ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll

Ballarat – 20 October 2003

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 G. Both

Witnesses
Mr J. McLean, Chief Executive Officer; and
Mr M. Marsden, General Manager, Planning and Environmental Services, City of Ballarat.

Necessary corrections to be notified to executive officer of committee
The CHAIR — Welcome to the parliamentary Road Safety Committee’s inquiries into the country road toll and crashes involving roadside objects. This is the first of the committee’s hearings, but there will be hearings across Victoria over the next three to four months. We intend to conduct six to seven hearings across regional Victoria. They are public hearings and we will be taking transcript of the proceedings, but the transcript will be used for our internal inquiry purposes. I advise you that what you say today is protected by parliamentary privilege. That means that anything you say cannot be used against you legally. We want to keep the hearing relatively relaxed and informal, so please feel free to say what you need but feel relaxed about it. We will start by asking representatives of the City of Ballarat for their thoughts on both the inquiries.

Mr McLEAN — Thank you for the opportunity. I am pleased to have the committee sitting in Ballarat. Ballarat provides a good case study for some of the things we will talk about that perhaps take the feelings of road safety into the practical dimension, and I will elaborate on that during our presentation. We also want to present an informal presentation, as you have suggested, rather than presenting massive amounts of data because VicRoads can provide the committee with all that. We want to concentrate on a little bit of data but more on how the community reacts to road safety and our perceptions about road safety and the matters that have attempted to be put in place here to improve the safety of the road environment. These are some thoughts put together by officers and there has not been an opportunity to seek council endorsement of those thoughts, which is an important distinction to make. So our presentation is about our feelings about road safety and our perceptions; it is not a council-endorsed approach. We thought that was appropriate for this situation.

In terms of the country road toll, Ballarat is an example of that blend of both a relatively large urban environment mixing with the rural hinterland. That leads to some issues around driver behaviour that is appropriate on a rural road and then coming quickly into an urban environment. We also have issues of a heritage nature in Ballarat. There tend to be very wide streets in the main street system in the old part of Ballarat. That is coupled with a cross-section of roads with unsealed shoulders and often avenues of large trees, which results in lighting and visibility problems. Some of those contextual factors play a significant role. The data certainly indicates that those older areas are overrepresented, particularly in casualty accidents.

The CHAIR — Do you mean the older areas of Ballarat?

Mr McLEAN — The older areas of Ballarat itself, and there are some notable exceptions on country roads that Mark will touch on shortly.

From our analysis we recognise that speed, drugs, alcohol and fatigue are the high influential factors in road crashes. There are probably some differences between the urban and rural environments, but we would certainly support greater scrutiny around drug and alcohol issues, which have been profiled in the media lately. That is very important particularly in terms of the younger generation, which tends to be picking up the education messages about responsible behaviour and designated drivers. Alcohol abuse is one of the main health issues in the community as well. Our drug strategy focuses on alcohol as a licit drug as well as the obvious illicit drugs.

Fatigue impacts on the community, probably not quite so much in the Ballarat area, but people who travel along the Western Highway from either direction are a concern. We have participated in regional groupings that have looked at advisory signage, particularly with the highway 8 group that starts from the Pyrenees and further over, and I am sure people from that area will talk about the issues particularly in the Wimmera and further to the west. That has affected one of our campaigns, which Mark will touch on, about supporting road improvements outside the municipality. It is an example of local government working together in groups and looking at a broader picture rather than focusing on roadworks in the immediate area.

I will use Sturt Street as an example — and the committee members may want to inspect this as there are some examples just outside the door. Several years ago we received funding from both the state and federal government black spot programs to upgrade the intersections to create better driver behaviour in Sturt Street, which is the main street and is a very wide street. People coming out of parking areas have been causing problems mid-block. The particular concern was that for both vehicular crash statistics and also pedestrians it was at most of the intersections right through the whole length of Sturt Street up to Pleasant Street, so in the inner part of Ballarat. We went through a process of fairly simple design, bringing some kerb extensions out and having no impact directly on the normal traffic lane, but forcing greater police discipline in terms of turning movements.

The other key feature in the design was trying to have a kerb profile in the materials that reflected the heritage nature of Ballarat, so bluestone with a hard face rather than the normal concrete rollover type kerbing that you would see in a modern situation. We received virtually no comments from our public consultation processes related
to that, and although we wrote to a number of emergency services and authorities we did not get a response. I guess it is fair to say it has become and continues to be one of the more contentious issues in Ballarat.

Although less vocal in their opposition, Ballarat residents still talk about it as something they wish did not happen, but they have got used to it. We did some design modifications to make it a little easier — contrary to the original design brief — to actually force people to turn corners at slow speeds so the pedestrians were not getting hit, and as well we narrowed the distances that pedestrians had to cross because of the wide nature of Sturt Street. There was lots of concern from members of the community about that forced change in driver behaviour because they could no longer slip around the corner at quite high speeds in that environment. Certainly the unforgiving nature of the kerb profile was also a concern with people hitting wheels. Although the design fully met the standards and there was ample space to do it at the right speed, it was and continues to be an issue that people bring up at certain points, and it comes up in the media regularly.

The CHAIR — I appreciate you have contentious issues with the general public, but has the redesign had the desired road safety effect in that it has minimised the crash statistics?

Mr McLEAN — Exactly. It is fairly early days yet so you cannot pick patterns, but the number of casualty accidents has diminished. Property damage has possibly increased a little more — it is about people not giving enough gap — and certainly pedestrians feel much better about it.

The other effect we were very concerned about was speed. From studies we have done the 85th percentile speed along that section of Sturt Street, which is a 60-kilometre-an-hour zone, is now back to about 60. It was about 70, so in terms of the technical outcomes it has been reasonably successful. In terms of the community acceptances of that enforced, changed driver behaviour, it is less successful. We regularly hear comments that people should learn to drive better and that we should put everything into education rather than forcing the situation. We would say it is very much a case of needing both. You have to force people to drive appropriately.

Mr MARSDEN — We intend to do a formal evaluation of the works in 12 months from the date of the completion of the works, so that will be early next year.

The CHAIR — So the work has only just been completed?

Mr MARSDEN — The redesigned works were completed in about March this year, so from that time next year, March 2004, we will do a formal evaluation of the works.

Mr McLEAN — Basically what we did was open up the throat and make the turning slightly easier, and with the fine layer of asphalt it has lowered the height of the kerb as well.

The other one to briefly comment on because it is another interesting illustration is Curtis Street, which is parallel to the Bridge Mall in the Melbourne-bound direction. It is a long story, but it was part of the redevelopment of that area to encourage a more retail precinct. We narrowed the road that originally was the whole Western Highway down to one fairly wide traffic lane with some marking. Once again there was a very mixed view from the community about that, but on any technical ground or any measurable ground, not just traffic-wise, it has been a fantastic success. Cars travel through there without the need of speed humps as happens on Little Bridge Street, because the environment is such that people do not feel the need to speed. It does not queue up or cause blockages back, which is a fear for many people. It is operating well as a retail precinct access route rather than just as a traffic route.

The traders in Bridge Mall say their numbers are up because people can park in bigger car parks and cross the street either at the pedestrian crossing or just by weaving across the road in a lot of safety because there is only one lane of traffic to traverse. In terms of all those measurable elements it has been very successful, but still a considerable number of people in the community think it is a disaster and are calling for it to be widened. It is about the perception of roads and what the role of the road is in the environment. It is not just car based and a traffic route; it is a broader issue than that. I think we need to work on that when we think about our planning and design. They are a couple of graphic examples in town of mixtures of space, and they are driven from different perspectives, but from a technical point of view they are operating very successfully and achieving their outcomes. As yet they do not have community ownership.

The statewide black spot program has been successful and has enabled us to deal with a lot of local issues. Some of those projects have been easy to get through, some require a lot of consultation and discussion, but undoubtedly it has had a major impact on making movement around the city much safer. The cessation of that program is of
serious concern, particularly in terms of modifying some of those road environments throughout the municipality that will be required to modify driver behaviour.

Mr HARKNESS — Not picturing Ballarat as a city but looking out to the rural roads, what percentage, as a rough estimate, of the black spot funding would have been used within the City of Ballarat? I picture intersections where you pretty much have a grid, but how do they compare with the rural roads?

Mr MARSDEN — I would say the vast majority of the funding has been used in the urban situation. As you say, because of the grid pattern of the streets with the intersections most of the money has gone into roundabouts and other sorts of treatments, so I would say the majority of that funding has gone through urban situations.

Mr McLEAN — The other program that is interesting to talk about, as well as the potential black spot funding program, is where members of the community could nominate projects that have not qualified. This is the term you keep getting faced with: how many serious crashes or how many people have to get hurt here before something happens, and I will come to that in a moment. But the idea was that sites could be nominated by people in the community as being ones they felt uncomfortable about driving through or negotiating. It was quite a smart program.

We have had some classic examples of intersections which have low casualty accident rates but which are very difficult for people to negotiate. I suppose in a sense, because they are so difficult, drivers take a lot more care. They are very nervous about them and perhaps when they get the go they hit the accelerator and move through quickly and they feel very uncomfortable in those movements but they do take extra care, rather than ones where perhaps things go wrong. How they feel about how they drive around is a discussion that comes up regularly, so looking at the data and the demonstrated behaviour sometimes does not highlight the opportunities for significant road safety in dealing with potential issues which one day will not work and will result in a significant accident happening. Being able to allow the opportunity for members of the community to express their concerns before something happens has been a valuable program.

We have supported and participated in some of the Transport Accident Commission initiatives, such as Operation Clampdown, Drive Right, the slow-down-in-towns campaign and the school crossing programs. We had the launch of the 40-kilometre-an-hour zone here recently, from a non-metropolitan point of view, so we are happy to work with the relevant agencies and be part of that.

The CHAIR — Has the rollout of the 40 kilometres an hour around schools actually commenced in Ballarat?

Mr MARSDEN — Yes, I think one has been completed over in Doveton Street.

Mr McLEAN — I have a couple of other comments on the representation in the Crashstats. Young drivers tend to be overrepresented here. That probably reflects on both the behaviour of drivers who live in the urban environment but also the country drivers who come into town on Friday and Saturday nights, and the entertainment activities that happen around that. Basically a quarter of all fatalities occur in that age category of 18 to 25, even though they are only 14 per cent of the population, so there is a significant imbalance there.

The mobility needs of people aged 65 and over is a concern for us as well. The opportunities for a range of alternative transport forms are a challenge. Some of our residents are in motorised wheelchairs and they have a fairly active and understandable advocacy campaign with us over their restrictions. Some of that comes from the existing street form. We have had a fairly active campaign of ensuring the trees and gardens are appropriately trimmed back, we are trying to provide appropriate crossovers, we have done a lot of new work on the tactile pavers, and have a retrospective program to deal with other areas. As we all face an ageing population that will become a concern for us as well. The other issue in terms of the broader country areas is how they get in and out of town, or between towns.

To close, and I touched on this before, I refer to the issues of what is responsible driver behaviour and of being constricted by engineering solutions. The lack of understanding and ready acceptance by certain sectors in the community is becoming more prevalent. They are pushing the boundaries of the law. People like to go and do their cruising around on Friday and Saturday nights. Pushing the boundaries is the same here as in other places. I do not think Ballarat is particularly any worse off than other places, but road safety and good driver behaviour is not fully accepted or recognised. There is a sense of impatience and a perception of major traffic problems and congestion in Ballarat, even though by comparison with Melbourne it is far less, but it is certainly an issue people talk about —
they have been held up. There is a sense that the car is king. There should be more of a focus on improved traffic flow rather than congestion management. People’s thinking about their appropriate role on the road is a concern. I will now hand over to Mark who will talk about some of the other problems on country roads.

Mr MARSDEN — Our last dot point is about the Midland Highway. Before I talk about that specifically I think it is important to understand the context of Ballarat in the Melbourne 2030 strategy, which is the state government’s planning strategy. A section in the strategy talks about regional cities, Ballarat being one of those, as network cities. It suggests that Ballarat can take some of the population growth from Melbourne. At this stage there has been no discussion about projections and we need to do our own analysis in terms of infrastructure capacity, things like water supply, and so forth. If there is an expectation that there will be a greater population living in Ballarat, and that we are a network city, then the highways between Melbourne and Ballarat and Melbourne and Geelong in particular will play a significant role.

With respect to the Western Highway, we all know it is duplicated all the way to Deer Park — in fact it is probably duplicated through Deer Park — but it is a bottleneck once we get there. There is an issue about driver fatigue when getting to that situation. The City of Ballarat, together with eight or so municipalities, has been campaigning for the Deer Park bypass. We have been urging the state and federal governments to give it serious attention. I wanted to put it in a bit of context in terms of Melbourne 2030. A similar situation applies to the Midland Highway.

The CHAIR — When you leave Ballarat how long does it take before you get to that bottleneck at Deer Park?

Mr McLEAN — It normally takes between one and a quarter hours and one and a half hours to comfortably get to Melbourne. In the morning that means that arriving in Melbourne between 7.30 a.m. and 9.30 a.m. can take over 2 hours. The bottleneck comes out a long way through Rockbank typically; it is sometimes worse and sometimes better. The municipality around Kaniva has nominated the Deer Park bypass as the most important major project on the Western Highway. There is the sense when driving that the road is getting better as the traffic is building up, and suddenly, whether it is during peak hour or congestion, or just the crossing of roads and safety issues that go with that, you see crosses in that section of the road where people have been killed, which really provides graphic evidence of that. It is interesting how people are starting to think outside their own patch.

