for a roadside device in the first place; to provide adequate clearance from the carriageway to posts and poles; to provide a clear zone between the carriageway and roadside barriers. Secondly, we need to ensure that riders who have fallen from a motorcycle survive after the crash has occurred and that the risk of injury is minimised — for example, minimise the number of poles and posts; relocate poles away from exposed areas; use semi-mountable kerbing; do not install barriers unless the hazard being shielded is greater than the barrier itself; select and locate posts or rails according to the guidelines; do not use posts or rails which have sharp edges, protrusions or parts that can trap a motorcyclist. Thirdly, there is a need to avoid collisions with other road users. Examples of how that can be done is to provide adequate sight distances with clear sight lines and restrict on-street parking where it interferes with sight lines.

In conclusion, I strongly recommend that all roadside verges be subject to roadside safety audits with particular attention to roadside furniture and objects. Auditors need to be specifically trained in motorcycle awareness issues and be fully conversant with the contents of Austroads Part 15. This audit should be repeated at least every two years or when changes to the road environment are made. It is also highly recommend that all roadside barriers in Victoria be subject to an audit for compliance with Australian Standard 3845 on ‘Roadside Safety Barrier Systems’. That is the end of my formal submission.

Mr STONEY — Neville, I think it would be fair to say that motorcyclists generally do not attract a high degree of support from the average motorist, mainly because of the attitude of motorcyclists, and I suspect they are individuals or the older disgraceful ones rather than members of a club. I think the way some motorcyclists drive disgracefully — I suspect it is an attitude thing, and they are younger — is of some concern to most drivers. Probably every driver in this room has had a bit of a scare from a motorcyclist appearing from somewhere and coming up beside them or weaving through traffic lights when it really was not safe to do so.

Have you a suggestion on how we might improve the attitude of the average motorcyclist? I do not believe I am talking about those who join clubs, because if you join a club I think you tend to be a bit responsible and understand these matters and take it seriously.

Mr GRAY — Yes. We are very proud of our accident record. We very rarely have a fatality, and on any given weekend there are probably about 10 000 Ulyssesans running around Australia on their motorcycles enjoying each other’s company — we are
a social club. The Ulysses Club has very specific rules. We have a rides leader, we have a tail-end Charlie. We ride within a front point and an end point. We know where the destination is. We have regular stops — we combat fatigue by doing that. But the lone motorcyclist is of great concern to us. How do you change attitudes? Governments have been trying to change attitudes for hundreds of years, and if someone comes up with that magic formula I would like to know what it is. Attitude changing is probably the hardest thing to do. Unfortunately probably experience is the only way to change attitudes, but by the time you have had a nasty motorcycle crash and that experience has been put into your brain it is mainly too late. So we do have this problem with lone motorcyclists.

I guess if they do crash, what will happen to them will not be good. The average motorcycle you pay $18 000 for has a superior performance to any Ferrari or Porsche that you can buy for $500 000, and I think that is sometimes what attracts the wrong people to motorcycling — it is the speed and the power. But again, experience is the only way they can actually learn, and it is usually a bad experience. Those sorts of people are not here for very long. Anyone who is joining the Ulysses Club and is 40 years of age has done the right thing.

I have been riding for 40 years and have not had an accident that I have been hospitalised for, and maybe that is luck, I do not know; I would like to think it is experience and skill. We could have a debate on that. The errant motorcyclist, the one who roars past at an ungodly speed and scares the hell out of everybody with a loud exhaust, is of great concern because that is what the public can see all motorcyclists to be; and we — the rest of the law abiding citizens — have to wear that.

We come down very heavily on our own riders who have loud pipes, who are unconventional and are speeding. I usually get up behind them and say, ‘Hey, cut it out mate. You are not doing much for the rest of us’, and they get very indignant and that is the end of the conversation before I get punched out, unfortunately. But that is the only thing we can do. It is a very hard question to answer.

Mr STONEY — Thank you for your frankness.

The CHAIR — Neville, you seem to have specific rules with regard to riding long distances and fatigue. Would you like to expand on that?

Mr GRAY — Yes. Probably one of the many advantages that motorcycles have is that they generally go for about 250 kilometres on a full tank, they generally have 15 or 17 litre tanks and most motorcycles get about 18 to 20 kilometres to the litre; so that limits them to about 200 or 250 kilometres or 2 hours to 2½ hours riding, which is probably the time you should be stopping. I advocate that all road users stop at the end of 2 hours or after 250 or 200 kilometres, whichever is the first. So in that aspect fatigue is not a problem. But when we are out in the open when it is hot, we boil; when it is freezing cold we also have problems. We are out in open conditions and that is very fatiguing. The wind noise inside our helmets is about 110 decibels, which if you were in an industrial situation would be highly illegal and something would be done about it, so noise alone is very fatiguing.

It tends to be self-regulatory. When we feel like pulling over, we do; but one of the problems is that the roadside stops all around Australia are not very motorcycle friendly. You do not have trees, you do not have an environment to entice you in off the road, and that is something we are also advocating — more stops that will entice you in such as shade, water, that sort of stuff. So motorcycle fatigue is a problem, but we do have advantages over the other road users as well as disadvantages.

Mr BISHOP — The issue of fatigue has interested us substantially. We are all trying to wrestle with it, whether it is caused by sleepiness or impairment or whatever the
correct issue is. How do you see it and how do you see that it can be managed? If you are pulled up on your bike I suspect when you get off it you are not fatigued.

Mr GRAY — No. Fatigue is a silent killer, it really is. I am doing a lot of work on that at the moment. I do a publication that goes into our magazine, and my last one was on fatigue. We have different problems. In the Ulysses Club motorcyclists tend to travel in groups — 10, 20, maybe 30 of us. We do long distances because we can, because we have the time and money and we like travelling long distances. The over-40s travel far greater distances than the under-40s. We have the problem of differentiation of levels within groups of riders. Some people may be fatigued after an hour. I have a fairly big BMW, which has a range of 550 kilometres and has full faring, it has radio, CD — everything, which makes my life easier. I get very little wind noise. It is very hard to abide by my own guidelines and to stop every 200 kilometres. It depends on the bike you are riding.

One of the good things is that New South Wales has its learner approved motorcycle scheme (LAMS), and it is about to be trialled in South Australia and Tasmania. That is very good for fatigue, and I will just elaborate. LAMS enables a novice ride to ride a bike — and I will refer to New South Wales because it is already in action — up to 660 cc as long as it has a power-to-weight ratio of 150-kilowatts per tonne or less. So you can get larger motorcycles like BMW 650s and larger Yamahas and things which can conform to this power-to-weight ratio which rev-less, which carry luggage, which are much easier to ride — they are not buzz bombs — and they are much less fatiguing.

That is a step in the right direction for fatigue problems with motorcyclists. New South Wales has just finished a two-year trial with no known increase of fatality rates among novice riders, South Australia is about to trial it, and I hear that Tasmania is about to implement it. That is one way we can look at fatigue for novice motorcyclists, because they are the ones who think they are invincible, and they are not.

The older ones are supposed to know better, but they probably do not either. There is a good bit of bravado involved in riding a motorcycle — ‘Oh, I just rode 1200 kilometres yesterday, and I win the bragging rights at the pub’ — sort of thing. I wince every time I hear that, but it is something else we have to confront. Fatigue is a huge issue; it really is the silent killer.

Mr STONEY — Could you expand a bit on that? You were saying that the wind noise inside the helmet is sometimes 110 decibels, but that with your own it is quiet and you can listen to a CD. Would you explain why some are more noisy and some are not, and is there anything that can be done in design to improve that, because it does lead to fatigue?

Mr GRAY — Yes. It is quite easy to fix. Helmets are designed with safety in mind, and I think wind noise is very much an after thought. It is something the manufacturers deal with, but with motorcycle safety protecting the brain is the main reason you wear a helmet. What was the first part of the question?

Mr STONEY — I am just intrigued that in some helmets you get 110 decibels and you were saying that with your own it is quiet and you can listen to music.

Mr GRAY — It is all to do with farings. We have what we call naked bikes that do not have farings, and my BMW has a full faring, which goes up above my head.

Mr STONEY — Can you explain that as well? What is a faring?

Mr GRAY — A faring is actually a monocoque chassis that surrounds the motorcyclist up to the front of the legs and which usually incorporates a windscreen. My BMW has a windscreen which goes up and down, so in the city I can put it down and get the benefit of fresh air over my face or in the country I can put it up and it actually goes
above my helmet so the airflow goes over my head and I do not hear this noise. You are in a cocoon of — well, it is not silence, but it is way below 110 decibels so you can enjoy all your CDs and stuff.

Mr STONEY — It is to do with the design of the motorbikes, not the design of the helmet, is it?

Mr GRAY — Yes, pretty well. It is a combination of both, I think. The more expensive helmets — they can go up to $1200 — the quieter they are, but they all conform to Australian Standard 1698 which is the rigidity and protection of the brain. Noise is not part of the Australian Standard. Maybe it should be.

Mr STONEY — Is that something the committee could look at?

Mr GRAY — Certainly, the committee on Australian Standard 1698, motorcycle helmets is, I think, sitting at the moment; so yes, a submission to it on noise. I may be corrected here, but I do not think noise levels is a requirement for helmet design at the moment.

Mr STONEY — And you are saying it should be because of fatigue?

Mr GRAY — I think so. The quieter the helmet, the less fatiguing the helmet will be.

Mr LANGDON — You mentioned earlier that a very low percentage of road users were motorcyclists, but you also mentioned there were many dormant cyclists. How often do these get back on to a bike after not having ridden for, say, 10, 5 or even 2 years ago, and think they can ride exactly the same way as they did then? Is that part of the problem?

Mr GRAY — That is of major concern, and that was the reason for my previous statement that we are trying to capture these guys before they go out on the road so we can tell them, ‘Hey, things have changed over the last 10 to 15 years. You need to go into retraining’. It really is a major concern.

Mr LANGDON — Of the fatalities, has any study been done of whether they are those dormant riders who are being injured more than anybody else?

Mr GRAY — Yes. No study that I can actually put my finger on at the moment, but that is the fact — that is, that after you go out after a period of dormancy you are high risk at first, and I think insurance companies will certainly back that up with data. You are at high risk until you get that experience level back again.

Mr HARKNESS — I assume that whether you ride the bike or it is just sitting in the shed, you need to pay your annual registration fees and whatnot. I do not know whether VicRoads or the road authority there in South Australia send out educational or other material when the registration renewals come forward. Is that a way of getting a message to those folk, because I am not sure otherwise how you target them?

Mr GRAY — It is about to happen. I heard last night. I am about to go to the Geelong Road safety forum, which is this Saturday. Our chairman is going to give the opening address.

We have just been talking about that. In speaking to one of the organisers last night and confirming my attendance he said that some wonderful things are about to happen here. I think it is the TAC or VicRoads — I am not quite sure; I think it is the TAC — are about to issue a brochure which will be going out to all registration renewals, so I would love to see that. That is a wonderful way of promoting and jerking people into reality.

Mr HARKNESS — What sort of information would go into that?
Mr GRAY — I have not seen the brochure, but I would say it would be imploring motorcyclists to, ‘Go to advanced rider safety training and do some extra training, please. Protect yourself! Put on the extra barrier of knowledge obtained from these rider training courses’.

Mr HARKNESS — I guess in any part of our society there is always going to be that small percentage of people who do not want to listen and will not listen, and you will never be able to do anything about that. But I guess it is targeting those people who might just be ignorant of the facts.

Mr GRAY — If you can target 90 per cent of the people, you are doing well there. There is going to be 10 per cent who do not want to listen, and what do you do with them? Do you ignore them or spend 90 per cent of your resources trying to target 10 per cent? I do not think so.

Mr MULDER — The additional $50 insurance charge that was levied on motorcyclists, have you any idea of any discussion with government as to where you believe that money has gone to, where it has been directed to?

Mr GRAY — I was part of the initial discussion with the TAC. I came over to Melbourne several times and talked to the TAC about the thing. It was a done deal. The Victorian Motorcycle Advisory Council (VMAC) was not informed. I have no idea where that money has gone. We are about to hear about that on Saturday as part of the agenda for the Geelong motorcycle safety forum. I would love to hear where it is going. Maybe this new brochure that is going out for insurance and licence renewals is part of that system. I hope it is, and I think that it is. But no, I cannot answer that question specifically.

The CHAIR — Does Ulysses have a position on bullbars on cars?

Mr GRAY — Yes, they certainly do. They cause a lot of damage to motorcyclists and especially to pedestrians. We would love to see them banned completely. If they are not banned completely, we would love to see a more motorcycle friendly and pedestrian friendly type of moulded plastic rounded-curve type of thing. I think Ford are actually into that. Their bullbar is quite aesthetic; it looks quite good. You do not even know it is a bullbar until you look at it closely and see the extra line of bars on top. But things like fishing racks you see on front of bullbars; they are horrendous. You just look at them and go, ‘Oh! No way!’ Yes, they are bad news.

