ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE
Inquiry into crashes involving country road toll
Bairnsdale—5 February 2004

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Necessary corrections to be notified to executive officer of committee
The CHAIR — Welcome to the committee hearing this morning.

Mr BREEDEN — Thank you for the opportunity of being part of this parliamentary inquiry. As the executive officer to our Road safety Committee in Wellington, obviously Road safety is near and dear to my heart. I cannot stress too strongly how important it is, and I hope the inquiry turns up new initiatives towards improving things.

The CHAIR — Thank you. We will get you to kick off with a description or overview of Wellington shire.

Mr BREEDEN — I have just returned from holidays so I am a bit overwhelmed at the moment and have not brought along plans of the shire, which I can send to you, if that would be of assistance. Fundamentally we are the third largest shire in Victoria, with a population of about 43 000 people. The Shire extends from a little place called Geliondale in South Gippsland to halfway up into the Great Dividing Range, running in a north-south direction. Along the Princes Highway it commences at Flynn’s Creek, just east of Traralgon, and extends through to Providence Ponds. It is a combination of the old shires of Alberton, the former shire of Rosedale, the former shire of Maffra, the former shire of Avon, with its centre at Stratford, and the former City of Sale. So five municipalities went into one and in my view it is perhaps a little big, but that is another issue again. The northern third of it is comprised primarily of Crown land, and to that extent it is not heavily populated. We have two small centres in this area — Dargo and Licola. The primary activities throughout the municipality are agricultural, the McAllister irrigation district is well-known for its dairying industry.

Coming from South Gippsland, it came as a surprise to me to see the extent of logging, especially relating to softwood harvesting, being carried out. Softwood harvesting produces a significant amount of traffic in its own right, especially relating to large commercial vehicles — that is, up to 68-tonne B-doubles. There is a lot of this activity on the roads. There is also a lot of activity relating to milk cartage, another commercial activity; and when I came to Sale I realised that education in its own right is a large industry within Sale, which generates a significant amount of bus traffic.

That is a very brief summary of the municipality, what happens here and some of the problems associated with Road safety. I will take the opportunity to say that the biggest concern that Wellington has — and I am sure it is reflected in other municipalities — is the degraded state of a large number of our timber bridges. I have grave concerns about these bridges, especially with the ever-increasing size and power of commercial vehicles. I was speaking a moment ago about B-doubles. One of the contractors here, operating out of Rosedale, has a B-double of 68-tonne gross combined mass. It is mass managed, but it is powered by a 600-horsepower engine, and designed to take a third trailer. VicRoads will not let him run the third trailer, but what I am indicating is that there is a push in all areas of commercial transport areas to get bigger and more powerful trucks all the time. The small rural roads are not up to it and certainly the small timber bridges are not.

The CHAIR — How many timber bridges would you have?

Mr BREEDEN — About 120 timber bridges that need replacing in the next 5 to 10 years. Any sort of timber bridge is $300 000, and the larger ones on the arterials are half a million dollars, so you can quickly do the mathematics to work out that you are looking at in the order of $60 million. Where will councils find that sort of money to replace timber bridges? I do not know, but it will not come from within councils themselves.

Mr LANGDON — The Roads to Recovery program has obviously been extended. How much did the Wellington shire get from that?

Mr BREEDEN — I think it is in the order of $1.2 million, but a significant part of that is being directed towards our replacement of the timber bridges; but again if you are looking at a recurrent replacement in the order of $50 million to $60 million, even a million dollars a year is still falling short of the mark in my view.

Mr STONEY — Can councils decide? Is it their call where the money goes?

Mr BREEDEN — It has to go on roads. It is a council decision as to whether it goes on to, say, the pavements or is directed towards bridges. Council, of course is recognising its bridge problem and directing most of that money to bridges.
Mr STONEY — So if that money was seen by council to be well spent in removing roadside objects that were dangerous, it could go towards that?

Mr BREEDEN — Yes.

The CHAIR — So how would the poor state of the timber bridges relate directly to Road safety?

Mr BREEDEN — It relates to Road safety primarily because you can have a situation where vehicles can lose control. You can get unusual situations of large vehicles crossing these bridges, going down the middle of the road in order to go between narrow kerbs, and perhaps alarming other motorists.

I was speaking yesterday to a group in Melbourne — it is called the Performance Based Standards for vehicles group — which is trying to match the standard of roads to the vehicles. I was describing to the group one of the problems we have. A lot of the old timber bridges were primarily constructed in the 1920s and 1930s, and many were replaced after the 1939 bushfires throughout Gippsland. They are so constructed that in order to provide the necessary waterway underneath the bridge you will find that the deck level is elevated above the approach gradient of the road on both sides; so you effectively get a ramp up and a ramp down. Whether the bridge is long or short does not matter. It is possible to observe this happening if you watch these 68-tonne monsters approach a bridge: the truck approaches, it probably will not slow down, and if it does the slowing down will be minimal. The vehicle and the load will go up the ramp, and the suspension compresses — the whole load gets on the bridge and the suspension compresses as it goes up the ramp. As the truck gets to the top of the bridge the load is up on the top of the suspension, and then as the truck goes across the bridge it comes down again; so you get this enormous impact load.

I am not sure whether you understand the mechanics involved in this scenario, but it hits the ramp, the ramp pushes the load up in the air, up it goes, and then as the load moves on to the bridge, down comes the load, so effectively you are getting not only the 68-tonne static mass, but you could be increasing the effective mass by up to 20, 30, or 40 per cent; so you could have the effective load on these bridges going up in the order of 100 tonnes. My concern is that one of the these days, one or more of these bridge will collapse under this type of load and there will be a catastrophic failure. A half million-dollar vehicle will be in the creek, with all sorts of claims about who was to blame, council failing in its duty of care and all of the other resultant things that will flow from that.

The CHAIR — What audit strategy does the council implement, then, if that is a concern?

Mr BREEDEN — We are conducting one now and trying to prioritise the bridges that need replacing, taking account of our road classification system — and we do have our own road classification system. We have developed a system that includes — (setting aside the Vicroads one, which has its own classification) — rural arterials, rural collectors and then below what are called our rural local roads. We are trying to assemble a prioritised listing for replacing and upgrading the roads, using those categories as a basis.

Mr BISHOP — You would have done that work in relation to the road management bill we will be addressing in this session of Parliament because of the finalisation of the nonfeasance issue, which you obliquely referred to in liability terms. So is your council well under way with that, do you know?

Mr BREEDEN — Yes, we are well under way with it, although I am not the officer directly involved in it; but council is aware of it. It applauds the overall thrust of that particular initiative, and we will be working towards it and cooperating with it.

Mr LANGDON — Back to the bridges situation, have you had any major accidents on the bridges?

Mr BREEDEN — No, not no date.

The CHAIR — Have you had cause to close any of the bridges?

Mr BREEDEN — Yes, and in fact in relation to one of the bridges over a tributary to the Avon River, known as Freestone Creek, we had a 12-tonne load limit on it; it was deemed through inspection to be unsuitable, and it was closed and decommissioned. Council is in the process of calling tenders for its replacement, and because it is a very long bridge the estimated replacement cost is about $750 000.
The CHAIR — On the positive side, I note in your letter to us dated 26 August, you talked about the Vicroads endpost protection program.

Mr BREEDEN — Yes, that is great. One of the highlights and good things about Road safety that has occurred over the last three or four years was the implementation and funding of the black spot program. The funding that we received included the bridge endpost protection program. I think it amounted to $300 000 or $400 000 of funding that we received. In addition we received in the order of the same amount again for other works, primarily directed at reconstructing at-grade intersections, taking the cross intersections and offsetting them, also improving intersections where you have a curve and a road coming off to bring the incoming road on to the back of the curve, improving intersection treatments in townships, traffic islands and all those sorts of things. This funding was highly regarded by the broader public because it enabled it to have a say in what it thought should be done, and it was very welcome by council itself because we believe the money was very well used, and the projects themselves have been very effective in terms of reducing the potential for road accidents. I cannot speak highly enough of that. I am terribly disappointed that the program is now unfunded.

The CHAIR — So all of the 120 bridges have had the endpost protection program implemented?

Mr BREEDEN — No. The endpost protection program would have applied probably to something in the order of 20 or 30 bridges, but on the higher order roads.

Mr LANGDON — What percentage would that be?.

Mr BREEDEN — Of the total bridge structures in the order of 20 to 30 per cent; in terms of the endpost protection program — I do not think you could justify applying it to all the bridges, especially when you get down to the very low-order roads, which carry less than 50 vehicles per day. In those cases you could not justify it for that category or type of bridge.

The CHAIR — We will not mention bridges again.

Mr BISHOP — A thing that interests many of us is driver fatigue, and you have brought that up in one of your dot points. Given the fact that you said this shire is the third largest in Victoria, would you like to expand on the dot point you have there?

Mr BREEDEN — I guess we can all relate to personal experience of driver fatigue. I do because I live at Leongatha and work in Sale. I was very taken by a presentation by Professor Phillip Swan — I think he works for the Monash University Accident Research Centre — at the Road safety conference not last year but the year before, about his research into that area. He alluded to the fact that we all suffer fatigue and go to sleep at times and do not even know it. I think it is important that this is taken up. The only way to truly address it in my view is through general public awareness and education, especially among young people. I have four children ranging from 21 to 30 years. The older ones are now mature and grown up but the young ones are shockers. Tell them what you will, advise them the best you can — they are bulletproof, they are infallible and they do not need sleep.

Mr STONEY — I don’t know any kids like that.

The CHAIR — You cannot put an old head on young shoulders.

Mr BREEDEN — It is just the way it is. I think driver fatigue is an important aspect of reducing the road toll. I am pleased to learn that we now have systems, especially among commercial operators, whereby they can maintain close surveillance on their operators to ensure that if they are driving beyond their recommended period of operation they simply cannot activate the trucks. All of those things have come in — satellite controls and all those things — and I think it is great because it is reducing the abuse of good operator practice.

The CHAIR — Is there a concern with fatigue with tourists heading through to the east of the state?

Mr BREEDEN — I guess there is an undercurrent of concern, but my hunch is that it is difficult to identify. Sale itself, which is the centre of the municipality along the highway, is two and a half hours or thereabouts east of Melbourne. I guess tourists could be getting tired having left Melbourne. If they are coming from the other direction it may be even more so, but again I guess in our workaday world we are aware of it but we are not out there actively seeking to identify it and do something about it. It is simply an awareness thing.
The CHAIR — I noticed that one of the shires — I do not think it is any secret — East Gippsland shire recognised the fact that, in its eyes, there is a lack of rest areas and hence drivers are continuing on.

Mr BREEDEN — That is probably true, and I can understand it in the East Gippsland shire being a regular holiday maker at Mallacoota. We go out through Bruthen, and once you get further east you get into some fairly hilly, forested country and the road becomes quite narrow with long steep grades.

The CHAIR — You are 5 or 6 hours from Melbourne.

Mr BREEDEN — You are just that much more tired and the opportunity to pull off is not necessarily available. I guess it is one thing to provide these areas to pull off, it is another thing to get people to use them. Being humans and observing the, if you like, nature of us: ‘Oh, we’ve only got an hour to go, we will be right’, and keep going. Again it is like the fatigue thing or the alcohol thing or whatever else — it is all about education. I make comment in here.

Mr LANGDON — With regard to the road toll, are there more accidents beyond Sale than prior to Sale? You are saying Sale is basically in the middle and two and a half hours is not that far so people might keep driving. Is there is a greater number of accidents after Sale?

Mr BREEDEN — I could not answer that question. I think the best people to answer that question would be Vicroads, which has, I guess, access to the road statistics more than I do. If there was a pattern there that could be identified it would be able to do it, I could not.

The CHAIR — I am very interested in the work of your Road safety committee. Could you expand on the role of the committee and who is on the committee?

Mr BREEDEN — The committee itself is comprised of a councillor who chairs it — Cr Darren McCubbin is the current chair — we have representation from the Wellington TOG (Traffic Operations Group) — that is, the police people — together with a range of other community representatives. We work our way through a range of Road safety issues. We also try and implement, consistent with resources, our adopted Road Safety Management Plan. We are dealing with things such as intersections, speed zones, pedestrian crossings, line marking, signage — all of those sorts of issues — on a regular basis. Of course, for things like speed zones we have to apply to Vicroads for approval and we do that. All of the other issues are dealt with as they come along. It is a productive and useful committee mindful of the fact that it has a $10 000 budget which is supplemented through the East Gippsland Community Road safety Council. As executive officer to our Road safety committee I am also the Wellington council representative on the East Gippsland Community Road safety Council, where we can access additional funds on a dollar-for-dollar arrangement. We are not into funding reconstruction of intersections and those sorts of things, but all the little things, the 1 and 2 percenters that combine collectively to add up to a useful contribution to Road safety. If I can finish, if nothing else the minutes go to the council and form part of the council minutes, and they maintain an awareness of Road safety in the minds of all councillors.

Mr STONEY — Getting back to the fatigue issue, there are a lot of signs, and it has always puzzled me that they are often just 10 minutes away from where someone may have stopped, or you go through a big town and suddenly you see a drowsy drivers sign. There does not appear to be coordination between these signs reminding you that you should stop and wayside stops. Has your committee ever thought of how the two programs might be coordinated, where you might have a sign before the wayside stop saying that if you are feeling drowsy you can pull off in 1 kilometre?

Mr BREEDEN — I think it would be true to say that the roads under our control, being the low-order roads, are not the sort of roads where fatigue is an issue because they are really only the minor collector roads that people travel on for maybe 20 minutes.

Mr STONEY — But your road safety committee would think about all roads in the area.

Mr BREEDEN — Yes, we do. Indeed, recently we were discussing roadside stops, especially relating to commercial — that is, truck — traffic requesting that additional provision be made for off-road rest areas for trucks. We wrote to Vicroads about that. The response was something like, ‘We think there are adequate pull-off areas for trucks along the Princes Highway east from Traralgon through to the border in its present form.’ We did not agree with that. We responded to Vicroads by saying, ‘We do not agree but in any event we believe that when you are designing major road facilities the like of which Vicroads is responsible for, the provision of wayside stops...
for not only the ordinary motorist but the commercial vehicles should simply be part and parcel of the design process — they should not be considered as add-ons afterwards or afterthoughts. When you are designing the roads that is the time you should be putting those things in. It should not be something you can just forget about but one of your check lists.’

Mr BISHOP — I commend you on part (c) of your paper on vehicle features. I am sure that happens to most of us, and it is not a bad suggestion. I am sure the committee will take that on board. Chair, I do not whether Neil is going to do a presentation or we are just asking him questions.

Mr BREEDEN — I am happy to run through that.

Mr BISHOP — I would like you to expand on this roadside objects issue. There are some very good points in there, but it needs a bit of expansion from our point of view.

Mr BREEDEN — Are you happy for me just to read through it and make comments?

Mr STONEY — If you would speak to it that would be good.

Mr BREEDEN — I have broken it up in respect of the issues raised. We are talking about crashes involving roadside objects and speed, drugs and alcohol; I do not think I need to expand on that at all because we have covered it fairly well.

The road and roadside environment. Clearly the road itself and especially its surface width and alignment have a significant contributing effect to accidents. It is not practical nor indeed justified to construct all roads to a sealed condition with alignment matching the default speed limit of 100 kilometres an hour. Accordingly we must rely on other road features such as signage, line marking, guide posts and other facilities to assist motorists to drive at speeds appropriate to the prevailing conditions. This need is heightened in wet conditions when visibility is poor and or/low temperatures are encountered — that is, ice on the roads. We are talking about driving according to appropriate conditions. I mentioned a moment ago that I have four kids. The youngest has just received her licence. We were holidaying in Mallacoota over the Christmas-New Year period and we took a trip around by the lake. I was a bit taken aback by the speed at which she was travelling. It says 60 kilometres an hour. I said, ‘Jess, why are you going so fast? You do not need to go this fast.’ She said, ‘Because it says 60’. I said, ‘Jess, do you understand that the 60 is the maximum speed but you should at all times drive at a speed appropriate to the conditions? What would happen if a dog ran down that bank or a kid stepped out in front of you — could you stop?’

The point I am making is that somewhere along the line it seems to have imprinted in the minds of motorists that when it says 100 or 80 or 60 that is, if you like, the correct and proper speed to travel at. I put it to you that somewhere along the line we have to instil in the minds of motorists that this is the maximum speed and that they should at all times take account of the prevailing conditions and drive at the appropriate speed. Again, it is an educative thing, but I do not know how we do it. I just make that comment.

Features such as cruise control, satellite navigation — and I think that is becoming more widespread, especially in four-wheel drives — and car phones all make demands on the driver, and can, as a result, be a distraction. These features are here to stay, however it is suggested that the appropriate response is to require manufacturers to incorporate these features in such a way as to minimise the demands on driver attention. I am sure with modern technology the manufacturers can do this.

I will relate a particular incident that occurred in respect of cruise control. I have witnessed at first hand an accident on the South Gippsland Highway several years ago in which an elderly lady, probably not used to the device, driving a late model Honda ran off the road and overturned when using cruise control. Clearly she misjudged the curve and/or the speed of the road. Having observed the accident I concluded maybe cruise control can be installed in vehicles with a sensor so that if you are travelling on a straight road and you turn a certain amount and you are going at a speed not appropriate to that curvature, it will automatically disengage.

In simple terms, if you are doing 100 km/h and you turn the steering wheel, say, 10 degrees, it turns off. If you are only doing 80 km/h you can turn it a bit more. You need to calibrate it consistent with the speed. I think that would be a relatively simple thing to do because here is a situation with an elderly lady, probably not used to it, who left the cruise control on too long, and by the time she had realized it, it was too late. She lost control of the vehicle, went into the big embankment on the South Gippsland Highway. The car overturned, and she was laying on the road. The car was a write–off, and she could have been killed.
Mr STONEY — There is another aspect of cruise control, and I will mention it, just to get it on the record: if you are coming up a hill and the road turns hard one way or the other, and the car kicks down a gear to keep maintaining the speed, it will perhaps throw you into a slide; so it is actually quite a tricky thing that you have to watch. You kick down a gear which jerks the car, whether it happens to be a wet surface or loose gravel, for instance, and it can really throw you because you get that surge in your car.

Mr BREEDEN — Certainly I think there is opportunity for a greater level of sophistication to be built in to those devices. In terms of enforcement, the extent and effectiveness of enforcement — and I guess we are talking about the Traffic Operations Group and those sorts of people — is somewhat unknown. The only way to properly test it is to remove it altogether for a period, and measure the results. This is, of course, impractical.

In terms of measures to reduce the incidents and severity of crashes, there is no single, simple set of actions that can be taken so as to reduce the incidence and severity of crashes. Of the available measures it seems to me that driver education offers best value. We need to instil in the minds of motorists that having a licence to drive on public roads is a privilege, not a right, and that attaching to this privilege is a significant responsibility not only to themselves but to their passengers and other road users. You have probably had that said to you many times.

In terms of changed legislation, what I say there is that it is not easy to comment on this matter, but as a suggestion the following could be considered: random breath testing for both blood alcohol and other drugs, and I think that is probably being considered in various quarters already.

Mr BISHOP — That is in train now. It commenced this year as a pilot program.

Mr BREEDEN — There is no doubt in my mind that the smoking of cannabis and all sorts of other things impacts on people’s ability to drive effectively.

The third suggestion on legislation would be for extended pre-training for young people seeking to obtain driving licenses. I made mention of the experience with my daughter, driving around Mallacoota, and it just seems to me that to hand over a licence to young people in today’s modern world and on today’s road system without significant pre–training and experiences in different road conditions — we are probably not doing as well as we could or should in that area. I know young people are anxious to get on the roads and get into their own car and all of those sorts of things, but somehow, something needs to be done. Perhaps it means going into simulators or something like that.

The CHAIR — That is an interesting second dot point in your submission as well — about retesting and training for older drivers.

Mr BREEDEN — Allow me to explain: my 93–year old father has just lost his licence after bitterly protesting and going through all sorts of tests. He was tested through VicRoads. He eventually lost it, and that was good. I will tell you what happened, and it is quite comical, but it is a bit sad. Prior to losing his licence he went for a test at the VicRoads office in Sale, and his eyesight was tested. He was leaning across the counter, trying to get the letters correct but not succeeding. A young girl on the other side of the counter said, ‘Mr Breeden, you are not getting the letters right’, and he said, ‘Yes I am. I can read them alright!’ She said, ‘Sorry Mr Breeden, you will need some glasses.’

So I got him some glasses that improved his distance vision. And on the day they arrived I was heading off home through Yarram to Leongatha on a Friday night, and I rang him up and asked, ‘How are the new glasses for your driving going, dad?’ and he said, ‘They’re terrific along the straight. They really enable me to see much better, but I have a bit of a problem going around the curves. When I go around them I can see two curves!’ So I said, ‘What do you do about that?’ and he said, ‘I just shut one eye!’ That story demonstrates that probably he should have lost his licence much, much earlier. I know people hold onto their licence because it is their independence and all of those things, but it is dangerous.

The other incident was again relating to him. When I first came to Wellington Shire I went out to Heyfield and introduced myself to the local real estate agent, Moss Mahony, and he said, ‘You wouldn’t be Tom Breeden’s son, would you?’ I said, ‘Yes’ and he said, ‘Well, when Tom drives that big old Valiant of his he is a bit of a menace on the road!’.

Dad is profoundly deaf, has lost a lot of the feeling in his feet because he has sugar diabetes, and overall he is not operating too well. What was happening was that he was dropping wheelies in the main street of Heyfield because
he couldn’t feel the pedals, he couldn’t hear the engine, so he guessed when it was right to take off, and the car was leaping backwards and forwards down the main street of Heyfield! The locals wouldn’t come into town at 9.30 in the morning because they knew Tom was in the main street. Thankfully he has now lost his licence. Those things might have a sense of comedy about them, but in truth he should not have been on the road. He probably had been on the road for 20 years too long.

**The CHAIR** — Yes. We had better to move to roadside objects now.

**Mr BREEDEN** — Yes. The next heading is, ‘Incidence causes and means of addressing accidents. This matter should really be broken into two parts: why vehicles leave the road; and when they do, how to minimise the likely outcome.