Mr MARSDEN — With the Midland Highway, even though we do not have any information at hand, as Ballarat and Geelong grow it would seem the traffic using the Midland Highway will also increase. Apart from a few takeover lanes, it is not a duplicated road. There have been some fatalities over the last few years around the same sorts of places, around Meredith and Elaine. The road there is no different to the rest of it between Ballarat and Geelong, but it seems to be a spot where there have been some fatalities and serious accidents.

The CHAIR — Are they accidents involving two cars colliding or are they off-road crashes?

Mr MARSDEN — I think it has been both, collisions and off-road crashes as well.

Mr McLEAN — Vicroads currently has a draft strategy for upgrading that section of the road, but it has not got to the consultation stage. It is certainly a significant issue.

Mr MARSDEN — We are suggesting that the issue of the highways between the capital city and the regional centres be considered as part of Melbourne 2030. I know Geelong road has recently been upgraded, but there is an issue between Melbourne and Ballarat, taking into account the Deer Park bypass in particular, and between Ballarat and Geelong.

The CHAIR — Have any suggestions been put up as to why that section of road between Meredith and Elaine is a high fatality area?

Mr MARSDEN — Not that I am aware of, no.

Mr McLEAN — I would say the draft strategy Vicroads is preparing has some analysis of that, but we have not seen that as yet.

The CHAIR — We can follow that through.

Mr HARKNESS — I come from a metropolitan area which is entirely residential, but the Frankston City Council has a dedicated road safety officer who is frantically busy all the time. Does this municipality also have a
road safety officer or staff, and how much time do council staff spend between the metropolitan area of Ballarat and the rest of the municipality?

Mr MARSDEN — We do not have a road safety officer as such. We have a road safety strategy that was put together by our engineers a few years ago. To be perfectly truthful we have had difficulty in getting that established and running with it because of resourcing. I suppose with respect to road safety we have not had one dedicated traffic engineer either up until — he starts next Monday. That person will have the responsibility for facilitating that particular committee and working on road safety issues, so we hope with the appointment of that person we will be able to pursue some of the issues we have.

Mr McLEAN — We have involved the non-engineering staff in the development of the strategy as well as people in the community, so we have had marketing and public relations people involved. It is a way of trying to get the message out. The issue of competing resources is always a challenge for us.

Mr HARKNESS — I know anecdotally of another issue which contributes to road toll and facilities, and that is when cars are slowing down or speeding up from small townships. I am sure you probably have a lot of small townships around the area. What sorts of strategies do you as a council intend to put in place to address those small township issues with people from the big smoke?

Mr MARSDEN — We have had some requests over the last 12 months to reduce traffic speed through some of those towns, one being Miners Rest, which on is the Sunraysia Highway. There was some concern, particularly from Vicroads, that because it is a major route for freight reducing the speed would impact upon that function. But at the end of the day, because of more people now moving into Miners Rest and the school population growing and so forth, Vicroads did agree that we would reduce the speed limit from 80 to 60. We have also had an issue in the township of Learmonth. The speed through Learmonth at the moment is 80 kilometres, so it reduces down from 100 to 80. The unique feature of Learmonth is the existence of service roads on either side of the highway. Vicroads has had a view that because of the existence of the service roads the speed limit should not be reduced from 80 kilometres. We had that discussion with Vicroads six months ago and we have been requested by council to again pursue this matter with Vicroads.

Mr HARKNESS — What about variable speeds — using some of that technology to address the issues at particular times?

Mr MARSDEN — That is an option we need to look at, particularly with the 40-kilometre speed limit outside schools. There is no question that there is a school crossing and children do have to cross the highway to access the schools. That is a discussion we need to have.

The CHAIR — Learmonth raises another issue — the Avenue of Honour. You have some significant trees. How does that mix go with collisions with cars?

Mr MARSDEN — Before I started working here it was more of an issue with the Avenue of Honour, Western Highway. It was before the bypass was established around Ballarat. There was a significant concern about the number of fatalities caused by vehicles leaving the road and hitting the trees. I understand that they do not meet current-day standards. They are 1 metre too close to the road. At a time when the speed limit would have been 100 you can see why there was a concern then. The speed has been reduced to 70 for a few kilometres beyond the Arch of Victory, but then it goes up to 80 and then to 100. Since the bypass has been established I believe the number of accidents has significantly reduced, but it has been an issue. If we started again — we have been doing some replanting — we would locate the trees at least 1 metre further away from the roadside.

Mr McLEAN — But it is an important broader issue that we are having debates about now. Even with the eastern entrance into Ballarat, as part of presenting your city in a very attractive way to visitors to the city — that gateway imagery — planting is an important part of that. Nothing makes a better impact than rows of mature trees. We are having quite a lot of discussion and almost dilemmas about that balance of road safety, meeting the standards, the aesthetics and what is an appropriate speed environment, because they are all interrelated. It is a point of considerable community debate. It is all very well to have the correct standards, but what does the community want in their area. You can have a lower speed limit, but does that change driver behaviour? If the road gives an impression of being a higher speed environment, how do you manage that? It is a significant issue of finding that balance between road safety and the perceptions of others. Certainly it is an issue for our eastern end, and the same issues will come back as the Midland Highway going towards Creswick is redeveloped as well.
Mr MARSDEN — In summary, that was the main issue we had with respect to crashes involving roadside objects. It has been about trying to get a balance between, in our case in particular, appropriate tree planting and the distance between the edge of the road and the trees. With the road management legislation we understand that guidelines are to be produced by the various utilities with respect to issue of roadside objects. I think that is the appropriate framework in which to pursue these matters a bit further.

Mr EREN — Do you conduct any audits or reviews of safety of the roads and roadsides?

Mr MARSDEN — As a general audit?

Mr EREN — A general audit. How often do you do that or a systematic review of the safety of roads and roadsides?

Mr MARSDEN — I would not say we do a systematic audit or a systematic review. When we have had incidents we have reviewed particular situations. I believe that is one of the objectives of the road safety committee we have, looking at that aspect of road safety, but we have not done an audit as such.

Mr McLEAN — In the main — especially when it happens on the road pavement itself and the immediate trafficable parts — less in that broader audit if you like.

Mr EREN — We have covered the behaviour of drivers and how some of that behaviour should change. But in terms of finding out what infrastructure is also needed to support some of those behavioural problems, most of the other councils I know conduct some audits of roadside objects and the requirements to make certain roads safer. You are right about planting trees too close to roads. I think some of the municipalities in New South Wales plant their trees further away from the road and we may need to follow their practice.

Mr MARSDEN — We have a five-year capital works program for roads. One of the criteria that we look at is certainly the issue of safety. Regardless of black spot funding programs, and so forth, just the general issue of road safety is something we consider in our own funding programs.

The CHAIR — Given you are on the main route between Melbourne and Adelaide, is there any comment you would like make about truck traffic or issues related to trucks?

Mr McLEAN — Not from my perspective because they are all on the bypass, so they are not impacting directly in the town any more. There is certainly anecdotal commentary, depending on the time of night you are travelling in particular, about the all-pervasive nature of the volume and the speed and the behaviour of some of the truck drivers. Going to Melbourne last Thursday there was a vehicle that was doing well over the 100-kilometre-an-hour limit, a B-double. Particularly going through areas when there was a slower speed, but then catching up again in the Anthony’s Cutting area, you get a sense of intimidation from that, and that is certainly prevalent. People talk about that. But in the town the bypass has been a fantastic outcome.

The CHAIR — The bypass has basically taken the truck traffic out of the city centre?

Mr McLEAN — That is right.

Mr MARSDEN — Also with respect to our own planning objectives we are promoting industrial growth in the vicinity of the bypass off Gillies Street in particular, which is north-west of the central business area. Through that strategy we are trying to reduce the amount of truck movements through the city, but a reason for promoting that area is also the accessibility and time spent between Melbourne and Ballarat.

The CHAIR — I am mindful of the time and know we have other appointments. If there are no further comments, thank you for your time; we appreciate it. The committee will send you a copy of the transcript.

Witnesses withdrew.
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Chair: Mr I. D. Trezise
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Staff

Executive Officer: Ms A. Douglas
Research Officer: Mr G. Both

Witness

Ms A. Carey, Chairperson, Central Highlands Roadsafe.

Necessary corrections to be notified to executive officer of committee
The CHAIR — Angela, I welcome you on behalf of the parliamentary Road Safety Committee. The committee is conducting inquiries into the country road toll and crashes involving roadside objects. These are the first of its hearings. The committee will probably hold half a dozen hearings throughout regional and rural Victoria. This is a public hearing of which we are taking a transcript which will be used for the committee’s purposes in writing up the findings of the inquiry. What you say today is also protected by parliamentary privilege, which means no-one can use what you say against you legally.

Ms CAREY — I was not planning to be too controversial.

The CHAIR — We wish to conduct a relatively informal discussion. I ask you to begin with some opening remarks.

Ms CAREY — Thank you for the opportunity on behalf of Central Highlands Roadsafe. I have not been with Central Highlands Roadsafe for very long and have only been in the chairperson’s position for a little while, so I do not know if I can answer any or all of the committee’s questions or whether I will be across every issue you are talking about. I am involved with Roadsafe because I have an interest in ensuring drivers on country roads are safe. It has also always been a concern of mine that we tend to focus a lot on the road toll. I have some statistics which show that although any fatality is probably one fatality too many, perhaps we do not concentrate enough on the number of serious and less serious injuries caused on all roads, not just rural and regional roads. The emphasis placed, quite rightly, on the number of deaths has an impact on motorists, but generally speaking I do not think motorists fully appreciate that for every person killed on our roads there are probably, according to my statistics, another 10 or so seriously injured. The impact of suffering a serious injury, while there is the potential for recovery unlike a fatal incident, still has an impact on family and working life, and financially and emotionally.

The CHAIR — Before you go any further, what geographic area does Central Highlands Roadsafe cover, and also who makes up the Roadsafe committee?

Ms CAREY — We cover the local government municipalities of Ararat, Ballarat, Central Goldfields, Pyrenees, Central Highlands and Moorabool, six municipalities, so that is quite a geographic area to cover. We are made up of members of the community, and I fall into that category. I do not work with road councils; it is not an area of interest I have. I was approached as someone who might like to come on board.

The CHAIR — So your position is voluntary?

Ms CAREY — It is a voluntary position, yes. We have a chief executive officer who is paid on a part-time basis. I am not sure how many hours that is, but he is our executive officer and does the administration-type work for us. We have members of the police force, a representative from each of those local government groups on board, a driving instructor, a couple of local police members who have come on board and a couple of community members as well, a representative from the local motorcycle riders association, so from that perspective it is probably a real community focus group.

The CHAIR — How long have you been operating?

Ms CAREY — That I could not tell you.

The CHAIR — Is it relatively new?

Ms CAREY — No, it has been around for a while. I have been in Ballarat for about 12 years and I knew of its existence in one way or another at that time. They are auspiced by Vicroads, which puts up the funding for road safety councils. They are across Victoria and we have funding from Vicroads to operate. Vicroads has representatives on the council too, people who are provided with the statistics and so forth, so they are across the state. Each region is covered, based on that municipal boundary structure.

The CHAIR — Sorry, I took you away from what you were saying.

Ms CAREY — That is all right. Basically they are the thoughts that I have on the road toll versus serious injury and that sort of thing as well. The point is worth making that I watch with interest advertising and news releases as they come out that are supposed to be preventive measures and I wonder how effective they are. I believe as a journalist — I have written about this in the past — there is a bit of the attitude ‘It won’t’ happen to me’. That concerns me, and I have given a lot of thought to how you change that attitude around. I do not know how you do it, I do not know that you can do it. I think the only way to make people realise that it can happen to them is for it to happen to them, and that is the last thing we want or need.
We talk about causes of road accidents and speed and we talk about drugs and alcohol and fatigue and those sorts of things, but it concerns me that that is not helping to put in people’s minds what the causes are. It is the people who take those substances or who are affected by those things who cause the accidents. It is a lightweight argument, I know, but we blame drugs or speed when we should be blaming the person speeding or taking the drugs. They are just ideas that I have tossed around in this role that I have had for a little while. I was hoping we would be able to have informal discussions. I am happy to take any questions. Apart from that bit of information that I have been able to source I did not have anything specific.

Mr HARKNESS — Do you find a big spike in accidents during holiday periods in country areas?

Ms CAREY — We do. I cannot tell you exactly what it is, although the figures I have from Vicroads, which are broken down into hourly or even daily periods, do not have them time by time, but we are always aware that at Christmas time, Easter and long weekends there is potential for greater injury. Anecdotally we would have seen it during those periods too with increased traffic on the roads and that sort of thing.

Mr HARKNESS — From your information are most of the accidents vehicle to vehicle? Can you give any indication of the proportion of vehicles that are crashing by running off the road into things?

Ms CAREY — I cannot give you an exact proportion, but I would say that of the accidents, and through my role at the newspaper too, obviously our staff are attending those sorts of accidents and we are reporting them. I am increasingly surprised by the number of single vehicle accidents that we have proportionately. On a scale we do not have large numbers of accidents, but with the accidents that we do have it does surprise me when you hear that there are single vehicle accidents, single vehicle rollovers and young persons killed or whatever it might be. Again I do not have the exact statistics, but that seems to me to have been a trend in recent times, the number of accidents that involve one car only, and to me would seem to be accidents that should not happen.