Why bullbars are used in the metropolitan area, I do not know. I can see a use for them in the country, and I think the federal government is working on this at the moment to come up with some kind of legislation on bullbars and the need for them in the country, but there is no need for them in the city, which is probably where the majority of motorcycle accidents happen.

Mr HARKNESS — Do you think there is sufficient enforcement of motorcycles? I know up in the Yarra Ranges somebody from the council was telling us about the police initiative with plain clothes motorcycle police. When we look at road safety we are looking at enforcement, education and engineering. I am wondering about your comments on enforcement.

Mr GRAY — When I first heard of the police bikes up at the Yarra Ranges I thought, ‘What a wonderful idea’, and so do the South Australian police. They have a couple of their own. But, okay, they are out for enforcement, but they are also out for education, and they usually pull over an errant motorcyclist and say, ‘Hey, you crossed the double line 17 times back there. I have got it on video evidence here’. They have cameras on their bikes.
The South Australian police have the attitude that they are reminding people not to go over the double lines, that it is on offence and they say, ‘You have just done it’. Probably the second time round they will book them, but it is much more an education-type thing. I think it is a wonderful idea — plain clothes police, cars, bikes, whatever. We are not different. We do things wrong and we should be pulled up.

**The CHAIR** — When we were overseas we came to realise that there was some research being done on airbags fitted to motorbikes. Are you aware of any of that research?

**Mr GRAY** — I am, yes. There is a jacket available in Australia. It is about $1000 and it self-inflates when an umbilical cord is pulled out of a central location. It is very expensive. I do not know if it works or not, and I would not want to be wearing one to find out if it works or not. Airbags in general have been around for quite a while, but their worth is subject to conjecture. I do not know if they would work or not. There are a lot of accidents in which you would love to have an airbag, and a lot for which you would not. Probably in most motorcycle accidents the need to get away from the motorcycle is probably of paramount importance. You do not want that following you into a crash barrier or some other vehicle. You have a double problem of hitting a vehicle and have the motorcycle, which weighs 250 kilograms, and sharp edges and things hitting you as well, so an airbag will not protect you from that. But I do not have an opinion on airbags. I cannot see how they would be an advantage.

**The CHAIR** — Are there any other safety devices that are being developed?

**Mr GRAY** — Yes, ABS brakes are a great advance for motorcyclists, and a lot of more expensive bikes now are coming out with ABS brakes as standard on both wheels. They are a fantastic invention. I have them on my BMW, and I have used them several times when I have braked on a wet line or some crack sealant in wet weather, and I can feel the wheel sliding out from underneath me and the ABS brakes come in — patter, patter, patter — and I go back to the straight and narrow again.

They work brilliantly, but they are a fairly expensive add-on extra. I would love to see them on entry-level motorcycles as well. There was a rumour about four or five years ago where the Japanese were going to put ABS brakes on all bikes. I think due to the competitive nature that has not happened, but if would be lovely if that legislation came in where ABS was required on all motorcycles, especially entry-level motorcycles and the small ones as well.

Beside that there is not much else you can do to make a motorcycle more stable, unless you put three wheels on it. Trikes are very popular. Sidecars are coming back again, and they have a very good accident rate. Very rarely do you hear of a fatality involving a trike or a sidecar, because they do travel a bit slower. I suppose that is one of the mean reasons, and they are a little bit easier to see.

Probably just going back on the previous statement the Ford people were saying about mirrors, I was cringing in the background there — you probably saw me — —

**The CHAIR** — I did.

**Mr GRAY** — We have a problem; no-one sees us. And one of the biggest areas where we are not seen is travelling in the blind spot of a vehicle. We can tell our guys, ‘Do not travel in a blind spot’, but sometimes you just cannot help travelling in a blind spot. If you are travelling, you may not be aware of it, even though it is not advantageous, so convex mirrors are what we would like to see on all passenger vehicles on the driver’s side. That is something else that could help us immensely to stop people changing lanes and we as a result spearing off into the environment and suffering.
Mr MULDER — In relation to the growth in popularity of the smaller little scooters that are not registered, and also bikes that have those smaller motors attached to them, do you have a position on that or is there anything you would like to say?

Mr GRAY — In South Australia, and I think in Victoria too, you can ride a 50 cc automatic clutch scooter on a car licence. Am I correct in saying that is so in Victoria? It is in Western Australia and it is in South Australia. There has been some concern in South Australia in the last few weeks, actually — it was mentioned at the motorcycle task force, of which I am a member and which is the equivalent of VMAC — on whether the motorcycle task members have an opinion on the little 50 cc scooters requiring a full motorcycle licence.

There are several answers to that question. There is a whole industry in Australia which actually rents out these little 50 cc scooters to people who have car licences who would not be riding them if a motorcycle licence were required. That industry would disappear, so we have to look at that. The 50 cc scooters are a wonderful step-up to real motorcycling. Most people buy them and quickly get sick of their flat-out at 45 or 55 kilometres an hour, and they are quite dangerous on an open road, a 100-kilometre-an-hour road. So they quickly get rid of their scooters and become real motorcyclists. Not that I am saying that scooter riders are not real motorcyclists — I have to be careful there — but it is a wonderful way to enter the real world of motorcycling.

Mr MULDER — What about the ones that are smaller than that again? The motors are smaller and no licence is required.

Mr GRAY — That is a great concern, and it is a great concern in America at the moment. There is a flood of little motorcycles coming out of China at the moment which you can buy for $500. They are virtually motorised skateboards or mini-motorbikes. They are little ones that look like a motorbike, but they are shrunk down to about a tenth of the size, and you can ride them up to 65 or 75 kilometres an hour. It is of great concern. Unfortunately when they have a fatality they are classed as motorcyclists, which really worries us. It is going to become a problem and you blokes need to look at that. It is a big problem in America at the moment.

Mr BISHOP — I have one further question. You said people do not see you, and I think that is true, but the law in this state says that you have to have your headlight on when you ride a motorbike. Can you give us your views on that? Should cars have running lights as well?

Mr GRAY — Another emotive issue. I have always ridden with my lights on, even though I was not required to back 20 or 30 years ago. As a result I think that I was more visible. That is my personal opinion. Compulsory lights can be a bit of a worry. If you are coming out of the sun you are virtually invisible, but I think that is only in a minority of cases, so I do think that riding with your lights on makes you more visible. If cars were to have their compulsory lights on we would be lost in a sea of lights. We would lose our exclusiveness, and that worries me.

The CHAIR — Thank you for your time, Neville.

Mr GRAY — Thank you very much.

The CHAIR — We appreciate you coming across from Adelaide, and we appreciate your input into our inquiry. I will see you on Saturday morning.

Mr GRAY — I am looking forward to that.

The CHAIR — We will provide you with a copy of the transcript in due course.
Mr GRAY — Thank you very much.

Witness withdrew.
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll

Melbourne — 21 October 2004

Members

Mr B. W. Bishop               Mr T. W. Mulder
Mr J. H. Eren                  Mr E. G. Stoney
Mr A. R. Harkness             Mr I. D. Trezise
Mr C. A. C. Langdon

Chair: Mr I. D. Trezise
Deputy Chair: Mr E. G. Stoney

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms A. Douglas
Research Officers: Mr G. Both and Mr P. Nelson

Witnesses

Mr T. O’Donoghue, executive general manager; and
Mr A. Vaughan, business development manager,
Tenix Solutions.

Necessary corrections to be notified to
executive officer of committee
The CHAIR — I welcome Mr Terry O’Donoghue and Mr Tony Vaughan of Tenix Solutions to our inquiry. We appreciate your time and input into our inquiry. As you are aware, this is the parliamentary Road Safety Committee and we are conducting two concurrent inquiries at present: one involving the country road toll, and obviously the other is related and concerns clashes involving roadside objects. We are operating under parliamentary privilege, so what you say cannot be used against you legally in the future. We are taking a transcript and we will provide a copy of it to Tenix in due course. I will hand over to you for our presentation.

Mr O’DONOGHUE — Thank you, gentlemen, for the opportunity of meeting you and presenting some of our ideas in relation to your inquiry. My name is Terry O’Donoghue. I am the executive general manager of Tenix Solutions, my colleague Tony Vaughan is our business development manager. He has been fundamentally involved in some of the projects that I think may be relevant to your inquiry.

Overheads shown.

Mr O’DONOGHUE — I will take a few minutes of your time to explain who we are and why we have got involved in what we believe to be a very important community issue, being road safety. The Tenix Group, which you would be familiar with, has a long and I think proven track record of project skills and a culture of working with government, primarily through the Anzac ship project over at Williamstown, and some of the more hi-tech software solutions that have been developed in consort with the department of defence over many years, so our heritage and background is fundamentally into that high-level project arena.

Tenix Solutions came into being in 1997 when it responded to an invitation to tender for the end-to-end service provision of speed camera program and enforcement program in Victoria. We operate under the banner of Civic Compliance Victoria. Tenix’s name until recently has not been in the press relative to this program, and we value that. We believe that we are the engine room that supports this whole program.

Some of the things that we have done is lifted the prosecutability rate that used to exist under the regime when it was run fragmentally by the government. I will not go into the detail here; we are leaving you a copy of this. This is more for background information.

The next slide gives a bit more detail about some of the things that we did as part of that contract implementation.

The next page highlights some of the major contracts that we hold. You will note that we are doing work in New Zealand. We do work for the City of Wellington, which is not only involved in parking enforcement but also has responsibilities for enforcement in the road safety arena, such as bus lanes and pedestrian crossings et cetera. We are doing a lot of groundbreaking work overseas primarily around the whole Victorian road safety program. I have to say that one of the things that Victoria stands out for world wide is its recognition for what has been done over many years and through different governments. I really feel that the energy and the enthusiasm that has been created is something that should not be lost, because Victoria is regarded as and still is a world leader, but I also have to say that the world is catching up very quickly.

There are many things which Victoria continues to attempt to do, and if there is anything we can do to support that as a company we will, because at both a social justice and a commercial level there are things that Victoria is able to benefit from here.

How all of this came about I think is because Alex saw the presentation we did to the New South Wales RoadSafe committee, and they found out about what we were doing through some work we were doing with the Roads and Traffic Authority in New South Wales, and Alex mentioned that she thought this might be of interest to this committee. So we are happy to come here today and explain to you some of the aspects of some of
the technology we have begun to experiment with, test on the road and are currently in
the process of rolling out a pilot program relative to this road safety alert system in
Ireland. That has come about by virtue of the interest that Ireland and the Garda have
shown when they went on a worldwide search to find best practice of road safety. They
are trying to accelerate their whole program up to a point, to something very similar to
the Victorian model, but with some other applications. and this is one of them that may
be of interest.

I will pass to my colleague Tony who has been working in much more detail in relation
to the rollout and application of this road safety alert system, to give you an overview of
how it is operating and the environments within which it can work. We have focused
some of the information to the terms of reference which you have indicated are relative
to country road deaths, and the application that this might have.

Mr VAUGHAN — The Garda have been tracking carefully the Victorian
model of road safety and after about a 12-month delay they expect in about February or
March next year to go to open tender and introduce pretty much the same system as we
have here based in Melbourne, which is a full outsourcing of the traffic camera office
and the operation of the on-road technology by civilians under police supervision. They
have decided to adopt a more gentle approach to the introduction of the program by
introducing a system whereby in probably the first three to six months they will have
what they call a road safety alert system based on an early warning speeding system.
This system will be in-ground illumination lights linked to a camera. The camera may be
either in the ground or on a pole — it is site specific — and drivers who are moderately
speeding or drivers who are speeding excessively will have their car registration details
captured. That will then just drop into the same process as we have here in Melbourne
where the driver will be identified through the evidence management system, and instead
of sending out an infringement there will be a letter of warning. That letter of warning
then goes into their database and, if there are subsequent offences, the letter of warning
will convert to an infringement notice.

Mr MULDER — Is that a covert or an overt operation that they will be
running?

Mr O’DONOGHUE — It will be pretty along the same lines as — —

Mr MULDER — It will be overt.

Mr O’DONOGHUE — And covert, sorry. They are not going to do what New
South Wales has done and put highly visible, colourful painting on the speed cameras,
but they will do as Victoria does and warn drivers that they are likely to be detected by a
speed camera. They are talking about the mobile fleet system as well through vehicles.
In fact one of the things that they have sought further information about is the ‘no-flash
camera card’ that is being developed here in Victoria. The next stage was using the
camera in the ground as not only a road safety mechanism, which Tony will show you,
but also as a camera within which one which could be used for road management information.
So where you have high loads of vehicles at certain times of the day, you can do 24/7
counting; you can actually see that there are trucks and you can even weigh them in
motion. They are exploring all that in the pilot which we are involved in in Ireland. We
have just had some of our engineers over there having a look at the site. They are going
to make it quite public that they are doing all of this, and then warn everybody that if you
misbehave you can certainly expect a warning via a letter, as Tony has explained, and
that if you become a recidivist you can expect that at some point you will eventually be
enforced against. To answer your question, it is a combination. You would not go into
the complete covert model, but then the speed cameras are quite large and visible.
Mr STONEY — So the Garda must think they have a better effect on road safety if they issue a warning with an explanatory letter about speeding, rather than just sending a fine out straight off?