In this regard the reasons for vehicles leaving the road are numerous, well known and include road conditions, speed, experience, alcohol and so on. How to minimise the impact of such events is more open to evaluation and response.

Freeways, of course, address this situation by broad separation between vehicles travelling in opposite directions, the use of various barriers and guardrails to deflect errant vehicles, and significant clearways on to the road verges to the side. It is not possible to provide this level of facility on lower order roads, the likes of which we are dealing with here, but there are lessons to be learnt, and I have noted them as dot points, as follows:

provide adequate clearway to the side of the roads and remove fixed obstacles immediately adjacent to the road — that is, trees, rocks, and so on, so far as is practical and within the resource available. Removal of these obstacles should be ‘as of right’ for the particular road authority.

We are becoming an increasingly regulated society, and I do not believe that a council should have to get approval from DSE or any other authority for a tree on the side of the road deemed to be needing removal.

**Mr STONEY** — Has there been trouble getting permission or has it slowed things down?

**Mr BREEDEN** — It has sort of slowed things up. Even site distances at intersections are affected, if you have an intersection with obstructed site distance. We have an environmental planner and all of those things, and I just raise the issue with you and put it on paper here because I think, and this is relevant for the new road management bill, every road authority should be, as of right, able to remove roadside obstacles consistent with practical applications without referral to a whole lot of other authorities who might have an interest.

**The CHAIR** — Are there trees that have been identified that have been unable to be removed because of the processes?

**Mr BREEDEN** — The need to remove them has been severely questioned by the environmental people, who say, ‘Perhaps we should leave that one in, and perhaps we should leave that one in’, when clearly the decision should be made to remove them because they represent a Road safety hazard. There should be no further reference to other people — just remove them.

**Mr STONEY** — What about with major works, such as on the Princes Highway coming into Bairnsdale, from memory, where they have just pushed the road out into the paddock and left a couple of miles of trees? Would that be in the same category? When it is a major decision on a major road, should it then be a case of a referral?

**Mr BREEDEN** — I mean at intersections and those sorts of places. I guess it is horses for courses. The odd small crops of individual trees should be as of right decided by council. When it comes to major roadside clearance, especially of native vegetation, I concede that that should be referred to the environmental planners and other statutory authorities. I understand and accept that.

**Mr STONEY** — So there is a clear definition where you have a tree identified, it is clearly dangerous, in which case they should just be able to go and take it; whereas if it is major works it is different. That could perhaps be defined in the bill.

**Mr BREEDEN** — I noticed last year Vicroads went along and did a lot of roadside clearance on the South Gippsland Highway south of Sale. I concluded from that that Vicroads probably now has defined clearance
zones for the roads under its control, whether they are 2, 3 or 4 metres clear of the edge of seal or something like that.

It seems to me that maybe that could be the precursor to the analogous arrangements applicable to what I am talking about — that, say, 2 or 3 metres on this or that sort of road could mean that council has an automatic right to clear roadside obstacles. Vicroads has probably already opened up the ground in that area, and councils could use that to assist them.

Mr STONEY — It would be good to find that out.

Mr BISHOP — You would see Vicroads as the group determining the classification and the format?

Mr BREEDEN — Yes. I see Vicroads as the lead agency in respect of roads. I put them there as the authority. They set the pattern and the guidelines. I think that is good. All we need to do is look at what they are doing and apply it to our particular situation.

Attention to signage in its various forms is important so as to properly and adequately inform the motorist of road conditions, especially where significant changes occur along particular roads, such as narrowing of the seal; changing from sealed to unsealed, and changing from flat or undulating to steep and winding.

We need the provision of roadside barriers and guardrails, and line marking, for sealed roads only, of course, including the application of barrier lines and edge lines, where appropriate. This should be mandatory for known fog-prone areas. A lot can be done for a minimal cost in the area of line marking.

Point (b), in connection with roadside objects, is headed: ‘Liability and accountability for roadside utilities..’ For reasons of access and convenience, roads and streets have historically been used for the installation of other utilities including poles and other fixtures. It is reasonable to expect this practice to continue.

In the circumstances and the interests of Road safety the following represent a suggested checklist when replacing utilities and installing new utilities:

- can the service utility be undergrounded?

- If the utility must be above ground, where should it be located so as to maximise Road safety?

- What type of equipment should be used so as to minimise the effects of vehicle crashes such as frangible poles, collapsible cabinets and those typed of things?

A combination of things can be used to make improvements.

In respect of accountability, it is my view that the particular service provider, whether it is Telstra or anyone else, should be responsible for addressing these issues when upgrading and/or installing their new facilities. In all cases the road authority should be notified, and approval obtained for such installations and upgrades.

Over on page 4 of my submission, under the heading of ‘Risk management guidelines and practices’ it is appropriate that guidelines and practices be developed, and I am sure Vicroads are doing that. Their development will need to recognise the range of roads used by the public, extending from freeways to local, infrequently used country tracks. All road authorities should be encouraged to participate in their development.

My final point on the need for changes to legislation and/or statutory requirements is that apart from legislation empowering police to undertake random breath testing for drugs as well as alcohol — and you were saying earlier that this is already in train — there are no other specific changes that come immediately to mind. It does seem, however, that when drafting new legislation and statutory requirements, care should be taken to provide appropriate levels of discretion to enable those who will be enacting it to be effective. That is where my submission finishes.

The CHAIR — Thankyou. Neil, can I ask how the implementation of the school restrictions has gone?

Mr BREEDEN — It is a bit early at this stage, Mr Chairman, because the new speed zones are being undertaken by contract directly under Vicroads, and it has not really got under way at all within the Wellington shire. Suffice to say I think a number of the schools which had previously been pressing for the installation of reduced speed limits past schools have welcomed it, and I am sure will be awaiting installation of the new signage.
It will also, if you like, require council to consider adjacent speed zones — for example, in Yarram there has been a consistent concern at the northern end of Yarram, along the South Gippsland Highway, that a reduced speed zone needs to be implemented. There is a school zone there and a 40 km/h zone will be implemented and that will impact on the adjacent zones and will produce, I think, a good end result. It is not just the crossings themselves, it could have good positive results on immediately adjacent speed zones as well.

Mr BISHOP — Do you get much feedback from your constituents in Wellington shire about the plethora of road restrictions going from 80 km/h to 60 km/h to 50 km/h to 40 km/h as you go through a town where there might be 8 or 10 changes?

Mr BREEDEN — We do not get a lot so much through the townships because I think people generally accept that that is reasonable. A couple of comments: I think they should be consistent so that as you approach townships people understand what is happening. Anecdotally, for example, there is a lot of complaint regarding the Princes Highway between Morwell and Traralgon where you come off the divided carriageway along by the new Central Gippsland hospital and you go through a number of different changes: you come off the freeway at 110 km/h, slow down to 80 km/h at the hospital, you then go a period at 90 km/h, then to 100 km/h and then back to 80 km/h. I think where you have what appear to be confusing speed zones between townships would be the thing that draws the major complaint — inconsistent and confusing speed zones along major roads like the Princes Highway.

Mr LANGDON — Following on from that question, in New South Wales, to do away with the plethora of zones, I noticed that coming through the towns they indicate that the whole town is a certain speed zone. Do you think that could be adopted here? Would that be effective?

Mr BREEDEN — I think probably what the state government has done by allowing VicRoads and councils to define the arterial routes through and within townships as being 70 km/h, 60 km/h or whatever and then by default everything else 50 km/h is not a bad way to go. The problem with having a blanket speed zone right throughout a township is that there will most likely be one or more major routes where that lower speed limit, and that is probably what you would be looking to apply as a blanket, will be either inappropriate or disregarded because it is a nuisance or difficult to comply with. I think what we have here in Victoria is not a bad outcome. It provides that little bit of discretion for council to decide whether it is going to be 60 km/h, 70 km/h or 80 km/h as appropriate in the circumstances but everywhere else 50 km/h. Hopefully in time the broader populace will understand that if they do not know what the speed limit is in a township they should go 50 km/h. I think that is not a bad outcome.

Mr LANGDON — One other question: the Hume Freeway in particular is getting point-to-point speed cameras like they have in New South Wales, not just for trucks but for all vehicles. Do you think that could assist along the Princes Highway? Is speeding a problem?

Mr BREEDEN — I am really not in a position to answer that. I think that would probably be best answered by the relevant TOG people along the Princes Highway: I simply do not know.

Mr BREEDEN — Thank you for the opportunity, I wish you well. I hope the outcome is very good.

Witness withdrew.
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into crashes involving country road toll

Bairnsdale–5 February 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
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Executive Officer: Ms A. Douglas
Research Officer: Mr P. Nelson

Witness

Mr C. Holmes, Executive Support Engineer, Shire of Baw Baw
The CHAIR — Welcome. Thank you for your time. A transcript will be taken. We use it for our own internal purposes, but we will provide you with a copy of it. If you like, the best way to kick this off is perhaps to describe to us the Baw Baw shire and what it takes in.

Mr HOLMES — I have a small presentation which tells a little bit about the Baw Baw shire. It probably only takes 5 or 10 minutes to go through, and then I am happy to take questions. I will not read this exactly, I will just précis it and perhaps enlarge on some of the points that I think might be important.

I thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. Baw Baw shire mainly wants to address term of reference (c) in the inquiry regarding roadside objects. It talks about ‘appropriate risk management guidelines and practices for roadside hazard management in various speed zones’. The various speed zones is the point we were a little bit concerned about. I particularly want to home in on that, if I can.

The Baw Baw shire is strategically placed. It is 100 kilometres from Melbourne, located on the Princes Highway. It covers approximately 4000 square kilometres and embraces a variety of country. It has the Baw Baw mountains to the north, very rich, flat dairy country to the centre of the shire and to the south is the Strzelecki mountain range. It has quite a variety of types of terrain and soils and so on. Many areas of the shire are very scenic and roads through those areas are used by a lot of tourists and locals who enjoy the very attractive drives through the country and so on.

Mr LANGDON — What would be the furthest part from Melbourne — 2 hours and 30 minutes, 3 hours?

Mr HOLMES — Warragul is 100 kilometres so, an hour, and then to go up to Mount Baw Baw is another hour — something like 2 hours. When you get right up the top into the state forest it can be even longer because there are virtually no roads up there. The top third of the shire is virtually state forest and we do not really look after a lot of roads in there.

The CHAIR — So you go up as far as Matlock?

Mr HOLMES — Yes. Milk production is a very dominant farming pursuit, as is fruit growing. Timber production, both hardwood and softwood, is a very important industry in our shire.

Financially the shire has in place a number of what we believe to be very effective construction and maintenance initiatives to manage our road network. However, it is fair to say that all the funds that are available are not really adequate to meet the general requirements to maintain the roads and the safety requirements for motorists on the roads — we struggle to do that. I daresay the same applies to other rural municipalities. In 1998 the Victorian state government had what it called the local government infrastructure study — Facing the Renewal Challenge. That identified that most of the shires had a shortfall in what they were spending to maintain their roads. We were no exception although we were on the higher side as we were fairly close to meeting our targets. In 2000 the federal government announced the Roads to Recovery funding.

Our share of that funding is $1.166 million a year; I have listed how we spend that. We mainly aim at trying to maintain our existing road network with that funding, to make up the shortfall identified in the Victorian government study. We spend $200 000 on resheets; $106 000 on bituminous resales; $555 000 on rehabilitation; and a small amount on capital works. That gives you some idea of where we are coming from. The federal government recently announced that the Roads to Recovery funding will continue for another four years. However, although the details are not out yet it appears to us that we will get about half of what we were getting before. I have listed how I worked that out. There is a meeting down in Melbourne today giving a few details on that.

Mr LANGDON — So, as you said, you are only getting half; you would like it to be what it was?

Mr HOLMES — It would be ideal. We were struggling with what we had before and just getting up to where we should be.

Mr LANGDON — What about the black spot funding?

Mr HOLMES — We get quite a bit of that, but it is for capital works, it is not really for maintenance works. Just to maintain what we have is where we were coming from. We are trying desperately to spend what we need just to maintain it. Once we do that then we can look at improving the system: our first priority is trying to maintain it. That is the struggle we have, and I think most rural municipalities are in the same boat.
To answer your question, we do quite well out of the black spot funding. We apply for a lot of that and in the last few years we believe we have done very well where we can identify spots that are eligible for the funding — you have to meet the various cost-benefit ratios and so on. I have attached a copy of the shire map to the handout you have, just for interest. We maintain virtually all the road network within our shire with the exception of the Princes Highway that runs through the centre of the shire and a couple of tourist roads and forest roads that Vicroads looks after directly.

Mr STONEY — On that, is that called the park access funding, through which Vicroads funds the park access?

Mr HOLMES — I do not know the answer to that. Vicroads generally looks after the highways, the declared main network, forest roads and tourist roads; that is generally its funding. We look after the declared main roads in our shire and some of the forest roads and some of the tourist roads using grants from Vicroads, using its funding.

Mr STONEY — There is a park access fund. I was going to ask this before but we will try to bring it out here. There is a fund from Vicroads of about $400 000, which is the park access fund. DSE manages it. It is designed for roads that are shire roads or shire roads that lead into national parks where there is no incentive for shires to do the road up because it is the end of the line and no-one lives there but it is still a shire road so there is this fund that DSE hands out to shires. My question was: every year it is different and sometimes the road gets it and sometimes it does not. That is why I was interested that you have 55 kilometres that obviously get it each year. It must be a different fund; you may not be accessing the park access grant at all.

Mr HOLMES — I wasn’t aware of that funding. I will make some inquiries.

Mr STONEY — You will be now. I know that shires right around the mountains have a dip at it, but it is intermittent.

Mr HOLMES — Yes, we shall have a look at that and see. Of the 2068 kilometres of road we look after, 1022 is sealed and 1046 is unsealed, so it is virtually half and half. The main part of what I want to talk about now is that the terrain through which the various roads in the shire pass varies greatly. We have mountains to the north, flat, swampy areas in the middle and then mountains to the south again. Most of the flat grazing areas have been extensively cleared, and hence little if any of the original native vegetation exists there. What does exist is often in the road reserve — the farmers have generally cleared their paddocks, and our road reserves are the only remnants left, and therefore it forms a very important part of the vegetation and needs to be preserved. The other areas are steep and very heavily timbered, and they present very attractive scenic tourist drives.

Mr LANGDON — Yes, looking at your pictures, there are enormous trees, and with many of them if you look beyond the road causeways there is hardly anything in the paddocks at all.

Mr HOLMES — That is right. They are general photos. I just went out and spent a day taking photos. I could have taken a lot more.

Mr LANGDON — So if it were not for the trees around the road reservations you would be looking at vast open spaces of nothing?

Mr HOLMES — Yes. The vegetation on the road reserves forms very important corridors for the animals between clumps of trees or what is left.

Mr STONEY — So in the case of the photo here in your submission, and the one on the wall now, the solution would be a barrier, I assume?

Mr HOLMES — You could look at guardrail. Again it is expensive. It is $100 a lineal metre for guardrail, plus the terminal ends.

Mr STONEY — It is quite expensive to take that tree out, though.

Mr HOLMES — That is right, and that is our dilemma. We do not have the funding to look at the number of trees that would have to come out or the number that would require guardrail around them. Photo 1 in the submission shows a lovely tree on what we call the Number 1 Road. It is a road close in to Warragul. It is just a
local road. It carried 778 vehicles a day back a few years when the traffic count was done, so it would be over 800 vehicles a day now on that road. You can see it is a lovely tree, and to remove that tree would create a big backlash from the community. There are many examples like that.

Mr BISHOP — To me, if you are slowing down that big tree is probably not such a big issue but you cannot see because of the others. Is that an issue in your safety planning assessment? You cannot see people coming from the right, can you?

Mr HOLMES — It may be an issue. We have not identified that as being an issue, but you are right — it could well be an issue.

Mr BISHOP — So if that were an issue and the council decided it was — —

Mr HOLMES — We would look at taking those trees out.

The CHAIR — By what process?

Mr HOLMES — We would need a planning permit to remove native vegetation for a start.

The CHAIR — Is that an easy process?

Mr HOLMES — Reasonably easy, but we cannot guarantee if we will get the permit. They are looked at on their merits.

The CHAIR — Are there trees that you have identified in the past as dangerous through the process that remain there today?

Mr HOLMES — There are certainly some we have removed. I cannot remember there being one refused.

The CHAIR — So generally you would get the permit at the end of the process?

Mr HOLMES — To date we have, but if we tried for a tree like that we may not. It is quite a significant tree. Generally we have not targeted trees like that.

Mr LANGDON — However, guardrail could ease the problem?

Mr HOLMES — In that situation, yes.

Mr LANGDON — And could be the same expense as taking the tree down?

Mr HOLMES — It would be, or guardrail might even be dearer than removing the tree

The next slide is again Number 1 Road a bit further down. There are a couple of large trees on the right and an avenue of trees on the left. The trees are fairly close to the road and we would not really look at removing those as they form an important strip of native vegetation. You can see in the paddocks that there is virtually nothing else in the area.

The CHAIR — Interestingly, on the right-hand side — and you referred to this in your submission — the shoulder of the road is actually grass.

Mr HOLMES — A lot of our shoulders are grass. We grade them about every five years to get rid of the grass because it tends to build up and gets higher than the road.

The CHAIR — One of the councils mentioned that, and I thought it might be one of your submissions.

Mr HOLMES — It was not mine, but we do have a lot of grass shoulders. This next slide is Willow Grove Road — a declared main road — where we maintain the road on Vicroads’s behalf. It is a very significant tree. If we wanted to do anything to that, we would have a lot of community backlash. It is right on a bend, there is a road that comes off on either side of that tree, it is a safety hazard but — —

Mr LANGDON — Certainly on a wet day, with that bend, I could imagine some problems.
Mr HOLMES — It was only taken a few days ago. I went out one day and took these.

The CHAIR — On the other side, you have the utility pole as well.

Mr HOLMES — Yes, and we have numerous examples like this. When you have 2000 kilometres of road network, they are everywhere.

Mr STONEY — So what is the solution to a situation like that?

Mr HOLMES — I am not quite sure. I was thinking about it in the last few days, and it comes back to a cost-benefit-type thing. The accidents we have are scattered across our local road network. It is hard to get a concentration of them, and to get back spot funding to do works is difficult because we cannot get enough accidents in one site, and the cost of removing trees like this is considerable, and the environmental cost is high as well. You start to think: what is the benefit of actually removing them?

The CHAIR — Have you any idea of the cost of putting a barrier around something like that?

Mr HOLMES — Guardrail is $100 a lineal metre. If we put 30 metres there that is $3000, plus terminal ends, so you are probably talking about $6000.

Mr LANGDON — Would you put a round one around it?

Mr HOLMES — That is a possibility. For one site that is not a problem, but we have hundreds of these.

Mr STONEY — So are you suggesting that in part we have to live with it and in part we might just identify the worst areas and perhaps upgrade those with barriers and the odd tree removal?

Mr HOLMES — Yes, that is what we have been doing for the last number of years. We identify that there are problems like that, but when we come back to this informal cost-benefit analysis, we recognise the importance of that tree, and although there may be an accident on one particular tree, we have to look at the overall picture.

Mr STONEY — Do you have a standard offset from the road that you would like to adhere to on a road like that? For example, is that pole outside your preferred placement for an object?

Mr HOLMES — If there were a new pole going in, that would be too close. We would move it back.

Mr STONEY — And you get an opportunity to do that with the company?

Mr HOLMES — We occasionally do, but when they are putting in a new line we would request it to go back 3 metres.

Mr STONEY — So thinking about power poles, would it be of assistance if there were a requirement that companies did adhere to what the council wanted regarding the placement of new poles?

Mr HOLMES — Yes, that would help us.

Mr LANGDON — They would normally contact you?

Mr HOLMES — They normally do.

Mr STONEY — But should it be a requirement?

Mr HOLMES — I think it should be.

Mr STONEY — This committee is looking for answers as well as getting evidence, so I am just trying to throw up ideas.

Mr HOLMES — I recognise that. I was mainly addressing things like trees where we identified that we do not think a lot of them are worth taking out, and to take them out would be an environmental disaster, and I know that is difficult when you are producing guidelines, but maybe the guidelines need to have something in there about the cost-benefit analysis.
Mr LANGDON — You mentioned guardrail and the cost. What about the wire rope rail? Would that be effective? I believe it is cheaper.

Mr HOLMES — It is about the same cost or slightly dearer. The benefit of the wire rope barrier is that if it gets hit it generally does not get badly damaged. It is only the little plastic posts that get damaged, and you replace them, and you can re-string the wire rope, whereas with the guardrail, you have to replace the whole thing.

Mr LANGDON — Would they do as good a job as the guardrail?

Mr HOLMES — On straight sections they do. It would not be much good in that case on the screen because you need a length of the wire rope to get any strength.

The CHAIR — That looks like it is the start of the gateway to a property or — —

Mr HOLMES — There is a gravel road going down to a few properties.

Mr BISHOP — Do you know if there has been an accident there?

Mr HOLMES — I am not aware of any, no.

The CHAIR — That is a local road as compared to a tourist road?

Mr HOLMES — The road is a Vicroads declared main road — Willow Grove Road. The gravel road is one of our local access roads. On this third slide I know an accident occurred at that tree about 10 years ago.

Mr LANGDON — Was it a fatality?

Mr HOLMES — No, she survived, but she was hurt. Again, maybe it should be removed or have guardrail past it, but I just bring them up as examples, and we have hundreds of them.

Mr LANGDON — If someone has an accident should there perhaps be an automatic edict that Vicroads does put up a guardrail or remove a tree because someone has struck it?

Mr HOLMES — It is a difficult one to answer because it comes back to cost again. Someone has to pay for it. That was obviously looked at, at the time. We have applied for funding. There is a curve back where I took the photo from, and we have applied for black spot funding to improve the super elevation, particularly on the curve. To date it has not been successful. That is the dilemma when we have the accidents they are isolated, and when you apply for black spot funding you need three or four accidents in that one location to get the cost-benefit ratio up high enough to do something.

The CHAIR — By identifying issues through accidents you are basically reacting to the accident. Does the council carry out proactive roadside audits?

Mr HOLMES — Not at the moment, no. We tend to be reacting at the moment, but it comes back to funding again — time, funding and staff.