Mr HARKNESS — As a group what sorts of activities do you engage in? Advertising? What sorts of road safety initiatives do you pursue? I guess a supplementary question is what initiatives would you pursue if you could and if you had the resources that you are not doing at the moment?

Ms CAREY — Sure. For the first time earlier this year we did a program with some schools in Ballarat, which was called the young driver program and we got involved with the police, the SES, the fire brigade, the rescue crash unit — that sort of thing. We brought in a couple of older students from schools and did a series of workshops with them on the sorts of issues they will be facing, because they are the ones who either have their L-plates or are coming up to getting their L-plates. They are going to be on the road soon. I think that was quite effective. We had the fire brigade with its crash rescue unit do its actual rescue. It was simulated, they brought in a car from the wreckers and they used the jaws-of-life and had dummies in the car. I could see the kids were just engrossed in that. We have not done any follow up to see whether that has had an impact on the ‘It won’t happen to my syndrome’, but for them to see what happens in an accident and how the CFA uses its teams to pull people out of cars was good. There was a member of the Honda Australia racing team there too, because a lot of young kids, especially in rural areas, will be riding motorbikes out in the paddocks before they have a licence, so there was a safety aspect there for the Honda Australia racing team to talk about the safety and the dangers associated with riding bikes at speed.

The Roadsafe network across Victoria at the upper level nominates a couple of programs that we focus on each year. Normally that is speed and drink driving, because they are the two big issues, so each council is given those two to focus on. Then we are entitled to pick a couple of programs that we want to focus on at a local level, and in our case this year we have chosen to look at older drivers, young drivers and fatigue..

The CHAIR — What types of issues would you look at when looking at older drivers?

Ms CAREY — With the support of Vicroads and the wider Roadsafe network we do forums with them. It has been an issue for us to convince older drivers that we are not coming in to take their licences from them. If we advertise a forum that we would like to — —

The CHAIR — They all think that.

Ms CAREY — I know, I can see where they are coming from. As I have said to groups before, I have seen it in my own family. We have had a member of the family — he is not with us any more — whom we knew he should not have been driving to the extent he was in his later years because as he got older things started to happen to his body. The message we need to get across — and we are looking at ways of doing this — is that we
are not going there and taking their licences from them, but giving them methods and ways and contacts for them to keep their licence, precautions that they can take. A lot of them do not realise that they can talk to their doctor about the medications they might need to be taking — all those sorts of things. There is this fear that they are going to walk in there and we will say, ‘No, you cannot drive, you are over 65 and so on’. I was interested to see the results of an older drivers parliamentary committee forum released.

The CHAIR — Do you think that was a good inquiry, good results?

Ms CAREY — I have not looked at it in depth, but I want to because it contradicted what we had been told at a forum put on by the Monash University Accident Research Centre. The results it was putting forward were that the testing, which I think was one of the recommendations out of this report, was not the best method; and that the intervention by family, doctors and other residents was better. That was based on research that has been done across the world, not just across Australia. I do not have a viewpoint either way because it is not one of my areas of expertise and I do not know, but that is one of the reasons I would like to go back and have a closer look at that report to see what comments came up and why they would have come to that recommendation.

The CHAIR — Fatigue is a key that you mentioned before. How would your committee address that issue and what are the problems you see with fatigue?

Ms CAREY — Rural Victoria has a different problem than do the metropolitan areas of Melbourne, and this covers all the areas we are talking about — that is, our lack of public transport. If you live in Beaufort, for instance, which is 20 to 30 minutes down the road, you cannot come into town and get home again without using your car. At a certain point in the day you might be able to, but not if you wanted to come in and visit friends and wander home at your leisure, or even come in to work. If you come into work on a Monday after a hectic and busy weekend, the only option is to drive your car home because there is no other way to get out there. Fatigue is a bit of an intangible concept to a lot of people. If asked, people will acknowledge that they drive when they are tired, but I do not think they would necessarily say that puts them at serious risk of crash or injury. We run our fatigue program with younger people who go out Saturday nights. We do circuits with the local football clubs as well on fatigue and younger drivers particularly, but they sort of mould into each other — —

The CHAIR — When you talk about fatigue at football clubs and with younger drivers, do you talk about fatigue as in feeling tired?

Ms CAREY — Fatigue as in having a big night on a Saturday night, doing the right thing and not driving home, but getting home and then getting up the next morning thinking you are over your hangover or whatever, or having Sunday free but then driving back to Melbourne or wherever on a Sunday night feeling tired.

The CHAIR — Do you see that as a major issue?

Ms CAREY — I think so, coupled with the issue of public transport. It is not just in footy clubs, but with anyone who is tired. You can be tired on a Friday night. Because we are essentially only 1 hour from the beach — and I say this from my own personal experience in schools and so forth — a lot of families will go to the beach on Friday night after school. I am sure they do it for the convenience and to get down there early Friday night. It occurs at Easter particularly, and at Christmas it probably happens, or if there is a long weekend people often take the opportunity to leave on Friday night. I know how I feel Friday night after work sometimes and the last thing I would want to do is get in a car and head off somewhere. It is hard to measure fatigue and how many accidents are caused by fatigue. You cannot say, ‘Blow in here and we will see how tired you are’. That is why I say it is probably a little bit intangible to people. There is no accurate measure other than how they feel in themselves. Again that ‘It won’t happen to me’ syndrome kicks in. They think they will be all right because in another 20 minutes they will be there.

The CHAIR — I know I keep harping back to it, but I am interested in the work you are doing with sporting clubs and with young people. How often would you do that type of work and what do you do?

Ms CAREY — It depends on the clubs coming to us. We promote it, but we have asked the clubs to come to us if they would like us to do the presentation. It is a program called Looking after your Mates. Through the Victorian Country Football League we have a sponsorship deal with a couple of leagues in Ballarat — the Ballarat Football League and the Central Highlands Football League. Central Highlands Roadsafe is a sponsor of those leagues, as anyone else might be. We have spoken to a couple of clubs. I have not done a presentation, but our chief executive, who is in Queensland and would otherwise be here, has done them before. We talk about the responsible drinking and serving of alcohol in the clubs. It is also about having a designated driver and all those risk factors that
come into that age group such as making sure you are right the next morning. You cannot have a big night and necessarily get up and drive your car the next morning. The Looking after your Mates program is about having a designated driver and making sure your mates do not get into the car when they should not.

The CHAIR — Do you think young people accept that message of having a designated driver?

Mr EREN — Who wants to be the designated driver?

Ms CAREY — That is right, that is part of the problem.

The CHAIR — Or is there a concern that the idea of sneaking home without being picked up is slowly creeping back?

Ms CAREY — Anecdotally, and from what I can see now, the idea of a designated driver is more accepted than it was 10 years ago. That message is slowly but surely getting through. I also think there are still people who try to sneak home. In country areas — and I have no evidence to back this up — someone who has a drink at a local footy club or perhaps not the local pub but at a private party and is driving home on the back roads because that is where he lives, back to the farm or wherever it might be, would take the risk.

Mr HARKNESS — A couple of years ago I had the good fortune to go to the Burrumbeet cup. It is 30 or 40 kilometres away and down a long path. Everybody was drinking either heavy beer or bourbon and cokes, and it is a long way back. Can you comment on the level of law enforcement for things like speeding and drink driving across the six municipalities?

Ms CAREY — For organised functions like that there is always a heavy police presence. I think the majority of people do the right thing. The fear with young people is getting caught, not getting killed. If that saves their lives then that is fine. I do not suppose it matters what stops them getting killed, but if it is the fear of getting caught then so be it. Most of them would have the sense to say, ‘It is the Burrumbeet cup, there will be police there, someone has to drive’, and they will rotate among a group of friends. I know from associations I have with young people in my own community and members of my own family that that is how they operate. I have a 21-year-old brother and that is how his friends operate. I still drive the message home to him that he has to be careful and that sort of thing, but for organised functions like that there is always a good police presence. I have family up in northern Victoria and I often do the 2½ hour drive up there. Sometimes I do not see a police car. That concerns me, and that is not the fault of the police. Sometimes I might see two or three if it is Christmas. So there is a focus at the times when it is seen to be high risk.

We participated in Transport Accident Commission’s Operation Clampdown earlier in the year. There was a more visible presence then. It was quite obvious, and that was the feedback I got from family and friends around the traps, that there was a more visible presence and that the flashing signs, the warning signs that were used as part of that operation, were effective in making people slow down. There is talk about whether or not, though, people become complacent once they realise those signs are there just as a warning, and there is not a copper on the other side of them, that they lose their impact. The portable signs we had did seem to have an impact, and we only had them here for a short time, and we have done it twice.

If you drive around Ballarat you will see a police car. They are common. We have a big police station in Ballarat with 90 police officers, so you will see them around Ballarat. If you venture further out to a lot of the smaller towns where there is one police car, that police car and policeman or woman cannot be everywhere at once. The visual impact in rural areas is minimal.

Mr HARKNESS — You have spoken a little about mobility issues. With the lack of public transport and the large distances that people drive, is there a community bus program or anything of that nature to assist people getting around the greater area?

Ms CAREY — Some of the nightclubs run courtesy buses. Some of the smaller pubs out in the rural areas have courtesy buses too. I have seen those once or twice. I am not aware of any program otherwise. We have a safe city rank just opposite the town hall on the other side of the road. That is for taxi use and mainly operates on a Saturday night. It is manned by a security guard on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights. That is mainly for safety reasons and is not related to alcohol. Predominantly the mode of public transport on a Thursday, Friday or Saturday night in Ballarat would be taxi, and that is beyond the reach of a lot of people.

Mr HARKNESS — Too bad if you are right up at Clunes.
Ms Carey — Yes. If you want to go to Clunes — you have come into the town for your night out — you get a taxi out there. Yesterday I was talking to someone who had had a big bay at the Avoca races. He and his friends decided to go to the Crown Casino in Melbourne, so they got a taxi down there and then got a taxi back home again. That is a smart person, you could argue — not a very smart person in another sense but at least he was aware that if that was what they wanted to do they could not take the risk of driving down there. Yet the only option for them to get to Melbourne is taxi, which is not a cheap option as you can imagine, and back again.

The Chair — I go back to the issue of fatigue. Given that Adelaide to Ballarat is a major truck route and it is probably 6 or 8 hours in a truck, is that another aspect of fatigue?

Ms Carey — I would think so, yes. We do not have a trucking representative on our committee at the moment, but we have representatives from the local bus companies. The hours that truck drivers are doing is a concern. That applies to anyone. We saw a horrible accident on the Western Highway recently where a woman and two children were killed driving at night to get to a destination. We do not yet know what happened, but I would not mind betting that she was probably driving at a time of night when her concentration and focus were affected. Sure, she may not have fallen asleep at the wheel, and that is another component of fatigue; it is not just falling asleep at the wheel but just being tired that affects your concentration. The research is out there that says driving when you are tired is the same as driving with a low blood alcohol level.

Mr Harkness — The representatives from the council were in here earlier and they indicated that an increasing number of people are commuting from Ballarat to Melbourne, and one of the biggest bugbears is the lack of the Deer Park bypass. I understand that the federal government has been reluctant to commit any funding. As a Roadsafe group are you lobbying John Anderson and the federal government to provides funds for that sort of a project?

Ms Carey — We are not actively lobbying, but you have given us a good idea. It is a problem for Ballarat. I do not know how many people commute from Ballarat each day, but I had heard that 5000 people travel down on the train so probably at least that again go down in the car, and my partner would be one of them who travels to Melbourne each day to work and back again. Most of his journey is from Deer Park into the city, which is ridiculous because it is slow, it is bumper to bumper, it is a bottleneck and it is dangerous. He will regularly see accidents in that area.

If you are cruising down the Western Highway as you can do between here and Caroline Springs, once you get there the frustration starts to build, particularly at peak hour. It is not so bad during other times of the day, but at peak hour it is a nightmare to get through. That is not constructive for anyone on the road at that point. There is a whole lot of other issues for Ballarat in having the Deer Park bypass built. I would have to say that road safety would not be high on the priority of those who are pushing for it, but it is probably nonetheless an important one. For economic reasons it will be great for Ballarat, but I do not think they are using road safety as their primary push for that, although it is important.

Mr Harkness — That would certainly have a positive road safety effect if it was to be funded.

Ms Carey — In both directions, yes.

The Chair — The committee is also inquiring into crashes into roadside objects. Has your committee discussed that issue?

Ms Carey — No, not at length. It came out when someone down Warrnambool way — a senior police officer — suggested chopping down the trees, which came at the same time as our council had just voted to plant another 50 trees out on the entrance to Sebastopol, so there are schools of thought in all areas. My own thoughts on that get back to who is to blame for the crash: is it the tree or the driver? That point was made in letters to the local newspaper at the time. I think local governments, VicRoads and government authorities need to be sensible when they are planning roadways and what objects you put on the sides of roads. I do not think you can put anything anywhere, but at the same time I do not think we need bland, horrible, dull roadways devoid of any area of interest to minimise the chance of someone crashing into a tree.

You probably noticed if you drove up this morning on the Western Highway as you come through Rockbank and that area the number of roadside crosses that have appeared along there in recent times. It gives food for thought. You would have to look at what is happening there on that stretch of road.
Mr HARKNESS — Of the six local government areas you operate within is there one that stands out as a particular contributor to the road toll or to serious injuries?