Mr O’DONOGHUE — I think that it is a combination of remembering that they virtually had no enforcement at all other than through the officer doing his normal patrols. They are making a huge quantum leap, and whilst the general community is very supportive of the need to do something to reduce the road toll and serious accidents, they also believe it needs to be introduced in a way for the community to embrace it. It is a necessary evil. Nobody likes it. Nobody likes getting a fine, but the fact of the matter is that you know that your behaviour, if you choose to speed, will result in the likelihood that you will be caught. They want to introduce a program where the community comes along with them and understands it. The community will never like it.

Mr HARKNESS — How many kilometres over the limit do you have to be to get the warning before it is excessive?

Mr O’DONOGHUE — They will set that standard. The technology allows you to do 0–20 kilometres, but in England the threshold speed on the motorways has been elevated to 30 per cent above the posted speed in some instances, primarily because the back office cannot cope with the amount of infringements generated.

Mr HARKNESS — I was just wondering with this particular example where the letter of warning has been issued, is it 15 or 20 kilometres over the limit — —

Mr O’DONOGHUE — They are not worthy of getting a warning. They have not yet set that, but they expect it to be very low, even 6 or 7 kilometres over the limit.

Mr HARKNESS — Then you get the fine? If someone is doing 50 kilometres over the limit, are you just going to send them a letter of warning?

Mr O’DONOGHUE — That will be at a police discretionary thing.

Mr HARKNESS — That is what I am asking.

Mr O’DONOGHUE — Sorry. I would have thought that if somebody was involved in an excessive speed detection like you have just described, that they would do something like that done by the Victoria Police, and that is make a special case of it. They do pursue them.

Mr MULDER — What do you intend to do — I know it is also an issue of government policy — as an organisation to get confidence back into the speed camera regime in Victoria? At the moment — I mean you say everyone else is watching Victoria and we did a great job up to a period of time, and we were — it is in absolute tatters, and part of that has been due to equipment breakdown, procedure failure — —

Mr O’DONOGHUE — I know what you are saying, but the cameras that are involved in the current problem we have nothing to do with.

Mr MULDER — The ones that were on City Link are your cameras.

Mr O’DONOGHUE — Yes, but if you read the documents you would see that they have a clean bill of health.

Mr MULDER — The state government survey (SGS) report showed the cameras being subjected to electric magnetic interference.

Mr O’DONOGHUE — Not outside of the tolerances.
Mr MULDER — I had a look at that document and it showed that there were about 300 over-readings, and 7 of those were prosecutable images.

Mr O’DONOGHUE — Seven in 4 million?

Mr MULDER — No, not 4 million.

Mr O’DONOGHUE — No, it was not.

Mr MULDER — Yes, it was. I am sorry, but that is what the document said.

Mr O’DONOGHUE — I suggest that you re-read it.

Mr MULDER — So you are saying that there was no images that got through that were prosecutable images?

Mr O’DONOGHUE — Within the tolerances that were required, they all operated within their specification. I am not denying that there were some variations, but there will be in every technology. The space shuttle fell off the launching pad in America. Nobody should ever say that you get 100 per cent technology-proof systems. You cannot. What you have are back-up systems that identify there is a change in behaviour. In the case of the cameras that really caused all of the problems here in Victoria, it was more to do with — entirely to do with — the in-ground sensor and piezo the way it was installed and the way it was monitored, managed or maintained.

That is what caused the problems out on those cameras. You will get variations, I agree, but in the CityLink tunnel some of the variations are not to do with that. You mentioned the interference. In the scheme of things we cannot find what actually interferes with changes in the speed reading, and to the extent that it would not be an enforceable image within the legislative requirements. We cannot find that.

Mr MULDER — The document I read said a number of those that were deemed to have been prosecutable images would have been withdrawn in the verification process.

Mr O’DONOGHUE — I am talking about in our system, yes. They would have. That is an example of one of the checks and balances — that is what I am actually saying — that in the system our verifiers would say, ‘This has moved within the tolerance regime. We would recommend to the police not to enforce, and that we should investigate what is happening’. In the CityLink tunnel you get a lot of emissions from diesels and trucks, and the camera lens gets affected by that. That is just one example.

Mr MULDER — Yet when I asked for copies of any that had been withdrawn for a period of 12 months prior to the system shut-down, they said that they were not aware of any ever being withdrawn due to a high reading.

Mr O’DONOGHUE — I am getting into an area which is government data. We are the custodians of that data. It is their call what they release. I am happy to go through with you the engineering applications and the way we go about monitoring and managing our equipment, but the cameras that have led to this debacle in Victoria are cameras that were purchased directly by the government but not through us.

Mr VAUGHAN — In our experience in dealing with the Garda, we came across a UK company called Astucia (UK) Pty Ltd which provided the in-ground illumination systems, and the Astucia system had gone through a pretty intensive test from best of breed similar equipment in a project in the Netherlands and had come away with the best solution of its type. We thought by using their inroad illumination system and, instead of linking it to a camera, we could link it to a variable message sign, an electronic, immediate awareness for a driver sign, we might be onto something which could play a targeted role in our program back in Melbourne. The enhanced scope is
linking to technologies that are known, but not normally matched up in such a way that by linking the in-ground lights in a line of sight directly to a instant message, a specific location, you could make a difference to driver behaviour at that site.

The immediate applications that we looked at were from moving traffic hazards such as lane delineation. We are working with Havant, an Auckland company at the moment, to look at using these in-ground lights to change the traffic tidal flow from a peak in the morning to a peak in the afternoon, whereby instead of little men running out with witches hats and on trucks, realigning the lanes morning and afternoon, it could actually be done electronically with these in-ground lights. By using the Victorian infringement management system (VIMS) we think there is an immediate application for school and pedestrian crossings, and just referring back to the terms of reference of this particular committee, all of those applications in a rural and regional setting, we believe, are immediately applicable. The other advantage of this system is that if necessary it can be solar-powered, so you can even put it in the remotest of places, and again a lot more cost effectively than traditional systems which I will come back to later in the presentation.

Mr MULDER — I am interested in those because of the Cressy-Ballarat intersection just out from where I live.

Mr VAUGHAN — I have a picture of that.

Mr MULDER — When they went in they were fantastic, but over a period of time a number of those lights no longer worked. Is there a maintenance issue with those or how are they powered?

Mr VAUGHAN — They are solar, and if they have stopped working, it should be the responsibility of the provider to replace them.

Mr O’DONOGHUE — Had they actually stopped working, or had they been interfered with and/or an attempt made to remove them?

Mr MULDER — I do not know, but I noticed that when they were first put in they were absolutely fantastic, but over a period of time the lights have gone out.

Mr O’DONOGHUE — I remember the first rollout of those which were just a pure illumination there at Narbethong, and I am not kidding, within a week, virtually all of them had gone. What has happened was that the locals, particularly the truck drivers had gone into the road surface and jemmied them out. The police knew where they were, because when they went to check the truck at the local hotel on the Friday night all the new studs were along the side of the truck tray, so what Astucia did based on the feedback they were getting from Australia and from us was to re-engineer the construction so that when it went into the road surface it had a star picket in it and some of the work Tony and the engineers have been doing is to turn them as near as possible into being indestructible.

Just going on your point about reliability, that project the Netherlands government endorsed included Phillips, Siemens — about five ‘stud’ manufacturers invited to roll them out over the road. We went and had a look at it about two years ago, and the only stud that was actually still working and that you could see was the Astucia one. I would have to say that in any situation which we get involved in and given the experiences which you referred to earlier, the service, maintenance and robustness of the technology is paramount to us. We are not going to touch anything that is second rate.

Mr VAUGHAN — Just going back to the niche that we see that this might address, we want to lift driver alertness at dedicated, specific high-risk locations and to make a link between safe roads and hazard-awareness for all drivers, and to perhaps introduce a new advisory tool as opposed to a greater level of enforcement to assist improved driver behaviour, and to perhaps target and manage recognised black spots.
We think the road safety alert system links those two technologies pretty innovatively to the extent that we have patented the idea. We think in an historical context we will offer a better opportunity for the state to bring the community into the road safety program, again through advisory rather than enforcement. It applies a key principle of adult learning, that adults learn better when they can touch and feel and see things that are moving, rather than sitting like I am at the moment. Repetitive interactive messages in hazardous environments creates what we call a halo effect: that if you are in the country, for instance, and have a rail crossing that has a road safety alert system where the lights flash and the sign indicates ‘Rail crossing: danger’ and a driver goes through that day after day, when the driver travels in other parts of regional Victoria and approaches a similar hazard, then the reaction should be pretty much the same; it will link the two — that there is a link between hazard awareness and safe driving.

The benefits that we see coming out of it are an improvement in driver behaviour and high-risk locations through voluntary compliance rather than enforcement, reduced road trauma risk at those sites and a creation — I pinched this from a Garda document — of a fair play between the authorities and the driving community, and a significantly less expensive hazard-awareness system. For example, a signalised pedestrian crossing with the little man, the sounds and the red and green, is about $250 000 to install. One of these systems at a pedestrian crossing is about one tenth of that price. It is somewhere between $25 000 and $30 000 depending upon the availability of the local infrastructure.

I thought it a good idea to put in here where we would be fitting in the Victorian model. I have not included the evaluation in there because I do not think it is relevant to this, but we have targeted engineering supported by mass media education for the TAC support. Other education such as the sponsorship of sporting teams and roadside signs, tired driving and power napping — that type of thing. This is an immediate hazard awareness which is really targeted at that driver at that location at that moment, rather than the generic approach that the other education relies on, again sitting under the enforcement and capture.

If I could give you some examples. Those flashing lights in the road can be placed in the centre of the road and strobed towards the driver and flashed simultaneously with the variable message sign, or they can be placed on the verge of the roadway depending upon VicRoads standards. All drivers approaching that crossing receive that warning every day at all time. It can be activated such as at Winchelsea by the lollypop lady. She presses the button and that system is activated, not only towards the driver but also across the front of the crossing, on both approaches. We think that if a driver is in that environment with that system operating with children, teachers, staff and parents around, their behaviour will be pretty much compliant.

Mr BISHOP — A technical question: is that more easily seen than the one on the pole?

Mr VAUGHAN — We believe so, yes, because you actually target each of the studs directly at where the drivers’ eyes will be.

Mr O’DONOGHUE — It is effectively strobing at you. So even if you were not paying attention, it would attract enough attention to get your mind focused on the fact that something is going on.

Mr VAUGHAN — On the children’s crossings especially the strobe is designed to come towards the driver, so he thinks he is going quicker than he is and he slows down. That is the Winchelsea site.

Mr MULDER — I went through that Winchelsea site the other day with a school crossing operating. The driver in the front vehicle — a truck — could see it absolutely, but everyone who was following directly behind could not see it at all.
Mr VAUGHAN — Yes. The weakness there is that it does not have an associated variable message sign, which we think would improve it.

Mr LANGDON — How many places have these? Is Winchelsea just a trial?

Mr VAUGHAN — It is just on trial, yes. This is a similar trial site in Baltimore in the USA. That is a little different, because that is activated by the pedestrian when he first steps onto the white line at each side of the roadway by a $2000 radar detector, which drops an electronic footprint on that particular piece of pavement. As soon as you step onto the road, those lights commence to flash.

The CHAIR — Are there other weaknesses? With the Winchelsea trial, those lights have been there for quite a while, have they not?

Mr VAUGHAN — I do not know the answer to that.

Mr O'DONOGHUE — Are there other weaknesses? The way that this is configured is very — rudimentary is probably the right way to describe it. The experience we have gained by trialling this and working with the UK company is that it needs to be alerting the drivers long before they actually get to the sensitive spot. The strobing lights act as illumination in any case — or they can — so at night they can delineate the width of the road or the centre of the road. By the way, one of the attributes of these studs is that they will operate in virtually every weather condition, including under snow.

Mr VAUGHAN — This is an in-road solar-powered system that runs for about 54 kilometres between the cities of Durban and Johannesburg. It is pretty much a Melbourne–Sydney situation. In the previous 12 months on that stretch of road there had been 28 fatalities, and in the 12 months after installation there were not any. So their impact was quite significant.

Mr O'DONOGHUE — It is worth noting that the driver behaviour over there is quite unique. I am sure you are familiar with that. But the outcome was what they were really after.

Mr MULDER — Are you considering using these systems in conjunction with the reflective white strips that are used on airstrips? A company has been in to see us and identified a few sections of road — that one around Docklands where all the vehicles come together — where in wet weather you cannot see any of the white lines on the road. They are very dangerous and quite difficult to get through. Has their use been considered?

Mr O'DONOGHUE — They have. In fact that company markets to airports around the world.

Mr VAUGHAN — That company has just sold half a dozen sets of about 20 that are being placed in a circle at Sydney and Melbourne airports, because at night the tug cannot quite locate the front of the aircraft, and it is a bit risky to back into a jumbo. They have placed these in a circle with a centre light, so that when the tug gets into the middle of that circle, it knows it is in the exact position to link.