Mr BISHOP — But you know where they are because you have been out and taken the photos. You have an audit in your head?

Mr HOLMES — An informal audit. I have worked for the shire for about 16 years now, so I have some knowledge in my head.

The CHAIR — But you do not do a formalised documented audit?

Mr HOLMES — No. When we know there are accidents at certain sites we will often go and look at them and assess whether there is anything we can do, but often there is not.

Mr STONEY — When an object comes to your attention, do you build up a dossier of where the worst accidents have been?

Mr HOLMES — We generally don’t. We rely on the Vicroads crash statistics to give us an individual idea of where the accidents are happening. I have here a map of where the accidents happen in our shire. They tend
to be very scattered. There is a concentration around the highway and towns like Warragul, and the rest are a shotgun effect scattered all over the shire, so it is hard to get concentrations of accidents in one site.

Mr BISHOP — But these are not just running into a tree.

Mr HOLMES — No, all accidents.

The CHAIR — Would you have a breakdown of what are run-off crashes?

Mr HOLMES — I do not have one, no. If I wanted one I would go to Vicroads and use its crash statistics — it has it all and can print it out. We do not duplicate; we use its system.

Mr STONEY — Thinking about positive action following an accident, would it be a good thing if all councils, as part of their program, followed up on sites and even nominated themselves an area of interest or a black spot for the shire to be under the shire’s assessment? Perhaps then if there were two accidents at the one tree or the one pole, corner or embankment you might give it more attention? I ask that because it strikes me that personnel change and then that knowledge is lost. You have an enormous amount of that knowledge in your head at the moment, I would imagine. Should shires start building up their worst places for incidents?

Mr HOLMES — I guess we do that. We do not formally get notified of where the accidents are; we do not that have that information, it does not come to us. We use the Vicroads crash statistics because all the injuries and fatalities are recorded on its site and we use its database to identify where the crashes are: when we want to find out where there are roads with accidents on them we use its database.

Mr LANGDON — You know there was an accident at that tree 10 years ago. Did Vicroads contact you or how did you know there was an accident at that tree?

Mr HOLMES — I do not remember now, to be honest.

The CHAIR — What you are saying is there is no formal mechanism where if there is an accident on one of your roads — —

Mr HOLMES — You would not necessarily know. The police attend the scene of the accident. They fill out a form and that goes to Vicroads and it enters it on its database.

Mr LANGDON — How are you meant to improve your roads if you do not know where the accidents are per se?

Mr HOLMES — Good question. We use its database. We access the Vicroads database as much as we can to find out where the accidents are occurring and try and get groupings so we know to apply for black spot funding.

Mr LANGDON — Is that you being proactive more than Vicroads being proactive?

Mr HOLMES — Probably.

Mr STONEY — It does the same thing on its roads. You are talking about the roads under your control.

Mr LANGDON — They are the ones I am talking about.

Mr STONEY — What about on a Vicroads road that you maintain? Who makes the decisions?

Mr HOLMES — It is a bit of both. It will sometimes let us know if it identifies a road that has a number of accidents in one location and sometimes we pick it up and then I apply through Vicroads for black spot funding. It deals with it at the head office in Vicroads, which has to live with the cost-benefit ratio statewide, and sometimes we get funding and sometimes we do not.

Mr STONEY — Would you care to comment that perhaps this whole process could be tightened up and made a bit more formalised with a view to identifying the worst and most urgent spots? Do you think the reporting procedure and the action taken should be tightened up a little bit?

Mr HOLMES — It probably should be a little bit.
The CHAIR — I am surprised that there is not a communication process whereby if there is an accident within your responsibility the local police as a matter of course, as a part of their process, provide you with that information rather than relying on you doing the right thing by going to the VicRoads web site.

Mr HOLMES — That is right. There is no process at the moment.

Mr STONEY — VicRoads does not necessarily tell the shire either.

Mr LANGDON — Your own words were that sometimes it tells you.

Mr HOLMES — On the main roads it does. If it picks up a site on the declared roads it is in control of it will sometimes tell us. Occasionally it will do it on a local road if it picks up the site. However, it is not a formal system. The other thing that is not there at the moment is what is recorded on its site is only fatalities and injuries — if there is just property damage I do not think there is a record of that, I think it gets lost in the system. Cars could hit a tree like that, no-one gets hurt and it disappears in the system.

The CHAIR — We better keep moving until we get to a gravel road.

Photographs shown.

Mr HOLMES — This is Moe-Rawson Road — not far from where I took the previous photo — and there are a couple of trees on a bend. The curve alignment markings we received are part of some funding we received under black spot funding last year. We got quite a large amount of funding for a number of roads, including this one, to put up curve alignment markers, edge lines and other works to try and address accidents right along that road.

Mr LANGDON — Would those curve alignment signs be more effective if attached to a wire rope barrier?

Mr HOLMES — They would be more effective, but it is the cost. I think the grant was something like $200 000, and we did a lot of sites with these curve alignment markings, many curves. We are trying to be proactive and address it, but it comes back to cost. With 2000 kilometres of road it is a massive cost.

This is a gravel road. It is a local road we call School Road. It has 87 vehicles a day. Again you can see there is virtually no vegetation in the paddocks on either side — what is left is in the road reserve. If we touched those trees our councillors would not be in office for too long.

The CHAIR — A number of councils we have spoken to have advocated for less than 100-km/h zones on gravel roads; I think they have advocated for 80 km/h. I would be interested in your thoughts with regard to that issue.

Mr HOLMES — My immediate thought is the speed limit is the maximum that you should be doing on a road; you should drive to the standard of the road. If you think the you are capable of travelling at 60 km/h on the road that is what you should be doing. To me the speed limit is not what you should be doing, it is the maximum you should be doing. I have a little bit of a concern in my own mind that people are getting this idea that whatever the speed limit is that is what they should be doing. It is not; it should be the maximum you can do.

Mr LANGDON — On that road on a wet day 100 km/h could be quite dangerous.

Mr HOLMES — I would not do 100 km/h on that section of the road.

Mr BISHOP — Most people would not, would they?

Mr HOLMES — You could not. If you did 100 km/h on that you would end up in one of those trees. I think the next slide might give you an idea; that is taken the other way. Reasonably sharp bends, narrow road — if you meet someone coming the other way you really have to slow down to pass.

Mr LANGDON — But legally they are allowed to go 100 km/h.

Mr HOLMES — They cannot be booked if they are doing 100 km/h but whether they should be doing 100 km/h is another thing.
Mr STONEY — There are 87 vehicles a day on that road so that would be 40 trips to school and home again and seven other people.

Mr HOLMES — Something like that — there are about four houses up the end of the road.

Mr STONEY — It might be the same car going back and forth.

Mr BISHOP — There are thousands of roads like that.

Mr HOLMES — We have many, many roads like that.

Mr LANGDON — Is it not true that most accidents on country roads like that involve people who use them all the time, not the complete strangers?

Mr HOLMES — Generally people know the road.

Mr LANGDON — They should know what speed they should be doing.

Mr HOLMES — I think they get complacent — they go down it one day at 80 km/h as you say and the next day it has been raining and is a bit wet and they go down it at 80 km/h and it does not quite work that time.

This is a road called Stuhrs Road; we are about to construct this road in a few months time. You can see there is a sign there that says ‘significant roadside area’. Stuhrs Road has 240 vehicles a day. This again is part of Stuhrs Road; there is generally no vegetation in the paddocks on either side; what is left is what is within the road reserve. The locals are very much into maintaining the vegetation, hence the sign at either end of the road. That is another shot of Stuhrs Road. This is just at the end, almost where I took the first photo. This is Darnum Park road, again some large trees there.

Mr LANGDON — The picture on page 9 appears to show — correct me if I am wrong — the big, old trees along the road, but it seems someone has done a lot of planting and the trees look smaller at the back. Is that correct?

Mr HOLMES — On the right is the Bonlac site. Bonlac built a large factory there six or seven years ago and did extensive plantings just inside the fence. It has quite a strip there — it would be 15 metres wide with quite a lot of young trees in it. It is doing its bit to help the environment by planting trees.

Mr BISHOP — You say the locals are quite protective of the vegetation, which is understandable, but let us say the tree in the middle was a bit closer to the road, which would be a real risk. If you had to take that out but you had a compensatory factor of planting some more along the side, would be that be acceptable?

Mr HOLMES — We do that occasionally; it is a balance, again.

Mr LANGDON — On that theme, you have that road there where Bonlac did planting several years ago compared to the very first picture where you had one tree by itself. If you had to remove a tree from there because of safety would it be easier to remove it because of all the other additional planting over the years compared to that one tree?

Mr HOLMES — It probably would be easier. There would still be some backlash from the locals but it is perhaps a little bit easier, particularly if we can plant others. However, the others take a while to grow; that is the dilemma.

Mr LANGDON — That is the point I was getting at — someone had been proactive already.

Mr HOLMES — That is right. I will move on rather than hold you up. This is Pryor Road. It was constructed not long ago and has 139 vehicles a day. Again there is nothing in the paddocks. I was trying to give you examples. I could take hundreds and hundreds of these but it was just to give you some examples.

The CHAIR — Is that road sealed?

Mr HOLMES — It is sealed. We sealed that within the last couple of years. You can see that the trees are quite close. This is still Pryor Road and the trees are quite close.
The CHAIR — Did you seal that road on the basis of just upgrading the road or was it in relation to identifying that it was unsafe?

Mr HOLMES — It was upgrading. It is close to Drouin with quite a few rural, residential-density houses, and we had a lot of complaints about dust and traffic on the gravel road. We have a reasonable size program to upgrade our roads and seal them. We think it is modest but enough, we are getting there. We have to upgrade roads like that which have more and more houses on them or we get a lot of complaints.

The CHAIR — What would cost to seal a kilometre of road like that?

Mr HOLMES — Full construction at the moment is about $130 000 a kilometre. We have what we call a gravel sealing program, which is a cheap method we use where we virtually just use the existing rock there. We do not widen the road much, we just put 100 millimetres of rock on it and seal it. That is working out at about $60 000 a kilometre. It has virtually cut the cost in half. It is a lower standard road, but it appears to work.

Mr LANGDON — How long will that road last?.

Mr HOLMES — We are still waiting to see. We would hope virtually as long, but we have not been doing it long enough to find out.

Mr STONEY — It depends on the trucks, I suppose.

Mr HOLMES — It depends how many trucks use it. You do not get very many trucks on a road like this, it is quite low. To date we have had very few failures. We have been running this program for about two years now, and we will see what eventuates.

The CHAIR — I am mindful of the time, it is getting away from us so we better move on.

Mr HOLMES — I want to show you this one. This is Willowgrove Road right up the top end where it runs through a section of state forest. As you can see, there are beautiful trees very close to the road. This section of road is used heavily by log trucks. I have two traffic counts on this section of road: 72 vehicles a day with 3.7 per cent commercial vehicles, that was in August 2000; another count in February 2001 showed 69 vehicles a day with 51.4 per cent commercial vehicles. We must have struck a week when they were carting logs out and half the traffic on the road the week we took the count was log trucks.

Mr STONEY — How do you do your counts? Do you send someone out?

Mr HOLMES — We send someone out and we put a counter across the road.

Mr STONEY — Otherwise they just go back and forth over it.

Mr HOLMES — That is a possibility, but we find that generally does not happen. It can happen but it is rare. We leave the counter out for a full week, and we can pick up hour by hour or day counts so if someone does get out and jump up and down on it you generally see a peak. It very seldom happens; they generally leave them alone.

The CHAIR — Is that also a tourist road?

Mr HOLMES — It would carry a lot of tourists. It is a declared main road so it is a Vicroads road, but that section would definitely carry a lot of tourists; it is very scenic.

Mr LANGDON — It does not look very wide.

Mr HOLMES — It is very narrow. It seems to work — we have very few problems on it.

Slide 15 is the same road just further up; beautiful scenery and so on. Slide 16 is the same road further up again. That is the end of the slides. I guess in summary what we were saying is whatever guidelines and practices are put in place we believe need to take into account the environment and other factors and not just the speed of the road. To use just 100 km/h or 80 km/h we do not think is the way to go. That is mainly what we wanted to present to you.
The CHAIR — The previous council raised this issue of older bridges, wooden bridges.

Mr HOLMES — We have a few of those, and we are slowly working through upgrading them. We are about to do one next year, and we have to do one with a 5-tonne load on it at the moment. It costs about a quarter of a million dollars to replace one bridge, and we have about 20 old timber bridges still.

The CHAIR — Do you see those as a Road safety issue?

Mr HOLMES — They often are. The bridge itself is often not too much of a problem. It is the handrails either side where they have the old timber handrails. We put guardrails up to try and improve that, but we still have some examples of the old timber handrails.

The CHAIR — Thank you for your time. We do appreciate your input. We are taking a transcript and will provide you with a copy in the coming weeks.

Witnesses withdrew
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into crashes involving country road toll

Bairnsdale–5 February 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 Officer: Mr P. Nelson

Witnesses

Mr K. Simcock, Asset Management Engineer, and
Mr P. Douglas, Asset Engineer; Shire of South Gippsland.
The CHAIR — Thank you to both Keith and Peter for your attendance here today. The proceedings are being recorded by Hansard, and you will receive a copy of the transcript within the coming weeks. Perhaps you could begin by running through your submission and explaining exactly what areas the South Gippsland shire takes in.

Mr SIMCOCK — The South Gippsland municipality borders onto Cardinia shire to the west, it takes in the townships of Nyora on the north-western side through to east of Port Franklin, out to Hedley. We border with Baw Baw shire, and the Bass Coast shire, and the Latrobe and Wellington shires. We have a fair amount of coastline. Wilson’s Promontory is part of the municipality, but we do not control any of the land or roads within the park area.

It is predominantly an agricultural area — dairying, with some beef and sheep, and it is a growing tourism area. We have a lot of very nice scenery. Our land forms vary from quite hilly up in the Strzelecki Ranges to rolling hills and then flats down around the coastal areas. Soil types vary from sandy through poor-quality clays through red soils and rocky areas up in the ranges, so it is quite varied. That also affects the quality of road and the different road building techniques required.

Also the hilly terrain is where we have a few of the problems with some of the narrower roads similar to the remarks made by the Baw Baw shire, but not to their extent, of course, but that is an issue. The tortuosity of the road can be a problem. There is fairly tight alignment, especially since we have a lot of milk tankers using the road, although that is probably only twice a day and most locals know when that is and are aware of when to keep out of the way, if possible.

Mr LANGDON — Have the milk tankers over the years got bigger?

Mr SIMCOCK — They have. In the last 18 months we have consented to Murray Goulburn going to 19 metre B-doubles, which is actually a benefit because they do track better than the single tri-axle semitrailer.

We have a very good relationship with Murray Goulburn. They are very proactive and are very hard on their drivers if they are seen not to be doing the right thing, so they are quite good corporate citizens when it comes to sharing the roads, and they are very interested in Road safety.

I am the council representative on the South Gippsland Road safe Committee, and Murray Goulburn are also represented on that committee, so we have good cooperation between local government, major industry and Road safe in general. That probably is enough general background.

There is a little more in the submission about the municipal profile. We are conveniently situated close to the outreaches of the metropolitan area, and we cover an area of 3280 square kilometres, with a population of approximately 26 500 people. The South Gippsland shire’s main towns are within commuting distance of the major employment centres such as Dandenong and the CBD. Also nearby are the major centres of the Latrobe Valley, which means there is a significant level of interregional transport movement.

The municipal district is centred on the township of Leongatha. Three main highways traverse the municipality, these being the South Gippsland Highway, the Bass Highway and the Strzelecki Highway. The South Gippsland Highway traverses the municipality from west to east, and provides the major road spine or connection to the metropolitan area to the west. The Bass Highway provides the connection between the major commercial centres of Leongatha and Wonthaggi, which is Bass Coast council, whilst the Strzelecki Highway connects Leongatha with the major centres in the Latrobe Valley. South Gippsland shire has a diversity of landscape, a wealth of natural and human resources, and its economy is characterised by the main industries of agriculture, including dairying, beef, lambs, potatoes, and horticulture, together with rapid growth in tourism.

The preliminary statistics in the South Gippsland municipality relating to road lengths are: 224 kilometres of sealed urban road; 1253 kilometres of sealed rural road; 95 kilometres of urban gravel road; and 1235 kilometres of rural gravel road.

In terms of observations about South Gippsland road conditions, within the municipality of South Gippsland shire 53 per cent of the road network is sealed and 47 per cent is unsealed. Generally the climate is such that conditions on unsealed roads can change rapidly, however council has been conducting and is continuing an extensive gravel re-sheeting program, which will assist in eliminating some of the more slippery unsealed roads under wet
conditions. Of course drivers need to exercise caution on unsealed roads, whatever the time of year and weather conditions due to the unstable nature of the road surface.

The CHAIR — That is an interesting statistic you gave us on the first dot point, that 88 per cent of all casualty crashes occurred on paved roads and only 7 per cent on the gravel roads.

Mr SIMCOCK — That is right. When we first obtained that bit of data we were quite surprised because we thought it might have been that the unsealed roads were a significant contributing factor, but you are right — they were not.

Mr BISHOP — And the reason for that? Have you established a view?

Mr SIMCOCK — No, we have not.

The CHAIR — It would be sheer numbers, would it not? There would be more numbers on the sealed roads?

Mr SIMCOCK — Well, that is correct of course, yes. Road conditions will vary from dusty, corrugated and loose surfaces in summer due to lack of moisture and inability to grade the surface because of this lack of moisture to soft surfaces with water washes and potholes due to heavy or high rainfall. The type of materials used for the pavement on the unsealed roads varies from fine road sands to crushed bluestone with different vehicle tyre grip characteristics for each type of material requiring the driver of a vehicle to exercise different skills to those required for driving on sealed roads. This can present a problem for drivers unused to experiencing these road characteristics.

It is probably worth noting that the statistics that we talk about in the submission which relate to the chart are from the crash statistics and those are only reported accidents — there would be numerous minor accidents on unsealed roads that would never get reported. As an agricultural area, drivers of vehicles may be confronted by hazards unique to rural areas such as slow-moving tractors with attached implements et cetera.

Moving on to accident information, the following information was obtained as part of the preparation of council’s Road safety strategy plan which runs from July 2002 to June 2005. A check of the recent crash statistics has revealed that the general accident types, trends and percentages remain relatively current: 88 per cent of all casualty crashes occurred on paved roads and only 7 per cent on gravel roads; 76 per cent of all casualty crashes occurred on rural roads — within the 100 km/h speed zone — and 25 per cent in urban areas with 19 per cent of those being in the larger towns. The reference to chart 1 is a graphical representation of that relationship. The predominance of accidents involve cars, station wagons, utes and motorcycles with cars being the most significant by far; charts 2 and 3 have been prepared to show that. While we do have motorcycle accidents, as you can see the actual number is only six so it is not a significant issue for us to really be overly concerned about.

The CHAIR — Your second dot point was that 76 per cent of all crashes occurred on rural roads within the 100 km/h zones. I notice that in the correspondence you provided us with last September you said:

The most likely cause for run-off the road-type of accidents is in my opinion, inattention and/or fatigue.

You have discounted speed to some degree? Would you like to build on that while we have those stats in front of us?

Mr SIMCOCK — Perhaps my intention was not to discount speed so much but what is the reason for running off a straight road whatever speed you are going? If you are paying attention you should not run off a straight piece of road. You could say that someone ran off on a bend because they were going excessively fast for the prevailing conditions on that bend but it would not apply to straights. Once we get into it there is another chart that shows how many vehicles run off on a straight piece of road.

The CHAIR — You also mentioned a key word — that is, fatigue.

Mr SIMCOCK — That is right. Again further in I mention there was an accident late last year in the Mirboo North area where it was indicated that the cause of that was fatigue but there had been sleep between the social activities and the accident. It can be a compounding issue, it does not necessarily need to be directly after you have done a heavy workday or something like that. The greater majority of accidents within our municipality occur on the rural arterial road system as it carries the bulk of the traffic volumes. The accidents on council-controlled
roads do not show any particular problem area or site; the accident sites are fairly widespread with no concentration in any specific location. Two of the maps that we have provided are actually print-outs from the crash statistics site and actually have the locations of crashes with the numbers. We have nothing over three at any one site and when you have a look at the map you can see that there is a fairly widespread incidence of accidents. This makes it difficult to identify any particular physical feature that may have contributed to the accidents. The predominant accident types are run off path on a straight with 19 per cent of all accidents and run off path on curve with 37 per cent of all accidents.

Mr STONEY — We are talking casualty accidents, are we not?

Mr SIMCOCK — All casualty accidents. The run off path on curve accidents are almost double the run off path on straight; chart 5 shows all the accident types and you can see toward the right-hand side the off path on a straight and off path on curve numbers.

Mr LANGDON — The next lot of figures where you have ‘pole, tree, fence/wall, embankment, guardrail’, are they all fatality accidents?

Mr SIMCOCK — They are all casualty accidents but fatals come in that. I suppose a fatal is an extreme case of a casualty accident.

Mr LANGDON — I note the figures there, I would assume guardrails are put up in areas that have either had a history of accidents or where someone has considered those areas to be dangerous?

Mr SIMCOCK — That is correct.

Mr LANGDON — Therefore I would assume they would still be getting a fair quota of accidents but looking at this figure of 7 per cent, guardrails are equal lowest.

Mr SIMCOCK — Yes. We do not have a lot of guardrail on local roads. Most of the guardrail on local roads would be bridge end posts so they may have been striking bridge end posts and having a serious accident and now they are striking guardrail and having a less severe accidents and may not even cause a casualty.

Mr STONEY — But the figures include highways, do they not?

Mr SIMCOCK — Yes, these figures do include highways. Yes, that is an interesting statistic.

Mr LANGDON — It did strike me that the embankment figure is quite high. We often hear about people hitting trees but the embankments are not far behind them.

Mr STONEY — Is that down an embankment or an embankment like a cliff, or both?

Mr SIMCOCK — We could not determine which way that was. I think if it is ‘struck an embankment’ it is probably a road cutting whereas if you went off an embankment you would not strike the embankment, you would strike some object beyond the embankment.

Mr STONEY — You might roll down an embankment.