Ms CAREY — In Ararat during the four years from 1999 to 2002 total accidents were 39 — this is in the municipal area of Ararat. In Ballarat the total was 303. Obviously population comes into play. That is the total number or accidents. There were 42 in Central Goldfields, which covers out Maryborough way; there were 52 in the Shire of Hepburn, which is out towards Daylesford; 107 in Moorabool; and 49 in the Pyrenees, which is out towards Avoca. That is a total number of accidents in that four-year period where someone was either killed or suffered serious or minor injury. Ballarat stands out there, but obviously population and the built-up area would play a significant role in that too. The road toll has been decreasing. I do not like these figures because if you put them out publicly, in four years the municipal area of Ballarat had four fatalities. I would think people would say that is pretty good. Try telling that to the families of those four people. You could not do it.

The CHAIR — That is right. It is another cross on the side of the road.

Ms CAREY — That is right. In Ballarat generally, of the 303 accidents where injury or worse was sustained, six were fatalities. So Ballarat people might say the same thing, ‘Only six fatalities’, but it is more serious than that. Using those figures is a bland way of looking at the thing and it takes away from the impact of a fatality or a serious injury.

Mr LANGDON — Turning to your original comments you talked about fatalities and the tenfold number of people involved in accidents and recovery and what have you. Do you believe the TAC is doing enough to advertise that fact? I am from metropolitan Melbourne. I do not get to see much country TV. Do they emphasise that sort of thing in country TV as well?

Ms CAREY — I do not watch as much television as I used to. I used to see a lot of TAC ads, but I have to say I could not remember when I saw the last one. My viewing is restricted to a certain amount of time at a certain time of day. Regardless of how often the TAC would advertise it, it is the message that is being sent. A couple of factors that come into that is the complacency I mentioned and the ‘It won’t happen to me’ syndrome and those sorts of things. The TAC was involved in the Operation Clampdown that we had here. I think it has probably changed tack a bit, moving away from the television thing, if I am right in my thinking that I have not seen as much as I used to of those horror head-on type accidents. With two programs like Operation Clampdown and Drive Right — that is happening right now — people are aware that those things are on so maybe the TAC presence is noticed in that way. I do not know what the impact or the level of the television advertising is, purely because I do not see as much of it as I would have once upon a time.

Mr LANGDON — You also mentioned the roads coming into Ballarat and other parts of the six shires you cover. Do the statistics show more accidents on the smaller roads or more on, say, the freeway-type roads — for example, you mentioned crosses on the roads into here. Are there more accidents in those smaller roads where the trees are closer to the road and things like that? Have you any stats on that at all?

Ms CAREY — I do not know. VicRoads might have stats, but I have not seen them. A police officer in Ballarat used to keep them himself. He would keep a log of what was involved in an accident, whether it was a car versus a tree, who was injured, where they were sitting, and it was quite detailed. It was something he did out of interest, but I think his workload was such that he could not keep it up any more. I have spoken to him about it in years gone by and it made for interesting analogies just to see what was happening and where. Again speaking anecdotally, our major accidents happen out of town where we experience fatalities or serious injury.

Mr LANGDON — Where the speed of vehicles is increased?

Ms CAREY — Perhaps, and where the roads are narrower, where you have long stretches of road uninterrupted by traffic lights and give-way signs and that sort of thing. I am trying to think of the types of accidents we have had in recent times. I have spoken about the single-vehicle accidents and I can only imagine they are the result of speed and carelessness in some respects.

Mr LANGDON — What sorts of roads are those accidents occurring on? You emphasised that a fair bit. Are they occurring on a particular type of road?

Ms CAREY — I would classify them as non-main roads, so they are not out on the Western Highway. They are out on the road that goes from Gordon to Burrumbeet or something like that. They are not back roads either; they are still rural roads — bitumen sealed roads.
Mr LANGDON — But they are narrower.

Ms CAREY — They are a bit narrower. They are not always marked with lines.

The CHAIR — They are busy.

Ms CAREY — They are busy for where they are, with a lot of farm traffic and rural traffic. In Ballarat there is a growing trend for people to move out into areas that become little communities in themselves — for example, Haddon, Snake Valley, Smythesdale, those sorts of areas, where you move out on to bush blocks. Some of those are becoming populated. People still work in Ballarat and are travelling on those roads daily. It is certainly not the level of traffic you would have here in Sturt Street, but I think concentration levels are probably at a peak when driving in Sturt Street because of all the other traffic around you, the signs and the work the council has started on the side streets — which is another matter altogether. Out in the country there is the temptation or tendency to cruise along because there is no other traffic around you. If you drive those roads regularly you think you know where all the give-way signs are. It is 4 o’clock and you know it is time for old Bill up the road to check the cows, so he will be coming along soon. All those factors come into it.

The CHAIR — Angela, thank you for your time and input. The committee will send you a copy of the transcript, which we will use for our own internal report writing.

Ms CAREY — All the best with your inquiry.

The CHAIR — Thank you for your time.

Witness withdrew.
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll

Ballarat – 20 October 2003

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 G. Both

Witnesses

Mr G. Smith, Director, Infrastructure Services; and
Mr A. Bainbridge, Manager Assets, Shire of Moorabool.

Necessary corrections to be notified to
executive officer of committee
The CHAIR — I welcome Gary Smith and Andrew Bainbridge from the Moorabool Shire Council to the parliamentary Road Safety Committee. As you would be aware, we are running two concurrent inquiries: one into the country road toll, and one that is obviously correlated to that into crashes involving roadside objects. This is a public inquiry and we are taking a transcript which will be used by the committee when it compiles its report for Parliament. What you say today is protected by parliamentary privilege, which basically means that what you say is protected legally. Thank you for your time and input. Having said that, I ask you to make your statement.

Mr SMITH — I am the director of infrastructure services at Moorabool Shire Council. My colleague is Andrew Bainbridge, the assets manager. Between us we would like to do a tag team presentation today. I think that way the committee will get the most value out of it and so will we.

We have provided the committee with a summary document, fairly much in dot point form, covering the main concerns which we believe will be of interest to the committee, given its terms of reference. We have combined the two together. It was easy for us to do that given the nature of the two. Hopefully from the headings of our summary document you will be able to slot them into your various criteria. We will work through that summary document as a discussion document. We have also provided the committee with a copy of our road safety strategic plan, which is a number of years old now, but there is a lot of useful information which you may wish to call on. Through this presentation we will draw on some of the statistics and action plans from that. If we may we will walk our way through this summary document.

Mr LANGDON — Before you start, could we have maps showing where these councils are? The last time we did this we had rural maps. Whereabouts are you?

Mr SMITH — Our office is in Ballan and we also have offices in Bacchus Marsh, so we range from the fringe of Ballarat all the way to the fringe of Melton. The Western Highway is the main federal highway through the middle of the shire. The Ballarat–Geelong highway cuts across the bottom, and the Wombat Forest, about which you no doubt have heard, across to the Trentham area is in the northern part of our shire. If you refer to the attachment document, page 8 gives you a quick summary of the shire which may be of use. It was a very good question and we probably should have come armed with a map. We take these things for granted. I have been at Moorabool shire for four weeks now, so it is probably a question I should be asking. Andrew is the font of knowledge when it comes to road safety in Moorabool shire and he will be speaking to the detail.

As mentioned in the introduction, we have developed this road safety strategic plan which hopefully sets a course of action for Moorabool shire over the next three or four years to address road safety issues, many of which are included in the committee’s terms of inquiry. We believe the behaviour of drivers as much as anything influences the statistics that we use to analyse many of our road safety concerns. Speed, drugs, alcohol, fatigue and behavioural problems are not common only to us. They are statewide — nation-wide if you like — and Moorabool is no different. We fit pretty well into the state average in most of those categories with accidents caused by those things. We do not have a lot of control over them, which is quite frustrating. We do not know how to address some of these things, given it is a cultural issue and a statewide behavioural issue. There is one advantage in most councils being similar in that regard; we can have common solutions statewide and do not have to run around in different areas looking for different solutions to the problem.

I refer to some statistics from Moorabool shire. We are the 21st highest frequency of casualty crashes in Victoria, which is nothing to be proud of. I daresay the Western Highway has a little bit to do with that. The incidence of off-road crashes is slightly higher in Moorabool than in the rest of regional Victoria, and we see ourself as being part of the regional component of Victoria. The number of casualty crashes per annum has risen in the last five years, looking at a moving average from about 95 to 108, which is about a 14 per cent increase and is heading in the wrong direction. Approximately 75 per cent of our crashes occur near the 80, 90 and 100-kilometre-an-hour speed zone categories, so it is a rural issue where we need to address our actions.

Over half of all the accidents in Moorabool are due to loss of control of a vehicle. The predominant crash-type for Moorabool is off-path on a straight — in other words, people for no apparent reason just leave the road on a straight stretch and collide with a non-frangible stationary object. The most hit objects are — no prizes for guessing — trees, embankments, which are high on the list; and walls and fences are around 10 per cent. Poles are not mentioned there, so that is interesting.

Moorabool has a high incidence of motorcycle crashes. Some of the tourist areas and hilly terrain areas attract motorcyclists to our shire and because of the nature of the terrain and the narrowness of the roads we believe a lot of motorcyclists are probably riding beyond their capacity and may contribute to their own downfall. On one
particular road, the Myrniong–Trentham road, there have been 13 motorcycle crashes in an 18-kilometre stretch of road in the last five-and-a-half years. Most people would say that is totally unacceptable, but we do not believe there is a lot we can do about it, and we will get to some of those reasons later.

Mr EREN — Of those 13 motorcycle crashes do you have a breakdown of those — fatalities, injuries?

Mr SMITH — Not here, but we can certainly get them for you.

The CHAIR — Are those minor accidents or severe?

Mr BAINBRIDGE — The only reason these have become a statistic is that they are either a fatality or a serious injury. These statistics are taken from VicRoads crash data. I do not have the breakdown of that information, but certainly they are not just a little misdemeanour.

Mr EREN — So they are serious crashes?

Mr SMITH — Yes. I think any motorcycle crash is a serious crash.

Mr EREN — Overall, though, is it more than 13 — the ones who do not get injured; they write off their bikes?

Mr SMITH — Yes, I would have to assume so, because crash statistics do not report near misses or unreported accidents. We believe the roadside environment is an overwhelming factor, especially where vehicles leave the road and hit trees. In fact in recent years we have had an increase in the number of vehicles that have left the road and hit trees.

Mr LANGDON — Do they include motorbikes?

Mr SMITH — Yes.

Mr LANGDON — Any idea of the stats there?

Mr SMITH — No, I do not have not have the stats with me, but certainly if you wish I could get that breakdown for you.

Mr BAINBRIDGE — That slide puts it into perspective: trees versus the rest.

Mr SMITH — Trees are clearly an issue for the Shire of Moorabool in off-road road safety. We believe tighter control of the management of the roadside environment is an increasing issue for us and most road authorities. There is a lack of acknowledgment by the Department of Sustainability and Environment that a road corridor, clear of non-frangible vegetation, is warranted in rural zones. Some of the things that DSE requires on planning permits when we want to do roadside safety works are to plant more trees than we remove. Given we are removing trees because of the accidents, we have to plant 10, sometimes 50 times as many trees — if it is indigenous vegetation. There is a need to preserve the native environment — that is state policy — flora and animal habitat. We have difficulty in obtaining a planning approval from DSE, full stop; and when we do get a permit the attached conditions are onerous, so we have almost steered away from off-road safety and we put our efforts into other things where we can achieve more with less hassle.

One of the terms of your inquiry has to do with cruise control and the like contributing to accidents. We would not have an opinion on that, not because we would not know where to get the information to come to a conclusion, but we made a comment there just the same.

Mr LANGDON — I have a question to one of our officers. If you have cruise control on in the car and you have an accident, can they monitor whether that has been on or does it automatically go off?

Ms DOUGLAS — I will need to find out.

Mr SMITH — If the ignition is off — —

Mr LANGDON — Because once you brake or anything it turns it off, so you would not know whether it was on.

Mr BAINBRIDGE — That is right, exactly.
Ms DOUGLAS — I do not know if there is a computer memory bank.

Mr SMITH — Maybe in the more sophisticated cars there is. Do you know, Andrew?

Mr BAINBRIDGE — No, I do not think there is.

Mr SMITH — As far as enforcement activities, it would be great to see more enforcement on country roads but we appreciate that even though there are lower percentages on busy urban roads that is where the heavy traffic is and that is where the enforcement effort must be, so with the enforcement needs to go round I daresay that country accidents are not going to be reduced too much by enforcement other than what is being done, which is good, but that is a never-ending battle.

Measures that the Shire of Moorabool has taken to reduce the incidence and severity of crashes are highlighted in the document you have been given. Unless Andrew wants to comment on that document we will let you go through that at your leisure. Most key components of that strategy are strongly focused on educative actions rather than works on the ground. The council has not been in a position to resource those educative initiatives to date, and that is probably an indictment of us and councils statewide; but dollars being what they are, priorities do not tend to focus on the nice to do things even though there is a good reason for doing them, it is more on the reactionary or the big picture or the asset management issues, so we are no different there.

Liability and accountability issues: we are strongly of the view that poor planning of the location of utility assets results in a lot of accidents. I mentioned that poles did not come up highly there. Fixtures by the Telstras and the Powercords and the like — there is not a lot of liaison between local government and those utilities.

The CHAIR — Is the poor planning still an ongoing issue or are organisations more aware of the road safety requirements as well?

Mr SMITH — I think they are more aware. Whether they are making any greater effort to address it, I am not sure. The pending road management legislation will certainly enforce that issues. That is a real positive to come out of that, I believe.