Mr O'DONOGHUE — Those applications are more modest in terms of size and volume, but they are also looking at marine applications with the studs. You get a lot of drivers who back down launching ramps and get off to one side or the other. The studs can go down the launching ramp, and in any weather conditions, including rough weather and at night, the illumination is right the way through, so the person reversing the vehicle can see where they are. Again it is not the primary advantage of the studs, but there are other applications like that.
Mr VAUGHAN — I thought this would be another useful example — at the West Gate Freeway–City Link interchange where you get off the West Gate and do that big left-hand loop up onto the Bolte Bridge, Transurban has had a lot of problems with semitrailers going into that bend too quickly and overturning. They are losing about one a month there. They came to see us about this system, and we said that we are still going through the early trials, but we think there is a solution there. They have decided to go to static signs initially, but if that does not work they are going to come back to us.

The aim is to get the drivers to voluntarily slow down before the sharp bend. The method is to encourage sustainable change through interactive repetition. Again we come back to that fair play attitude between City Link and its clients. The design of it will be the standard blue-on-white warning sign that there is a road safety alert system in operation. There are a number of options for City Link to consider. Just below where you go off to the left and where you climb back over the entrance road, we are probably going to try this new speed measurement device with a twin laser system which arrived in Melbourne just two weeks ago through a local company Transol Corporation. We think we can get speed accuracy down to well under 1 percent, which will be totally reliable, by using a pair of twin lasers.

Mr O’DONOGHUE — Picking up Mr Mulder’s point from earlier about the accuracy et cetera, my response is that it is to do with the piezo in the road and the way it is installed and maintained. We are really encouraging the government to have a serious look at this technology, because it does not rely on digging up the road and it has multiple checks and balances via the laser beams. We think it is important that this be thoroughly and properly tested. We are going to do it irrespective of that, and if we are not allowed to do it in Victoria, we will do it somewhere else.

Mr MULDER — On that issue, apart from the digging up of the road aspect, the problem with those cameras all along was that they were never maintained and the system was never maintained. Irrespective of whether you put in a new system, unless there is an appropriate maintenance program in place, it will never gain community acceptance.

Mr O’DONOGHUE — That is exactly right. You are dead right, and the contract that we are responsible for requires us to do that. A major significant part of our contract is service, maintenance, upgrade and identification of new and emerging technologies. I could not agree with you more in relation to the service and maintenance. It is improper for me to make any comment, but we wait with interest to see what Chas Baragwanath’s independent report says.

Mr MULDER — As a private company — I have worked in the private sector myself in the past — you would expect to make money and you would expect to generate profits?

Mr O’DONOGHUE — Yes.

Mr MULDER — There must be some form of a system in place that protects the interests of the public in relation to what checks and balances are carried out not only on the fact that you are doing the maintenance but on how the maintenance is being done and what the reporting mechanisms are. I do not think that exists.

Mr O’DONOGHUE — We were able to demonstrate to the government when it asked us what level of service and maintenance we were providing to the technology that we were responsible for; we provided that. As a consequence of all the events to do with the Western Ring Road cameras, it focused the mind of the government on the need to elevate that to an even higher level. The Western Ring Road was a contract that was not part of the Department of Justice, and there were different engineering standards. If I can be so brave as to say, we did try to explain it to VicRoads. We said, ‘You are not
talking about a traffic light system. You are not’. It might look simple, but it is far more complex and sophisticated, and the demands of performance are not bound by just a technical description — these are legislative and regulatory requirements. It is a whole different standard.

The regime that is currently being put in place will probably be the strongest around the world. We had a lot to do with the Home Office in England. Tenix looked at the standards because we are trying to do work over there. We had out here the British police officers responsible to the Home Office for the certification of equipment and the application of standards. We did that to educate ourselves so that we can play in the world market. I believe that Victoria has had a very, very serious look at the standards and the certification processes that England goes through.

Mr VAUGHAN — One of the options for Transurban using this device is to trigger the illumination studs in the VMS via a speed measurement to suggest that the vehicle is approaching the bend too quickly. The laser device measures the speed 3000 times between beams, but it also then tracks the shape of the vehicle, so that device will enable Transurban to warn trucks only. It will recognise a truck and switch on the system, so it is quite flexible. Once it is triggered, the lights light up, and whatever message you choose to show there then flashes. The road data is logged to a central processing centre, and the lights will strobe away from the vehicles.

There is a mocked-up example whereby the vehicle under the bridge has activated the lights system. You can see the VMS signs in the distance. The same vehicle would get the message from the VMS in that window between those two lines there, and hopefully that will eliminate the problem of crashes at that particular bend.

There is one aspect that I just remembered when we were talking about the in-ground camera that the Garda are considering. By introducing a simple automatic numberplate recognition system and installing it in the in-ground camera, you can get extremely precise travel-time information back to the drivers. Rather than working on vehicles travelling over a series of embedded loops over the journey, the numberplate will go through point A, at the next site it will go through point B, and then it will give an exact time of that travel distance back to someone entering that approach at site A.

At the moment we are looking with VicRoads at a slow driver turn-off using a road safety alert system on the Great Ocean Road, whereby we would use a two-piezo system to estimate a driver’s speed — two piezos because it is not for enforcement, but it will be close enough — and if the driver is travelling at 65 kilometres or less where it is safe to travel faster and there are three or more cars banked up behind him, the lights will come on and a VMS will say, ‘Slow driver, pull over’. That is all the system will be.

That graph is just a wonderful history of road safety management. I have been around the world a fair bit in the last three or four years, and wherever I go they know the Victorian system. I do not think the recent past has had any effect on our reputation internationally, although that very last little blip at the end that shows an up-curve in that graph is of interest.

Mr O’DONOGHUE — I think it is worth saying that that is at the time that the speed camera program came under such a public spotlight and the government announced the switching off of them all.

Mr MULDER — A number of those fatalities that occurred were not on those roads affected by the Victoria speed cameras being shut down. Another issue that has not been highlighted of course is that this is the first really wet winter we have had for a long period of time. There has not been a lot done in terms of driver education about adapting behaviour when driving in wet weather.
Mr O’DONOGHUE — You are quite right in terms of road weather conditions. If the community at large thinks it can get away with something, it will do it. In relation to the speed camera program, there was confusion about whether the mobiles were still working or not, and those members of the community who were prepared to take the risk began to take it more. That was in combination with a much wetter winter, and you can track that.

Weather conditions play an awfully big part, but so do socioeconomic conditions. You can look back to the time — like right now — when petrol was nearly out of the reach of a P-plate driver or a family man: the serious accidents began to drop away. People were just not in a position to travel as much as they had been. They were using their vehicles for essential travel to and from work and to the station. All of those things play a part.

I know it might sound a bit strange coming from a private company like ours, but we actually believe that the education process is fundamental to making the whole program work well. You only have to come down to our 150-seat call centre — it was; it does not need to be at the moment — and listen to the people who ring in. We are not a traditional call centre; we do not just sell Foxtel. It is an aggressive environment, because virtually everyone ringing up is pretty annoyed about having to ring. You just need to listen to the sorts of things they say.

Our operators basically give callers an education about the technology, the process that is gone through and the rights of the individual to do things. They can go through the court, or, if they have a problem with their finances, they are given time to make a delayed payment. You just need to listen to that call centre to understand that, underlying everything else, the community at large actually believes this is a necessary evil. We can show you transcripts, because we are constantly recorded by the government to monitor how we perform in the call centre. You will get an individual who says, ‘I totally disagree with what you have done, but I understand it now. Where do I send the money?’ There is a lot to be learnt from that, and Tony is a great advocate of the education process.

Mr MULDER — Do all the callers say that?

Mr O’DONOGHUE — No. There are plenty of others.

The CHAIR — We have just met with the Ulysses motorbike club, so I have motorcycle issues on my mind as well. Have you had any feedback from motor cyclists about their safety with the strobe lights like the ones we see down at Winchelsea?

Mr VAUGHAN — There was a concern. They are only 4 millimetres out of the road surface, and in VicRoads standards that would probably put them down the left-hand side. But there have not been any issues with motorbikes, no.

Mr O’DONOGHUE — But we are conscious of that.

The CHAIR — Because in resolving hazards you can create a hazard as well.

Mr O’DONOGHUE — That is right, because of the slippery nature of the surface. So their application in the different environments would have to take account of that. In the centre lane it is appropriate. But they are standards that VicRoads would set and that we would have to abide by, and they would have to go through them — like they did with the metal rope in the middle of the road.

Mr VAUGHAN — Where we think the road safety alert system fits in historically is, if you go back to the 1970s when the road toll peaked at about 1066 and everybody decided we had to do something, it was commander-control enforcement only. We then moved to enforcement and education. We think that the road safety alert
system will fit into that next stage, rather than being another degree of enforcement or harsher enforcement. This site-specific and driver-specific system has a lot to offer.

**Mr O’DONOGHUE** — Responding to a question Mr Mulder asked earlier, we are a private company, and, yes, we look to make profit from the things we do. One of the things that we see as a dual application with this program is that it provides a camera — not an enforcement camera, but a camera that can monitor traffic.

The data which VicRoads and every road authority around the world constantly needs is about traffic flow, volumes and the sort of vehicles travelling at different times. Consider the money that is spent on those surveys, which are currently done manually, traditionally by university students sitting in deck chairs: by the time you collect, analyse and do something with the data, things have moved on. We think that the application with the camera is going to give you 24-7 immediate information, and that information is a commodity that can be utilised by government in programming and planning its road construction differently so that it gets the opportunity to change the road behaviour and road usage as well as the safety issues.

It is a position that we are putting to road authorities all around the world at the moment. Alex would have seen it, the Roads and Traffic Authority in New South Wales clearly does not want to be beaten by the Mexicans — being Victoria — so they are trying to embrace some of these initiatives quite quickly. I thank you, Alex, and the committee for giving your time up to listen to us.

**The CHAIR** — We thank you for your time as well. Any further questions?

**Mr STONEY** — I am intrigued by the experiment down the Great Ocean Road encouraging slow drivers to pull over into pull-out lanes. Do you know what the road safety philosophy is behind that?

**Mr O’DONOGHUE** — The slow drivers are causing others to take a risk and overtake, and they are doing it in places where it is either illegal or very dangerous. This all stems from a combination of work done by Victoria Police and VicRoads over a long period of time. You have situations where particularly motorbikes will pull out over double lines and scoot past, and vehicles as well. You have to recognise that the Great Ocean Road is one of the best known tourist attractions Australia and worldwide so lots of people are going to travel it, but they are not commuting — they are actually being tourists. Their behaviour on the road is going to be different from that of you and me who are trying to go from Geelong to Anglesea or wherever.

The answer to the question is slow drivers are as dangerous as speeding drivers. With the number of run-offs on the side of the road where you can go and look at points of interest, by having the message on the sign at the side of the road saying ‘pull over’, we think — it is not us, we are just part of the solution — VicRoads and police believe by telling the driver that they should pull over, there would be a reduction in the likelihood of serious accidents and possibly deaths. I understand that is the underlying philosophy.

**Mr STONEY** — I am totally intrigued because I fully agree with you. I have been on this committee off and on since 1992. In the late 1990s a few country members tried valiantly to convince the police and VicRoads that there was an issue with slow drivers. We could not get to first base because the police said, ‘Well, everyone is entitled to use the road and they can drive at their own speed, it is not an offence. People just have to wait’. We used to use the examples of some of the narrow hilly roads leading out of Melbourne towards the snow et cetera, where you could get up to a kilometre of cars all being frustrated by some very slow driver or new driver or an old farmer in a hat —

**Mr BISHOP** — Hey!
Mr STONEY — Or a young farmer in a hat! The attitude of the police was you just had to wear it. We said very strongly — and I actually raised it in Parliament — that it was a major cause of road frustration and threats to road safety. We could never get them to get to first base, so I am really intrigued to see now that they are moving to perhaps identifying that.

Mr O’DONOGHUE — I think you are absolutely right. The current assistant commissioner, Bob Hastings, and his predecessor have been strong advocates of addressing this sort of issue; likewise the ones at school crossings and the ones in street shopping centres. That is another application where the road safety alert system could be used.

One of the other things that may be of interest from a country perspective is that New South Wales looked at whether it would embrace one of these at a school crossing. They felt the school crossings were one of the safer places because there was so much activity and people around and so on. They suggested we look at — I cannot remember whether it was Dubbo or Wagga, but there was a part of the Newell Highway where there was a relatively small township and the trucks were coming through at extraordinarily high speed. They felt in this small hamlet, unless the local officer was there with his radar gun, there was a high risk of a truck doing some major damage. From a country perspective New South Wales saw those country locations as a bit of a danger. All of what you said is absolutely true. From what we understand in our conversations and discussions with VicRoads and Victoria Police, they are very keen to get this out there on the road in the way that we have described.

Mr VAUGHAN — We have the Australian Road Research Board doing a pre-installation assessment and a post-installation assessment, and I will certainly get the results of that to the committee.