Mr SIMCOCK — That might be vehicle rollover incidents. I do not believe we were able to glean that information from the crash statistics — it just had ‘hit embankment’. My first thought was that was road cutting rather than a fill.

Mr STONEY — You would think so.

Mr SIMCOCK — We will move on to the next bit. Trees and road embankments form the largest portion of the collision with fixed object crashes. Within our municipality collision with poles is a minor issue, therefore there is not much that can be done regarding these collisions in our area. As I say, road embankments are a consequence of the type of terrain and trees are predominantly naturally occurring roadside hazards.

The CHAIR — With regard to trees and where you identify a dangerous tree, given the process of dealing with DSE are you generally successful in having those trees removed?
Mr SIMCOCK — We are, yes. However, we have not really had a large number of those types of situations where we have approached them to take out a dangerous tree.

The CHAIR — You have or you have not?

Mr SIMCOCK — We have not. I think in the last two years we have only removed two, and I do not think we took out anything much before that in terms of that type of situation.

The CHAIR — So in relation to those two trees what process did you use to identify the trees?

Mr SIMCOCK — The council has not been particularly proactive, it would have been what was reported to us either from trucks or school buses or general public coming in to say that they felt there was an issue at this particular location.

The CHAIR — Do you conduct a Road safety audit?

Mr SIMCOCK — We have not conducted any Road safety audits on our existing roads. The only Road safety audits that we are doing are when we do new works over $10,000, at this time.

Council is responsible for approximately 800 kilometres of sealed rural roads — that is, roads within the 100 km/h speed zone. Three hundred and five kilometres of these roads have a sealed surface of less than 6 metres in width and of these 305 kilometres, 85 kilometres is less than 5 metres wide with 46 kilometres of this being less than 4 metres in width. The Austroads publication *Rural Road Design: a Guide to the Geometric Design of Rural Roads* recommends that road traffic lanes should be a minimum of 3.1 metres and desirably 3.5 metres in width for a total sealed pavement width of 6.2 metres to 7 metres. It goes on to say that narrower traffic lane widths — down to 3 metres — are recommended for consideration where any of the following apply: the road reserve or existing development form stringent controls preventing wider lanes; the road is in a low-speed environment; there is little or no truck traffic; finance for road construction is limited; or the alignment and safety records are satisfactory in the case of a reconstructed arterial.

Most of the roads within the municipality have milk tanker traffic and farm trucks/cattle truck usage. As can be seen from our statistics, there are a significant number of roads that are considered narrow. Council does not line mark the centre of any sealed road of less than 6 metres in width. The minimum of a single-lane sealed road should be 3.5 metres. Single-lane roads with sealed width of between 4.5 metres and 6 metres may lead to two vehicles trying to pass with each remaining on the seal. This potentially increases a head-on accident. Narrow sealed roads need to have increased shoulder widths to maintain traffic safety. Many of council’s narrow road seals are not offset by increased shoulder widths.

The CHAIR — While we are talking about trucks and cattle truck usage — getting on to cattle — is livestock an issue with regard to Road safety?

Mr SIMCOCK — It can be. There are still a number of cattle trucks where you are driving along behind them and they have cattle urine and what have you dropping off the truck leaving trails on the road. While that would create a slippery road condition we cannot determine whether that is a contributing factor.

The CHAIR — I mean livestock on the road.

Mr SIMCOCK — Sorry. I do not think so because it has all been signed now.

Mr STONEY — Cows crossing the road?

The CHAIR — Cattle underpasses?

Mr SIMCOCK — Quite a number of cattle underpasses have gone in in the more hazardous locations in our municipality. That has been a big help. I do not think stock on roads is a really high issue.

Mr DOUGLAS — It is not as great an issue as in some other areas — our road reserves are quite narrow and our local laws officers are quite keen on removing livestock from roads. I see it as very marginal. The local laws officers are very proactive as soon as a call is made. They are on 24-hour call and they remove stock from the roads.
Mr SIMCOCK — Council encounters problems with trying to widen roads during reconstruction due to the significant amount of native vegetation on the roadsides. This necessitates council then obtaining permits from the Department of Primary Industries for tree clearing with resultant requirements for significant gain in tree planting that has become not only an expensive exercise but also a bureaucratic can of worms. Thus while roadside trees are recognised as a Road safety issue, the road reserve is no longer just a reserve for road purposes but also a native vegetation preservation area and a wildlife corridor and habitat area. These issues compound the problem of Road safety. Narrow roads compounded by hilly terrain with large vehicle use can only be seen as a potential Road safety issue. It is only the fact that there are relatively low traffic volumes on these roads — say around 100 vehicles per day — that there are not significant numbers of accidents.

The CHAIR — That is the point we were getting to before, where you are widening the road you have problems with regard to having trees or native vegetation removed?

Mr SIMCOCK — Yes, that is right, we do.

The CHAIR — To the point where your council feels there are safety issues out there?

Mr SIMCOCK — Yes.

Mr DOUGLAS — We have halted reconstruction of a few roads because the vegetation removal is too large a problem.

The CHAIR — So you maintain the road as it is although you have identified the fact that the road needs to be upgraded or widened?

Mr DOUGLAS — If we have sufficient work in front of us that we upgrade other roads, that is left on the list for an indefinite period of time.

The CHAIR — So those high-priority roads are left?

Mr DOUGLAS — At the moment.

Mr STONEY — Is it the Department of Sustainability and Environment or the Department of Primary Industries?

Mr SIMCOCK — I am not sure which it is. I would not like to say that they are being obstructive, but the requirements they place are very high. I am not sure what the numbers are. We did it for one road that we did 12 months ago — they are seeking to have coupes of trees planted and fenced out within farmland, so it becomes difficult for us to find areas to plant trees to replace the ones we want to pull out. They do not want us to plant 1 for 1; we might have to plant 40 or 100 for 1 that we pull out; and there are many hundreds of trees that may have to come out, and it becomes almost impossible to find the land on which to plant the trees to replace them.

Mr STONEY — So it would be fine to plant 40 or 100 if you took out 1 particular tree, but when you have to remove a whole belt to widen the road the numbers becomes ridiculous. Is that what you are saying?

Mr DOUGLAS — Yes. The cost benefit to the community can be better spent on upgrading a road, but that is not required.

Mr STONEY — So a different formula might be required whether it is 1 tree or, say, 20 trees? It should be a different formula for the number of trees to be replanted? Is that what you are saying?

Mr SIMCOCK — Yes. But the other difficulty we have — and it is a reasonable comment from DSE — is that we always have to argue as to why we are upgrading the road. It may only be used by 100 or 200 vehicles a day. They do not see that as a significant volume.

Mr STONEY — But their business is the trees not Road safety, isn’t it.

Mr SIMCOCK — We can only go by the questions they ask.

Mr STONEY — So they actually put their nose into deciding whether the road should be upgraded or not?
Mr SIMCOCK — That is the way we feel. We feel that we should not have to justify why we want to build this road and where we want to build it.

Mr STONEY — Sure. You are the experts on road building and they are the experts on maintaining the vegetation.

Mr SIMCOCK — Yes. It might seem harsh to say that it is too big a problem. Some of these trees can be a real road hazard, and I do not want to suggest that if one person gets killed it is not important; but we are not talking high volumes of crash statistics along these roads, so that is the reason why we might step back and do other work rather than concentrating all our efforts — —

The CHAIR — Are these roads being upgraded because the amount of traffic using them has increased or is there potential safety issues?

Mr SIMCOCK — There would be a couple of issues there. One would be the maintenance of the narrow road because of breaks in the edge of the seal, with big vehicles having to get over to pass, so that is an issue. The damage to vehicles is another one; not just accidents but wear and tear from running on the shoulder and hitting the edge breaks and damage to tyres.

Yes, there has been a bit of an increase in traffic volume, but we do not experience a large increase on a yearly basis; we are probably only running at about 1.5 per cent of traffic increase, but expectations of the public also come into play, so it becomes a bit of a political issue. People expect better conditions of roads. They are paying their rates and they want something for it.

Mr DOUGLAS — And if we do an upgrade of the road we try to stick to the design principles of the day, and often those roads were settled in the 1800s so their alignment was built for horse and cart. So we try and improve the alignment for cars, and that is when we come into conflict with the vegetation.

Mr BISHOP — Would it be better if Vicroads had an established policy in relation to fixed objects from the edge of the road which would then give you the right, as of right, to remove that tree if you wanted to go through the full permit process?

Mr SIMCOCK — That would be very nice but I do not think they would ever get that through Parliament anyway.

Mr BISHOP — Trying to take a positive look at it, the tenor of what I am hearing is that you get put off doing things because of the economic financial aspects of it, and perhaps if you looked at it purely from a Road safety point of view you may not get put off. You are trying to balance the whole system within your area of management, whereas we are looking at a Road safety issue.

Mr SIMCOCK — There are already guidelines in the road design manuals that cover objects within the road reserve, and there are cross-sectional diagrams that show clear space within a certain distance of the edge of the road lane, and if an object is placed within that — and we are talking about poles and culverts and that type of thing — then if you have not got sufficient clear run-off that is driveable, you have to put guardrail in. If you applied that same clearance to naturally growing trees on the road you probably would not have any trees left on the road reserves.

Mr BISHOP — But in a practical, commonsense way you would not do that for a heap of reasons. Perhaps if a Road safety audit were done and there were three trees on a section of road that were intermittent and you took a phased approach and planted some other trees there and took the others out two years later in a planned approach, would that be more acceptable to the community you deal with, do you think?

Mr SIMCOCK — I am sure that would be, but most of the problems are not just with one or two trees. It is like Baw Baw, where the trees are continuous, but I take your point. It is certainly worth consideration.

Mr BISHOP — From what we have seen from the photographs previously you have huge trees on either side of the road in places, and there would be an understanding by a motorist that the trees are there so they would take more care. Would it be reasonable to assume that the more risk element is of an individual tree on the side of the road or on a corner rather than a great string of them? Is that reasonable?
Mr SIMCOCK — It is reasonable, yes. That is a good point.

Mr STONEY — You said if you took out a tree you have to plant 40 more. Did you say on private land, off the roadside or can it be — —

Mr SIMCOCK — It could be on the road reserve but we are finding that where the trees are that we wish to take out, there are already trees there to take up the balance of road reserve anyway. The only real areas left would be private land.

Mr STONEY — So you could not pick a road that did not have trees on it and plant a plantation along the edge of the farmer’s fence well away from the road somewhere else in the shire? It has to be adjacent, does it?

Mr SIMCOCK — As far as possible it needs to be within that same area. We could not replant them somewhere else because we are talking about specific species of trees.

Mr STONEY — So is it a fault of the actual vegetation laws that there is a road full of trees and you plant 40 for one taken out, even though there is also nowhere to plant them. Is that a flaw in those requirements?

Mr SIMCOCK — Maybe it is.

Mr STONEY — You can speak freely. We are looking for the truth. We do not care if we offend people.

Mr SIMCOCK — As engineers we probably feel it is a bit over the top. Sometimes we think that the regulations can be a bit too strict and it would be nice if there were a bit more flexibility in there to allow you to find another area where you could plant trees.

Mr STONEY — But it might be to the benefit of the whole district if a treeless road had a nice belt of trees that were planted in the right location, after removing a tree somewhere else. But that really cannot occur, can it?

Mr SIMCOCK — Well I am not saying it cannot occur, but it is difficult, in our experience, isn’t it Peter? Where we take one out, that is where they want them put back, and not elsewhere?

Mr DOUGLAS — Yes.

Mr SIMCOCK — But we might have to temper that a little because of the species of trees as well. Where we find another area where there is space, it might not suit the particular species that needs to be replaced.

Mr STONEY — So you have to plant the same species as well?

Mr SIMCOCK — Yes.

The CHAIR — A key sentence in front of me from your submission says that maintaining the current asset is council’s focus rather than road upgrade. Why are you just maintaining the roads?

Mr SIMCOCK — I guess it is to do with a funding issue. We did not want to make a song and dance about a funding issue at a Road safety inquiry.

The CHAIR — Although it is relevant in that if you are just maintaining the roads and not upgrading the roads it is an issue for the committee because we are not getting to this issue of upgrading because in reality you are just maintaining what you currently have.

Mr SIMCOCK — That is the reality of it. There is insufficient funding for us to have a real program of upgrading of what we would see as substandard road, definitely.

Mr LANGDON — What have you done with the Roads to Recovery funding?

Mr SIMCOCK — That has been going into reseals and resheets of the existing infrastructure. There has been some minor upgrade work, but it is very minor.

Mr LANGDON — What about black spot funding?
Mr SIMCOCK — We do not get that anymore. We do not qualify for that anywhere. You must have more than three accidents in any one location or along a length. We have successfully applied for a number of intersections that did qualify, but we do not bother putting any in anymore because we are just wasting our time.

The CHAIR — Are you keeping your head above water with the ongoing maintenance program?

Mr SIMCOCK — Yes we are. We have that on track.

Mr LANGDON — Would the black spot be wasting you time because — —

Mr SIMCOCK — We are competing with other areas with much higher crash statistics and we do not want to steal their money. It is on a needs basis.

Mr LANGDON — Speed through your smaller towns: in some towns speeds can move from one level to another, and in one town we came across 13 speed zones. Colac is famous for it. Do you have that problem in any of your towns?

Mr SIMCOCK — It does not seem to be a problem. We mainly have the one buffer zone, say, 80 km/h and then down to 60. Of course with the larger towns we have the 50 kilometres in the CBD, but everyone is getting used to that.

Mr LANGDON — What about the speeds around schools?

Mr SIMCOCK — We have not changed that yet. We are due to have them rolled out this year, as I understand it. We are quite supportive of that.

The CHAIR — How effective is enforcement of speed restrictions?

Mr SIMCOCK — Fairly good I think. It is a resourcing issue for the police, isn’t it, really? We do not do it. It is up to the police to do that. I do not know how many they do, and I have not had access to police statutory information on speed enforcement.

Mr LANGDON — Is speed a problem through your shire in general terms?

Mr SIMCOCK — No. I know they catch quite a few but it is not a major issue, I believe. They ping people for 5 kilometres over and of course that is human nature — you are going down a hill; you will gain a few kilometres, and they like to set them up where they will catch the most people. In terms of speeding along the open road I do not believe we are any different to other areas of Victoria. It does not come to us as an issue, as a council, but we are well aware of the initiatives that are done through the Transport Accident Commission and the police, through our contacts with Road safe, so there are fairly good programs already in place. I am not in a position to comment as to whether it needs to be stepped up or not.

Mr LANGDON — What about the speed on gravel roads? There has been a suggestion that 100 km/h could be too much. Some have suggested 80 kilometres on gravel roads, to bring that down to a safer level.

Mr DOUGLAS — The alignment of our roads dictates the speed. If there is a good alignment the roads are fairly well maintained and fairly open whereas if the alignment is winding and tight you will not travel at those speeds anyway so it becomes irrelevant to us.

Mr SIMCOCK — I would be reluctant to see us introduce another speed zone just for gravel roads — unless you are going to be out there enforcing it, what is the point? People have a driving licence and they are supposed to exercise some responsibility and drive according to the road conditions. It used to be part of the Road Traffic Act that it was a driver’s responsibility to drive according to the prevailing conditions. I think that has been taken out.

The CHAIR — I am mindful of the time, but in your submission you also talk about inattention of drivers. Would you like to go through those dot points?

Mr SIMCOCK — There was another point I wanted to get across: other contributing factors to crashes could be inattention and fatigue but not necessarily fatigue due to long distance travelled. I say this because our crash statistics show that the majority of crashes — 62 per cent — involve local people on local roads. These
crashes can be due to fatigue from long work hours, shift work or social activities and may be the result of cumulative effect even following sleep, as was the unfortunate case of a young person in the Mirboo North area as reported in the local papers late last year. I consider that there are many factors which can cause inattention in drivers: smoking, fiddling with a vehicle’s sound system as in changing cassettes or CDs while the vehicle is moving; unruly children distracting the driver.

Mr LANGDON — Hear, hear!

Mr SIMCOCK — And possibly the use of mobile phones and fatigue. The majority of the crashes involve people who live in the municipality, with 62 per cent of the total figure, and with 31 per cent of the total involving people from the direct vicinity of the crash. This would that indicate that drivers of vehicles feel comfortable in their own areas and therefore are probably less attentive and let their concentration levels drop. There is probably also the factor of knowing the road, which can lead to a blasé attitude to the road environment. There is often a lot of discussion regarding placing warning signs along roads. This is of use in specific locations; however, it is impractical for council to sign every bend due to the vast number of signs that would be required, and the consequent lessening of the effect of existing signs were this to happen.

I feel that the TAC has in the past done some good work in getting Road safety messages across to the public, but it has been some time since there was anything done on inattention and lack of concentration. This may be an area that could be considered for an initiative. Although I am unable to provide any specific suggestions regarding actions that could be taken in regard to the country road toll and collisions with fixed objects in particular, I hope that the information provided may be of some use. I would like to thank the Road safety Committee for the opportunity to place this information before it.

Mr BISHOP — I have a question. We are struggling to find the answers. If you were king for a day, what would you do?

Mr LANGDON — On Road safety issues.

Mr BISHOP — Obviously on Road safety issues; there are a lot of issues in the document and other people have done the same. What would your priorities be? Obviously you have financial determinants but putting those to one side and the other issues of having to get permits to take out trees and all those sort of things, what would you do if you really focused on Road safety on your roads?

Mr SIMCOCK — I think as I indicated I would be keen to up the education aspect of it and getting in people’s faces. However, you have to be careful because if you get in people’s faces too much they switch off. I live in Korumburra and I watch the metropolitan stations so I am not sure whether the TAC ads run as often on the regional station as they do on the metropolitan stations. That might be worth pursuing.

Mr LANGDON — Do they have the same sorts of ads? They might have to be more rural focused.

Mr SIMCOCK — I think if we said we would like more money to upgrade roads we would still have the incidents of run off the roads on straight. I could not find out whether narrow roads were a contributing factor in run off the road: run off road on straight, was it a narrow road? We could not determine that. I think that is probably the only comment.

Mr BISHOP — The tenor of a fair bit of your paper is that it is local people in local areas predominantly who are having the accidents. Is it more of an awareness issue that anything else?

Mr SIMCOCK — I think people feel safe in their own area: they have been driving around for years and years. I do not think they take as much care as when they are away, have different roads they do not know and they are a bit more careful and look out for signs and so forth. I have done it myself: you drive along a road and, ‘Did I see a warning sign for this bend?’ You saw it but you did not recognise it because you have driven past it so many times.

Mr STONEY — However, that is not to say that the roads are not dangerous — it is just that people have become so used to them that they have forgotten or just become complacent about the fact that they are dangerous roads. That is not to say that a particular tree should not come out or a blind spot should not be fixed because you will get visitors who do not know a road and will approach it with a totally different attitude but still get caught.
Mr SIMCOCK — That is true.

Mr STONEY — And the locals become blasé to it and they get caught. The main thing is the danger of the road rather than people’s attitude. It is a two-pronged thing but the danger is there irrespective of people’s attitude.

Mr SIMCOCK — It would probably be a fair assumption to say there is less chance of running off what we would term a standard road, which would be two full lanes of 3 metres each, so a 6 metre-wide sealed road on a straight, than there off a 4.5 metre-wide or less sealed road. Most of our gravel roads are probably two lanes — it is the sealed roads which are the narrow roads for some historic reason. I do not know why that is.

Mr STONEY — It is cheaper to do it.

Mr BISHOP — Are those crashes single vehicle?

Mr SIMCOCK — Yes.

Mr DOUGLAS — The majority are.

Mr SIMCOCK — Except where there is anything with a head on.

Mr BISHOP — The majority are single-vehicle accidents.

Mr SIMCOCK — Struck object, single vehicle.

Mr STONEY — So most of them are really driver error.

Mr SIMCOCK — You would have to think that.

The CHAIR — Which gets back to your point of education.

Mr SIMCOCK — I am just wondering whether people feel too comfortable with all the air bags in their vehicles these days. Modern vehicles are a lot easier to drive so people relax more. If you had to drive an old EH Holden I am sure you would be going less quick than in a new Commodore or Falcon just because you get that impression of, ‘I’m really driving this vehicle.’ There is no power steering and you have more of an impression of speed. It is very easy to speed in a new car these days because they do it so easily. My personal view is that people get sucked into going faster than they mean to because the car just goes so easily and they end up driving beyond their capabilities without realising it until something happens and then it is too late.

The CHAIR — Are there further questions? If not, thank you, Keith and Peter, for your time and input into our committee hearing. We will provide the shire with a copy of the transcript in the coming weeks.

Witnesses withdrew.
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into crashes involving country road toll

Bairnsdale–5 February 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 Officer: Mr P. Nelson

Witnesses

Ms D. Campbell, Road safety Coordinator, Vicroads Eastern Region;
Snr Const. A. Milbourne, Latrobe Traffic Management Unit; and Chairperson, Road safe Latrobe;
Ms H. Morrison, Road safety Officer, East Gippsland;
Sgt C. Wilson, Warragul Police, and Vice-Chairperson, Baw Baw Road safe;
Sgt G. Slink, Bass Coast Traffic Management Unit, and Chairperson, Road safe South Gippsland;
Mr K. Emms, SES Officer, Chairperson, East Gippsland Road safe, and representative, State Executive of Road safe;
Snr Const. P. Linford, Baw Baw Traffic Management Unit;
Ms J. Cahir, Road safety Officer, Baw Baw and Latrobe Vicroads;
Snr Const. D. Rogers, Bairnsdale Traffic Management Unit;
Snr Sgt D. Carey, Bairnsdale Police;
Mr S. Dunning, Traffic Management Officer, Shire of East Gippsland; and.
Ms K. Nelson, Group Manager, Development Services, Shire of East Gippsland.
The CHAIR — I welcome you all here this afternoon. This is a hearing of the state parliamentary Road safety Committee. It is a formal hearing, and therefore we do take a transcript, and all four Road safe organisations will receive a copy of the transcript in the coming weeks.

The hearings, although we would like to keep them informal, are subject to parliamentary privilege, which means what you say cannot be held against you later legally. So if ever you wanted to let rip, now is the opportunity!