Mr BAINBRIDGE — To qualify that slightly, the situation from a couple of years ago moving forward has improved enormously, but nobody has moved retrospectively. There are still power poles parked immediately behind the kerb and there is no real incentive to shift those assets to safer locations. With new assets, yes, we are doing a lot of that; but older assets is where the big gap is.

Mr SMITH — They are probably more in urban environments. Whether that is a real issue — we have not noticed a lot of roadside object collisions in urban areas so much as in the rural areas.

The CHAIR — I take the point you are making about when you are putting in new installations, but with regard to the ones already there does the council do some kind of audit on those at-risk poles and trees?

Mr BAINBRIDGE — Council does road safety audits more on an ad hoc basis than a systematic approach.

The CHAIR — Ad hoc or reactive?

Mr BAINBRIDGE — Reactive is a better word, for sure. There is no system of applying an inspection regime to cover that.

The CHAIR — So what would make you react — just that you need to go out and do an audit here, or would it be an incident or an accident?

Mr BAINBRIDGE — It is generally either an incident or something else that might be a catalyst to change. It might be either a general road condition or some other factor that puts it into a preplanning phase, so we then go out and do a road safety audit and make sure we cover all of those aspects when we design the work.

Mr LANGDON — On the same issue, what have you done to that stretch of road that has had 13 motorcycle accidents? You have obviously done audits and there must be particular spots on that road that have more potential than others. Using that as an example, how have you managed that?
Mr BAINBRIDGE — Over the last three years we have been very successful in obtaining black spot funding. That particular stretch of road has received black spot funding. It is on a main road, and since Moorabool has handed back main road responsibility to Vicroads I understand that Vicroads has now rectified that through a black spot application.

Mr LANGDON — Do you know what sort of work has been done?

Mr BAINBRIDGE — I do not think the work has been done. This is only a fairly recent example. The problem was correcting super elevation across the road at a particular bend and also improving the texture of the road surface. The combination of the road texture, as well as the particular curve, was seen as a course for many of those accidents.

The CHAIR — How successful has the black spot funding been in minimising road accidents?

Mr BAINBRIDGE — That is a very good question. It is very difficult to tell because the majority of these works were only done a maximum of three years ago. It is very difficult to see the results. Probably over the course of the next two to three years, putting together a five-year comparison will help us a lot.

Mr SMITH — The rear page on the document we are referring to now gives a summary of our black spot funding over the last three years, which has been substantial, and we appreciate it and it has been a lifesaver so far as general works are concerned for black spots. Unfortunately the program has finished; that is the only disappointment. While it was alive it was fantastic.

Mr BAINBRIDGE — There is a footnote to that as well. The bridge protection program was the only approved so-called potential black spot program in the state and we may never see a comparison of that $140 000 for protecting bridge endposts because it was only a potential black spot. There are no statistics to compare it with, so that is a challenge for us. Hopefully we never see a statistic there.

Mr SMITH — It is a bit of a catch-22 situation because it is a potential black spot. You try to cut some of these things off at the pass before they become a statistic, but then you cannot compare them to see how well you have done.

Mr LANGDON — Without making a rod for the government or any succeeding government, do you think black spot funding has been the most influential thing in helping rural councils?

Mr SMITH — So far as road safety, certainly, and the federal government’s Roads to Recovery funding if it was applied to road safety, but that was discretionary. As a forced exercise, black spot funding was, yes.

Mr LANGDON — So the federal funding created a great benefit as well?

Mr SMITH — Indeed. At the bottom of that last page you will see that we have been recipients of $820 000 a year over four years. You can do a lot of good work with that. If that program does not continue then about 30 per cent of our capital works infrastructure replacement will drop off and road safety will really take a hike unfortunately. We are sweating on black spot funding coming back at some time in the future and Roads to Recovery continuing. It will affect our sustainability and our risk management strategy.

While talking about risk management guidelines, which is halfway down the third page, we believe the development of codes of practice under the impending road management bill will certainly help give control and guidance to road management authorities. The inspection regimes that will come out of that process will certainly be improved across councils in particular, and I think all authorities working with roads, and that will be to the betterment of road safety.

The biggest issue facing us is that we have an infrastructure funding gap to the tune of $3 million per annum on just asset maintenance. A lot of that incorporates safety issues, but while we have to address an asset base with that sort of funding gap, there is no money left to tackle specifically road safety issues unless they are that high on the list. There is no discretion. That is one of the biggest frustrations facing us, that lack of capital funding available to do some of this stuff.

Mr HARKNESS — As I was driving here this morning along the Western Highway I noticed the backlog of vehicles heading through the Deer Park area. I know one particular project that has been on the agenda for some time is the Deer Park bypass. Unfortunately we do not seem to be getting any commitment from the
commonwealth on that project. From a road safety perspective how important do you think that project would be for your municipality?

Mr SMITH — From a road safety perspective — I do not know the statistics of that end of the highway, but we do not want frustrated drivers in that frame of mind heading our way as angry drivers. That will not help. They will be fatigued from spending half an hour in a car park waiting for it to clear. There must be head-to-tail accidents every day, all over the place. It has to be a big cost-benefit ratio to do the job, other than the time factor, but road safety is a key component.

Mr HARKNESS — Have you made those views known?

Mr SMITH — Yes, through the Western Highway action committee group, and with a federal election coming up some time next year no doubt there is an opportunity there that we probably cannot afford to miss. We are making all the points we can, along with a few colleagues, of course. All the councils from the South Australian border right through to the metro area are working together on it. It is a high priority for councils.

Mr LANGDON — In a previous inquiry during the last session the committee looked at rural road safety. One thing that struck the committee on many occasions was, and you have a fairly large shire, that some of the councils — and I think you have even highlighted it in your own submission — did not have the funds to do the work that needed to be done without the rural road assistance from the federal government and black spot funding. Would you emphasise that point as well?

Mr SMITH — Yes. It would almost halve our capital works which is to the tune of about $2.5 million per annum. It would almost halve that if we did not have black spot and Roads to Recovery funding. We have a $3 million shortfall per annum now. We need to maintain our asset at its current level for the next 10 years.

Mr BAINBRIDGE — To put that into perspective, without Roads to Recovery and black spot funding the council cannot afford to replace 1 per cent of the asset in any given year. We are effectively asking any given section of road to last in excess of 100 years before it is replaced.

Mr SMITH — The practical life of a road is probably between 30 and 40 years for general heavy traffic.

Mr HARKNESS — What initiatives are you, as a council, pursuing that are proving to be very effective, and what initiatives would you pursue if you could that you are not already undertaking? For example, increased advertising, better enforcement around schools, encouraging Vicroads to put audible things down the sides of country roads.

Mr SMITH — Yes, the tactile marking has come out of the black spot program.

Mr HARKNESS — What sorts of initiatives are you currently pursuing and which ones would you do if you could?

Mr BAINBRIDGE — We are not doing too many. As Gary said, beyond physical capital works, which we are undertaking, the area where we really need to have a big impact on is education, those behavioural aspects. As Gary said, most of the behavioural aspects are already covered by the Transport Accident Commission programs covering fatigue, speed, alcohol, those sorts of issues. Other research would indicate that the combination of enforcement with that sort of education is very effective in controlling the road toll. In that context, wee little Moorabool shire is not well placed to respond or enhance that in a particularly meaningful way. Notwithstanding that, we have been involved in the safe routes to schools programs. This strategy alludes to pedestrians and other areas of risk, other than the rural road toll, and there are some areas we have initiated in relation to enhancing safety of other road users — bicycles, pedestrians and passengers.

Mr EREN — Do you have a policy on planting trees on roadsides and how far they would be from the road?

Mr BAINBRIDGE — We generally follow the Vicroads guidelines and codes of practices, amended slightly. Vicroads has larger roads, larger volumes of traffic and therefore can justify larger clearances on the sides of its roads. Many of our roads are lightly trafficked and therefore we need to scale down those parameters somewhat so we do, but it gets back to the point Gary made. We go through a process of selection of a road that needs to be rehabilitated, and we incorporate all those road safety aspects when we do that work. It is rare that a road safety issue of itself initiates roadworks. It is usually a combination of many factors which would initiate that road safety work. Given that we have such a small amount of funding allocated to road funding generally speaking,
it is also quite rare that we would go out and do wholesale tree clearing, for example, on a roadside, just to address that issue. We do attempt to maintain a clearance, and generally speaking where we possibly can we maintain a clearance of 5 metres from the edge of a seal, and we have a program of a couple of hundred thousand dollars a year for rehabilitating shoulders. The theory there is that if an errant vehicle leaves the surface, if the shoulder is in an acceptable condition they have an opportunity to regain control of the car and get back on the seal and continue the journey, so the two are combined.

Mr EREN — What about in the form of education of private landowners? Obviously there are a lots of farming properties down there and some of those fence lines — I see in the City of Greater Geelong there are a number of complaints of private property owners planting trees too close to their fences which then, having hundreds of acres and thousands of trees, infringe upon the road. So does your council have a policy on educating some of those private landowners?

Mr BAINBRIDGE — I do not know that I could bring to you a council policy document, but certainly our practice is we try and catch the egg before it hatches. We do have a list of approved species for planting either within the road reserve or close to it. Certainly looking at the past where trees have obviously been planted too close to a fence line and they are now growing out over the road reserve, we have a policy of asking those people to remove those limbs back to our clearance tolerances. As I said, that is like a minimum of 5 metres or more if it is a busy road. In some instances we have asked people to remove trees from the road reserve because we can see that that particular type of tree is a potential hazard, so we are proactive in that regard. Our environmental section works with DSE and a number of private contractors in planting huge numbers of trees on Crown land other than road reserves, so we would like to think that we are a light shade of green in that we do try to look after our native environment and promote native vegetation but in locations other than road reserves.

Mr SMITH — Or near intersections within private properties. We could probably do better.

Mr HARKNESS — On the subject of education which you were speaking about earlier, in Frankston where I am from there is a dedicated road safety officer who spends all of his time getting around schools, kindergartens, community groups, Apex groups, and also working closely with councils on subdivisions and on a whole range of things. Do you have a road safety officer or somebody who performs that role and do you intend to get one if you do not?

Mr BAINBRIDGE — To answer two questions in one, what would I do if we had more money, I think we need to recognise the role of education in the road safety process. If we were blessed with more funding one of the things I would advocate would be a road safety officer to undertake that education role.

The CHAIR — Looking at the documentation, casualty crashes have risen by 14 per cent or 15 per cent in the last five years. Has council determined why there has been that extent of increase? Is it just sheer numbers of traffic, sheer numbers of vehicles, and therefore you are being unfair to yourself in that the number of vehicles in crashes may have decreased?

Mr SMITH — I do not think we have had time to analyse it. These have just come in the latest week, the latest road stats. We have not had time to analyse the reasons behind them. We know what the facts are now, but we need to digest those.

Mr BAINBRIDGE — The next slide tells part of the story. The large bar marked ‘other — industrial, rural, freeway’, the word that needs to be understood is ‘freeway’. A large proportion of the increase that we see is casualty crashes on the freeway, and that is also in direct relation to the number of vehicles carried by the freeway.

The CHAIR — So you are saying there has been an increase in total numbers, but if you compared it as a percentage of total vehicles travelling it may have decreased?

Mr BAINBRIDGE — Yes, it may be in synch.

The CHAIR — So you are looking at sheer numbers of casualty accidents.

Mr BAINBRIDGE — Yes.

Mr LANGDON — I noticed before that you noted police presence or supervision of cars going too fast on long stretches of road. The state government last week announced point-to-point speed controls on the Hume Highway. Would a thing like that on the Western Highway be of assistance, over a period of time?
Mr BAINBRIDGE — I think it is a tremendous initiative and has the potential to save lives, in short.

Mr LANGDON — That is a fairly strong statement.

Mr BAINBRIDGE — I think it is so true. We were talking about driver behaviour. Do we not all do it? If we see a car on the side of the freeway, do we not all ease off on the accelerator for fear that it might be a speed camera, only to speed up when we find that it is not?

Mr EREN — I deny that!

Mr BAINBRIDGE — But I think that is human nature. If there is another measure like those point-to-point cameras, that will deter a number of people who are on those long trips and only slow down for the bits that they have to and recklessly speed in the sections where they do not need to slow down.

Mr EREN — In terms of driving under the influence, we have seen over the past 15 years there are more incidents of people driving under the influence of illicit drugs. How do you see that as a problem in the Shire of Moorabool? Is there an increase that you know of people driving under the influence of drugs other than alcohol, or both?

Mr SMITH — I do not think we have the means to be able to come to a conclusion on that one. The answer is we do not know. Alistair mentioned issues before that you think might make a difference. I think this new school zone speed limit will be a real plus, especially in rural schools on 100-kilometre-an-hour roads.

Mr LANGDON — On the issue of the zones, some people have complained — I know the Herald Sun uses Colac as a prime example — of seven or nine different speed zones through that particular town. Having just come back from Queensland down the Newell Highway, in every town I approached in New South Wales you saw as you went into it two signs, one saying you are about to enter a 50 kph zone, and the entire town was covered by the 50 kph zone except if you went past a school, therefore being only one or two zones and not nine. Do you support such a situation?

Mr SMITH — Personally, yes.

Mr BAINBRIDGE — I think so. Yes, I would support that. There are many examples where you really have to be a conscientious driver and look for the signs to be sure that you are travelling at the correct speed. I think we have too many changes now along our main thoroughfares.

