ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll

Colac – 9 December 2003

Members

Mr B. W. Bishop
Mr J. H. Eren
Mr A. R. Harkness
Mr C. A. C. Langdon

Mr T. W. Mulder
Mr E. G. Stoney
Mr I. D. Trezise

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

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms A. Douglas
Research Officer: Mr P. Nelson

Witness

Mr P. Wilson, Development Manager, South West Water.

Necessary corrections to be notified to
executive officer of committee
The CHAIR — Welcome to the Road Safety Committee. We are conducting two inquiries. The first is an inquiry into the country road toll, and concurrently we are also running one on crashes involving roadside objects. We have held three or four hearings throughout regional Victoria and will continue to do so during the month of February. These are public hearings and, as you can see, we will be taking transcript and will provide your organisation with a copy of that transcript in the near future. What you say today is protected by parliamentary privilege, which means that anything you say cannot be held against you legally in the future. Once again, thank you for your input and time. I am not too sure whether you have a submission. If you do not, we can probably get into some questions. Perhaps I can open the batting by asking what is the responsibility of South West Water and what is your geographic location and area?

Mr WILSON — South West Water is responsible for the taps and toilet side of water and sewerage service delivery in 16 towns within the south-west of Victoria, ranging from Camperdown through to Koroit, and then from Lismore down to the ocean.

We have had some concerns recently with above-ground hydrants and a push by the Country Fire Authority to have them used as a general firefighting facility rather than the below-ground hydrants which have traditionally been adopted throughout our authority. One of the issues that we raised with the CFA was the risk to road safety and also the risk to our infrastructure from cars hitting them. Fortunately we have agreed to not proceed down that path, although there have been a number of above-ground hydrants installed in the last 12 months.

The CHAIR — When you talk about above-ground hydrants, just describe what — —

Mr WILSON — They are the ones you see around Melbourne that sit up above the ground, about this high, with a steel cone covering them. When the cone comes up, you see an outlet tap that the fire hose hooks onto, whereas with the below-ground ones a hydrant is plugged in and attached below the ground, so when the hydrant is not there, when the fire truck has gone, it is flush with the ground.

The CHAIR — What is the CFA asking for — the above-ground hydrants?

Mr WILSON — Yes. And the reason it wants them is because it is more obvious where they are, so the trucks know where to go to hook onto them. I think that is the only reason the CFA is after them, although there was a secondary issue to do with how well the below-ground ones were indicated within the road reserve.

The CHAIR — How many above-ground hydrants would there be in, say, an area like Colac?

Mr WILSON — Colac is not in South West Water’s area of responsibility, but within Warrnambool there would be 2000 or 3000 hydrants, and probably about 10 above-ground ones. So it is not an issue with existing road infrastructure, but there is a risk if the CFA stuck to its line and said, ‘We want this’, of the scene changing in the future.

Mr EREN — So would it be more of a problem for the CFA in terms of accessing it or visibility wise? Is it harder to get to the underground ones?

Mr WILSON — As long as they are installed correctly, no, they are not harder to get to.

The other risk is that a car could be parked over the top of it so that the CFA cannot access it, but that is against the law. They are not supposed to park over the top of a hydrant.

Mr MULDER — They are signposted, are they?

Mr WILSON — Yes, they are.

The CHAIR — What you are saying is that the CFA is moving towards asking for above-ground hydrants?

Mr WILSON — It did have a push last year towards it, and it is only because of representations from ourselves and the city council that we have put that on hold. We are now developing a memorandum of understanding to do with the better indication of existing below-ground hydrants rather than going to above-ground hydrants.

I guess the other area of road safety for our infrastructure is air valves, which are large concrete pits above ground, which sit above the ground, something like this height, which are located along major pipeline routes which
generally are in road reserves. South West Water has pipelines that deliver water from the Otway Ranges right through to Warrnambool — big, long pipelines mostly running in road reserves with these pits scattered along the length of them. We have recently changed the design of these air valve pits so that they do not have to be as prominent, mainly because of approaches from Vicroads to do with a reasonably recent pipeline put through from Warrnambool to Koroit.