Having said all of that, I thank the four Road safe committees that make up the Gippsland area for their time and efforts in coming along today, and no doubt for all the effective work you have done over many years, so thank you for your time and input. From our committee’s point of view it is very much appreciated.

Ms CAMPBELL — Thank you. We have a fairly set format here in terms of verbal submissions being made, and the corresponding written submissions can be found in the folders we have handed over to you.

In response to your astonishment at the number of people we have here, it demonstrates that we do have thorough networks in what we call the eastern region, and it is my job to initially give you a picture of what that region entails. Some of you will be familiar with it, some will not.

We went with the way in which the locals actually describe this region, and mostly it is described as stretching from the Phillip Island penguins and the Bunyip River bunyips to the Mallacoota mullets and the Genoa goannas; from the southernmost point of mainland Australia to high up in the ridges of the Australian Alps. I guess that picture very aptly describes some of the issues that confront us when we are trying to tackle Road safety factors.

Overheads shown.

Ms CAMPBELL — We have six municipalities within this region, and they are very diverse in both their geography and socioeconomic nature. The ones we have in this region are Baw Baw, South Gippsland, Bass Coast, Latrobe City, Wellington, and East Gippsland. Across those as you can see on the illustration that we have in front of you on the PowerPoint, there are four Road safe community Road safety councils. We are very fortunate to have four. I think we snuck one in under the covers.

Those Road safety councils are key advocates for Road safety practices in the local communities they cover. As you can see, Road safe East Gippsland covers the shires of East Gippsland and Wellington; Road safe South Gippsland in the green covers Bass Coast and South Gippsland municipalities; Road safe Latrobe covers the City of Latrobe and that is in blue; and Baw Baw in purple covers obviously the municipality of Baw Baw.

You have met the representatives who are here today. The way in which we had like to go about this, if it suits you, is to give an overview of the region-wide issues because there are issues common to all of us, and then each of the people on the panel will present local issues which are peculiar to their particular Road safer. We would like to encourage questions wherever you want to, because sometimes if you save them up to the end, they get lost and time runs out. Does all of that suit?

The CHAIR — Yes, that is certainly the way we have done things over the last few months.

Ms CAMPBELL — Unfortunately, due to the funeral of a colleague of ours in Vicroads in eastern region, my team manager who was originally going to proceed with the region-wide issues is unable to be here; so if it is alright with you, I will read through the notes now.

The number one issue that we have identified is clear zones. It is considered that the ability to provide clear zones has always been somewhat compromised by various issues including: road works being constructed within the existing road reserve, existing reserves containing the only remaining remnant of local vegetation due to the clearing of adjacent farmland — that is quite a large issue in this area, insufficient acquisition of land — even when duplicated carriageways are constructed in cleared farmland or greenfield sites — to provide the clear zones together with the replanting of vegetation to screen headlight glare or just landscape the road reserve. So there is always the issue of how you balance these things when you really do not have a lot of land to play with.

The required clear zone widths themselves have increased over time to allow for batter slopes and horizontal alignment outside of curves which is a good thing, and therefore between planning and land acquisition/construction. The required width may have altered significantly and no longer be achievable.
With the recent introduction of the state’s native vegetation management framework and the associated net gain provisions, environmental outcomes have significantly impacted on the ability to economically provide the appropriate clear zones, so finance is obviously a factor.

Removing significant and/or protected remnant native vegetation involves substantial costs and long-term commitment to satisfy net gain outcomes, often to the point that clear zones are compromised to minimise or avoid the costly and labour-intensive alternative.

The CHAIR — So there are you talking about the matter we heard about this morning, whereby if you remove a tree you have to replace it with another 40?

Ms CAMPBELL — Yes, it is exactly those sorts of things, including significant Aboriginal sites also. Any of those things have quite large costs associated with them and they are often recognised when we submit budgets in the bidding process — not just Vicroads but local government or whoever. Those sorts of things are not taken into account; it is more costed on a traditional cost-benefit ratio without acknowledging the adoption of these initiatives. That is my understanding.

Mr STONEY — Would you give us a definition of ‘clear zone’? Are we talking about separation from other traffic or separation from objects, just for the record?

MS CAMPBELL — I am not from an engineering background, but it is between both, I believe.

Mr DUNNING — It is from the edge line of the roadway on to the reserve.

Mr STONEY — Free of objects?

Mr DUNNING — Yes. It is 6 or 9 metres clear from the edge of the pavement to the trees across the reserve.

Ms CAMPBELL — It is only of recent times that safety barriers are being erected within medians to prevent head-on, cross-median crashes. Strictly speaking, such barriers are required up each side of the road formation where the respective clear zones have not been achieved, so obviously that is a huge financial cost if we were to do that, and that needs to be weighed up, given the research that is now apparent on the savings to lives that those barriers have indicated. The second one is speed, and the reason we have done these region-wide is that the Road safes have two statewide programs — speed and drink-driving.

Mr BISHOP — Just interrupting you there, on the clear zones, now that we have a definition of them, from what we have heard this morning it would appear that some flexibility might be required. On some roads you may have a tree in a particular area that might be better out of the road, regardless of the cost, but it might only be a single tree. In other areas we have seen photos where there are hundreds of trees on the edge of the road where people are well aware of the dangers and issues, and we would believe they would compensate in that situation. Is it your view, from a regional perspective, that a bit of flexibility is required?

Ms CAMPBELL — I would think so, and I think that our police personnel would be better suited to following that line.

Snr Sgt CAREY — That is one of the issues we were going to bring up later. We are not asking for every tree to be taken out, but we all went through the situation with some light poles down in the city being hazards back in the 1970s, and we are looking at a similar thing here.

Mr BISHOP — So you will discuss that later?

Snr Sgt CAREY — Yes, that is one of the points.

Ms CAMPBELL — Yes, thank you for bringing that up, because that will be a later part of our submission. Speed is one of the statewide programs that the Road safe groups have agreed is a priority issue and one that the 24 councils actually work together on. In our region we have noticed that positive results have been achieved as a result of the default 50 km/h limit in residential areas — that is borne out by the studies Monash has conducted in the metropolitan area — and also the more recent reduction of speed limits in strip shopping centres, the 50 km/h implementation there. There are a total of 12 towns in the eastern region which will have permanent...
50 km/h zones by the end of this February. I think also, just to add to that, people’s mindset to the 50 km/h is also a factor in that; they are finally realising that if in doubt, 50 km/h would be a very good option.

The current introduction of the school speed zones is another initiative aimed at slowing traffic around the higher risk primary and secondary schools. To be effective, initiatives such as those noted above must be supported by education and enforcement, and they have contributed to a general slowing of traffic and driver acceptance of the same, which is what I said.

Mr LANGDON — On the issue of education, it was mentioned earlier that there are a lot of TAC ads in Melbourne; are there many on the country stations?

Ms CAMPBELL — We do get pretty much the same advertising. The TAC is very good about that. They have, I understand, taken away their radio advertising, which I think may have been a slight misjudgement because in this region we find that one of the optimum ways of educating people is to target their known drive times and to look at the different groups, and we can pretty much work out through the radio stations when a particular demographic is listening.

Mr LANGDON — A lot of people listen to the radio while they are driving.

Ms CAMPBELL — Exactly — when they are doing the type of behaviour you are trying to target. I understand that the TAC has reduced that, particularly in rural areas, but has increased its roadside billboard signage — in their eyes as a compensation for that. We do not have any hard evidence of what impact that has had other than it has happened. Television is a bit hard for us to say because we really only do get the rural things but we certainly get their advertising and their most recent campaigns.

Mr LANGDON — Are any of the TAC ads rural based or are they the standard mass production?

Ms CAMPBELL — No, they do target them. Over the years they have provided us with a compilation for actual in-house-type presentations that we are using so we can expand on what they have done in mass media advertising. Would you say maybe an eighth of those would be specifically targeted to rural?

Snr Const. MILBOURNE — There have been a number that have been targeted. Of recent times there have not been a lot but they do target from time to time depending on when the fatalities rise in country regions. We will probably talk about education a bit later on as well.

The CHAIR — You talked about the speed zones. Another issue that generally gets raised is the number of speed zones where you are, as another member of our parliamentary committee who is not here said, going from 80 km/h to 70 km/h to 40 km/h back to 80 km/h and 70 km/h. Has that become an issue within the region.

Ms CAMPBELL — It is an ongoing issue and probably will be slightly increased at the moment due to the introduction of the school speed zones; we so far have two municipalities where that has been implemented — Latrobe City and Baw Baw. Not only do you have some permanent changes arising out of that but you also have the factor of being able to recognise where you are in the daytime, particularly in the afternoons — it is very easy to lose track of what time of day it is — and suddenly find yourself at 2.30 p.m. in a normally 60 km/h zone which is down to 40 km/h. It is raised as an issue, but I think on the counter side of that there has been much less flack than we would have expected, which indicates to us the mindset of people is such that they are starting to accept a much lower speed limit. That is what we are hopeful of. Do any of the police want to add to that.

Sgt WILSON — You have summed that up pretty well. There are still areas where the speed zone does change quite a bit over a short distance. I do not know how we are going to address that.

Mr STONEY — Do you find motorists tell members that they got confused or they thought it was one or they missed one?

Sgt WILSON — You do. You get a lot of people saying they have no idea what the speed zone is. If you pull over a car and ask the driver what speed zone they are travelling in, I would say 70 per cent of the time most people could not tell you what the speed zone was. We did surveys a few years ago in relation to that exact thing where we just stopped cars and asked them what speed zone they were in, how long it had been since their last rest, et cetera and most people did not know what speed zone they were travelling in.
Mr STONEY — Therefore the number of speed zones is not an issue in that case — they just did not know. But the idea of getting confused because you are going up and down in the speed limits all the time is a different issue.

Sgt WILSON — I find that if I am driving in a town that I do not normally drive in you really have to pay attention as to what speed zone you are in and you can catch yourself out. We all drive and we all know. At times you think, ‘Is it 80 km/h or 60 km/h?’ With our rural area most people within the town that they work in or live in know what the speed zones are and that is not really an issue, it is when you get people from out of town who come in.

Mr LANGDON — In New South Wales when you enter a country town they have signs up saying you are about to enter a 50 km/h zone and the entire town is a 50 km/h zone. Do you think that would work better?

Sgt WILSON — We have that in the road rules in Victoria, there is provision to have the area speed zoned. I have never seen it personally. Do you think it has been implemented anywhere?

Ms CAMPBELL — Not that I know of.

Sgt WILSON — We have the ability to introduce it.

Mr LANGDON — Do you think it would work better?

Sgt WILSON — Definitely.

Snr Const. MILBOURNE — My personal opinion is the school zones are not done the right way.

The CHAIR — Why?

Snr Const. MILBOURNE — In having timed school zones — it is creating a lot of confusion in people’s minds.

Mr LANGDON — It should be a standard?

Snr Const. MILBOURNE — It should be standard. If it is going to be a 50 km/h zone past the school, the whole school zone should be a 50 km/h zone because you are getting a lot of schoolchildren using the school grounds after school and that is when you are going to have your problems — when they are playing on the basketball court and the ball bounces over the fence, there will be no teachers there to stop them and a car is going to fly past and skittle somebody.

The CHAIR — What you are saying is if it is 40 km/h, it should permanently be 40 km/h?

Snr Const. MILBOURNE — Not necessarily 40 km/h but bring it down to 50 km/h — ‘You are now entering a school zone and it is a 50 km/h zone’ and that is it. There is no time zone so there is no confusion with people trying to work out what time of day it is, particularly after school hours when, say for example, in the areas in Traralgon they are until 4.30 in the afternoon — the schools knock off at 3.30 p.m. and there is only going to be a lot of traffic around for the next 15 minutes, from 3.30 to a quarter to 4, they physically cannot go fast anyway because of the way the roads are designed and the congestion, yet when there are no kids around people still by law have to travel at the 40 km/h and it is causing frustration, so why not make it 50 km/h right around the school zone and then you do not have to worry about what time of day or night it is?

Sgt WILSON — It could in fact create an illusion to the children that they are in a safe environment when it is a 40 km/h zone and then after hours another 20 km/h on top of that is going to catch some children off guard.

The CHAIR — We had better push on.

Ms CAMPBELL — From that, it is considered that a general view of the overall speed zone guidelines is appropriate such that the roads are reviewed and signed on an individual basis against various criteria which may consider: road surface, gravel versus sealed surfaces; alignment, straight versus winding roads; available clear zone; severity of roadside environment; traffic volume; abutting developments, et cetera. Roads in eastern region which may warrant such review include sections of the Baw Baw tourist road, the Great Alpine Road, the Bunurong tourist road, Traralgon–Balook Road, and all unsealed roads. I guess, again, alluding to your reference to New

5 February 2004 Road safety Committee 214
South Wales, they have bitten the bullet there a bit on the Princes Highway and where they are unable financially or for other reasons to improve the road they have dropped the speeds down to 80 km/h from 100 km/h.

Alcohol and drugs is the other major statewide one that we all have as an issue and it does continue, as you are well aware, to be of considerable concern with respect to crashes, injuries and fatalities. The liquor licensing accords that are in place in this region have had a positive effect where implemented but we think they could be extended to any drinking establishment, sporting club, hotel or club. There is a lack of public breath-testing facilities. We understand that there are pros and cons to a public breath-testing facility but it does mean that people do not specifically know if they are over the limit after a few drinks or in particular on the morning after many drinks where people have behaved responsibly the night before but need to get up to go to work and have not understood the effect of residual alcohol.

**The CHAIR** — Could you briefly describe the liquor licensing accord?

**Sgt WILSON** — I can do that for you. Each licensing inspector for each police district is responsible for a liquor accord. All the licensees from clubs, hotels, et cetera are invited to come onto the accord. They have a meeting either bimonthly or monthly and they discuss things that can be implemented to really promote responsible service of liquor; that ties in with our Road safety as well. If we want to use campaigns like ‘pick a skipper’ and educate sporting clubs that have licences et cetera, we use the liquor accord to try and promote our means and get the Road safety message in. The liquor accord itself has responsibilities for Road safety, responsible service of liquor, stopping minors, assault reduction strategies et cetera. It encompasses a wide range of policing issues.

**Mr BISHOP** — Is the most challenging area there the sporting clubs?

**Sgt WILSON** — They are probably the most successful for us at the moment. They have really come on board and we have spent a lot of time with them. You will hear a bit more about it but we are having a lot of success with the sporting clubs, we have really turned it around.

**Ms CAMPBELL** — It was a problem because a bar was their major fundraiser. Some of the suggestions for more knowledge of alcohol were an extension of things like the alcohol interlock system but in saying that, there was something of a similar nature available in all vehicles. We also understand that there would have to be huge education with that because people do not understand the fact that not only do you have to wait for mouth alcohol to disappear but that in fact alcohol will continue to rise in your system for 1 hour after your last drink. There would be a danger that people could think they were below the limit, head off and over that hour be over the limit. There would need to be a lot of education.

Our other significant issue when it comes to drink-driving is the lack of alternative transport means. We have people particularly who mention sporting clubs. Sporting clubs can exist without a town facility around them — they can be out in the middle of a district with no other amenities at all. It is cost prohibitive to use a taxi even if you can get one and people tend to take the easy option and say, as the TAC says, ‘I’m only just a little bit over’.

We are doing things such as the ‘Looking after our mates’ presentation which is a presentation working in with the good sports program in sporting clubs, with youth groups, and with the OH and S managers in business, which deals with educating people on how they can either make judgments not to drink and drive or if they are going to drive, how they can assess the situation and make sure they will not be over the limit or at risk. It works on a looking-after-your-mates basis.

Education, enforcement and engineering — you will hear this from all of us today and it happened independently because each group of people put their submission together separately, the theme is we believe there needs to be ongoing and extended education of all road users within the community and it does need to start as young as possible. It is attitudes that we have to develop and we have to counter modelling that people have already received from parents or carers who may not be giving the safest of options in their role modelling behaviours.

**Mr BISHOP** — On that issue, in areas where we have discussion on this there is great debate about the value of prelicence drivers training versus on-road training; in other words, contained education around a track or out on the road. From the dealings we or I have had with TAC, they are impossible to try and negotiate with on that and so are the police generally. They would always angle for on-road education rather than prelicence stuff. I
would like a view on that. The data I have seen suggests that both of them are valuable. Why do we not do that? I am very disappointed with TAC, I think they are impossible on that, and also with the police view on it as well.

**Snr Const. MILBOURNE** — Can we hold off on that? That is part of the presentation that I will do and it may address some of the issues you are talking about there.

**Ms CAMPBELL** — At this point it would need to be both, but not off-road facilities. It needs to be hands-on, behind-the-wheel instruction, and also an education of attitudes and behaviour. So we are talking about value judgments which can be demonstrated through classes. We believe it needs to go right the way through schools, businesses, and every organisation that has anything to do with road users, and that means everybody, if we are to develop a positive change.

We do not want just a number of compulsory presentations; it needs to be integrated into the overall business of whichever organisation it is, and one of the biggest challenges we have is a lack of commitment particularly from the department of education. We understand schools have a very crowded curriculum, but if you go into any school where a student has lost his or her life, either just after leaving school or while he or she is still within the school community, it is devastating for that community, and they can tell you what a lasting impact it has, yet the department of education has difficulty integrating programs that already exist into its curriculum. We have already spoken about engineering so I will not go any further into that, and just at the end of this part of the presentation is a brief summary of the fatalities from 1998 until now, so you can look at that summary at your leisure.

**Mr LANGDON** — On those statistics, in the City of Latrobe, the number of fatalities annually, over four successive years, is 4, 2, 1 and 1, and then suddenly it jumps up to 11 and then 8. Was there a multiple fatality there? It seems to be an enormous increase.

**Snr Const. MILBOURNE** — I will address that as well when we come to my part of the presentation.

**Ms CAMPBELL** — And that is why we have included those figures, because obviously it is something that needs to be investigated.

I will now invite Keith Emms, from Road safe, East Gippsland, to speak on the local issues pertinent to that point.

**Overheads shown.**

**Mr EMMS** — Thank you. Turning to the first slide, most of you will be familiar with the term ‘Driver fatigue’. I would like to touch on some of the issues connected with it. Although we are unable to get exact figures, research has found that over 25 per cent of fatal crashes involve drivers suffering fatigue. Further research is finding that the true cause of these crashes is that the driver was carrying a sleep debt. Two main causes are lack of quality sleep, and driving at times when you would normally be asleep.

Research has demonstrated that it is not simply a case of how long you have been driving; it is a case of how long you have been awake. Reaction tests conclude that 17 hours without sleep, assuming you are not carrying a sleep debt, is like driving with a blood alcohol content (BAC) of 05.

After 24 hours without sleep it is like having a BAC of 1. The graph shows how the risk of road crash increases with how long the person has been awake. This graph assumes the person started the day with a good sleep and without carrying a sleep debt.

Due to the natural need for sleep, the risk dramatically increases after 16 hours without sleep. There is a higher crash rate from midnight to 8.00 a.m., and another from 2.00 p.m. to 6.00 p.m. This is in line with the body’s natural circadian rhythm, which is telling us to sleep on a 12-hour cycle.

This is a strong reminder not to drive when you would normally be sleeping, and also to stop and take a power nap in the afternoon, or to stop and change drivers. Unfortunately we find in Gippsland that a large percentage of drivers stopping at our driver reviver sites headed off from the Melbourne suburbs straight after work, and had driven for many hours without a break.

One driver I spoke to at a driver reviver site on Boxing day at 6.30 in the morning had already been driving through the night, and was visually fatigued when he got out of the car. He had his wife and two small children in the car with him. He still had 4 hours to travel, and stated that if we had not been open with the driver reviver site, he
would have kept driving. These stories are not uncommon among the volunteers that man these sites. We need to change driver attitude.

Mr BISHOP — Before you go on, how do we fix it?

Mr EMMS — We need to encourage people to stop, not just have advertisements every 15 minutes or so, saying, ‘Take a power nap.’ The problem is more involved than that. When you drive along the roads, where do you stop? I ask everyone in this room that question: do you normally stop at McDonalds because you know there is a clean toilet, and it is safe and secure?

There is no doubt that people will not pull up at a roadside stop that just has a table there and nothing else. I have a list here of our rest stop areas, and most of them do not have, for example, any toilets or even any shade. A lot of my colleagues are on the road, and we do not even use them. We stop at McDonalds a large percentage of the time, or at KFC, or one of those places where you know they will have a clean toilet.

Mr LANGDON — You don’t have a power nap at McDonalds, though, do you? You might have something to eat or — —.

Mr EMMS — No, that’s right. You have a break. You get out of the car and walk around.

The CHAIR — Keith, one of the councils we spoke to today — and I think it was East Gippsland — raised the issue that they did not feel there were enough rest areas in their particular shire.

Mr EMMS — It is not just rest areas; on a lot of the roads you cannot pull off the side of the Road safely because there are drains on the side of the road, so if you pull your car over you are making yourself a hazard and a real chance of getting a tail up the backside. We really have not put that into the equation.

When they built roads I am sure there was no thought put into places for people to stop and take a 15-minute power nap. That is what we have come up with now, but we have not provided that in the earlier planning.

So we need to change driver attitude. How do we do this? Through many things, including reinforcement of TAC advertising campaigns such as, ‘Take a 15-minute power nap’. That is one way of getting the message across.

We also need community education such as the highway signs, and certainly Road safe has been a leader in that area with a lot of banners being erected. They would not have been up when you came through — we put them up during holidays. We don’t leave them up because sometimes if you do that, it just becomes another sign that nobody reads, so we take them down, and put them up again during holidays, for maximum effect.

Mr LANGDON — In rest areas, do people mainly pull into them during the day? You say your statistics show that 2 o’clock in the morning is a time when people are more prone to have an accident; then in that case do people pull up and use those rest areas at night, or do they feel they are too dark and they might be bashed, robbed or whatever?

Mr EMMS — They are not used a great deal at night. You find a lot of campervans might pull over and stop for the night in those sites, but I do not think they are used much by anyone else.

When we are out on the road during the daytime we certainly see people using some of the sites, the better sites. At some of those sites I think they pay contractors to empty the bins, and I do not know if it is Vicroads or the shire but those workers can judge how many people have stopped by how much rubbish there is in bins. At some sites, they would probably never get any.