Mr SMITH — There is one section of the Western Highway at Rockbank — you are probably all familiar with it — which goes from 80 to 90 to 100, back to 90, back to 100. It is the highest revenue-raising strip in the state, and that is why, because no-one knows what speed zone they are in.

Mr LANGDON — I think I had that same incident when I drove through there. The last aspect I want to raise, particularly in relation to the motorbikes which you have mentioned, is the wire barriers that they now use. What is your opinion of those? I know they are cheaper than the old guard rail ones. What is your opinion of those wire barriers?

Mr SMITH — I know there are some concerns. We are members of the Central Highlands Road Safety Council and it has been raised there by the Ulysses Motorcycle Club as an issue. I can certainly see its point of view and there is probably some substance to it. We do not use that product in the shire, but it is used extensively in New South Wales. I am not sure what the record of it is though.

Mr LANGDON — To my knowledge there has not been one motorcycle fatality involving it at all.

Mr HARKNESS — My understanding is that any motorcyclist who hits it is likely to perish by hitting a tree because they are airborne and not by getting garrotted by the wire in any case. The flexible nature of the Brifen wire actually slows the vehicle, bike or car.

Mr SMITH — That is the design intention, yes, so in theory it should be fine.

Mr LANGDON — You do not use it in your shire; is that a particular policy?

Mr SMITH — I do not know. Andrew might be able to answer that.
Mr BAINBRIDGE — Much of the guardrail we have put up in the last three years has been an extension to existing guardrail, so there has been no incentive to change the entire section, it is just an extension. The bridge endpost is an example of that. In many installations where we are putting up guardrail they are around a corner and the Brien wire is not well suited to sharp radii in that situation. Where we look at rotary rehabilitation projects, we try wherever possible to remove the need for a guard device. It is not always possible, but the guardrail is a hazard itself. It is just it is a lesser hazard than the thing it is trying to protect. Where we possibly can we attempt to design out of it. A couple of points: we have not put a lot of guard device in, other than on bridges. The second point is we would seek to design out of it.

Mr LANGDON — I noticed a lot of those wire rails are now put up in heavily treed areas. They have not pulled down the trees, but between the tree and the roadway they have put in that wire which I assume is a safety aspect because the wire is more forgiving than a 4-foot wide tree.

Mr SMITH — It certainly is.

Mr LANGDON — Can you see that working in some areas instead of knocking down trees?

Mr SMITH — If we could get over the motorcyclist issue, yes, it would be worth investigating.

The CHAIR — Do you have many unsealed gravel roads?

Mr BAINBRIDGE — Yes. Of the 1400-plus kilometres of road in the shire, in excess of 500 kilometres is unsealed. Most of those unsealed roads are unsealed for a good reason. They carry very low traffic. There would probably be a few of them — —

The CHAIR — It is mostly local traffic, is it?

Mr BAINBRIDGE — It is mostly farm access, those sorts of things. Of that 500 kilometres there would be probably fewer than 50 kilometres of gravel road where you could justify saying, ‘This road really does need to be sealed; we need to provide a better standard and it needs to be improved’.

The CHAIR — If you had the money you would seal 10 per cent of your unsealed road?

Mr BAINBRIDGE — Yes.

Mr SMITH — The rest you could not afford to because it is much cheaper to maintain a gravel road than it is a sealed road.

The CHAIR — Yes, and given the light traffic, and it would be pretty much the same traffic using it on a regular basis.

Mr BAINBRIDGE — Yes, that is right.

Mr SMITH — There was a statewide push to look at 80 kilometres an hour maximum on a gravel road. I know Philip from the Pyrenees shire will probably tell you they would support that, but I do not know what Moorabool’s position is.

Mr BAINBRIDGE — We have not formed an opinion.

Mr SMITH — It is certainly worth pursuing.

The CHAIR — So most of those gravel roads would be in 100-kilometre zones?

Mr BAINBRIDGE — Yes, definitely, the overwhelming majority of them. Only 1 per cent, perhaps 2 per cent, of our gravel roads would be in close proximity to our urban area; a very small amount.

Mr LANGDON — An issue that arose during the previous Road Safety Committee inquiry was the use of B-doubles and heavy vehicles on roads not necessarily designed for them, particularly in rural Victoria. Do you believe the use of those vehicles has deteriorated some of your roads to a degree that it may be causing accidents?

Mr SMITH — My guess is certainly yes, but Andrew is more qualified to comment on that from Moorabool’s point of view.
Mr BAINBRIDGE — The B-doubles have damaged our road network, without question, but in my opinion it is not by reason of through traffic. B-doubles, as you know, by their configuration have certain fixed axles, and when those B-doubles attempt to turn or manoeuvre on a road — the example might be a cattle truck delivering cattle to a farm — the need to manoeuvre that large vehicle off the road and get it back into a farm gate or something of that nature, and that is where the damage occurs. We exercise a permit system for B-doubles and we look carefully at where we allow them to travel. The first principle is the road network is there for all vehicles to use. If that is the only way this B-double can get to that particular spot, then our bias is towards allowing them that use. But if there is an alternative where we can get them to use better standard roads, wider roads, main roads, highways, freeways, certainly we would push them down those routes because the standard of road is better.

Mr SMITH — It is a bit of a catch-22 situation; we do not want to restrict trade, but we want to protect the assets they are using.

The CHAIR — Do you have any further comments?

Mr SMITH — No. The strategy is fairly succinct and it is probably something the committee can use.

The CHAIR — We appreciate your preparation, thank you.

Witnesses withdrew.
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll

Ballarat – 20 October 2003

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 G. Both

Witness

Mr P. Jeffrey, Projects Manager, Shire of Pyrenees.

Necessary corrections to be notified to executive officer of committee
The CHAIR — Philip, welcome to this inquiry. We will be taking a transcript of today’s proceedings but basically that will be used by the committee in writing up its report. You are protected by parliamentary privilege so anything you say today is legally covered. As you may be aware, the committee is running two concurrent inquiries: one is into the country road toll and the other is crashes involving roadside objects. As you can see, there is a correlation between those two inquiries. We thank you for your input and your time. I will hand over to you to start proceedings.

Mr LANGDON — Before you start, whereabouts is your shire?

Mr JEFFREY — Pyrenees shire is west of Ballarat, between Ballarat and Ararat. It is approximately 40 kilometres wide and it runs north-south, takes in the townships of Beaufort and Avoca, and runs pretty much on the west side of Ballarat.

Mr LANGDON — Do you have a main highway through it?

Mr JEFFREY — It has four highways running through it. It has the Western Highway, which is obviously to Adelaide; the Sunraysia Highway, which links to Mildura; the Pyrenees Highway, which is linked from Bendigo through to Ararat; and the Glenelg Highway on the southern end, which runs from Ballarat down to the south-west of Victoria.

Mr EREN — How many people would reside in the Pyrenees shire?

Mr JEFFREY — The Pyrenees shire is approximately 6500 people, so it is a fairly low population for the area. I should have brought all these stats with me but it is a bit about over 2000 square kilometres, so it is similar in size to Moorabool but the population is pretty low.

The CHAIR — And you have better wineries in the north!

Mr JEFFREY — Yes. Basically there are two main towns in the shire, Beaufort and Avoca. The population is approximately 1500 people, so there is no big urban centre, or what you would call an urban centre. The shire offices are based in Beaufort and there is another centre in Avoca as well. That is basically the shire. I have not prepared a presentation such as Moorabool may have, as time did not allow; but I have a few copies of our road safety program.

The CHAIR — You have four major highways running through your municipality?

Mr JEFFREY — Yes.

The CHAIR — When you look at those road safety issues, obviously you look at this in conjunction with the various councils that also run along the route of those highways?

Mr JEFFREY — I guess it would be the Central Highlands road safety committee or whatever it is that works in that forum. On that document that we have just handed around, there were only three copies and there are two parts to it. One is the actual road safety strategy and the other is a data analysis.

The CHAIR — How old is your strategy?

Mr JEFFREY — It was only adopted in June this year so it is fairly recent. We decided to split it into two portions, basically to keep the bulk of the strategy down, because we find if people pick up a big thick document straight away they turn off. We have put our data analysis together basically using Vicroads Crashstats as a start. We engaged consultants to give us a hand to do the strategy.

Going through the Crashstats showed us a few things. Mainly as far as number of accidents in the shire is concerned we rank fairly low in the state, but as far as accidents per capita we rank fairly highly, obviously because we have a low population. In five years we had 12 casualties, and that is in the same period as everyone would have — 1997 to 2002. I am not sure if anyone has this document, which is a data analysis, but I am on page 5 at the moment. There were 80 serious injury accidents, 69 other injury accidents and a total of 161 crashes which would obviously require the police to attend. That is how they are on the Crashstats.

The CHAIR — No doubt the answer is in this document, but what percentage of those accidents would be on those major highways as compared to what happened locally?
Mr JEFFREY — I think 53 per cent of the crashes were on one of those four highways.

The CHAIR — Where is that stat?

Mr JEFFREY — It would be on page 6. The majority of them were on the Western Highway, which would have by far the greatest traffic numbers of any road.

Mr HARKNESS — When people exit a road and crash, what are they hitting? We heard from Moorabool that 40 per cent of people are hitting trees. Would that be comparable with your shire?

Mr JEFFREY — Yes, it would be. I think ours might be higher in terms of trees — 80 per cent of the crashes were run-off-road crashes.

Mr HARKNESS — That is high.

Mr JEFFREY — Yes, it is pretty high. Among the objects they collided with, which is on page 8, there was fairly great number of trees. I am not sure of the percentages.

Mr EREN — About 35 per cent involved trees.

Mr JEFFREY — That would be 35 in the total number, I guess. I do not know whatever the percentage was.

The CHAIR — You have some good statistics in this.

Mr LANGDON — What percentage of your total would be percentage on gravel?.

Mr JEFFREY — Ours would be 700 kilometres of sealed road and 1200 kilometres of gravel, so it is a very high percentage.

The CHAIR — You support 80 kilometres an hour on those roads?

Mr JEFFREY — I definitely support 80 kilometres an hour, probably because we have a great number of gravel roads and I do not think that the design of those roads would cater for vehicles travelling at 100 kilometres an hour. The shire would definitely support a lower speed limit on those roads — a uniform speed limit across the state as in urban areas where they have 50 kilometres an hour.

The CHAIR — You may not be able to answer this, but would you be able to say what percentage of those roads the council believes would be sealed or would justify being sealed if it had the funds? If you cannot answer that, that is fine; we can get that information from you later.

Mr JEFFREY — I do not think it would be a high percentage, based on traffic numbers and the future maintenance costs, but certainly a number of roads would be sealed if we had the money.

The CHAIR — Would local people support your call for the 80 kilometres an hour on gravel roads, including the percentage who use those?

Mr JEFFREY — They do; some do.

Mr LANGDON — They do; some do?

Mr JEFFREY — It is hard to gauge because some of the surveys we have sent out, particularly with this document, did not provide much feedback on that sort of stuff. It is hard to get feedback at all sometimes.

Mr EREN — Those crashes that were off-the-road crashes, 80 per cent of them, do we know whether most of them were off gravelled roads or off sealed roads?

Mr JEFFREY — They were mainly off sealed roads — 84 per cent of all the crashes occurred in daylight in clear conditions on a sealed road.

Mr LANGDON — During daylight?

Mr JEFFREY — Daylight hours.
Mr LANGDON — What were the conditions?

Mr JEFFREY — Fine, good conditions.

Mr EREN — So you might want to make those sealed roads gravelled roads!

Mr JEFFREY — I guess the traffic numbers generated on those sealed roads is probably why most of them are sealed.

Mr LANGDON — Do you believe that fatigue is the greatest problem on roads, or speed, or is it a combination of both?

Mr JEFFREY — It is probably a combination of a lot of factors but fatigue would be one major factor. I guess that correlates with loss of concentration. It is a bit hard to gauge why; I would be assuming because most of them are on the highways. It is mostly people who are outside who are having the accidents, who are just passing through.

Mr LANGDON — Have we the stats on them?

Mr JEFFREY — No, we tried to find some stats on that and maybe get their postcodes to find out their origin.

The CHAIR — So a lot of that passing traffic I would imagine on the major arterials would be trucks. Do the trucks throw up any safety issues that come to mind?

Mr JEFFREY — The trucks do not rate highly in my stats.

The CHAIR — They do not rate highly?

Mr JEFFREY — No, but they certainly are an issue. Who knows, they could be a cause of an accident that does not get into the stats.

The CHAIR — When I mention trucks, nothing jumps out to you as a major issue?

Mr JEFFREY — On the main roads, no; on local roads I would say yes, because a lot of our local roads are narrow seals, probably 3.7 metres wide, and the roads definitely have not been designed to cater for truck traffic. They were built in the 1950s when Dodges were probably the heaviest trucks.

Mr HARKNESS — Has the shire received much Roads to Recovery funding from the commonwealth government in recent years?

Mr JEFFREY — Yes. Over a four-year period we have received close to $800 000 a year, which is a great help, and one much needed for a shire with such a small rate base. It has been really helpful.

Mr HARKNESS — But $800 000 does not go very far, does it? A roundabout costs you $100 000 or so, does it not?

Mr JEFFREY — Yes. We have our own road hierarchy within the shire basically set up with strategic routes which link major towns or the higher traffic roads, and that is where all our Roads to Recovery money is going at the moment. All the other peripheral roads or collector roads do not really get that funding. Our capital budget tries to supplement that.