The CHAIR — There is a push to lower them from what they are at the present time?

Mr WILSON — Yes, and that is fine as long as it is done in the design phase, because the pipeline itself has to be altered. If there was a move to try to remove all these existing ones from the road reserves, it would mean megabucks in replacement costs.

Mr MULDER — Do the existing ones have crash barriers around them?

Mr WILSON — No. Generally they are on minor country roads rather than major highways, although having said that, on the Princes Highway between Allansford and Warrnambool, they are located along there, in the central median.

The CHAIR — Has there been a history of crashes?

Mr WILSON — Not that I am aware of, but I have only been in the area for 15 years. I do not know of any in that time.

The CHAIR — But the potential is there?

Mr WILSON — It is.

The CHAIR — Do you do systematic reviews of your infrastructure along the roads with regard to safety, or would that mainly fall within the auspices of Vicroads?

Mr WILSON — That would be left to Vicroads.

The CHAIR — Do you work closely with Vicroads in regard to road safety issues?

Mr WILSON — I am unaware of us having been approached by Vicroads other than the recent constructions. We do work in with Vicroads. We are obliged to make our infrastructure as safe as possible in the road pavement.

The CHAIR — You have your fire hydrants and your concrete pipes that we have just talked about.

Mr WILSON — I guess the other thing to do with road safety is the tripping hazards for pedestrians in pavements and the level of our manhole covers, our sewerage system covers, within the pavement. When a road is resheeted, often it will just be built up around the cover so you feel that ‘drr-drr’ as you are driving along that road as you go over one of these covers.

We have had approaches from the council, and we have approached the council to make sure that they let us know when these sorts of things are happening, so that we can work in with it and either raise the covers to match with the surface or have particular criteria that we work with so that if it gets beyond a certain height we have to do something about it.

Mr EREN — How is that going? Is the council informing you when it does roadworks?

Mr WILSON — On and off. I would have to say it is not consistently done, but I think the new road management bill will bring that to the fore and put in procedures that will solve that.

The CHAIR — I presume you also have legal liability as well surrounding tripping hazards and your infrastructure on the side of the roads.

Mr WILSON — Yes, and it is debatable as to whether it is our liability or the person who changes the road pavement who raises the issue or causes the fault. To my knowledge it has not been tested.

The CHAIR — You do not want it to be tested!
Mr WILSON — No.

Mr MULDER — When you have major works being carried out, who is responsible for those safety issues? Is it contractors, or does South West Water bear some of that liability? I am talking about major sewerage, mains works and objects on the side of the road, vehicles and so forth.

Mr WILSON — Generally our works are done by contractors, and through the contract document we attempt to make them responsible for all their actions. But I suppose it is up to the court to decide who is ultimately responsible.

Mr MULDER — Yes.

Mr WILSON — We have certain work practices that we require them to do, and we have an obligation to bring it to their attention if they are not complying with any of those. So to that extent we are responsible to a degree.

Mr EREN — Certain issues about mobile phones have been raised. Do your fleet cars have hands-free kits in them?

Mr WILSON — Yes.

The CHAIR — If there are no other questions, I thank you for your time and input. We appreciate your coming up from Warrnambool.

Witness withdrew.
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Witnesses

Mr G. Dolan, General Manager, Infrastructure
Cr S. Hart; and
Cr P. Mercer, Shire of Colac-Otway;
Mr M. Harrison, Chairman; and
Mr C. McAliese, Roadsafe Colac.

Necessary corrections to be notified to executive officer of committee
The CHAIR — Gary, Stewart and Michael, welcome to the parliamentary Road Safety Committee. We are conducting two inquiries — into the country road toll and into crashes involving roadside objects. We are travelling throughout regional and rural Victoria over the next couple of months and meeting with organisations such as yourself to help us with those inquiries. We are taking a transcript of the proceedings, and we will provide the Colac-Otway shire with a copy. What you say today is protected by parliamentary privilege, which means that what you say cannot be used against you legally. Thank you for your time and input; we appreciate it. If you would like to kick off proceedings by speaking to your submission, we will ask questions as we go through.