Mr DUNNING — And at some sites the bins have been removed.

The CHAIR — When we are talking about fatigue, are we talking about drivers of cars or the trucking industry or — —

Mr EMMS — We have some real issues with trucks also. Cattle trucks, for example, are not allowed to stop in the towns, so where do they pull over safely? There are not many sites, and not a sufficient number of sites. We have a member on our Road safe council who is from the trucking industry, and he is always pushing for more sites.
Mr STONEY — Is it an offence for them to stop in a town?

Mr EMMS — Yes. Refrigeration trucks are also not allowed to stop in towns because of the noise.

Snr Sgt CAREY — With the shire it is very difficult, as Keith alluded to. There are not many statistics on it and because a lot of them fall off the road east of Cann River, straightaway it is blamed on fatigue — well, it might have been, but it might not.

There was a family of four killed last year and they said it was fatigue, and I said, ‘Well, why is it fatigue?’ I played devil’s advocate. How do we know it was fatigue? They were all killed so we couldn’t ask them. The ones who are not killed often won’t admit that they went to sleep, and some will, but they could have swerved to miss a kangaroo or a dingo - and I have seen quite a lot of them up there.

We have said for the 30 years that I have been on the force that it is fatigue, because they have got that far and then they have fallen asleep, but several fall asleep this side of Bairnsdale, and that is 3-and-a-bit hours from Melbourne.

The thing is driver attitude, and your committee asked earlier: ‘What can we do?’ You can ask that about everything. All of us here can obey the speed limit, all of us can stop when we feel tired, why can’t other people? That is what I ask. We enforced seat belts, and a chap said to me many years ago, ‘Oh, I’m in and out of the car all of the time, so I don’t worry’. And I said to him, ‘I bet you’re not in and out of the car as much as I am, and I always put mine on!’.

Why can’t they? I know I am talking about a perfect world, but I do not know what else we can do. Certainly there are not enough good rest areas, but there are a lot of gravel areas, and if they were really tired they could pull over.

Di Campbell here knows me well, and she knows that I have been battling for the ‘Dave Carey rest area’ for years, but really this highway goes to sleep. at 7 o’clock at night. At Orbost they have gone to bed. There is nobody travelling the highway. So do we spend a lot of money on a big, flash rest area that I have been campaigning for, like they set up on the Hume — with one each side of the highway — given the numbers passing through? And of course you need to bear in mind that if you do that, they must have toilets, lights, emergency phone, tables, chairs, shade and whatever.

We had a beautiful one near Sale on Crown land. It was a beautiful picnic spot - my family and I quite often went out there with the kids — but there is no way I would sleep there in the dark; and they have closed it now. There is also one at Providence Ponds, and we had lights put in there and quite a few campervans stop there. Every time I pass I notice a number of them. A semitrailer was there this morning, and it is getting used. I think that is because it has lights.

Mr LANGDON — So they need to be lit up at night?

Snr Sgt CAREY — I think so. But it is tricky. From this side of Melbourne to Lakes Entrance there are plenty of towns with lighting where you can pull up. But the problem is that east of Bairnsdale there are no 24-hour service stations at all. Once you go us past Bairnsdale there is nothing open, and certainly down at Lakes Entrance there is nothing open after 7 o’clock or 8 o’clock at night. People then say, ‘Oh well, we might as well keep going, and we’ll make it to Merimbula’.

Ms CAMPBELL — I think education is the answer. There are tools that we can use. Research indicates that workers — and we would all be guilty of this — push themselves more than they should because of the distances they travel and the commitments they have.

We know as part of Workcover and occupational health and safety that we should be able to bring in a much greater duty of care. With sporting clubs and alcohol, that has happened. Those clubs are doing something about it because of the possibility of being sued for negligence. So there is that aspect, which we are not really pushing well enough at the moment.

There are programs within Workcover that exist, which we could tap into. We have found that when we do presentations and we speak about being awake for these extended periods of time, we are not sure that the word ‘fatigue’ means anything to people. But people can identify with, ‘Yes, I have been awake for too long, and I can see I am feeling tired’. That has a big impact on people, and being able to correlate it with the BAC figures actually enhances that point further. So education should help a little bit.
Mr EMMS — A couple of initiatives that we have been involved with include driver reviver sites, which were mentioned earlier. They are manned by volunteers, and I am finding in the 11 years I have been in the service that a lot of them are manned by SES volunteers. That number of volunteers seems to be dropping off a little. They are either not open as often or not for as long; so one of the initiatives of Road safe is to make a donation of $100 to the volunteer unit for each day they open, and that has brought it back up again, which has been a good initiative.

All volunteers, not only SES, have to fundraise to survive, and it is getting harder and harder to sell raffle tickets; so they see that as a way of getting 100 bucks into their kitty to buy equipment and so forth.

We have a site out at Newmerella near Orbost, and I am taking some people there tomorrow. There has been a partnership there between Vicroads, the local shire, the SES and Road safe, where lighting has been put in and lots of work has been done there, and the patronage has increased twofold out there.

Ms MORRISON — Another thing we have trialled recently is hiring visual message signal boards — the electronic ones on the trailers — advertising to take a break, particularly when there is heavy traffic up here at Christmas and Easter. They have been extremely effective, they have increased patronage by more than 100 per cent at the Driver Reviver sites. Unfortunately we cannot afford to do it at every site — they are extremely expensive: if they do not give us a discount they cost about $200 each per day to hire. They are very effective at reminding people that they should take a break and that about 2 kilometres ahead there is a Driver Reviver site and they can pull over, have a drink, have a rest and then feel a bit more refreshed.

Mr EMMS — If I could just finish on two points: one is I believe that rest area sites should be in the planning stage of any roads, and also that perhaps an audit should be done of the existing sites using the Vicroads guidelines for rest areas. They have just sort of popped up over the years and they are sporadic, there are no minimum standards out there. If the travelling public knew there was at least a minimum standard, then they might use them a bit more often. The other one is we have just received in-principle permission from Vicroads to go out and seek corporate sponsorship of sites; we are going to investigate that in the far east.

Mr STONEY — Could you just run through what happens when there is an accident, how it actually works physically, who rings who, how do you get the paramedics out and how long does it take?

Mr EMMS — What we find now with mobile phones is normally a passing motorist is one of the first calls — they will ring a police station which will go into the police dispatch area and normally dispatch one police car and an ambulance if the information that is fed in indicates that there are people injured.

Mr STONEY — So the central control does that, you do not make an assessment?

Mr EMMS — As a volunteer?

Mr STONEY — No, say the motorist rings 000 and says there has been a bad accident with a car into a tree 10 miles out, the central dispatcher decides to send an ambulance on the information, is that how it works?

Mr EMMS — They will normally send a police car.

Mr STONEY — And an ambulance?

Mr EMMS — And an ambulance.

Mr STONEY — Depending on what they are told.

Mr EMMS — If there are people trapped they will also activate the SES but it normally depends on the police.

Sgt WILSON — We do a concurrent call-out. If an ambulance has been dispatched to a high-speed collision outside a built-up area generally the road rescue crew for that area will be dispatched at the same time; it is dependent on the operator. We are trying to get that concurrent call-out going straightaway. As you can imagine, if it takes you 20 to 25 minutes to get there, the ambulance arrives and says, ‘We need the SES’, you are waiting another 25 minutes.

We are trying to get the immediate concurrent call-out. The police are called in any event, the ambulance is called if somebody is injured and possibly if they do not know if anyone is injured but it looks like a high-speed collision
they will dispatch the ambulance anyway. We are finding now that our emergency response to a lot of these accidents also includes the helicopter and we are finding that the paramedics are calling that in straightaway for anything that looks serious. I think we are saving a few more lives by having the helicopter and the immediate response.

Mr STONEY — Are you comfortable with the response times? Is that working quite well?

Mr EMMS — We are having some hiccups with our call-outs. There have been delays with the SES and we put in the reports. There is a reporting form after all accidents, the guys can put in a form and it goes in and is looked at. I know we have had a couple of incidents, especially down this area because people ring 000 and Morwell CFA does our call-outs. That will change in the next 12 months; there are changes coming which will probably improve those call-outs. The concurrent call-out is the way to go. Even though our guys are volunteers there is nothing worse — and it has happened — where they have arrived on scene about 30 minutes after the accident, and the police and ambulance scream, ‘Where have you been?’ when they have not had the call.

Mr STONEY — What input do police have in identifying dangerous objects on a road? Do you have any formal process to feed into the VicRoads system or the local shire system that, ‘This tree really should be removed’, how does that work?

Sgt WILSON — Individually police members bring it to the attention of their sergeants or the officer in charge of the unit. That goes through to VicRoads or the shire depending on who is responsible for the road and then we leave it with them and they either say yes or no. We generally generate the report and it is up to the responsible authority to do something about it.

Mr STONEY — Have you had any success or has it been mainly that you have done it and it has gone into the ether?

Sgt WILSON — Both, it could go either way. I think it all depends on the funding and the response from whoever you get in contact with. However, over the years it has got better — the response from both the shires and VicRoads has progressively got better.

Ms MORRISON — VicRoads has a care database so when someone like the police or even an interested member of the community rings in, it gets put into there and it must be looked at by a certain time; I am not sure exactly of the time.

Mr LANGDON — Does that database inform the council as well?

Ms MORRISON — No, it is a VicRoads database.

Mr STONEY — What happens if it is on a council road rather than a VicRoads road?

Ms MORRISON — If that is the case and VicRoads was contacted, we would contact the shire.

Mr STONEY — The reason I am asking is someone told me that then Bengworden road was identified as having some trees on it and I understand the police did feed it in but nothing has happened; it might be just a rumour.

Snr Const. ROGERS — It is not a rumour.

Ms MORRISON — That issue has been ongoing for a long time.

Mr STONEY — Could we have a minute on it?

Snr Sgt CAREY — I will throw to Senior Constable Rogers because he instigated it. I guess what I have done in the last five years of being here is started to turn it around a bit. Just to give you an idea I said to someone recently that I wish I had thought like this 20 years ago when I worked the highway and tried to help get these things done. He said to me, ‘You would have been told, “Shut up and get out there, enforcement is your game, do what you are told”’. That is probably right. The guys would come to me. We had a bridge here in town, it was pedestrian traffic and eventually we lost a couple of pedestrians. I would have planning meetings and they would raise the issue of this bridge and I told them to do something about it, to get me some photos and we would report it.
It took us a little while — the members have to understand that a lot of these things take money and there are budgets — but we got something down. David raised this issue of the trees on the Bengworden road — unfortunately we could not fit all the slides in and this is a different road but I will show those who come with me tomorrow that one tree is even closer than that. They have put a guardrail around it which I do not think would do anything. We are doing that now. We are not looking at how many we can catch out there on the highway with the radar, we are looking at why we are catching them, why they are still speeding and why they are running off the road and why they are hitting these objects.

Snr Const. ROGERS — What concerned me on the Bengworden road was that driving the road every day as we do we can see the weak links in our system. Down on the Bengworden road there are trees which are within 1 metre of the side of the bitumen in a 100 km/h zone. Several trees down there have claimed lives and when we go to these accidents and we see people killed we say, 'This should not have happened, how can we avoid this?'. Our mentality is to look at accidents and see why they have occurred and try to eliminate it so it does not occur again. The trees are a great issue, as we all know what kills people is the sudden impact. It is the sudden impact that we need to relate to. As far as I am concerned trees should not be within 15 metres of the side of a road. I know that upsets a lot of greenies and I know that that is an issue other people can fight over but as far as we are concerned as police officers if we see trees on the side of the road it is danger waiting to happen. That is a classic example. You could run into that tree with a semitrailer and I can guarantee the tree will not move — it should not be there. These are the sort of issues we would like to raise with you people.

Mr STONEY — Just to wrap it up, the police have put in reports on dangerous objects and nothing has happened.

Snr Const. ROGERS — Exactly. Approximately three years ago I went through it with the Vicroads people. We itemised 30 trees on the Bengworden road and put a yellow cross on them all and those trees were marked to be removed. To this day not one has been removed.

Snr Sgt CAREY — Tell the board about the permit.

Snr Const. ROGERS — The reason being is it is not necessarily Vicroads’s problem but that each tree had to have a permit issued to have the tree removed.

The CHAIR — That is the process that is delaying it.

Snr Const. ROGERS — So in other words it does not happen.

The CHAIR — Have you finished there, Keith?

Mr EMMS — Yes.

Snr Sgt CAREY — I realise we are running out of time but David will give you a couple of seconds on the sway bar which relates to a fatality the other day.

Snr Const. ROGERS — As you can see the second dot point on this particular slide says, ‘Reduces sway caused by wind deflection from large passing vehicles’. We had a fatality out here on the Princes Highway 5 kilometres out of Bairnsdale in January. It was exactly in a position where the woman was doing everything right, she was passing in an overtaking lane, she was attempting to overtake a semitrailer. We suspect that what has happened is the aerodynamics of the van have been altered because of the wind load behind the semi, as we all know. The trailer itself has started to sway and as a result of the sway she lost control, the thing went down the wrong side of the road and hit an oncoming car with an innocent person and a person was killed, another person’s life is still hanging in the balance. It comes to looking into the device and what it actually does — it is not a levelling rider, it is an antisway device.

If you look at the blue system on the red trailer section what it does is stop the trailer from swaying if it is put into a position where the aerodynamics of the towing trailer are affected. I imagine all of us at our ages would have probably towed or experienced towing a van and we know that on a lot of occasions when you are towing a van that if the wheels go into the gravel or the load is incorrectly balanced, a sway can occur. When the sway occurs there is a possibility of losing control. We feel as a result of an antisway bar it takes away the element of the driver losing control of the trailer.
The CHAIR — Is that a local product?

Snr Const. ROGERS — It is. I have no connection here, I have no shares in this at all but he is a local guy. I have a lot of paperwork on it and the unit actually works. The recommendations from the people who have used it are that they cannot commend it highly enough.

Mr LANGDON — Are they expensive?

Snr Const. ROGERS — As it says, it is easily fitted to most trailer accessories and I think it is in the vicinity of $200 to $300 but it takes away the element of your trailer losing control. That is the Stabil-tow.

Ms CAMPBELL — If Road safe East Gippsland is happy we will flick through its remaining slides and then invite Gary Slink, chairperson of South Gippsland Road safe, to speak.

Sgt SLINK — I am the chairman of Road safe South Gippsland. We handle the Bass Coast shire and the South Gippsland shire. Some of the identified local issues — I will try not to be repetitive here but to be brief as time is of concern — drink-driving is still one of the issues. Obviously we have partnerships going with Victoria Police and VicRoads, local shires and Road safe groups. Most of us here have delivered a lot of these programs, and still do, to do with the anti-drink-drive message.

The big problem we find is that more and more young people are drinking larger quantities of alcohol at younger ages. We do expose these kids, given funding and time, in the later years of secondary school, trying to get them ready for driving experience on the road but by then they already have the drinking mentality: 12 and 13-year-olds going out to functions are already trained in the consumption of alcohol way before we get to them with the drink-driving message about their driving. This is across the board; no doubt it is national. What does not help is the number of alcoholic beverages entering the market in vivid colours mixed with fruit juices, milk and so forth. It is like lolly water.

Mr BISHOP — And biscuits.

Sgt SLINK — Certainly, Tim Tam alcoholic biscuits. This goes against what we are all trying to achieve, and no doubt there are millions of dollars and man hours being spent in trying to undo all of this, but it is already ingrained in our youth anyway. It is a big social concern - how we diminish the influence of aggressive advertising. Maybe it is with legislation. That is all we can think of.

I will move on to elderly drivers. Bass Coast and South Gippsland shires have a larger than the state average percentage of elderly drivers. It is a good place to retire to.

The CHAIR — We have just completed a report to Parliament on elderly road users and recommended things such as eyesight tests with licence renewal. At present the age of 18 is the last time your eyesight is tested. At 60, we have recommended, licenses be renewed every five years, and after 75 or 80 it is every two years, with a medical required.

Sgt SLINK — Good. We still, of course, deliver with our partnerships the older drivers forums or seminars; we do them every two years in each shire, and some of these seminars have been showcased at some of the state conferences. We have very good feedback, and generally find that we fill every venue we do. We are just about to embark on our new round.

Ms MORRISON — With those older driver programs, education is still the key. Even though they are older and we tend to think of education being for young people, they need it too, but with a different emphasis. This is not about speeding and drink-driving, this is about frailty and getting older and accepting that you may no longer be safe on the road. It is a big decision for them. These programs are fantastic. I as well as a lot of other people here have been involved with them, and the success through evaluation is always outstanding.

What I would like to see is some incentives for people to attend those programs. We usually get the Probus members, the University of the Third Age members, the senior citizens — the interested people who love anything like that — but we are missing a lot of people. If this committee could come up with ideas, with incentives — perhaps they could be financial, perhaps discounts on licence renewals, discounts on registration or even something like a free meal or something along those lines — that would be fantastic. It is just a matter of getting the people along, because at the moment we are missing quite a few of the people we need to get to.
Sgt SLINK — These forums, unless you are already aware, cover subjects such as a person’s legal obligations relative to their driving licence, eye health and the use and effect of pharmacy medications, safer driving and mobility, which includes pedestrian movement, and we often have a pharmacist, doctor, police officer or a VicRoads representative to deliver these programs. Basically we can only continue that with established networks and adequate funding, and the funding becomes a problem.

I will move on to the tourists. Obviously in our area we have Phillip Island and a lot of the coastal areas. I won’t go through all of the statistics at this point.

Mr LANGDON — When we have been on the other side of Victoria we noticed that the Twelve Apostles is often mentioned as a day trip. The councils over there are saying, ‘You can’t really physically do it in a day’. Do you get the same problem over in this neck of the woods?

Sgt SLINK — It is not too bad generally, we have a lot of coach trips. On a good summer’s night we would have 60 to 70 tourist buses come down from Melbourne, and it is easily done in that time. The road has improved over the years, there are more plans in effect, and it is really only a 2½-hour trip from Melbourne on a tour coach, so that is not too bad an issue.

The CHAIR — I suppose if someone has left Melbourne and decides to go to Merimbula — that is where you have problems?

Sgt SLINK — That is it.

Ms MORRISON — And a lot of them do not realise how far away it is, and then they are committed, once they have passed Cann River.

Ms CAMPBELL — One of the unique issues with Phillip Island, though, is not so much the distance but the time of day that the major attraction occurs, which is not until dusk. So if people are travelling down in the summer hours, it comes back to how many hours they have been awake, driving on unfamiliar roads, having travelled around and looked at a whole lot of other tourist attractions prior to going to the penguins. And if that were not enough fatigue, they then get back in their cars and head back to Melbourne.

Mr LANGDON — My point was that it is advertised as a day trip and it is not quite physically possible to do all that in a day without having fatigue and so on.

Sgt SLINK — Phillip Island can be done in a day. Ordinarily there are two types of tourists. The first is international tourists — the people who get off a plane at Tullamarine, rent a car and go hurtling down the highway, literally, and many a time we have picked up these people doing 130 km/h or 150 km/h, just to go and see the penguins, and then they hop back in their cars and head back.

There have been tour groups organised to fly down from Sydney to Melbourne, who either rent buses or cars, just to see the penguins. They then go straight back to the airport and back to Sydney. Some of these people are on unfamiliar roads in a car they have not driven before, and some of them are insane. I see this pretty well on a daily basis.

We welcome the changes to legislation that enable us to suspend someone’s drivers licence or give them a fine as we would a Victorian licence-holder, but the majority of these people are gone in a week, so any licence suspension will not really have an effect; but the monetary punishment might be something. Still, they are not educated and not being told anything. I do not believe any literature is handed out at the point of rental of these cars. I have personally been to a number of these fatalities involving international tourists. Some have been killed trying to read a tour map, and they cross dual lanes of a highway; others have not recognised the change in a road surface and lost it on the soft edges.

The CHAIR — Or they lose concentration and follow their natural driving instinct which is to go to the other side of the road.

Sgt SLINK — Exactly. We have had a number of those as well. They momentarily lose concentration and think they are on the wrong side of the road and they will clean up someone going the other way. We have also now identified a number of high-profile international tourists, many times, to do with the motorcycle races. I will not rattle off any names, but I am sure there are a lot with tickets pinned to their walls.
The second type of tourist is your average weekend person. One of the heavy transport operators asked me to bring up the fact that some of his tankers have encountered people stopped in the middle of country roads hopping out of the car and taking a photo of the wildlife or the trees. There was an accident in Cowes down on Phillip Island about four weeks ago, which will be recorded as a single truck going off the road into a tree, but in actual fact the truck was avoiding a woman who had stopped to let an echidna cross the main road of Cowes, probably only 50 metres over the top of a crest. The truckie effectively saved this woman’s life by going off the road and hitting a tree, but it will not be represented that way in the statistics.

People are unaware, when they come out to the country, that they are likely to encounter heavy vehicles, tractors and so forth. We even get organised motor cycle clubs now touring in our neck of the woods and certainly other parts of Gippsland because they like the roads. They are not straight and mundane, they allow them to corner and hook in a little bit, and that would reflect on hospital statistics and ambulance call-outs just about any day of the week.

Some of the responses have been good. With our networking, Road safe has come up with signs warning people especially on narrow roads. One that comes to mind is the Korumburra to Warragul Road, where large signs depict heavy vehicles. Who knows — it may work or it may not; but we are hoping to see positive results of that, and we are looking at other roads we can identify without overdoing signage on those roads.

On the question of younger drivers, one particular problem is that these drivers are driving high-powered vehicles. Current laws prohibit probationary drivers from driving vehicles with a power rating of 125 kilowatts per metric tonne. However that is a calculation, and it is rather complex and not easily enforceable. There are a lot of kids out there at the moment driving cars not on a Vicroads magic list, and two years ago those types of cars were our police pursuit cars. However, I understand it is a cumbersome procedure for Vicroads to actually liaise with the Federal Office of Road safety and have these cars put into a list.

One solution we have thought about is, through Vicroads, to issue each vehicle with a kilowatt rating that takes away the confusion for the owner and the police, and this rating can be on the registration label, on the certificate for all to see, and if it is over so many kilowatts you cannot drive it when you are a probationary driver. That would simplify things very easily.