Mr EREN — I am interested in the fact that 84 per cent of those crashes were off the road on sealed roads. Do we have any data on where these people actually live? Were they travelling through or were they local residents? Obviously there has to be some fatigue involved if they are running off the road.

Mr JEFFREY — Yes, that is right.

Mr EREN — Where did they start off from and at what point did they get tired? Obviously this is where they get tired. Do we have any statistics on that?
Mr JEFFREY — I thought we tried through our strategy to look at that, and we got a consultant to look at it. I think some of the crashes reported postcodes. We could not really get a firm gauge, which is why we did not put it on.

Ms DOUGLAS — The latest research has shown that they are not local people. The majority of crashes involve people who live outside the municipality.

The CHAIR — And are unfamiliar with the area.

Ms DOUGLAS — They have been travelling for a few hours.

Mr HARKNESS — With somebody travelling from Adelaide to Melbourne, for instance, if they have not taken an adequate break it would be within your municipality where they are starting to tire.

Mr JEFFREY — That is right.

Mr EREN — In terms of focus, if there is such a high incidence then the committee may need to concentrate on those areas, whichever way they are going, and note that they will get tired at this point. What signage do we need to put up? What precautionary measures do we need to take?

Mr JEFFREY — It would be interesting to get a full data analysis of the Western Highway to see where the main incidence of accidents is. That could contribute to some black spots areas.

The CHAIR — It is not only visitors travelling through your municipality, because if you look at your wineries tourism is probably becoming a big industry, as in most municipalities, and you have people driving on local roads who are unfamiliar with them or not used to using gravel roads et cetera.

Mr JEFFREY — That is definitely an issue. There are many narrow roads. People may not know that when a semitrailer is coming down the road at 100 kilometres an hour, and he is off to the side and there is a lot of dust, that can create a lot of confusion, or it may obscure your vision for 50 or 60 metres after he passes.

The CHAIR — Are the numbers of tourists increasing dramatically?

Mr JEFFREY — Definitely in the north end of the shire; the wineries are taking off at the moment. It seems to be the in thing at the moment.

The CHAIR — So you are getting those tourists on weekends?

Mr JEFFREY — Yes, that is right. I do not know that we could prove or disprove that the wineries or tourists are contributing to any crash statistics.

The CHAIR — A large proportion of people who are injured or killed on the Great Ocean Road are tourists who are unfamiliar with those types of road conditions.

Mr JEFFREY — Yes, that would be right. I do not know the answer to be honest.

The CHAIR — No, but it would be interesting. Those are the types of statistics we can pick up through Vicroads.

Mr HARKNESS — Does the council have a particular focus at the moment — for instance, fatigue, drink-driving, speed, seatbelt wearing? Is there a particular focus or have you identified it through this study?

Mr JEFFREY — We identified that through the study.

Mr HARKNESS — Is there a particular issue?

Mr JEFFREY — Depending on what stats we are looking at, whether it is the public perception, the crash data or our own perceptions, we have tried to keep it fairly broad rather than focusing on a specific thing. Elderly drivers is an issue, and it will become a greater issue because the population of some towns is getting older and older as all the younger people move to the cities for education. Elderly drivers is an issue and probably will be in the future.

The CHAIR — What about younger drivers?
Mr JEFFREY — Novice drivers is something we have ear tagged in the strategy, but the focus is to support novice driver programs. There is not a lot we can do. There was talk of a log-in system for learner drivers. I am not sure if that is through for learner drivers or not.

Mr EREN — It is for drivers on L-plates.

Mr HARKNESS — It is an honour system at the moment.

Mr JEFFREY — That would be a good idea because at least it would give parents some responsibility to ensure learner drivers had had some sort of experience with all sorts of conditions and roads.

Mr LANGDON — You seem to have an abundance of highways running through your shire. Last week the state government announced the introduction of point-to-point road safety measures on the Hume Freeway to trap those people who are obviously driving over the speed limit along the freeway. Would you support those measures in your area, particularly on the Western Highway through to Adelaide?

Mr JEFFREY — I could not see that it would hurt. Is it for all vehicles?

Mr LANGDON — In the Victorian case it is for all vehicles.

Mr JEFFREY — I just drove to Queensland and they have it on the Hume pretty much throughout New South Wales. I travelled up the Hume and then the Pacific Highway.

Mr LANGDON — They are only for trucks; the Victorian ones will be for all cars.

Mr JEFFREY — I would definitely support that.

Mr LANGDON — Do you think it would be a good safety measure?

Mr JEFFREY — It has to help, yes. People would become accountable; they cannot speed up between permanent speed cameras or whatever other measures there might be out there. It would be a large administration task, though. I not sure how it would work. Does it take photos of numberplates and calculate the time?

Mr LANGDON — I think it takes photos of the numberplates and does it several times, and then the speed is calculated between the two points. If it is greater than you could possibly do legally, you are fined.

Mr JEFFREY — So it will logged through a computer system. It would be a decent measure. It would probably be a bit harder where you come through towns and have to slow down, or it could be you are stuck at lights at Ararat. I am not sure that you could work it out percentage-wise for the Western Highway.

Mr EREN — It would not be on roads that travel through a town; it would be on a straight stretch of road.

Mr JEFFREY — Over a 100-kilometre distance or whatever?

Mr HARKNESS — Police and other agencies often engage in different campaigns or operations. I think last year there was Operation Clampdown. How often to do you see a blitz enforcement in the area?

Mr JEFFREY — Fairly intermittently.

Mr HARKNESS — I assume most of the country towns probably have one or two or so police staff who just cannot monitor that huge geographic area, so are the blitzes effective and how often would you get them?

Mr JEFFREY — I do not live in the town.

The CHAIR — Easter time would be one of them?

Mr JEFFREY — Yes. Intermittently there are booze buses in the town, speed cameras. The Western Highway is well policed between Ballarat and Beaufort. Since I have been there I have only seen probably five or half a dozen — I have been working there 18 months — it is not a huge blitz. I used to work at Moorabool beforehand where it seemed to be, particularly in Ballan, very well policed. It would be once a week.
The CHAIR — I realise it has to be a subjective answer. You mentioned booze buses. With regard to
booze buses being in a town like, say, Beaufort or Avoca, how well does the bush telegraph work if you are at the
footy club on a Saturday night and the booze bus is down the road?

Mr JEFFREY — I grew up in a country town and I still play football. As soon as one person gets pulled
over they are straight on the phone to the hotel to say there is a booze bus up the road or a police patrol, so in that
regard they probably do not have a great effect locally, but they do on the through traffic.

The CHAIR — Within the local town you would see that bush telegraph, for want of a better term, would
work pretty well?

Mr JEFFREY — Yes.

The CHAIR — Would that mean that young blokes would sneak home some other way or try to find their
way home some other way?

Mr LANGDON — Some safer way?

Mr JEFFREY — That is a good question. I guess it would probably depend on the person. Some would
try to sneak home another way. It depends how far away you are. Sometimes they would have had three or four and
they would be pushing the limit, but may not be over or construed as drunk. They might take a chance. But if
someone has had a fair few they would find another way home through a mate, ringing someone up. That is just
through my experience. I cannot speak for everybody.

Mr LANGDON — If you have just driven up to Queensland you would have noticed, as I did, that in
rural New South Wales instead of having various speed limits through a town they have indicated a
50-kilometre-an-hour zone the whole way through the town. I notice when driving into a town there is a sign
saying that you are about to enter a 50 km/h zone. The only variance is when you are in front of a school. Would
you support that through rural towns?

Mr JEFFREY — Yes, I would. I think some sort of consistency in the speed through the town is
definitely a good thing, otherwise people concentrate too much on the speed limit of areas. You know, you
concentrate on other things. I heard Gary mention Deer Park before where it can get really busy. I think sometimes
you do not get the opportunity to see the sign as you go past too. If there is a consistent approach it is a good thing.
I heard you mention Colac earlier. I am not sure what the situation is there. I remember reading about it in the
Herald Sun. I would have to drive through it to assess it, but I think it would be a good thing. The other thing I like
about New South Wales is that they paint the speed limit on the road. That is just a personal opinion.

The CHAIR — So it is a different colour for different speed limits?

Mr LANGDON — No, they mark it on the road.

Mr HARKNESS — You cannot miss it.

Mr JEFFREY — There is no excuse then.

Mr EREN — Nobody could not say they did not see it.

Mr JEFFREY — I just think that it is a good idea.

Mr HARKNESS — They have the ‘60 ahead’ sign and then the marking on the road.

The CHAIR — I read somewhere else they were talking about having markings, different coloured lines
for whatever zone you are in, so if you are in a 60 km/h zone it is a blue one and if you are in a 50-kilometre zone it
is a yellow one.

Mr EREN — What if you are colourblind?

Mr JEFFREY — It would be difficult to maintain if it varies. You would have to re-mark it.

The CHAIR — They are probably those big figures on the road.
Mr EREN — What do you think that we as a state government or others as members of the federal government or local councils can do to help your council improve the road safety record?

Mr JEFFREY — I guess it would be the same answer as most councils — more funding and resources. I heard someone mention a road safety officer. We just do not have the staffing to cater for that sort of thing in-house. We did talk with a couple of neighbouring councils about sharing one between two or three councils for maybe one or two days a week. I think that would be a good idea just for a specific focus and they could drive these sorts of things as well, because at the moment we will be meeting perhaps once a quarter to review some stats and try to get some ideas to put into next year’s budget and then it is up to council to adopt that.

Mr HARKNESS — Yes, certainly engineering and enforcement must be covered with education.

Mr JEFFREY — Yes. We have put a focus on education in this document. That is how you reach the people. I think a dedicated officer would definitely help that, and that takes funding. It all comes down to that sort of thing.

Mr LANGDON — Do you think they need to continue the federal government’s Road to Recovery program?

Mr JEFFREY — I do. I think without it we just go back to where we were, backwards. The last couple of years we have made some minor inroads into improvement of our program for capital works, but probably every council could say the same thing. We probably have a 20-year funding gap between what our current spending is and what we need to spend. Road to Recovery has definitely been a big help in that regard, but it is only four years at the moment. Hopefully it will continue.

Mr LANGDON — What about black spot funding?

Mr JEFFREY — Black spot funding has been pretty good, actually. I used to work at Moorabool shire before I came here and it got a hell of a lot of money through black spot funding, as did Pyrenees shire probably, but I have not been there long enough to gauge how much money it got. But definitely some of the bridge endpost protection is good, intersection treatments are a big help. We need more bridge endpost protection. We would have maybe 80 unprotected bridges at the moment with no approach rail.

Mr HARKNESS — Are people going off the bridges?

Mr JEFFREY — I am not sure whether they are.

Mr HARKNESS — Or is it just the cost of repairing the bridge if somebody clips it?

The CHAIR — They are potential hazards, I suppose.

Mr JEFFREY — It is a potential hazard, yes. You have an embankment leading up to the bridge and just the bridge rail itself as a guide with no protection leading up. I guess it is the same as hitting a tree, so there is nowhere to go once you hit it. They are probably closer to the road edge than a tree is.

The CHAIR — They generally narrow down before you — —

Mr JEFFREY — Yes, particularly some of the rural ones. They are probably down to one lane or one-and-a-half lanes, some of them. I do not see why they make them so that people think they can squeeze two through. I might just raise a few issues. Bridge endposts and trees are definitely an issue in a rural environment. I think delineation is fairly important for some of our back roads, whether it be through guide posts, line marking, or various other means. I think at the moment we probably have kilometres and kilometres of roads with nothing — they are just lined with trees.

The CHAIR — Those roads would have gravel shoulders.

Mr JEFFREY — Probably gravel shoulders, some grass shoulders on just narrow roads, even on gravel roads. Delineation is particularly important. Even though the statistics do not show many night-time crashes, if you do not know the road and you drive on some of those rural roads at night, it can be a common mistake — it can be a mistake even if you do know the road. I perceive it as an issue.

The CHAIR — Are animals a concern — for example, kangaroos?
Mr JEFFREY — Definitely, yes, and livestock, particularly during drought periods when you often see farmers droving on the side of the road and all they have is a ‘Sheep next 1 kilometre’ sign.

The CHAIR — Are they particular causes of accidents?

Mr JEFFREY — I have not heard of one with livestock. It seems to have been increasing over the last couple of years.

The CHAIR — So it is not livestock escaping, but livestock being managed along the road?

Mr JEFFREY — Yes. I have not heard of an incident, but there could be one.

The CHAIR — I can imagine the difficulty if you are coming over the top of a crest of hill at 100 kilometres an hour and find there are 500 sheep sitting on the road.

Mr JEFFREY — It does happen and you come across it fairly often. So livestock and wildlife are a problem. There is not much you can do if a kangaroo jumps out in front of you. There are rail crossings, particularly with the opening of the Ballarat–Ararat railway line. There are a lot of non-signalised crossings within our municipality. Hopefully it does not happen, but the old cocky who has been driving on that road for the last eight years, or however long the trains have not been running, might just cross over, taking it for granted.

Mr LANGDON — What railway line is this?

Mr JEFFREY — The Ballarat–Ararat line, which is reopening — whenever it opens; it is supposed to be soon. Out of all the crossings through our shire — I am not sure how many there are — only two are signalised.

The CHAIR — I suppose there is also the maintenance of those crossings as well, especially on gravel roads.