Mr O’DONOGHUE — We try to embrace those independent organisations at the earliest stage to give us some guidance and validation of what we are talking about. We use ARRB and the Monash University Accident Research Centre constantly. In the Irish endeavour that we are pursuing at the moment, MUARC has been asked to provide a lot of independent advice about what Victoria has done and what we are proposing. It is another feather in the cap for Victoria in terms of the independent research that goes on as well.

Mr MULDER — I will put my pre-parliamentary cap on from when I used to do quality assurance auditing. Your traffic camera office and your mobile camera network, are they subject to any external certification or auditing process or is that all done internally?

Mr O’DONOGHUE — No, we are ISO compliant.

Mr MULDER — Which — 9002?

Mr O’DONOGHUE — Yes. We did that independently. We were not contractually required to do it, but we did it once we recognised how sensitive an area we were operating in.

Mr MULDER — How long ago was that?

Mr O’DONOGHUE — We started it in about 1999. It was unbelievably difficult; I did not realise what I was embarking on when I started it. We go through six-monthly reviews and we have performance improvement notices put on us. They range from the way we behave in the call centre through our integrated IT system down to the camera technology. As you would be aware, they track the process. They did help us. We were able to identify some pitfalls which had not happened, but might have done if we had not addressed them.
Mr VAUGHAN — You would be very welcome to come down and have a look at the operation.

Mr O’DONOGHUE — We would invite the committee; Alex has seen it. From the broader perspective of what we are doing in Victoria, I have been constantly encouraging the government to come down and look.

The CHAIR — We would like to take that offer up.

Mr O’DONOGHUE — Terrific. We would love to host you.

The CHAIR — One more question and we will wrap up.

Mr BISHOP — When we were in the UK they discussed vehicle-activated signs which were stand alone and could be altered in relation to weather conditions. They seemed to us to be a great invention and they got tremendous results over there. How expensive would they be to install in Australian conditions, particularly in the country roads area?

Mr VAUGHAN — They are not very expensive at all. The in-ground illumination systems — —

Mr BISHOP — These were above ground with a sign on them.

Mr VAUGHAN — They would be triggered from an on-ground sensor probably. The illumination systems can be triggered by rain, by mist or fog, whatever you choose. They are not expensive at all.

Mr BISHOP — What do you mean by ‘not expensive’?

Mr VAUGHAN — Somewhere between $8000 and $12 000.

Mr O’DONOGHUE — It depends on the configuration. For a holiday weekend and people going to the snow, there is no way you would invest in putting that sort of technology out permanently because 90 per cent of the time that road is used just by a Volvo driver with a hat on.

The CHAIR — We will finish it there. Thank you for your time. We will take up your offer. We appreciate the input and we will provide a copy of the transcript in due course. Thank you very much.

Witnesses withdrew.
CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll

Melbourne — 21 October 2004

Members

Mr B. W. Bishop Mr T. W. Mulder
Mr J. H. Eren Mr E. G. Stoney
Mr A. R. Harkness Mr I. D. Trezise
Mr C. A. C. Langdon

Chair: Mr I. D. Trezise
Deputy Chair: Mr E. G. Stoney

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms A. Douglas
Research Officers: Mr G. Both and Mr P. Nelson

Witness

Mr R. Schnittler, chair, national telematics coordination committee, ITS Australia.

Necessary corrections to be notified to executive officer of committee
The CHAIR — Mr Schnittler, welcome to the parliamentary Road Safety Committee. We are currently conducting two inquiries: one into the country road toll and, obviously related to that, run-off road crashes and crashes into roadside objects. A transcript of your evidence is being taken today and we will provide you with a copy of the transcript in due course. We are also operating under parliamentary privilege so what you say today cannot be used against you legally in the future. Having said that, we appreciate your time and input into our inquiry. I see you have a presentation so without undue delay I will hand it across to you.

Mr SCHNITTLER — Thank you for being prepared to see me and also ITS Australia, because I am representing that organisation here today.

Overheads shown.

Mr SCHNITTLER — I intend to give the committee a quick outline and introduction, first of all, about ITS Australia, and you may want to know who I am so I thought I would give you some information about me. Just in case you do not know what intelligence transport systems (ITS) are, I have included a slide about that so I can explain a little bit what we are on about. Then, of course, we have to refer to the terms of reference. I will first talk about the relevance of ITS through the various terms of reference of the committee and then about the broader context and how ITS can contribute to what you are trying to achieve, and also a little bit, hopefully not too much for you, about what it can achieve over and above what you want to achieve. After that I will refer to specific examples and then conclusions, and I am available for whatever length of time you might require to ask me some questions.

The CHAIR — I cannot promise that we will not ask questions as you go along.

Mr SCHNITTLER — You can do that too. ITS Australia is a not-for-profit umbrella organisation. It is actually a NGO, but it is being supported financially by the federal government as well as by industry. It has as its aims to foster the development and deployment of intelligence transport systems technologies. As I said, I will explain in a short while what ITS is. We believe we can deliver a significant contribution to Australia’s economic, environmental and societal objectives. We aim to guide the development and integration of appropriate advanced technologies into the transport area in particular.

We represent government, industry, academia and consumer organisations, so we are trying to reconcile our interests and work for the common good basically, both at home and we also represent Australia in the context of ITS abroad. We have various sister organisations around the globe: ITS America, ERTICO in Europe and ITS Japan as well, and there are others.

We implemented the national e-transport ITS strategy on behalf of the Australian Transport Council and also Austroads, and we have secured funds from Victoria’s state government towards the establishment of a national ITS centre of excellence. I do not know if anyone here knows about this. We are talking about establishing a facility down near the West Gate Bridge. Hopefully we will get Victoria to be the leader in Australia, in fact a global leader in this type of technology. That is what we are working towards.

Now to me. I a degree-qualified German mechanical engineer. I have specialised in the automotive industry. I have done combustion engines, I have done vehicle design and I have done ergonomics by way of study, which I finished in 1979. I have been in Australia since 1982 and in the automotive industry since I finished studying basically. I have been Mr Ergonomics for Ford for a fair while developing the ergonomics in the Ford Falcon vehicle.

The CHAIR — What type of things did you do in that role?
Mr SCHNITTLER — I established a cross-matrix committee which looked at all facets that impacted on vehicle ergonomics for the Ford Falcon, coming from the Ford EF, which was the old square-type boxy design, into the EA model. I basically looked after the interior design predominantly of the vehicle, making sure that the controls, the visual displays, everything that affected driver comfort and driver operation was actually optimised. That was very successful at the time. It was quite a progress and was looked at very positively by the press.

The CHAIR — We might have some questions about that before you leave.

Mr SCHNITTLER — I have moved on. Do not confuse the final execution of the EA vehicle with the engineering intent; they are quite different things.

I developed professionally. When I came here I was an automotive engineer. I stayed in automotive engineering roles for about 10 years. I then moved into the commercial arena and did things like account management, market development, marketing manager, territory manager, mostly on behalf of Australian companies within the automotive industry that wanted to sell their wares to overseas OEMs.

I then went out on my own and did some consulting to overseas companies that wanted to increase their presence in Australia, in the same area basically. During that time I started studying again. I finished a postgraduate degree this year and researched into telematics in the process. That is why I am now very much interested in ITS. I am currently involved in ITS with ITS Australia obviously, and have been asked, due to my experience and background and research in this area, to chair the committee that aims to generate a positive or active environment for the introduction of telematics, in particular, in Australia nationwide.

The CHAIR — When you say ‘telematics’ what are you talking about?

Mr SCHNITTLER — We probably should go to the next slide because that actually explains what telematics is all about. When we talk about transport, we have something called integrated or multimodal transport systems, which comprise everything — they comprise railroad, air, everything, — so we can split those up. First of all we have air transport, which is out of the equation, and we are left with surface-based transport systems. Then we split them into land based and water based. All the ships are out and after that we go into rail and road.

When you talk about road-based transport system, you have dumb infrastructure. Dumb means there is no ICT capability within that infrastructure — in other words, the bitumen, the steel planks at the side of the road and all that sort of stuff; there is nothing to that in terms of artificial intelligence. Or you have dumb vehicle technology like steering columns and axles; they do not have any ITS to them either. Then you are left with the stuff that has intelligence. That is the intelligent transport system.

Then you have road-based systems, which are those signs which are governed by computers that can change, for example, the prescribed speed or can give advice to road users, all that sort of stuff; and you have got that in everything that is vehicle based. Within vehicles again you have two types of systems that can be applied: one, the vehicle autonomous systems or the so-called advanced driver assistance systems, or ADAS. These are systems that are put into the vehicles these days with increasing frequency and which actually aim to assist the driver in his driving task. One of the very early examples of this is ABS, the automatic braking system, which enables cars to be braked while they are going around a curve because the wheels do not lock any more. That is a typical ITS application in terms of the vehicle-based autonomous system. It does not need to have any sort of interference or input from outside to do that.

Otherwise we have vehicle communicative systems, and that is what we talk about when we talk about telematics. For vehicle communicative systems you need a wireless
connection; you need wireless connectivity of the vehicle to the outside world. That enables the exchange of information between the vehicle and outside service providers to do certain things. There is a whole plethora of things that can be done and we will get to that later.

Of course, this is a very simplistic scheme and there are all sorts of mixed shapes and forms. We have hydrofoils, hovercraft, amphibic vehicles and all those vehicles that are neither one nor the other or they are both. At the same time we have telematics. We have ITS in the rail system; we have ITS applications in aeroplanes and in shipping. A very prominent example is the GPS, or the global positioning system, which has actually been used in bulk transport, shipping and also in aircraft for yonks, but it is only now coming into cars. What I am saying is that this is a scheme which describes the mainstream but there are all sorts of forms in between which we also try to cover from an ITS Australia point of view, but ITS Australia is focusing on where the bulk of the activity is taking place. We are focusing on road transport because the majority of all traffic and all passenger and goods transport takes place on the road.

Regarding the committee’s terms of reference, I must say that ITS is highly relevant to them all — for example, we have systems to monitor speed and driver condition which, just as examples, would refer to the first reference. We have systems to read the road ahead and to identify obstacles ahead, which are technologically possible. They would refer to (b). We have vehicle features that can assist and/or inform, which are actually the domain of intelligence transport systems so far as in vehicle, and that refers to (c). Then, of course, ITS can provide a lot of alternatives in terms of enforcement. It is soft in situ enforcement that I am talking about rather than the policeman standing at spot A and not at spot B. We will come to that when we come to the detail.

Mr STONEY — I would like to discuss that a little. Would you rather do it later?

Mr SCHNITTLER — We can do that now.

Mr STONEY — It reads as though cruise control might have a potential to cause crashes, is that how I am reading it?

Mr SCHNITTLER — No, certainly not. I have a slide about cruise control and I have noted in the terms of reference that there seems to be a particular interest in cruise control being something which might cause accidents. Firstly, as a researcher I have to say I have not come across any significant sources in the literature that indicate that cruise control is a major cause of accidents. Secondly, if anything, cruise control is a device that tends to make driving safe rather than unsafe. That is because, firstly, it enables people to safely adhere to the speed limit without constantly checking the speed on the speedo, and they can keep their eyes on the road instead. Of course, the other is it relieves them from tasks that require mental capacity like driving at the same speed over long periods of time and therefore there is more capacity available to actually attend to the outside environment, if that is what they need to do.

Mr STONEY — Have you heard of instances with cruise control where you might be going along a straight road, then there is quite a steep incline and perhaps a sweeping bend at the top, and the cruise control kicks down to keep the car at 100 km/h, for example, but can kick down and perhaps throw the car across the road because it is not really under control; it catches the driver by surprise?

Mr SCHNITTLER — If someone is inattentive, then there is no doubt that something like that could happen, but cruise control inherently is a device which helps rather than hinders driving; there is no doubt about it. We have developments in the cruise control area, and I am stepping a bit ahead of the presentation, that actually improve on what cruise control is today. We have something called adaptive cruise
control. We have just heard a couple of days ago in the press about Nissan bringing out a new luxury model in the Infinity range, and that will now have an adaptive cruise control fitted to it that is actually able to work within slow stop-and-go conditions. In other words, it will be able to keep the vehicle within a prescribed distance — let’s say 2 seconds from the guy ahead — in changing traffic conditions; in other words, at non-constant speeds. This is where this stuff is actually going.

There is a lot to be said about what the automotive industry is doing, but I think we all welcome free enterprise and the capability of companies developing freely what they can develop. By and large, the development of those things, whether we are talking about cruise control or about other features within the car, are being progressed towards better and more responsible solutions. We should not try to forbid things which perhaps are at a current stage but have the potential to be developed in such a way that they are much better in the future, so that any inherent potential danger that still exists can be developed out. This is what the aim is largely of the development efforts of the automotive industry.

Mr STONEY — I do not disagree with that at all. It is just perhaps drivers should be aware that under some conditions cruise control can be a bit tricky.

Mr SCHNITTLER — That is a matter of education, obviously.

Coming back to this slide and the committee’s reference:

potential measures to reduce incidence and severity of crashes ...

A raft of potential measures can be provided by ITS to actually address this issue, and there is a plethora of necessary changes that can be identified both in the legislative and in the regulatory area to make those things actually feasible in the first place.