Mr LANGDON — Like when you buy a new fridge?

Sgt SLINK — Exactly. Good point! As it is, it is very hard to enforce, and we have to actually get a certificate from Vicroads to tell us what kilowatt rating that car might be and hope that it stands up in court. It is ridiculous.

In terms of influences on young people at this point, I went to a Road safety forum conducted by the TAC in Warragul in 2003, and I mentioned the influences of DVDs and computer games on kids. They take enormous numbers of hours of these kids’ time, and they are actually playing unrealistic games of high-speed chasing and running over people and so on. There are some horrific games out there.

When I said this was a big concern, the reply was, ‘That would be censorship. We cannot do anything about that’. It is a hot potato. It is like these kids getting used to alcohol at a very young age. They are playing hours and hours of these silly games, which are in part censored, I suppose — many of them have 15–plus ratings which no-one pays any attention to, and it basically gets them used to high-speed and high–powered driving. There are no consequences in a game like this because if you come unstuck or have a major crash, which ordinarily would kill you, you press the reset button. There are a number of documented cases now around Melbourne where kids are in high–powered cars without any regard for consequences, doing speeds that could kill you.

Ms CAMPBELL — I will invite Sergeant Wilson from Road safe Baw Baw, who is its vice chairperson, to make his submission now.

Sgt WILSON — Baw Baw is sandwiched between Latrobe and South Gippsland, so the factors that influence them influence us as well. Fifty per cent of our collisions involve single vehicles into fixed objects off road. A lot of those accidents occur in the 100 zones, not so much on the Princes Freeway which runs straight through Baw Baw, but the back roads connecting smaller towns such as Korumburra to Warragul, and Neerim South to Warragul.
It is my job to attend all the fatalities in the area, and I have been able to reconstruct quite a number of these accidents. I find time and time again that it is not necessarily high-speed collisions that cause the problem. In the majority of cases it is a 100 km/h zone — although an appropriate speed for a particular bend might been 70 km/h — and the vehicle was only 5 or 10 kilometres over an appropriate speed for that particular bend. The problem is the road environment, whether it be a gravel shoulder that is in poor condition or trees or other fixed objects close to the road, and therefore people are getting killed.

Fatigue is quite often blamed, as has already been suggested. In collisions where cars have gone off the road and there has been no braking whatsoever right up to the time of impact, it would appear to be fatigue. You would wonder in some of these cases why someone would not have woken up over that time, but we certainly can put those ones down to fatigue, unless it was a heart attack, and that is normally picked up in the autopsy anyway.

We are not sure in how many accidents fatigue is a contributing factor but generally it is fatigue, not paying attention or probably being a little bit quick on these roads that causes people to become unstuck and be killed. Our collisions have not really decreased much in the last few years. In 2001 we had 199 injury collisions; in 2002, 187; and in 2003, 179. They are coming down but not very much.

Probably the major contributor to our road user group are motorcycles. In 2003 we had 54 accidents involving injury: out of the 179 injury collisions, 54 were off-road or on-road motorcycles, it is a very large number of our collisions. I have a lot of documentation about it but what I can say is basically the areas north of Warragul, in the Neerim districts and up in Rawson and through the state forest, we have many people coming up from Melbourne, mainly from the south-eastern suburbs, and they will ride there on the weekends, come off their bikes and hurt or kill themselves; we have some very serious accidents up there which tie up a lot of resources in, as you can imagine, very inaccessible areas at times. People are dying or being very seriously hurt because we cannot get to them quickly.

That is a very major concern for us in Baw Baw. We are doing all we can at the moment to address that with the media. We have other campaigns going at the moment to educate the bike riders through bike clubs, intercepting cars with trailers on the back and giving them information brochures et cetera. We have just got $100 000 in funding from the federal government to increase signage and warnings for motorcyclists and improve some of the on-road cambers on the major routes for the road bikes. We need more funding to get police response up there. We find it very hard to get Melbourne resources up there with the off-road bikes to enforce it. When we get them up there we can get 20 to 25 unregistered motorbikes in one weekend. Between us we cannot get in there. We try and hit them and we might get three or four. We are under-resourced as far as our response is concerned and when you look at how they figure on our road toll we really need to do a lot more to try and either stop them from riding like idiots or stop them from going to a lot of these places where we cannot get in and help them out if they do come unstuck.

The CHAIR — I am from Geelong and the Barwon Road safe committee there — there is always the issue of motorbikes on the Great Ocean Road — has done a magnificent little brochure that highlights the spots to visit but all the way through it there is the flavour of safety: the black spots to look out for, the issues with regard to laying the bike over and all the rest of it. That is a great brochure. I do not know whether you have seen it but if you contacted the Barwon Road safe — —

Sgt WILSON — We will do that.

Ms CAMPBELL — We have done a similar thing. One of the biggest problems is they are on forest roads. A survey was done late last year by the local police in the Neerim area and it is people from outside of our postcode by quite a distance. They are not seeing themselves as tourists so to get the stuff to them has relied on, in particular, the warning signs, identifying the spots where they unload the trailers and the intercepts Clint was talking about, which are providing them with information — you should have some of this background information in your package. Fatigue is an issue. They are on unfamiliar roads, they have left home early and about 4 o’clock in the afternoon fatigue sets in and they lose concentration and they run into trees, or the road they used to go on has changed because it is a Department of Sustainability and Environment road and they have reconfigured it for whatever is going on forestry-wise and so on. There are bits and pieces there.

Sgt WILSON — To sum up, we have tried as much as we can to increase visible police presence on the back roads, putting booze buses and speed enforcement on those roads just to let people know, particularly those who travel every day on those roads, that there could be a police member around the next bend and hopefully they
are more alert when they are driving there. In relation to the motorcycles, we are doing as much as we can on the
to address it but we need more funding and we need more visibility.

**Ms CAMPBELL** — Last — he will do a wonderful job of doing this quickly! — is Andy Milbourne,
chairperson of Latrobe Road safe.

**Snr Const. MILBOURNE** — I love going last, it is terrific. I will try and précis my 20 pages down to a
couple. In the Latrobe region we have approximately 70 500 people. Of that number, 11 per cent are in the
18-to-25-year age bracket. In 2003 that age group made up 33 per cent of our fatalities on the roads in the Latrobe
region itself. You add to that the fact that they represent only 14 per cent of Victoria’s licensed drivers and it is
certainly a horrifying figure when you compare the two of them. Added to that we had a 21-year-old male who had
just left the region and fell off the road and killed himself up on the Strzelecki Highway; that would increase the
statistics but it went down to Slinky’s area rather than ours. The figures are not real good.

Contributing factors to those include speed, alcohol, fatigue, the non-wearing of seatbelts and of course a big one is
inexperience. Gary has mentioned some extremely valid points in relation to high-powered vehicles but if we are
truly serious about Road safety and reducing the road toll and the severity of injuries we really need to look in a
different way. Speed limits only go a small part of the way to reducing fatalities — they are just signs and we
cannot enforce the signs unless there is police presence around. Most become aware of where those enforcement
measures are set up via media outlets saying there is a speed camera in such and such an area; local knowledge is
also a big thing — people know where police set up their speed sites. Therefore, you have to look at it in a different
way.

The heavy vehicle industry is restricted with the speed those vehicles can travel at, what is to stop us stopping all
cars travelling at over 100 km/h? For example, the car I drove up in has a speedo with 260 km/h written on it. If I
was a young bloke — well, I am still — that is a challenge: how fast can I get this car to go? Why do we have
vehicles that travel at those speeds? Why not reduce them? All those speedos are doing is encouraging motorists to
drive faster and as a consequence die and even kill faster.

Passengers not being belted up is a big problem as well. Statistics are now showing that a high proportion of
rear-seated passengers are actually being killed. I will come back to the point you made about the fatality list in the
Latrobe region: four of those statistics were actually rear-seated passengers unbelted. It is a concern. Some 30 years
after the wearing of seatbelts became compulsory we are seeing that the deaths and serious injuries are coming
down but they are still there and, as I mentioned, sitting in the back seat of a car is fairly dangerous these days
because people think they are safe in the rear seats. We have had advertising campaigns reminding people to wear
seatbelts in the past but they have ceased; we do not see that anymore. However, we all know that McDonalds
make hamburgers so why do they still advertise? They know they have to keep the message in people’s minds so
they can keep selling those hamburgers.

We all know the different political parties — the Liberals, the Nationals and what have you — but all of a sudden
when it comes time for an election campaign they seem to be advertising as well. It is the same philosophy: you
need to keep your message in the front of people’s minds, and we are not doing that with seatbelts these days. That
is why people are out there and they are putting themselves at risk. We have to get back to the old ‘click clack, front
and back’.

**The CHAIR** — Is the wearing of seatbelts an issue within the trucking industry?

**Snr Const. MILBOURNE** — Truck drivers do not die in truck crashes, they do not need to wear
seatbelts — I know I am being facetious but that is the attitude they have. A lot of trucking companies are now
forcing these drivers to wear seatbelts.

**The CHAIR** — They tell me it is unsafe to wear a seatbelt.

**Sgt WILSON** — I can tell you first hand that most who die do not have their seatbelts on.

**Snr Const. MILBOURNE** — I attended a truck rollover just before Christmas and he could have killed
himself because he was not wearing a seatbelt. If he was wearing a seatbelt he would have been strapped in there.
He would have been upside down but he would not have received the massive head injuries he did simply for not
wearing his seatbelt. It is an attitude problem there once again with the truck drivers.
Mr DUNNING — If you speak to the truckies — I spent 28½ years with the enforcement branch at Vicroads, dealing with truckies all that time — they will say with the seatbelts fixed to the column and the seat going up and down they end up being strangled in the seat and that has an effect of their not being able to control the vehicle properly. There is a push with more modern vehicles to have the seatbelt built into the seat itself and the seat itself have a seatbelt with just a strap. Hopefully that will go some way to solving this problem.

Snr Const. MILBOURNE — It comes back to education and reaffirming that we need to be wearing seatbelts to save lives. Speaking of education, we educate our young to balance a cheque book, to cook a meal, to learn arithmetic and so forth but we are not teaching them to drive a car. We are teaching them how to get their licence and that’s it. Returning to the comment of Mr Langdon earlier about the education in schools and so forth, Vicroads, Road safe and Victoria Police in cooperation with the Department of Education and Training are actually getting a program up and running that will start in term 2 of this year; I think in my notes I have written term 2003. We are getting something up and running which is trying to coordinate all of the different programs that are available at the moment: ‘keys please’, ‘looking after our mates’ — all the driver safety issues. It is being called for from the schools and it is just a matter of getting the support of the education department. It is being funded at the moment through private industry. The RACV has kicked in with money and we have secured funds from local businesses within the area but we need to have something put in place where it is legislated and put into the school curriculum again; it used to be, it is not there anymore.

The number of young people who are losing their lives on our roads is ridiculous, as I mentioned at the beginning. It is because they do not know what the consequences of the driving actions are. We are not going in there and telling them not to drive, we are going out there to show them how to drive safely, reinforce with parents backing them up and getting at least 120 hours driving experience that they need to have on the roads. At the moment, by the time they get to years 11 and 12 and they are getting ready to get their licences, they know it all; and if we cannot teach them earlier, we have lost them. We have to educate them earlier and that comes back to when they are in the schools. By the same token, we are losing a lot of kids out of the school system and we are missing out on those so we are trying to address them through TAFE colleges, apprenticeship schemes and so forth. It really does come back to the politicians being able to get the money into the school system and making the time there available. It does not need a lot of time but it needs consistent time and it needs to be part of the curriculum.

Mr BISHOP — So the position of Victoria Police now would be to support prelicence driving training.

Snr Const. MILBOURNE — Absolutely.

Mr BISHOP — That is a change.

Snr Const. MILBOURNE — One of the main drivers for this particular project we have up and running is my local inspector. He has put a hell of a lot of time into getting this up and running with Vicroads and Road safe. The partnerships are there, it is being developed. The Department of Education and Training has said it will come aboard and give us some time so it is just a matter of getting it tied up with the schools themselves. If it comes from the top it is easier to spread it out.

Mr STONEY — Do you see a difference between driver education and advanced driver education? There has been an argument against advanced driver education because it gives people an unreal expectation.

Snr Const. MILBOURNE — Exactly. We have to teach them how to drive safely, not to be Peter Brock or whatever, and that is what advanced driving courses do. I know people who have been driving for many years and done an advanced driving course, learnt what they have learnt in controlled conditions and then tried to do that out on the roads and scared the hell out of themselves because they have nearly come undone. That is what advanced driving does to people — it gives them a false sense of security.

Ms CAMPBELL — I think one of the things we keep overlooking all the way along is the actual difference between males and females in their approaches to driving. We are underestimating the testosterone factor with males — there really is a different approach to their whole road use behaviour to that of females. There is a little bit more aggressive behaviour these days with females but on the whole if you look at the statistics, it is males who dominate in the statistics, particularly in the young drivers it is pretty much mostly males who are at risk. We perhaps have to review some of the programs we currently have with a view to taking into account the differences that are there.
I am not quite sure if we have quite understood what you were saying there, Mr Bishop. When you are talking about the police view and the TAC’s view on predriver training, are you referring to actual in-car training?

**Mr BISHOP** — Yes, both: theory and in car.

**Ms CAMPBELL** — I think to clarify, most of the research available these days does demonstrate that it is preferable to have on-road experience and that is a problem unless you have a learner’s permit, as against off-road training. As Andy explained about the advanced driver training, it can give a false sense of confidence.

**Mr BISHOP** — I am not talking about that. The Monash study indicated the on road but there is some statistical evidence to say that the prelicensure training in the school curriculum, which is done by a large number of schools in parts of Victoria, is a distinct advantage. In fact, we have gone to the TAC looking for funding and cannot get it. The original stuff we had was not supported by the police because of their view that the on road was more important than the other one.

**Snr Const. MILBOURNE** — I will just touch on the single vehicle collisions in the region. Many of them actually occurred on back roads, including gravel roads and so forth. Alcohol was a factor there, and it was usually along the lines of people trying to dodge where the police would normally be. I do not know how you fix that.

Just to wrap it up, many of the recommendations and comments raised by our counterparts here will upset the civil libertarians, but it is really time we started turning things back onto them and calling the so-called welfare groups if they are interested in saving people’s lives or just stopping their feelings getting hurt, because that is ultimately what it comes down to.

There are so many cost-effective ways of reducing the state road toll, and behalf of all of the Road safety councils here — Road safe East Gippsland, Latrobe, Baw Baw and South Gippsland, we call upon you to get behind the driver’s seat, get behind the ideas we have presented here, and be Road safe. Thank you very much.

**The CHAIR** — I commend all of the four road safe committees for the work you have put into your submission, and the obvious passionate desire you have to deal with these issues. Thank you for your time and your effort, and we commend you for the work you are doing within your communities.

**Witnesses withdrew.**
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into crashes involving country road toll
Bairnsdale—5 February 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 Officer: Mr P Nelson

Witnesses
Ms K. Nelson, Group Manager, Development Services,
Mr S. Dunning, Transport and Technical Officer,
Cr H. Bates, Mayor, and
Cr M. Freshwater; Councillor, Shire of East Gippsland.

Necessary corrections to be notified to executive officer of committee
The CHAIR — I welcome representatives of the East Gippsland Shire. Two of you have already been introduced. They have now been joined by Councillors Bates and Freshwater. Welcome to you all. To start off, perhaps you could give us an overview of the shire itself, what areas you take in — major towns and cities — and then move into your submission. As I have said before, we operate under parliamentary privilege, which means that what you are saying cannot be used against you legally into the future.

Ms NELSON — Thank you. The presentation we have for you will give an overview of the shire, so I will start to use the presentation and slides, and Steve Dunning and I will be doing most of the talking between us; but if the councillors have a point they would like to make, they can jump in. If you have questions, please yell out as we go. We would like to start with an overview of East Gippsland, to give you the context in which we are operating, and also have a look at what council’s role in Road safety is, then look at key trends in East Gippsland, quoting crash statistics at you. You probably have access to all of that so we will pick out the key issues and then look at some possible solutions.

I suppose to some extent we come to you not as experts knowing exactly what is causing the road crashes, but as a local authority with responsibility for road management, and as a body with an interest in what is going on in the municipality, and we have a role in Road safety; so we are here with our local knowledge and feel for what is going on within the context of our role.

East Gippsland shire has a population of just under 40 000 people. The majority live in the south-western part of the shire, Bairnsdale being the major centre, with 11 000 people. There are not too many other towns with more than 5000 people. Lakes Entrance and Paynesville would be the next largest towns, but the majority of the population lives in this part of municipality, which is the western most corner, and from here there are lots of small communities in isolated parts throughout the shire.

Seventy-five per cent of the region is held in reserves of some sort or another. In terms of the area of the shire, we are the second largest municipality, and it is about 10 per cent of the state, so it is a significant area with a small population. It is a growing tourist destination, particularly with the Gippsland Lakes, but also ecotourism and wilderness experiences are more common for people to become involved in, as is the high country.

We have a growing retirement population. Our population is ageing, and we also support traditional rural industries — farming, fishing and forestry — and that has some impact on our Road safety issues.

To give you some idea of the kind of infrastructure that the shire has, we have lots of roads that service very small populations with fairly low traffic volumes. This slide shows lots of footpaths and guardrail, and there is an extensive network of declared roads because of the number of highways traversing the shire, and there are tourist and declared roads that Vicroads manages.

We are about 3\(\frac{1}{2}\) hours from Melbourne if you come to Bairnsdale, as you know, and basically it is around the same travelling time to any of the other extremities, so through to Mallacoota, up to Omeo in the north or up to Bonang and Tubbut or up to the New South Wales border — you are looking at similar travel times. So basically when you get to Bairnsdale you are only halfway to the New South Wales border.

Going through a few of the issues that we think have relevance to Road safety in East Gippsland, because there is very little in the way of alternative transport options — we are a pretty car dependent community — that becomes an issue for older drivers who find themselves in a position where they have no choice but to continue to drive when they maybe should not. For younger residents who are quite isolated, unless they gain their licenses as early as they can and get into cars to get themselves around, there are very few options for them also.

As I mentioned earlier, there are long travelling distances to and then through the shire, so people are driving long distances, and it is increasing popular as a motorcycle route, the Great Alpine Road particularly is promoted as a great place to go on your motor bike, and lots of them are using that road.

We heard from East Gippsland Road safe about the issue of power nap sites and appropriate facilities for people to stop. The further east you go, the further apart the towns are and the less likely you will be to find somewhere open or somewhere safe to stop. There is a lot of heavy transport on our roads, and Steve Dunning might want to take over at this point.
Mr DUNNING — At each of the road freight forums conducted by the National Road Transport Commission (NRTC) over the last seven years, a couple of things were raised at all of the venues. One was the lack of rest areas for trucks. A lot of the rest areas on the side of the road are big enough to get a car in, but it is impossible to get a 25-metre B-double in there. That is a big, big problem for the transport industry, and particularly a problem in this area east of Orbost.

The previous group stole a bit of my thunder on that point, but they explained it very well. I did receive in the mail yesterday the annual report from the Victorian Road Freight Advisory Council. In it it states that work is currently under way in Victoria to develop a rural rest stop area policy in line with the draft national guidelines being developed by the NRTC; so it looks like something may be *under way there.

But certainly the big problem in this area is the lack of rest stops for vehicles on the main highway system. You will not get cars pulling into these bays if there are a couple of trucks sitting there; and that only happens if the trucks themselves can get in anyway.

We really only have one stop where you can actually get off the highway, and that is in a little area called Murrangower, about 15 kilometres east of Orbost, where you can get right off the road and where trucks and vehicles can both pull in there and get proper rest.

Ms NELSON — The last point relates to the issue of road reserves. There are extensive areas of road that go through state parks but in areas where we have cleared farm land — you will see some examples tomorrow — a lot of the vegetation that is left is in the road reserve and often it is quite significant, particularly in areas like the red gum plains, so we do have issues in balancing management of the vegetation which has significance but also the road corridor. Where the trees do not form part of the road pavement, then planning permits are required to remove that vegetation and then issues other than simply Road safety come into the decision-making process.

Some more issues. Movement of animals, mention was made earlier of people crashing into animals. With the nature of the kind of country you are driving through in East Gippsland kangaroos and things are going to be there. There is also livestock being moved around at regular intervals around the shire.

The CHAIR — Do cattle underpasses assist in that problem?

Ms NELSON — Yes. A number have been installed on the Princes Highway.

Mr DUNNING — There are a couple near Orbost.

Ms NELSON — We issue permits for livestock crossings so we control that through our local laws department. That has improved a lot in the last few years with the new signage requirements and those sorts of things but it still relies on people to be aware and do the right thing.

The CHAIR — It also comes down to the inexperienced city traveller coming out into the country too — the first time he strikes some cows across the top of a hill would be the first time he has ever seen it.

Mr DUNNING — In the long paddock.

Ms NELSON — I suppose it is always an issue for a municipality like East Gippsland, with the vast area we have to look after and the small population and rate base — we have huge infrastructure management responsibilities. As a road authority we have big and growing responsibilities in respect to audit and risk management of that infrastructure. The changes to the way we do that through the road management legislation mean that if issues such as trees on the side of the road do start to become more of a liability issue then we are in deep trouble because we really seriously cannot address all of the trees in our road reserves; it is a case of trying to manage the risk as best we can.

Mr BISHOP — Are you looking to address that in the consultative process with that particular bill?

Ms NELSON — Our engineering staff will certainly be picking it up. I briefly discussed it with them today so I am not going to go into any real detail today in respect of it but all of the risk management issues and the way we need to manage our assets into the future will have a big impact.

Mr BISHOP — The nonfeasance issue.
Mr BATES — Perhaps if I make a point here on the nonfeasance issue, while it has been extended by the Parliament I am a member of the Gippsland local government network and we have recently brought to the minister’s attention that nonfeasance has been reintroduced into two states — New South Wales and Tasmania — because it is seen to be, particularly in shires like ours, an absolute necessity. Certainly we intend undertaking a complete review of our roads and the quality of the assets but nevertheless there are going to be times when something will occur which we are not aware of but unless we can demonstrate quite clearly that there has been a major maintenance regime in operation for that road, it will cause us some serious problems.