Mr JEFFREY — Yes, that would be an issue definitely. I am not sure what they have put in place. I have noticed that whoever has the contract to do that line up has just put up a sign that reads ‘Railway open’, or something like that, and it is about 5 metres from the line itself. There are no advance warning signs.

Pedestrians: we have had five pedestrian incidents in five years in Beaufort, which is probably fairly low compared to some areas committee members may come from, but if you are elderly it is pretty hard to get across the Western Highway in particular, or in Avoca it is hard to get across the Sunraysia Highway. It is pretty hard to get across if you are elderly and there are B-doubles racing through continuously.

The CHAIR — What do you see as the answer there?

Mr JEFFREY — We are pushing for the installation of traffic lights in Beaufort and we have probably gone two-thirds of the way with Vicroads. Hopefully that gets through because it would be a great help, particularly with school children.

The CHAIR — Is that also an issue in Avoca where you have those two lanes of traffic?

Mr JEFFREY — I do not think it is as big an issue, probably because there is a median strip separating the road, so there is a bit of a refuge. It is one-way traffic, even though it is dual lane. It probably does not have the traffic as well.

Mr LANGDON — You said you had trouble with trees in close proximity to the road. Have you put up any wire rails near trees to stop cars hitting the trees?

Mr JEFFREY — We have not used the wire rope system at all.

Mr LANGDON — Is there any particular reason you have not used it?

Mr JEFFREY — We have not put in a huge amount of guardrail in the last five years and what we have put in has been part of the bridge endpost protection. I am not sure whether it is suited to that or not. I would have to check. I believe it is a bit cheaper.

Mr LANGDON — It is a lot cheaper.
Mr JEFFREY — I do not think we have put in much guardrail to really warrant a specialised company like that to come in. I heard someone mention motorbikes before. I am not sure which is worse, hitting a guardrail or a wire rope on a motorbike. I am pretty sure I would not want to hit either. If you are going to have some safety rail system, I cannot see that there would be any difference in having a guardrail or a wire rope so far as a motorcyclist is concerned.

The CHAIR — Is the Pyrenees shire part of a road safety network?

Mr JEFFREY — Yes, we are a member of the Central Highlands Road Safety Committee. Gary Smith, who was here earlier, was the director until a month ago and he attended those meetings. I guess his replacement will attend in the future.

The CHAIR — Angela Carey, who is the chairperson, presented a submission earlier today. Do you have anything to add?

Mr JEFFREY — I do not think so. I have covered what we wanted to get across.

The CHAIR — Thank you for your time and input. We have taken a transcript so we will send you a copy of that when it is available. If there is anything you would like to add please feel free to contact Alex or me.

Witness withdrew.
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll

Ballarat–20 October 2003

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 G. Both

Witness

Ms M. Weston.

Necessary corrections to be notified to executive officer of committee
Ms WESTON — My name is Michelle Anne Weston, and my residential address is 514 Ligar Street, Ballarat 3350.

The CHAIR — I will not go through the whole spiel because you have heard it many times today. I admire your interest in having sat through today and offer a very warm welcome to you. Having said that we now invite you to speak.

Ms WESTON — I was very interested to read the advertisement in Saturday’s paper about today’s inquiry, and straight away I stated writing out a few notes. I have been a licensed driver for 23 years and have not had a speeding fine, touch wood, but I do try and abide by the road rules.

I have heard people talk about education today and I think that is really important, but I am a dog owner and I know it is hard to teach old dogs new tricks, so I think we should go right back to when the learner drivers are learning to drive. From personal experience I have known some parents who are drivers who are allowed to teach their children out on the highways with L-plates. They sit beside them and they have no idea themselves of the road laws, the road rules or the attitudes required by drivers. They are teaching their attitudes and incompetence to the young people sitting beside them. I think it should be a requirement that before you get your licence you should get driving lessons from a proper establishment. You should not be able to go out with just anybody who might have got their licence 40 years ago and not kept up with who you give way to, what double lines mean — that sort of thing. Attitude is a big thing. We talk about education and behaviours — —

The CHAIR — Before we get off the learners, what we as a government have tried to introduce is a logging system where we are encouraging learners to have at least 120 hours experience behind the wheel before they go for their licence. Would you support that?

Ms WESTON — I would support that, but those 120 hours could be spent beside a bad driver so they have just picked up 120 hours of bad experiences. You just have to see parents walking their children across the red lights, jaywalking. They are not teaching children the right road rules. It is not survival.

First off, young people should go with a driving instructor to get the real road rules so they have the current rules and they know what they are up against. I have some aunts and uncles who are pretty ordinary drivers and they are teaching their young children how to drive. I am out there on the road with them and I see them overtake on double lines and things like that. They do not respect the road. They do not think it will happen to them, it is always going to happen to someone else.

Road rage is another thing. Road courtesy is not taught. We are not taught to abide by the rules or to be courteous to other drivers; it is, ‘I want to get there’ and being in a hurry and that sort of thing. Young people seem to be risk-takers, and if they can get away with a little thing it snowballs into a bigger thing until, ‘Oh dear, a head-on! Someone has died!’ or ‘What a terrible accident’. I do not think some accidents are accidents; I think they are just murder. I think people are overtaking on bends, they are overtaking on double lines, and they are asking for trouble. Nine times out of 10 they will get away with it. A young person out near Meredith in Moorabool shire did not get away with it; he killed an innocent person coming the other way as well as himself.

The CHAIR — So you are suggesting that we look at some type of train the trainer situation?

Ms WESTON — I think so. I remember when I got my licence 23 years ago I was taught only the bare minimum to pass the test. I was not taught everything to save my life. I was not taught everything that you need to know to be safe on the road. I was just taught the bare minimum to get past the written test and to get past the driving test. We should know what is in all the road laws, not just the few that Vicroads might pull out to test us on. I think we should all know there is to know. I do not know if everybody saw that national driving thing on TV a few months ago, but I took a real big interest in that, and I was very close scoring to the driving instructors. I have always been interested in vehicles. I got my licence when I was 18. I am a road user, a pedestrian, a cyclist, a motorcyclist, a truck driver and a pilot. I am safer up there than down here! When you are taught to be a pilot you are taught discipline and respect.

Another thing that has occurred to me is when there is an air crash CASA is there and does a big investigation. It then goes away and does a report and all the other pilots in Australia read about that and think there is a lesson to be learnt. But even when there is a major accident on a highway and we hear that the major collision squad from Melbourne has come up, we never hear what it found out. We never hear it was caused by a blow-out from a bald tyre, or they did not have this or that. We do not know what the reasons are, and we should learn by others’ unfortunate experiences.
The CHAIR — There needs to be a larger emphasis on education?

Ms WESTON — I think so, yes. Lots of different things. I think we should have more police presence.

Mr LANGDON — What is your opinion of the speed cameras?

Ms WESTON — Wonderful. And like this fellow sitting here before, I do not slow down if I think there is a speed camera because I know I am not speeding. I never have to slow down because of a guilty conscience, because I am not speeding. I have cruise control, but I know that when I go downhill I have to keep my eye on the speedo because it will speed up, and that is the only time I have to check my speedo — when I am going downhill.

Mr LANGDON — The state government’s policing of speed limits, you would support that?

Ms WESTON — Definitely. We have a shared walkway mall out here, Phoenix Mall. Cars come up one way — 10 km/h speed limit; there are meant to be people walking across. There is nothing shared about it. The cars come up there doing 40 km/h and the pedestrians have to get out of the way. I do not know how many times I have thought of ringing up the police and saying, ‘Why don’t you just sit there? Every second person would lose their licence. Teach them a lesson!’ One day someone will get knocked.

The CHAIR — Is alcohol an issue? We touched on it before in rural and regional Victoria where the local sports club is the focal point of small communities such as Beaufort, and you have the bush telegraph with regard to booze buses and the like, so we may see examples of younger drivers being inclined to take the risk of driving under the influence. Is that a reasonable scenario?

Ms WESTON — Maybe. I am not involved in any sporting clubs so I do not really know. I am not the type of person who, if I see a booze bus down the road or something like that, flashes their lights to the oncoming drivers to warn them. I think bugger it! If you are speeding or drink-driving you need to be to be pulled over and taught a lesson. I have been to a few safety seminars, being the fleet administrator here, and at one interesting talk I went to a few weeks ago a national fleet manager from Telstra said that every time they order a new vehicle it comes off the factory floor with day running lights so as soon as you turn the ignition on the lights are automatically on.

Mr LANGDON — They tend to push that more in New South Wales and Queensland. I have not seen any active signs in Victoria pushing that aspect.

The CHAIR — In your job as a fleet manager here in Ballarat do you have the opportunity to suggest that initiative?

Ms WESTON — I remember years ago reading about some research study that was done in Western Australia where they had a section of highway with a sign saying, ‘Please we are doing a survey: turn your lights on’. You drove so far with your lights on and then you turned them off so they could see whether having your lights on a dull day reduces the crashes, and it does. Every time I am on a highway, as soon as I start doing 100 km/h the lights go on. I think, if I am doing 100 km/h and someone else is doing 100 km/h, we are going to come together fairly close. If they want to overtake and they do not see me: head-on!

Mr EREN — Do you think you are going to get everyone a Volvo?

Ms WESTON — No, not at all. We buy Australian-made here!

Mr HARKNESS — Just as a case study, how many cars come back with bingles, either minor or major?

Ms WESTON — We have an insurance risk manager here and I hope he keeps statistics on how many crashes we have, but it does not filter through to me. A few months ago we were given a safer driving kit that has been put out by VicRoads. It is safety week next week and I have just signed up our vehicles to do the Drive Right program. I got the chief executive officer’s approval for that; he was pretty happy with it. Nobody knows yet that they are going to be driving around being courteous to others. It seems that some people, especially young people,
think that getting a licence to drive is a right. It is not a right, it is privilege — you have to earn it. You are out there and you have other people’s lives in your hands. It is scary when you are at the other end of it. I have almost been killed a couple of times on a pushbike, and when it is out of your hands it is awful.

The CHAIR — What other issues do you confront on regional and rural roads as a pushbike rider?

Ms WESTON — Pushbike riders are definitely second-class citizens. People do not want you there, you are just a nuisance. They do not think you should be on the road. Even though you are allowed to ride two abreast and you have a whole lane to yourself, people do not want you there on even one lane of the road. The other day I saw a fellow who was nearly pushed off the road; the car did not think the bike should be there.

The CHAIR — Do you have bicycle lanes in Ballarat?

Ms WESTON — We do, but they are not maintained very well. If you want to have a look at one go out via Norman Street. They are more gravel.

The CHAIR — I have noticed that too. Cars push the gravel into the bicycle lane so you are riding into gravel.

Ms WESTON — Bicycle lanes are fine, but they are not wide. If there is a parked car on the side of the road — and this has happened to me — and you ride past doing everything you can but somebody opens their door just as you are riding past, there is nothing you can do. A bicycle lane is fine, but when there is a car on one side and a car on the other side, you are still vulnerable.

Mr HARKNESS — Cyclists in country areas have a problem where there is no shoulder on some of the minor roads so you are having to mix it with large trucks and cars.

Ms WESTON — Yes, and there is no sharing involved when you are beside a B-double or a semitrailer. Who is going to share? The cyclist always has to give in. Just like the pedestrian and the car, the pedestrian always has to give in. The smaller always has to and that is not fair. That is just the way it is.

I also like what New South Wales does, even though it has been about seven years since I did the drive up the Newell Highway. I like how they warn you before you are coming into a town. I do not know if it is still the same, but there are signs. Here the speed limit is right when you get there, whereas up there they say ahead is an 80-kilometre zone.

Mr LANGDON — They do that; they say ahead is a 50-kilometre zone.

Ms WESTON — Yes, they give you a warning. I am a little short-sighted — and do not get me wrong, I have passed aviation medicals so I have reasonable eyesight — but in Victoria you are expected to be doing the speed as soon as you reach the sign. You see a sign that says 80 kilometres and you have to be doing 80 kilometres from that second. I think they should give a bit of warning like they do in New South Wales, such as coming up is an 80-kilometre zone so you can start to slow down, and by the time you get to the zone you have slowed down. A big 60 or 80 painted in big white writing on the road is also helpful. Just along here we change from 60 to 50, from 50 to 40, and you have to be looking for the little 50-kilometre sign among all the other parking signs, and it is very hard to see. If it was written on the road and you have to drive over it you cannot miss it. What other issues are there?

Mr LANGDON — You are representing the public at the moment.

Ms WESTON — Yes, I am the public. I refer to day running lights I went to a talk a little while ago about a safe car being put together by the Monash University Accident Research Centre and Ford and some other engineers, and it was really interesting. They have day running lights on that. I am hoping that one day I can get it into council policy. It has been proven to be safer for white cars driving on grey days or silver cars on grey days. Drivers do not want to put their lights on. If only they knew how hard they are to see.

The CHAIR — No doubt daylight running lights will be one of the issues we look at as part of this inquiry.

Ms WESTON — It would be helpful. And zero tolerance; the police let people get away with too much. They might see them overtake wrongly, or with a light out or something, but people get away with a little thing and
it escalates. There should be zero tolerance; hit them hard and teach them a lesson. That is probably about it. I do not like B-doubles. They should grow up and be trains. They are safer on the train lines.

The CHAIR — From Geelong to Melbourne there are B-triples, known as road trains. They are big.

Ms WESTON — I am very passionate about this.

The CHAIR — You have done a good job. I agree with you that the issue of daylight running lights is something the committee needs to and will look at. Thank you, well done.

Committee adjourned.