The next slide is headed ‘The broader context — ITS capabilities’. Certainly there are systems available now, being developed or being put into production in the most advanced regions that can monitor the condition of the driver while driving. They can detect fatigue. They also can detect things like the driver being under the influence of something that they should not be influenced by. There are things like over-speed warnings and there are degrees of input from a simple beep and display that the speed zone has changed to a voice message saying, ‘You are now entering an 80 km/h speed zone’ or, something like that, through to actually reducing the vehicle speed. In other words the driver is not really the driver any more other than doing the steering; the car does it all for you.

All these things are possible. What the governments of this world need to decide is whether it is sensible, whether it is sellable, whether these things should be done.

Mr BISHOP — Do those situations depend on GPS mapping being totally or fully done?

Mr SCHNITTLER — Over-speed warnings obviously have something to do with GPS mapping, because the car needs to know where it is at all times. It needs to know where it is on the road network and it needs input, and that is one of the points which needs to be addressed. If we can again jump ahead a bit in the presentation, it needs input in terms of the changes in traffic situations. In other words, if there are construction works or if there is traffic banking up somewhere, or if the weather is bad in a particular spot, if there is rain or hail or whatever, all these things can be fed to the vehicle and can form a picture of what the condition actually is at a spot.

Then of course drivers can be warned accordingly. All these things are possible. There is absolutely nothing technologically in this area which is not possible in one way or the other. It is just that the legislative and regulatory framework and also the infrastructure
environment need to catch up with these types of things, and we will get to that a little bit later.

We have things like lane departure warnings, whereby a vehicle watches by itself whether it is staying on course or drifting off. We can assist drivers in situations that exceed their skill level, for example, as already mentioned, ABS or automatic stability control, which is an advancement on ABS, which corrects the vehicle if it becomes unstable. We can have brake assist or we can have adaptive braking. Again, adaptive braking would then take into account where the road is actually going and perhaps help the occupant, the driver, to negotiate a corner that he perhaps has underestimated or whatever. And then we come back to the question about cruise control. With today’s ways and means, these things can be addressed. But what it takes of course is a new vehicle. The vehicle has to have the technology in it.

The CHAIR — How far down the track are we before we look at things like fatigue detection and lane departure warning?

Mr SCHNITTLER — We are very much in the advanced experimental and trial stages at this point in time. I would not be surprised if people in the most advanced areas are looking at introducing these types of features into vehicles right now.

The CHAIR — Which countries or which companies are advanced? Can you say?

Mr SCHNITTLER — If you look at the automotive world, there are only three areas where the music plays. One is central Europe, and I am talking about France and Germany there. One is the United States of America, and one is Japan. You can forget everything else. If you look at the automotive industry we have only a few brand owners that are relevant in the global context. You have a couple in the United States, which are General Motors (GM) and Ford. You have a few in Europe, which are BMW, DaimlerChrysler, Renault, and Peugeot Citroën. And then you have a couple in Japan, and they are Toyota and Honda. Everyone else is dependent in one way or the other on those few or it is very likely that they will not survive in the long run, and they are certainly not technology leaders. So if you are talking about technology advances in the biggest sense, these are the companies you are looking at, and there are not very many.

Of course then you also can minimise trauma time and maximise assistance capabilities. When I talk about minimising trauma time, you know that we now have a service provider in the industry and that provides automatic crash notification in case a vehicle which is equipped with their system is involved in an accident. What happens is that when the vehicle crashes immediately, at the same instant, it dispatches an automatic distress call nominating the exact location of that vehicle and also, hopefully, the severity of the crash, and possibly how many occupants are in it.

You could extend that to enhanced automatic crash notification by actually including medical history, medical requirements or medical details of the people who are involved there so that when the ambulance is despatched the officers know exactly what the needs of those people are; they will know the severity of the crash and the likely injuries that might have been suffered, and also the medical history including the possible allergies, blood groups and so forth that those people might have. All this is possible.

But again if we are talking about divulging medical history in this way we are talking about privacy issues, data security and all these types of stuff. And again there is legislative stuff that needs to happen before these things can be enacted, before they can be made possible. ITS Australia, or the ITS industry, has all the means to make these things happen but legislation is required to actually enable it.

Theft prevention is another thing. You may have recognised already while I have been talking about all these capabilities that as soon as telematics or location-based services
are involved they require the tracking of the vehicle; it needs to be known where the vehicle is. For example, if a taxi company does not know from where I am calling they cannot send the taxi. In the same way, if the service provider does not know where my vehicle is it cannot provide the service; it is as simple as that.

That again generates problems because we are running into privacy issues; we are running into issues of maintaining the anonymity of people who may not necessarily want to be tracked. Therefore we need to be extremely careful in how we approach this and how we bring it to the public; how we make the public recognise that actually tracking their vehicles is for the greater benefit and really has many good connotations for them; and assure them that their privacy is actually safeguarded legally.

There are more requirements over and above, I guess, the rules and regulations that we have in place — for example, for electronic toll collection, which is one of the telematics applications used on CityLink in particular and in future on the eastern tollway — and we have to make sure that we have the relevant legislation in place to ensure the people are comfortable with these types of concepts.

We can do all this, but of course over and above this we also have the potential to monitor vehicles with respect to any parameter — in other words, we can monitor in terms of location, time, or the weather. We can monitor it in terms of its environmental impact. There are a whole lot of tools, I guess, that could be available to do things differently from the way they are done today.

We can monitor drivers with respect to appropriate conduct — it would be situation-dependent, mind you. We can therefore assess accident potential, and that is regardless of whether an accident is actually going to occur. It would be just depending on what actually was happening with the vehicle or how a vehicle was driving at any given time. That is all possible electronically. The question is: do we want to do it?

Beyond safety we can assess environmental impact, which has direct connotations for, for example, the greenhouse effect or amenity — for example, noise. We have the potential for user-related charges based on the stuff like that which we determine. We have the potential to reduce risk because we can actually defuse traffic congestion and the like and make sure traffic flow is optimised around town, that there are only certain volumes of traffic on certain stretches of road, and that vehicles are evenly distributed according to the capacity. Therefore we can greatly enhance traffic efficiencies and the economies of whatever is happening. That does not have anything to do particularly with safety, but I am just trying to show the committee that really everything hangs together. If we try to do all these good things for safety there will be a whole lot of other flow-on benefits which have positive effects on other stuff.

I guess I have talked a fair bit. What does all this have to do with the road toll? It has a hell of a lot to do with it. I have included in my presentation a quote from a conference, which occurred not so recently now. There is an e-safety working group which is chaired or, I guess, helped by our sister organisation in Europe called ERTICO. The quote says:

The (e-safety) working group recognised that the greatest potential in applying new technologies for road safety is offered by intelligent integrated road safety systems.

I repeat it — ‘the greatest potential’ — out of everything. Therefore it is vital that we push these technologies ahead and clear the way for them to be deployed.

I guess there is a lot that could be said about human nature and what people have the propensity to do and why. There are people that look at the developments in the motor industry critically. I could certainly talk for a whole afternoon about these types of things, but I will not get into it to any great extent.
I refer to some specific examples: the human machine interface and driver distraction. Driver distraction has been recognised as a relevant issue by the industry for a long time. Everybody is working at things like text-to-speech and voice recognition in order to actually overcome the problems which are now being posed by people having to operate controls and input stuff when they are driving, which is less than ideal. Voice-to-data capability is around the corner; it will not take long. It will enable you to actually talk to your car; you will be able to tell the car, ‘I want to go to point X’, and the car will give you directions by voice how to get there. If the infrastructure is in place it will give you that information based on dynamic navigation, which means the navigation is based on where the vehicle is on a road map, and on current information what the conditions are on the potential ways; it will choose the optimum route and it will get you there in the optimum fashion. It will do so by voice and you will not need to look at anything any more other than the road.

That is the future, and it is very close. But what we need for that is infrastructure in cities like Melbourne. We need traffic data and the traffic data actually needs to be for more than just the freeways; it needs to be for all arterial roads. We need to know what is the traffic density and so forth on those arterial roads, and it all needs to be fed into these systems in order to make it work.

The CHAIR — When the committee was in Europe it heard that most of Europe has already been mapped. Where are we in Australia and Victoria in regard to mapping?

Mr SCHNITTLER — Most of Australia has been mapped too. If you look at the Sensis web site, for example, you actually have various menus there. If you put any Australian address in there, if it is anywhere in the populated area you are most likely to get an adequate response; in other words, it will show you exactly a cut-out of the map and it will show exactly where your search address is. You have the choice of zooming in and out and getting exactly the size of map that you need for your purposes. You can download those maps to your PC, you can purchase them or you can print them out. Those capabilities are there now; it is all done, and it is all available.

Mr BISHOP — I was in a GPS vehicle the other day and we wished to go from Swan Hill to Birchip. The vehicle wanted to send us through Ouyen because the roads were not fully mapped. That would have taken us hundreds of kilometres out of our way. So either that particular installation in that vehicle was not up to speed or in fact we need more work done in Australia to map less-used roads — I suppose that would be the best description of them.

Mr SCHNITTLER — We have problems in Australia in that Australia has various conurbations which are virtually autonomous. There is Melbourne, Sydney, the Brisbane and Gold Coast areas, Perth and Adelaide, and then there are a few smaller ones. The majority of the population lives there, and there is quite a bit of nothing in between in a lot of cases.

If we talk about network coverage it is the same picture. We have the GSM network currently, and that is in the process of changing now because we have third generation telecom networks coming on stream. But predominantly we still have the GSM, or we have the CDMA network that Telstra is actually involved in that covers a wider area within Australia. But we still have large areas within central Australia in the remote areas where there is no coverage at all other than perhaps satellite coverage. And I am not familiar with how far that goes in Australia in the current context.

Certainly if you are trying to rely on navigation systems in the outback, then I think you are probably not well advised to follow them because they are not made for these types of conditions. They are actually made for conurbations; they are made for densely populated areas and for people that do not know where they are going. That is what these
navigation systems are made for. If I know where I am going I do not need a navigation system.

Mr BISHOP — No, but my point is that if your intelligence systems are going to operate, you will need that sort of facility in place.

Mr SCHNITTLER — Yes, of course you will. There are two kinds of infrastructure problems in Australia at the moment. One of them is the total coverage in terms of telecommunication for the total continent, and the second one is the coverage with traffic data for the conurbations in a broader sense, away from the freeways. Both those issues need to be resolved in order for those things to work better and properly.

During my research I have come across the fact that various road organisations or authorities are trying to figure out what to do with the data they are currently gathering. They are in two minds about whether they should try to sell them or whether they should provide them free of charge to interested parties because they are generated by public infrastructure, and there is an argument that they are public property. My view on that is that really they should give them free of charge to interested service providers, but there should be a public-private partnership in the sense that in return these service providers chip in to improve the infrastructure from here on in. I think that would be a win-win situation for everyone. That is what I would do, but that is just my idea.

The next item on the overheads is the intelligence speed adaptation. We referred to that before, so we will go to the next one. The development thrust of ITS is obviously aiming at transferring original roadside infrastructure like traffic guidance systems, for example, into the vehicle — in other words, the driver has got in his instrument cluster or, even better, on a head-up display what the current legal requirement is — for example, the speed or whatever he might encounter, and you do not need to put the infrastructure onto the road any more.

The dollar signs should be flashing up with you guys, because in the long run there is savings potential if we transfer all this stuff into the vehicle. If these technologies are possible inside the vehicle, then we do not need the roadside infrastructure expenditure any more. We do not need those signs which are every 5 kilometres and currently show the words ‘Drive Safely’ or whatever because they do not have anything else to display! They are just redundant. These costs can be saved.

ITS Australia obviously wants to work with government regarding road toll and trauma reduction. We want also to work with government in optimising environmental potential and how to address that through ITS. We can address transport efficiency and improvements there, infrastructure planning issues — all that type of stuff. The technology is there, there are just certain needs to implement it. We can demonstrate how telematics can deliver and thereby improve the electoral standing of the various governments that make these things happen and the increased efficiencies in public expenditure.

The industry has quite a different spectrum of interest. Industry is interested in making a buck, in tracking related cost benefits, for example. But at this time we have already phones with GPS built in and telematics units are not all that expensive any more — about $250 now — and we can basically get into discussion with industry about location-based advertising, mobile payment, mobile commerce. But there we hit another legislative snag, because if we want to enable wireless transaction then we have to make sure that the transaction security is absolutely beyond reproach, and currently in the legislative arena that is not safeguarded in Australia — not to the extent it needs to be. So that is a huge area that needs to be attacked in terms of legislation.

Then of course we need to talk about public perception. Everything needs tracking, as I mentioned before, and if we have mobile payment, there is the security perception. We
cannot destroy the public perception because once it is destroyed it will be very hard to recover again. We need to be very careful.

Looking at the general public, we can sell all these things to the public by telling it how its safety can be improved, how the risk of theft can be diminished by tracking their vehicles, how their driving efficiency can improve by leading them away from the traffic congestion, how their vehicle can be more convenient in giving them all this information that they need, but only what they need during the driving process, and so forth and so on. So that is also the agenda of the national telematics committee that I am trying to put up and ITS Australia.