Ms NELSON — The final point there is really about the fact that there are lots of heavy vehicles using fairly low-standard roads in the municipality. We have mentioned there the carting of fire-damaged timber, the ash harvesting operation that has started in the shire. I might hand over to Steve for a couple of comments.

Mr DUNNING — The timber industry is a fairly big industry in the shire even though it has gone through some streamlining lately. A lot of our roads in the shire are certainly not designed to cater for a lot of the vehicles which are using them, whether they be the timber industry, milk tankers or cattle crates. We have a situation where we have a 19-metre B-double which is general access — we cannot restrict them going into areas unless there is a limited bridge or a road limit on a road. Then you go out to the 25-metre B-doubles which are 62 tonnes to 68 tonnes depending on whether they are under mass management or not. These vehicles are travelling on a lot of the roads particularly up north of Omeo and carrying the ash-salvaged timber from the last bushfires. They are on these roads which are best described as goat tracks — they might have been widened over the years but they follow the old original road around. These roads are certainly not capable of carting a lot of these loads which is going to mean an awful lot of money being spent on these roads to get them back to scratch. Would the mayor like to comment on that one at all?

Cr BATES — I would love to comment in detail. As it stands at the moment, the volume of those trucks has gone up by something like 300 per cent. Just as a matter of Road safety a lot of those trucks have been brought in from outside Gippsland so they do not know the roads for a start. With the intense traffic the damage to the roads is quite severe. We are seeking extra funding out of the bushfire recovery moneys to try and maintain the quality of the roads, not only so the trucks can handle them safely but also to maintain their conditions from the point of view of the local community, bearing in mind that there are such things as school buses travelling on those roads as well. While there have been some agreements reached, as a result of a committee we have working, that the trucks will not travel at certain times, nevertheless the conditions of the roads are of serious concern to us. We are looking at the extra road maintenance cost over the period of the recovery process to be in excess of $1 million. In fact, most of our maintenance that is being undertaken at the moment is on the roads. Not all roads are being used by timber trucks, I would want to stress that but most of our maintenance which we would normally allocate across the region is now by necessity being forced into maintaining those roads. Even as recently as this week I have had major complaints that you can lose a truck in some of the ruts that are appearing in them. That is how serious it is.

Mr DUNNING — Tomorrow I will be going to the Great Alpine Road and there are 28 log trucks using that road at present so we are bound to run into a few of them through the ash ranges, a windy piece of road north of Bruthen for roughly 40 kilometres.

Ms NELSON — We are mixing the trucks in with the motorbikes which are also using the Great Alpine Road. Following the fires we were promoting for people to go up to the high country and be tourists and we have been mixing all of that traffic on a road that is perhaps not suited — it is not a road we manage. There are other impacts which have implications for Road safety; I know you are looking fairly specifically at Road safety issues. An example of a spin-off is the trucks mostly travel through the township of Swifts Creek. You are not going that far tomorrow but there is a need for children to cross the main road in Swifts Creek. It does not meet the VicRoads warrants for a funded school crossing so we are left looking at different ways to be able to fund the safe crossing of kids in those communities. I suppose it just shows that there is an increased impact where we cannot demonstrate the normal warrants needed in terms of volume of traffic and numbers of kids crossing the road but there is a real potential hazard there which we have to try and address because it is a community need.

Cr BATES — I will just add, we have a committee looking at all the bushfire recovery situation. We have a meeting tomorrow as a matter of fact and that will again be raised. The shire is certainly, because of the need, looking at putting in some form of crossing but one of the issues that we have to face is we need VicRoads approval.
first. Vicroads has done the traffic counts and does not see the need or is not prepared to put in some form of lights during the term when the kids are crossing the road. It is a double highway with two lanes but then you have service lanes either side as well so there is a decent distance to cross.

It is of interest that the trucks are saying they are not the problem — they recognise the issue, there is lot of information going out to them and they slow down and stop coming into the town so they are not going shooting across the crossing but they are alleging that cars are coming around them and passing as they are coming through, it is an opportunity to get passed. For mine it is an accident waiting to happen and I am not prepared to see that continue..

**Cr FRESHWATER** — If I could just add in there, that particular bit of road is the first bit of straight and open road you get after a reasonably lengthy drive from Bairnsdale up and people really do start to whistle along there and do not realise they are running onto a school crossing. It is of serious concern.

**Cr BATES** — Quickly on the motorbikes, I travelled to Omeo on the Great Alpine Road on Sunday and in the first hour I passed more than 100 motorcycles coming down the road. That is giving you an idea of the volume that is travelling up there at the moment.

**Ms NELSON** — This is satellite imagery of the shire. It gives you a pretty good idea of where the main towns are and how many trees there are out there. Apart from the main area around Bairnsdale the shire really is small patches of cleared land in between bush so you are driving long distances between most places. Apart from the Princes Highway most of the roads run in a north-south way and there is not much connection through.

I will go over council’s role in Road safety very quickly. We have developed and adopted a Road safety strategic plan and operate a steering committee which brings together a lot of the Road safety stakeholders in East Gippsland with the aim of trying to coordinate our activities and making sure we are maximising the actions we are all taking. We have actively sought black spot funding in the past when it was available. We have staff who are trained to undertake safety audits for existing roads — that is Steve’s role — and also for approval of new infrastructure.

**The CHAIR** — So you do conduct safety audits?

**Mr DUNNING** — Yes. I did a course roughly six months ago and I have started doing the audits on the existing road network, mainly for safety signage but we are also looking at where the trees are close to the road and other problem areas on the road.

**The CHAIR** — I congratulate you for that. I think you are probably the first council in Gippsland which is actually doing that, from what we have learned today. We have asked that specific question of each council.

**Ms NELSON** — We have responsibility for upgrading and maintaining road infrastructure. We participate in East Gippsland Road safe; both Steve and I are members so we work closely with those guys. We were the pilot council for the development of Vicroads older drivers Road safety program. That is probably what got us really interested in working out what this was all about. I am now going to hand over to Steve.

**Mr DUNNING** — I would like to go through some statistics I got out of the crash stats database for this shire from 1 July 1998 to 30 June 2003.

**The CHAIR** — Where do you get these statistics from?

**Mr DUNNING** — The Vicroads crash stats database. In that period there were 842 accidents recorded, of these there were 44 fatalities. Three hundred and ten of these accidents occurred on non-declared — local — roads which resulted in 9 fatalities. You can see from that that a big percentage of those accidents occurred on the declared road network. Of those 842 accidents: the driver having lost some form of control contributed to 84 per cent of them; 84 per cent of accidents occurred on paved roads; 72 per cent of accidents occurred in daylight; and 79 per cent occurred in dry conditions. That really throws up the question of driver education and people driving according to the conditions. I am not sure exactly how you answer those figures but it is a big problem.

**Mr DUNNING** — This map of the shire shows where the collisions have occurred, where people have hit fixed objects. Fatal and serious injuries from vehicles colliding with fixed objects make up the single largest component of all road trauma in this state. Up to four out of every 10 deaths in Victoria are as a result of a collision with a roadside object; and 43 per cent of accidents in East Gippsland Shire have been into a fixed object; and the
breakdown of what has been hit is: trees — 45.7 per cent; embankments — 22.5 per cent; fence or wall — 8.5 per cent; guardrails — 5 per cent; poles — 4 per cent, and the remaining number — 11 per cent.

Mr STONEY — Over what period is that?

Mr DUNNING — That is a six–year period from 1 July 1998 to 30 June 2003. Unfortunately we did not have a breakdown of each year, but it has been fairly steady through that period of years.

In terms of crashes involving roadside objects, the majority of accidents occurred in dry weather and on paved roads. Seventy nine per cent of these accidents occurred in a rural zone, and 77 per cent occurred in a 100 km/h speed zone, which also begs the question of people not driving to conditions and driver education.

Non–residents — this is an interesting statistic, and it surprised me. Of accidents in the shire, 62 per cent involved non–residents — that is, people living outside the shire. There were 32 deaths where non–residents were killed, and 529 casualty accidents recorded where non–residents were drivers of those vehicles.

Mr STONEY — Is that consistent with the statewide trend?

Mr DUNNING — I think it is a bit different here. Other shires were a bit higher than us,. We are about 14th in the municipality so far as accident totals go, but on this particular one, with the state average I am not really sure. In terms of trucks, 80 per cent of truck accidents in the last six years have occurred on the declared road network, and 85 per cent of truck accidents involved a roadside hazard and of these, 30 per cent were into trees and 25 per cent were into embankments. In terms of the overall figure, trucks accidents only contributed to 8 per cent of the overall figure in the shire.

Mr LANGDON — You made a point before about 100 km/h zones and whether people were driving at a suitable speed limit for the conditions. I know that a fair proportion of your roads are unsealed. Do you think people are driving on unsealed roads at 100 km/h when they really should be driving at a much lower speed?

Mr DUNNING — Yes. One of the other shires has introduced a default 80 km/h limit on gravel roads, which would go a long way towards addressing the problem. One of the things I deal with on a day-to-day basis is the speed limits through the towns, and I get two or three phone calls a week on this. People just have to learn to drive to the conditions.

I graduated from the police driving school back in 1971, which is an awfully long time ago, and I remember the inspector of the school, when we graduated, said:’ Just remember three things when you get into a car — only drive to your capability; the capability of the vehicle; and only drive where you can see.’ I think it is three very good points. I have taught my kids those things, and if you comply with them, you will never have an accident and I have never put a dent in my car to this day and hopefully my kids will be the same.

Cr BATES — One of the points that can be made again — and you will see by one of the previous maps you had — is that the distances to travel between towns are quite substantial. When you move out of the main areas of Bairnsdale and Lakes Entrance, you are looking at 2 or 3–hour drives, and once you get off the main highways, you are looking at varying conditions of roads; and even some that are sealed, of course, are extremely windy and very narrow; so you are looking at conditions which really do not sustain high speeds.

I think it is significant that the statistics show that perhaps a lot of visitors to the area do not understand the quality of roads that they get on. The Bonang Highway is a classic, where in many instances now, although it is supposed to be a two–lane highway, in many areas there has been so much crumbling of edges that you are down to a single lane, and knowing the road from a local point of view makes it easy, but when you get visitors going up into the high country up there, you can run into some problems.

Mr DUNNING — According to the statistics, 60 per cent of all fatal accidents in this shire involve people running off the road into trees, and 42 per cent of all casualty accidents are into trees; and as Kate Nelson mentioned earlier, 75 per cent of East Gippsland is some sort of park side — there are an awful lot of trees out there.

In terms of motorbikes, 75 per cent of motorcycle accidents in the last six years have occurred in the rural area of the shire and 27 per cent of motorcycle accidents involved hitting a roadside object. Of this number 19 per cent collided with trees and 15 per cent with embankments.
Mr DUNNING — This map of East Gippsland shows our three worst collision areas, up near the number 9 highway — that is, on the Omeo highway itself between an area called Callaghans Rd and Bingo Tice Road. It has had nine accidents and one fatality over the six–year period. Seven lost control, all in dry conditions, and eight were during the day; seven of these were motorbikes.

This is largely a farming area, which I imagine would explain the motorbike accidents; but it is a road which is used and publicised a lot in the motorbike magazines for their drives. It is a popular road and they suggest you stop and have a lemon squash at the Blue Duck on the way.

Cr FRESHWATER — It is a bitumen road. Just because it is up there does not mean it is gravel.

Cr BATES — No, that is right. It is a fairly narrow, windy piece of road.

The CHAIR — And where do they go? The Blue Duck?

Mr DUNNING — Yes, the Blue Duck is very popular. Just near Cann River there is another spot, which seems to have its fair share of mishaps. It is on the Princes Highway near a little place called Beehive Track, which is just near Wingan National Park and Mt Drummer, as you come down roughly 10 kilometres east of Cann River. It has also had nine accidents. Eight lost control — again it is a windy section of road. The majority of accidents occurred in dry conditions and during the day. Our third spot there is at Lakes Entrance, on the coast, once again on the number 9 main highway. That number 9 seems to be a popular figure. There were nine accidents, nine lost control — five in dry conditions and four in the wet.

This area is Jemmy’s Point, down into Lakes Entrance itself. It is a very windy section, and there is also a bit of a problem there with the fish cooperative in Lakes Entrance, where the refrigerated vehicles pick up the fish. If they leave the trucks sitting there for a while, the fish juice tends to come out with the ice on it, onto the roadway, which tends to make it fairly slippery.

Mr LANGDON — Are they all 100 km/h areas?

Mr DUNNING — No, the Omeo Highway and the Princes Highway are 100 km/h, but the other one is a 60 km/h zone.

Mr LANGDON — Any chance of reducing the speed on the other two areas?

Mr DUNNING — Again it comes back to Vicroads policy. The Princes Highway is a Vicroads road so that is up to them, but it is largely a matter of driving to the conditions. There is no development along there; and to reduce the speed limit you need a certain amount of development along that section of road.

Cr BATES — There are advisory signs on the windy parts, but again, just from experience, they do not seem to make a lot of difference.

Mr LANGDON — Would it help if Vicroads reduced the speed in the area?

Mr DUNNING — It would certainly be an advantage. As the mayor said, a lot of the advisory signs do not work because they have no enforcement value. We can put advisory speed signs around a bend with the left or right arrow and the wobbly road sign; and with a 50 km/h sign on it, but there is no enforcement value, and that is the problem with private signage.

Ms NELSON — One of the issues with the Jemmy’s Point area in Lakes Entrance is that it is that main view you get when you arrive at Lakes Entrance. It is the entrance and the beautiful view of the lakes, and people stop and people drive and look, and it is one of those spots where people are not paying attention to the road.

Cr BATES — There has been a number going through the guardrail. You can only explain that by saying they are not paying enough attention.

Ms NELSON — It is an iconic view so we do not want to take it away, but it is probably causing the accidents. This next slide is an attempt to give you an idea of what we think some of the solutions might be. As the police mentioned earlier we are theorizing about the cause of these accidents, and the statistics can tell us some things, and we are not claiming to be experts or know all the answers.
I suppose we are saying there needs to be a multi-faceted approach, not just one single approach. The first program might seem a little out of place, but we have been funded by the state government, together with Wellington Shire, to look at alternative transport options, and I have put in there that it would be great to continue to see the support of those kinds of initiatives so we can find sustainable alternative transport options for members of our community who are not able to drive, to give people the alternative if they have that choice.

Of course we would also see as a necessity continuing the driver education, and I suppose I would see enforcement included in there as part of that program because if there is no penalties then sometimes the education will not have any effect on people. There was talk earlier about improving the number and standard of the power nap sites. We would certainly support that. If there was the ability to have better power nap sites or stopping sites, we could promote those better through the shire.

The CHAIR — What would make them better?

Ms NELSON — I suppose we recognise that it is a difficult issue because people were talking about McDonalds and service stations, and that will not happen in East Gippsland beyond Lakes Entrance, which is our last McDonalds. There are a couple of issues that we have encountered. First there is the issue of trucks and cars; so they need to be suitable for truck drivers looking to sleep and not disturb other people. They need to be big enough to accommodate the type of traffic that will be facilitated. They need to be safe:, so if they are not going to be in towns then they need to be lit and people need to feel they can stop there and be safe; and one of the issues that we have come across — and I suppose it is easy for us to say because the majority of the sites would need to be on the declared road network rather than the local road network so they will be on the main traffic grids — is a reluctance or inability to fund management or maintenance of those sites.

Some of the sites have been Parks Victoria or DSE sites, and they have said,’ This is not our core business so we are pulling out the facilities‘; and it then gets muddled up between providing pull-off picnic tables and lights and toilets for tourists, for tourism reasons, or are we providing them for people who need to have a rest, a break from their drive.

The jurisdiction for management of those sites has been called into question. Whose core business is it to provide those sites and how do you effectively manage them if they are miles away from the nearest depot?

Mr DUNNING — As far as the sites for those stops go, it is handy if they can be close to towns when they are open after hours so people can get something to eat and then be able to eat it within a short period of time: get out of the town if that is where the only site can be and eat whatever they have bought while it is still hot.

As to toilet facilities, between Orbost and Cann River you have 100 kilometres. There is one very environmentally friendly toilet at Murrungowar and that is the only one along that section, which is an hour’s travel. There is one at Cann River and that is it, you have another 45 kilometres to the New South Wales border and then you are on the highway.

Ms NELSON — Cann River is a very well-used toilet facility in the middle of the town. It is a very popular spot.

Cr BATES — It has the highest number of pieces of toilet paper that we distribute in the shire.

Ms NELSON — As part of the powernap site idea I suppose what we are suggesting is that the whole thing needs to be investigated and some sort of policy developed that might look at innovative ways of dealing with this in more remote areas — if you do not have a McDonalds or something that is going to fund the infrastructure that might be required, how are you going to do it? Part of the thinking should be that they need to be planned for, they need to be recognised as an important part of the road infrastructure. You do see that on the more major road reconstructions where there are truck stops built into the road infrastructure that is there. Perhaps some thought needs to be put into it whenever we have the opportunity to upgrade roads or do road work.

Cr BATES — I think that is an interesting point. Some of you may have seen the one on the main highway at Drouin going into Melbourne. It is very popular with truckies and it has electric barbecues. It is well set up and is obviously well used. I have pulled in there a couple of times and certainly there have been three or four trucks in there and the facilities are well used and well maintained. It is off the road, screened a little by the way it is off from a cutting and it makes quite a good screened area where you can get in and relax. However, there is nothing this side at all of that nature.
Mr BISHOP — You see the situation in New South Wales up the Hume and on the Princes Highway they unfortunately leave a lot of ours for dead — an unfortunate word to use — but it is an encouragement there to stop.

Ms NELSON — We are almost there. I suppose these couple of points are really looking at what you were talking about earlier and the need for some flexibility and a balanced approach to dealing with vegetation and animals and things on roads. We have had at least one situation where we were reconstructing and sealing a gravel road where vegetation had to be removed and the replacement requirement was completely unrealistic in terms of what we could achieve.

The CHAIR — What was that requirement?

Ms NELSON — It was in the thousands of trees to remove a very small number of large trees: the more significant the tree you remove the more you have to plant. I suppose we do not necessarily disagree with the principle but the requirement was to plant back in that road reserve; I am not sure that is always going to make sense. In the end we argued that to do it and to keep the clear zones, there was not enough road reserve to achieve what they were after, so it was reduced.

The CHAIR — What was reduced — the upgrade?

Ms NELSON — No, the actual number of trees.

Mr STONEY — So they do have discretion but they just play it tough?

Ms NELSON — At that time the no net loss requirements were fairly new and they were interpreting the controls really on a regional basis. That is going to change as the guidelines are released for implementation of the new native vegetation framework requirements. I am a little unclear about how regionally you will be able to interpret those requirements to suit the conditions. The council has plenty of land where it can plant trees, we just might not necessarily want to put them back in the road reserve where we are trying to improve the standard of the road. If there was able to be that sort of flexibility that would be good. It is an extra cost, dealing with the vegetation so we need to be sensible about what we are trying to achieve in redoing the road.

Cr BATES — From the diagrams you have seen we believe we have a lot of trees in East Gippsland anyway; I am not sure we need all that many more.

Ms NELSON — In fact, it may be more sensible that we replace vegetation in a different area altogether where you might get the environmental benefits. It depends on the vegetation you are removing.

We have seen some real benefits from the improvements we have been able to make with the black spot funding that we obtained. I suppose this is a bit of a bid to see that sort of funding reinstated for us. It is a big job for us to keep our infrastructure maintained let alone be able to afford to deal with all of the Road safety issues that might be out there. Tomorrow you will have a look at a couple of areas where we have used black spot funding to upgrade some of the roads with widening and signage.

The CHAIR — The key word there is reinstate.

Ms NELSON — Yes. There is also an issue to do with the construction of overtaking lanes so there are adequate overtaking lanes and people do not get frustrated when they are stuck behind a truck and thus pass in areas where they really should not.

The last one is to continue the research and work closely with local government to pilot and implement tailored approaches. I think we can do some really good things at the local level if we have some guidance. Our experience with the older drivers pilot was it was one of the best things councils could ever get involved in because you had all of the support of Vicroads Road safety experts guiding you through, giving you all the expert advice that you needed: we had the issues and they helped us work through how we could deal with them. It was excellent. The information they produced, all of the different strategies and CDs and you name it were great but the actual working with those officers and the resources they have to put into developing those programs is excellent. We would like to see that sort of thing continue where we are directly supported.

Ms DOUGLAS — It was such a good trial down here that Kate presented the results at our oldies conference.
Ms NELSON — This is just a small ad for East Gippsland.

The CHAIR — Whereabouts is that?

Ms NELSON — This is down at Chinamans creek at Metung; it is like that all the time, of course. This is an opportunity if there are any further questions.

The CHAIR — Do we have further questions?

Mr STONEY — I think the staff would like you to expand on the “Let’s Get Connected Program”. Could you brief it out a little bit?

Ms NELSON — This actually was something that started with the older drivers program because we identified that there were very few alternative transport options for people who were in a position where they had to give up driving; we kind of struggled with it through to the end of the pilot and did not really get very far. This is a reasonably new program which is jointly funded by the Department of Human Services and the Department of Education and Training and Department of Infrastructure. We put in a bid jointly with Wellington shire to set it up. It has a community development focus, it is about communities looking at solutions to their transport issues. It is a learning in action community development program where we are focusing on trying to address transport disadvantage in regional areas.

There are a lot of issues out there and we will not be able to solve them all but through this project we will be able to get a very good handle on what the issues are and what some of the solutions are. Some we will be able to deal with but others will require more investigation or resources or support to be able to address those. It is a three-year program and we are really only into the first six months so it is quite early to be asking for continued support but the issue of alternative transport is a really difficult one in regional areas and we will need support at some point. We will have a go at dealing with what we can but at some point it is going to need some follow through to get some results.

Cr BATES — The result really is a growing aged population — it is growing quite substantially now. Even in Bairnsdale there is no alternative transport other than people getting around in a car or getting around on one of those little electric carts, even they are not really safe on some of the roads and footpaths we have. It is quite a challenge.

The CHAIR — If there are no further questions, thank you very much; we do appreciate it.

Committee adjourned.