In the automotive industry e-safety, Vision Zero and mobility are certainly very hot topics, and all of those have a major impact on safety. Of course the other hot topics are stretching the fossil fuel reserves, minimising emissions, resource-use recycling, noise amenity and all that sort of stuff. Telematics and ITS can do a lot to improve in all those areas, and that is why it is important to get involved.

I am going over this very quickly now. You can read it all yourselves. I am sorry about it, but this is only a short overview of what is possible, and I am not going into any technological detail at all. As I said, for virtually everything you have a technological application which is currently being worked on. There are gaps which need to be closed in terms of infrastructure or legislation or other requirements, and we need to get to talk to governments like yourselves in order to get those issues resolved.

The summary assessment: we can monitor speed, drugs, alcohol, fatigue — everything. It needs to be done right. We need to work together with you to do it.

The CHAIR — How would you go about measuring fatigue, for example?

Mr SCHNITTLE — There are systems which people are working on that look at drivers’ eye movements and so forth and the sizes of the pupils — everything can be looked at, and you can exactly recognise what the condition of the driver is. The algorithms that are being built into these systems can recognise what the condition of the driver is.

The CHAIR — Would it be fair to say that is all still experimental?

Mr SCHNITTLE — It is in the advanced experimental stage, yes. But it is around the corner. In five years we will have all this stuff for sure.

The CHAIR — Until five years?

Mr SCHNITTLE — We cannot introduce all this stuff with immediate effect but it is important to try and become au fait, and to start working at it now to be at the forefront. It is good for Victoria, it will be good for business, it will be good for Australia to have this leadership role here. If we are clever enough at it, we can be a world leader in this. I think that is a great thing to accomplish, so we can look at the road and roadside environments like lane keeping, adaptive cruise control, dynamic navigation — all that stuff — and environmental features.

How about the mobile phone? There was much talk on the airwaves just recently about mobile phone usage in cars. People do not know what to do about drivers using hand-held mobile phones while driving, even doing text messaging. In airplanes it is widely accepted that you should not use your phone because it interferes with the equipment. How easy is it to put a device into the car — because they all have electronic engine control models these days — that makes the driving of the car become not dangerous but just unpleasant, if you have a mobile which is not in a cradle in use in the car? It is dead easy electronically, because all you do is to make the engine run a bit
 irregularly. That is enough to upset everyone, and they believe you if you say the phone interferes with the running of the car, you cannot use it. That is it. Easy! It can be done.

Mr STONEY — Are you saying that even passengers on a mobile phone might interrupt the drivers’ concentration?

Mr SCHNITTNER — Look, admittedly I finished the research for this about one and a half years ago. By that time there was a huge argument going on globally about whether it is more distracting to have people dialling or actually talking or whether it is more distracting for people talking on the phone rather than talking to their wife or to the kids in the back and all that sort of stuff. Honestly, there is no agreement as to what is the more and what is the less dangerous situation. All I am saying is that if a person is alone in the car, we can make it happen that they cannot use the phone if it is hand held.

The CHAIR — So the capability is there to do it?

Mr SCHNITTNER — Absolutely, no doubt about it. Going to enforcement, I guess the enforcement that we have today — and that is my personal view more than anything else — is just about as far as it can go. You cannot have policemen everywhere. Policemen can be in one of a thousand places but not in the other 999, and that is a problem because people will transgress if they think they can get away with it. So you need other stuff, you need other approaches.

One approach obviously is coercion through economic imperatives. You can do that also with ITS. If you take parameters that refer to the conduct of a vehicle as it is progressively being read by the system that is on board, then you can make for example road charges, the fuel price on the bowser, road tolls, and whatever else you have — your registration charges — dependent on this, rather than making them one flat fee for everyone regardless of how the guy behaves. It is possible. And then you have an economic incentive for people to do the right thing and perhaps you do not need the policeman at the corner any more.

So there is another thought — it is just a thought. But huge changes are required — wireless transaction security I have mentioned, privacy legislation, ADRs may need to be addressed, the Trade Practices Act — if you have automotive OEMs interested in doing certain things with the vehicles in terms of service and a customer relationship management and channelling the vehicles potentially to their own dealerships then obviously you need to look at what impact that has on all the other service industries out there which are not aligned to the OEMs. So you need to look at the relevant legislation. What I am saying is that most of this stuff is mostly nationwide; it is not state government stuff, so there is a lot of interaction which will need to be required by the Victorian government if one is starting to look at these types of things.

To conclude, ITS and ITS Australia is able to assist with all these areas, especially safety which is the subject matter for this committee, also emissions sustainability, and we are very happy to cooperate in any way or form. Of course I personally am very happy to help wherever I can. That is it.

The CHAIR — It is one of those topics you could talk about all day. You could get into any one of those issues, but we have not got all day. If there are no further questions, thank you, Rainer. We appreciate your time and your input into our inquiry. As I said, it was a very interesting talk and it is a very interesting topic. We have taken a transcript and will provide you with a copy of it in due course.

Witness withdrew.
CORRECTED TRANSCRIPT

ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll

Melbourne — 21 October 2004

Members

Mr B. W. Bishop Mr T. W. Mulder
Mr J. H. Eren Mr E. G. Stoney
Mr A. R. Harkness Mr I. D. Trezise
Mr C. A. C. Langdon

Chair: Mr I. D. Trezise
Deputy Chair: Mr E. G. Stoney

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms A. Douglas
Research Officers: Mr G. Both and Mr P. Nelson

Witness

Mr A. Helps.

Necessary corrections to be notified to executive officer of committee
The CHAIR — Welcome, Andrew. You are here as an individual, but I presume you have worked with the State Emergency Service?

Mr HELPS — Yes, Chair, I have been in the emergency services system in Victoria and Tasmania since 1962. I have worked as a police officer, a one-up paramedic, and for the last 26 years have been involved with the Victorian SES.

The CHAIR — As we understand it you are not representing the SES?

Mr HELPS — No, I think they would probably have conniptions if they thought I was here today, so I am speaking from my private experience of working.

The CHAIR — Before we start, would you please give us your full name and address?

Mr HELPS — My full name is Andrew George Helps, I live at 125 Huxtable Road, Pakenham Upper.

The CHAIR — Today we are operating under parliamentary privilege, so what you say cannot be used against you legally in the future. We are taking a transcript and will provide you with a copy. If you would like to start, we will get into questions and answers as we go through.

Mr HELP — From the perspectives of road rescue and emergency services in a small area of Victoria, which is Pakenham where our particular SES unit services both the Shire of Cardinia and the City of Casey, we are seeing a rapidly emerging trend with vehicles striking roadside objects as well as roadsides objects that have fallen down on roadways. This is driven, I believe, by the fact that since the council amalgamations in the mid-1990s a whole lot of the preventive issues that used to be handled as a matter of course by councils are no longer being carried out. We also have a really serious problem with VicRoads willingness to address hazard and risk issues when it comes to highways. If any of you ever drive east of Pakenham on the Princes Highway and look at the number of dead trees in the centre plantation along the side of the road you will start to understand the problems there.

Mr LANGDON — Are these small dead trees or large ones?

Mr HELPS — Both, but small dead trees cause as much if not more accidents than big dead trees. Prior to council amalgamation our council and the City of Casey had crews that went round and as a matter of practice took out hazardous trees on roadides. Ones that had died, ones that were likely to fall over, ones that anybody exercising their common-law duty of foreseeability would say, ‘Well, that is dangerous’, we used to do in Cardinia. We had two crews that did that. After amalgamation it all went out to nominal contractors, the council sold all its heavy equipment and the practice just stopped.

By 1999 from an emergency services perspective, of course, when the low-price contractors servicing the councils had tree jobs, especially in windy weather, they were just dumping them on to the emergency services as 000 calls. VicRoads has a policy, which is still in place, that it will not do anything about a tree until it falls down, which is rather alarming because I believe — and I think the Federal Court recently agreed with me in a decision — it has a duty of foreseeability. So we are seeing this issue that relates to the fact that nobody wants to own the problem any more since council amalgamations; the designated emergency service that should have responsibility - SES has no heavy equipment and these days cannot borrow heavy equipment from the council to fix the problem; and even as units if we could get heavy equipment we have been banned by our director from addressing the issue. He has written especially to our unit and told us under no circumstances are we to address the tree issue; and the service
as a whole in January this year was banned from handling any tree over 2 metres in height.

The CHAIR — When you say, ‘address the tree issue’, how do you mean?

Mr HELPS — We used to handle trees on roadsides by either cutting them down or cutting them up or getting the council to come and do it. We had a system where we would talk to the council works officer and a decision would be made according to the urgency of the job and either SES or the council would do it, depending on whether it could wait. In 1999 we got to the stage as a unit — and we look after 300 000-odd people — where we had to get proactive, so we started surveying our roadsides for tree hazards. This was driven by the fact that in 1999 we had a major incident involving a tree and a school bus in Cardinia where a school bus stopped at a tree that was down over a road, the driver was assisting a motorist who had run into the tree that was over the road, he had 42 kids on board and a 30-tonne tree came down 2 metres behind the bus. Now, the tree that came down was one that had been reported, but nobody had done anything about it. If it had hit the bus we probably would have had 20 to 25 casualties, it was a tree of such size.

We started to survey our roadsides and identify trees that represented a hazard. We were well into that process and we had done many kilometres of roadway when we were given a written instruction from the director of SES that we were not to do it. That was rather strange because, firstly, he had no power under the act to issue that instruction; his act only allows him to control the emergency operations of units, not the non-emergency operation of units. Secondly, we believed — and indeed the coroner had told us — we had a duty of care, being the people who were seen to have a higher level of expertise in the community.

We are also seeing a trend on the winding bits of roads where people driving four-wheel drive motor cars as distinct from four-wheel drives are tending to lose them on corners and striking objects. Now, you cannot plan for that type of incident, but you can certainly plan for and take mitigative action for the removal of trees that are likely to fall down and become hazardous.

It is important that your committee understands that from the volunteer perspective in Victoria we are rapidly getting into a position where the volunteers are likely to get sued, no matter what happens. In fact I had a discussion with Mr Clayton and Mr Esplin about this very issue yesterday, because the government is trying to feed down into the volunteer system in Victoria normal occupational health and safety requirements, as if we were running a normal business that made teapot cosies in Coburg or something, without providing the plant and equipment to do that. So you have volunteers out there who are told they are subject to the Occupational Health and Safety Act now, but nobody will give them the funding or the support to do it. But the High Court and the Federal Court in a number of recent cases have overturned the 400 year-old common-law provisions about the highway code.

There have been a couple of High Court cases — I think Singleton council was the main one — where councils were deemed to have a duty of care. When it comes down to the crunch and somebody gets injured with something that quite obviously was dangerous, a lot of us senior volunteers are forming the view that we are probably going to wind up standing in court being sued by a fee-for-service lawyer, and we do not like that feeling. That is now permeating through the SES and the CFA to a lesser degree with volunteers not turning out, because they are frightened that if they know about something they might get sued, and it is only a matter of time before this happens.

I do not know where we go in this state for some legislative changes to make somebody responsible for the issue, because if I go to my local council at the moment and say, ‘That tree on that roadside is dangerous and when the wind blows it is flopping around
and it is going to fall over the road’, the CEO will say to me, ‘Well, I have not got any money, I am not going to pull it out. I will wait until it falls down and somebody will put it in as an 000 call and someone from the CFA or SES will come along and take it out’.

**Mr STONEY** — So at the moment you are able to chip the tree once it has fallen to help, or whatever — —

**Mr HELPS** — We are allowed to cut it up once it has fallen down.

**Mr STONEY** — But if you identify a dangerous tree that is going to fall, you have been told you cannot touch it. Is that it?

**Mr HELPS** — Yes, and if it is on a VicRoads-controlled road they will not come out. We had an incident 18 months ago where we had a dangerous tree on the Princes Highway. We sat there in the rescue truck and we rang the VicRoads control room. They said, ‘We will send the contractor out to have a look at it’. So we sat there in the truck, and we waited and waited. Two hours later the VicRoads control room rang us back and said, ‘Our contractors looked at that tree and there is nothing wrong with it’.

**Mr STONEY** — They did not come at all?

**Mr HELPS** — There had been nobody there. What do we do? If we leave it there in that state and it falls down and hurts somebody, then we are going to get sued — probably personally rather than as a service — because the service has no money. In that particular case we knocked it down ourselves despite the instruction, but we should not be doing that. We should have the legislative support to say that if the senior officer forms a belief it is dangerous, then he should be allowed to do something about it. We are trained and certified to do it, but we are not allowed to do it.

**The CHAIR** — You have raised these issues here today, but have you raised them in other government forums as well?

**Mr HELPS** — Yes, I have had a long and lengthy but one-sided discourse with the SES director. We have raised it with our local council. At one stage our local council was going to buy us some gear, and then the SES director said, ‘I do not want you to buy them the gear because if you do they will use it and I do not want them using it’. I have been having long and involved discussions since Christmastime with the Department of Justice over the occupational health and safety issues, because they keep writing rules and flowing down occupational health and safety to a point that it is stupid. At the moment if we complied with the Occupational Health and Safety Act and we had a call to put a rescue truck on the road at, say, 2 o’clock in the morning, then it may well take us 24 hours to get the truck out the door. We just cannot do it. But I cannot get anybody in government to understand that there are times when people have to take risks. We had a call-out the other morning. I was sitting there watching the crew go out the door, and it was not compliant because there was nobody in that truck who had had the required amount of rest in the past 24 hours to comply with the driving act. Where do you get somebody at 2 o’clock in the morning who has had 8 hours unbroken sleep in the last 24?

**Mr BISHOP** — You raise an interesting issue that this committee has heard, but from another angle — that is, that many of the municipalities you have spoken about wish to remove the trees, but when they apply to the Department of Sustainability and Environment they find they cannot. It is a very long and involved process in relation to that particular issue. It may well be that the new Road Management Act, which puts responsibility on people in relation to safety and roads, might put that issue to the forefront, but I do not think there is any municipality — or many that we spoke to — that did not raise the issue in that context. It is unusual that you have not brought that issue up.
Mr HELPS — From my practical experience, that council-DPI interface is quite often used as a crutch to avoid spending money. You might think I am cynical saying that, but I have been at an accident on a roadside where we have had 35 tonnes of tree threatening to collapse over a major VicRoads thing, and you cannot even turn DPI out at 4.00 a.m. to get them there to make a decision about whether they still love this bloody tree or not, to be blunt.

At the end of the day a volunteer ends up putting his superannuation and his house on the line to do the right thing by the community. He gets the big saw out of the truck and he goes bang, drops it down and clears it up so that everybody can get to work in the morning. I made the point to Mr Esplin yesterday that we are going to get a major windstorm event around the city — we have not really had one since the mid-1980s — and this city and all the outer area could be shut for months. The last time we called for a piece of heavy equipment in our area to remove a tree the estimated time of arrival was three days because the contractor had to bring it from Orbost. He said, ‘I am not bringing it from Orbost until somebody tells me who is paying because it is not in my contract’. We ended up with a great big team cutting it up into 100-millimetre rings that were big enough to manhandle to roll off the roadway so that people in our area could go to work.

The DPI thing is very much a municipal crutch. I would like to think our society is sophisticated enough so that if somebody who is competent makes a decision that it is dangerous, then it really does not matter who says what and it goes. We have had an argument from our chief executive officer to avoid spending money and that the SES and CFA volunteers are not qualified arborists, therefore they could not know whether a tree is dangerous. I went to the people at Burnley who run the arborists’ course and they said, ‘What is he on about? They are two units in a three-year course. If your eyes are working you know whether it is alive or dead. Does it have any leaves on it? If the answer to the question is no, then it is dead’. It might be deciduous, but most of us know what is deciduous. The arborist people said, ‘If they are going to go down that track then we will run a little RPL course over a weekend and give them all tickets to make them emergency services arborists’. The municipalities do not want to spend any money. They say, ‘The DPI will not let us’, and you go to the DPI and they say, ‘We know nothing about it’.

Mr LANGDON — My local council is nothing like Casey. It has no rural areas, but it is seen as being overzealous in cutting down trees. We have people gather around the bases of trees to try and stop them being cut down. You say some councils do not want to do it, but my council and the local area seem more than keen to do it. How do you explain that?

Mr HELPS — I think it is all about circumstances. In our area — that is, Casey and Cardinia — at the end of the First World War the old Forests Department dished out nearly 2 million Pinus radiata seedlings to soldier settlers and farmers, so we have 2 million radiata trees across the area — less what has died in the intervening period — that have reached the end of their lives. Whenever there is a Pinus radiata that has to come down because it has died I never see anybody hanging around saying, ‘Leave it there’. But I can understand it; I have been into the city on storm damage jobs. I have had trees down over roads and other ones that are dangerous, especially in Malvern. People have been out on the street saying, ‘You cannot cut that tree down. We are going to get the council out to bung a piece of steel in, strap it up and hold it there’. The people in the city are probably a lot more attached to their trees than the people in the country, and that is just an information issue to the community to say, ‘Who is going to accept responsibility for this thing?’. If they end up paying an extra insurance levy to keep them there, it will probably become unfashionable pretty quickly.

Mr STONEY — You made an interesting comment earlier about all-wheel drives, as opposed to four-wheel drives, having trouble on bends. Is it just operator error, or is there — —
Mr HELPS — The boy racers just go too hard and do not quite know how to handle them. They have just bought a WRX and they go roaring round a corner and something funny happens, so they take their foot off the accelerator and the car stands on its side and goes sideways into a tree. We are increasingly getting that now. If I look back to when I was doing accident appreciation in 1966, I looked up the figures the other day and we had three truck casualty situations in the whole state for the year, and we had none of those sorts of things because nothing went hard enough and fast enough.

Mr STONEY — Is it speed and lack of confidence and not a design fault in those all-wheel drives?

Mr HELPS — We upgrade the roads and they can whiz around. Their favourite road goes from Pakenham up through to Cockatoo to Lilydale. They whiz around there, something happens and we lose them. We end up with a car sideways into a tree. We can never plan for that, but we certainly plan for the issues of what trees are dangerous and what trees are likely to be dangerous, and we can take steps to mitigate it. But at the moment there is no coherent state government policy about who can do it and who is going to pay for it. That is the issue; it is not getting done. That was the message I wanted to give your committee this afternoon, Chair — that is, that from a practitioner’s point of view in a very active emergency service unit — we average better than one cut-out a week at Pakenham — it is a major problem. I have 3400 kilometres of road in Cardinia shire that have large numbers of dead trees on the roadside. There is no program to take them out, and eventually they all come down.

The CHAIR — Are disused power poles the same problem?

Mr HELPS — No, we do not have a problem with disused power poles. We certainly had a major problem on the Princes Highway and Beaconsfield-Emerald Road with the impact of MTBE killing roadside trees. I think there are 3900 dead trees between Pakenham and the Bunyip River on the Princes Highway, some of them quite dangerous. We are not allowed to do anything about them. Everybody says, ‘Wait for them to fall down’.

Mr MULDER — I apologise for asking a question that already may have been asked. Has it been discussed with you as to whether it is government policy due to retention of native vegetation or whether it is a resources issue?

Mr HELPS — Everybody says it is a resources issue. If you look at the minimal amount of money that the SES gets compared to the CFA — and the SES is the combat authority for storm damage in Victoria — our unit gets $9000 a year, which is $4500 from the government and $4500 from the council. That is to run an SES unit that is doing on average 1200 jobs a year. At the moment it is costing us $72 000 to run the unit, which is money we have to raise from the community, yet we have a profusion of CFA units in our area that cannot turn out during the day. But they do not have to buy fuel; they have a Shell Card. They get new trucks every couple of years.

So you have this huge rump of money that goes to the CFA, but unfortunately in our area fires are not — apart from every 20 years or so — the major issue. It is storm damage, road accident, rescue and flooding. We have had built 8600 houses in the last 20 years on a flood plain that had 4 metres of water on it in 1934. There is not one evacuation resource. There is no evacuation plan; there is nothing.

Yet try and talk to Treasury about getting money for SES! We got a change to the TAC act in the late 1980s to make the TAC pay for road accident rescue. When it got to the Department of Justice they did a comfortable deal with the TAC and the money never flowed through. The government just said, ‘The TAC is paying that so we will take it off the budget’. We got nothing. We needed a crane the other night to lift up a train to get a
frail palliative care victim out from underneath that train, but we could not get one because nobody is going to pay the bill.

A volunteer had climb in underneath the train — which would not be allowed under the Occupational Health and Safety Act — to get the bits out. We have a problem here. The SES is running out of competent large chainsaw operators because we are not allowed to train on trees any more. You cannot physically go somewhere and teach someone how to tip a tree over because you are not allowed to do it.

We used it go up to the state forest where they were clear-felling years ago and train our operators up there, but you cannot do that now because the timber workers will not have non-union people on site, and nobody is going to take the risk that one of the volunteers might have an accident while they are being trained, so they do not get trained any more. It is a very serious issue, and I am saying to you that it would be really appreciated if you could address it in what you are doing.

I have real concerns about the fact that the director of SES instructs us not to do things which then puts us in a no-win situation if somebody gets hurt. We are personally going to get sued. Every morning when I leave home at 6.00 a.m. to drive into the city I drive past a tree that even young people would understand is going to fall over the roadway one day or another. It weighs 25 tonnes or thereabouts when you measure it up and look at its weight. It has a big cross on it that I put there five years ago, and it is going to fall over the roadway. If it falls and squashes a car, who are Slater and Gordon going to chase? They are going to say, ‘Mr Helps, you are the senior volunteer out there. You drive past that tree every day. You have a duty under common law of foreseeability. You should have foreseen that that tree was going to fall down, therefore we want your house and superannuation’.

Mr MULDER — The Road Management Bill would have picked it up, would it not?

The CHAIR — I am not sure whether it would.

Mr MULDER — There is a new road management bill whereby road authorities, such as VicRoads and local councils — whoever is responsible for the road reserve — is to conduct audits on that road and road reserve and deal with issues such as hazards.

The CHAIR — Are you aware of the Road Management Act?

Mr HELPS — No, I am not. We thought the High Court decision with Singleton council was the wedge that we needed to get somebody to do this. I printed it all off laboriously one weekend, took it down and gave it to the SES director who promptly stood up, walked over and threw it in his rubbish bin.

The CHAIR — Out of that same action came the Road Management Act where basically the road authority — whether it be VicRoads or local council — has, for example, the responsibility to conduct a safety audit of the road infrastructure and are responsible for that road infrastructure and the safety on that road.

Mr MULDER — That includes conducting regular audits and carrying out maintenance on that road and any road reserve — —

The CHAIR — Which does address an issue because we have tried — —

Mr HELPS — Bring it on!

Mr MULDER — It has been passed through the Parliament.
The CHAIR — You will need to get a copy of the Road Management Act for a start and have a look at that because that may address the issue to some degree in the issue that you are raising today. I know when we travelled through regional Victoria, which we did in autumn this year — we visited something like 50 or 60 regional councils — it was pretty ad hoc with regards to, for example, road safety audits. Some councils were very proactive, but I would say — and this is my guess — that the vast majority were not active at all with regards to road safety audits. But the Road Management Act does put that responsibility onto the responsible authority, whether it be the council or VicRoads.

Mr HELPS — A number of us took our holidays and were doing it for nothing, and the council CEO at Cardinia jumped up and down and he got squeezed by the councillors. He then hired an arborist who promptly went around and put crosses on the same trees we had already put them on — at a cost of $79 000! But that did not fix the problem because the trees are all sitting there with crosses on them.

The CHAIR — I suggest you get a copy of the Road Management Act and have a look at it. It does resolve the issue of resources.

Mr HELPS — Has it been passed yet?

The CHAIR — Yes.

Mr HELPS — So it is actually law?

Mr BISHOP — It does not become law in some councils for a small amount of time, but the principle of that process is under way.

Mr HELPS — So the Governor has signed off on it?

Mr BISHOP - Yes.

Mr HELPS — And there is a phase-in period with some of the councils?

The CHAIR — It was debated in the Parliament in the autumn session.

Mr MULDER — There is still a significant issue with roadside vegetation as to who makes a call to remove a tree. What the councils are saying now — or what councils and the road authority will say — is, ‘We identified that we want to pull it down, but if the Department of Sustainability and Environment will not agree to it, then the liability transfers to you. If you want to make the decision as a government not to take the trees down, then we are not accepting the responsibility as a road authority’.

There are still a few issues to be determined in terms of who is going to make the call to cut the trees down and whether it can be done by council or VicRoads, whether they have to get permission and who finally is going to accept responsibility if somebody refuses to have the tree removed. That still has not been tested.

Mr HELPS — We go through that issue regularly at 2 o’clock in the morning and at 4 o’clock in the morning. What worries me is that all the people who make the decisions are not available. They do not answer their phones and their control rooms cannot get hold of them. In the end rather than sit there till 9 o’clock in the morning the crews wind up doing the job anyway. They say, ‘If you do not like it, guys, come out and talk to us at the time’. If you ring VicRoads at 4 o’clock in the morning and say, ‘We have a dangerous tree and we want you to get somebody out to do it’ — sorry, it will not happen. It just will not happen. Our contractor at Pakenham was boasting regularly about the fact that he got paid for cleaning up trees on the roadway and he just dumped them all for 000. He says, ‘What a wonderful job the SES does. I just ring up and then I put in a bill’. We have to go and have a tin raffle to raise the petrol for the chain saws. It needs fixing.
The CHAIR — Thank you, Andrew.

Mr HELPS — I appreciate your time, Mr Chairman. It is my pleasure to give you a bit about the hard world and what goes on out there in reality.

The CHAIR — We appreciate your interest in coming in. We have heard what you said, and we will give that due consideration as we prepare our report.

Mr HELPS — Perhaps a little recommendation about a better budget for SES may not go astray.

Committee adjourned.