Mr DOLAN — I have provided our submission, and there is also a brochure, or essentially a tourist map of the area. It is something that tourists to the area would get, and it is probably easier to look at and read than an engineering map.

As you would be aware, Colac and the Colac-Otway shire are located about 2 hours from Melbourne, so there is convenient access to a heavily-populated area. A description of the shire would say that we have plains in the northern area, a hinterland area and an Otway Ranges area, and we also have a coastal environment. It is important to put that in context, because it is a diverse municipality and people will encounter differing driving conditions when they come here.

The economy: it is essentially a grazing area, so we have sheep and beef. It is a dairy area, and there is cropping as well. We have timber through the Otway area, and that gives rise to a different type of transport through the area. We also rely heavily on tourism, and as you can see, Colac is a service centre and a business area as well.

As background to our road network, we obviously do not have any motorways in this region, but we do have A, B and C roads. We have tourist roads, local roads and forest roads. The A road is the Princes Highway West, which runs through the area. The B roads are the Hamilton Highway and the Great Ocean Road, and the C roads are generally the north–south roads in the area from Cressy down to Colac and also from the Princes Highway through the coastal area. Turtons Track is one of the tourist roads, and the Cape Otway Lighthouse road is another. The map shows the forest roads, and that gives you an understanding that there are different levels of management and ownership of roads throughout the area. There are Vicroads roads, local roads and also the forest roads.

The CHAIR — Gary, you may not have the answer, but how many kilometres of gravel roads would you have?

Mr DOLAN — We have 1100 kilometres of local gravel roads and approximately 500 kilometres of sealed roads.

Just to provide a snapshot of the casualties, which are shown on page 3 of the handout, we can see that most casualty accidents happen on the declared road network and are generally along the Princes Highway and also south of the Princes Highway between that highway and the coastal areas. The coast does not show up, but you can take the bottom of the page as Bass Strait. These roads carry the most traffic, and they are the C category roads as well.

Mr EREN — Seeing as though you have so much gravel road, do you have a breakdown of the accidents that occur on them?

Mr DOLAN — No, I do not. I will get to those a little bit later because we have a strategy for them. I would assume that most people have seen the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria report that has come out in the last week. That paints a very good picture of roads typical to this area in terms of C category roads, and the issues that are on those types of roads. Generally, two-thirds of the accident types are run-off roads — either run-off roads at corners or run-off roads on straights. The booklet also identifies a standard which they consider C roads should be, and I think we are quite supportive of that — two 3.3 metre lane shoulders, either sealed or unsealed. I think we would be supportive of sealed shoulders in this area. Also line marking and centre and edge marking, guideposts, kerb and line markers and cleared safety zones. They are all fairly typical things that you would more than likely expect on a road network, but it is quite important for our network, particularly the C type roads because of the type of traffic mix that is in the area.

The C roads that we talk about here are predominantly from the Princes Highway through to the coast, the Colac–Lavers Hill Road and the Colac–Apollo Bay Road. They carry a mix of traffic and provide access for timber, and a large volume of that is timber traffic and dairy traffic, but tourism is also a big driver there. There is a mix of factors that makes the area difficult to drive. Some of the geometric road standards that we do have — the maintenance
standards that are in place — are the terrain that is there, the Otway Ranges and the weather patterns that we have. That mix makes it very difficult in this area.

The Royal Automobile Club of Victoria provides a desirable standard and, as I said, we are supportive of that. But along with that, there also needs to be an appropriate maintenance regime. I think that is probably where we fall down a bit in funding in this area, so it is a regime and appropriate funding to be put in place. As an example of maintenance standards, we gave back our roads to Vicroads, and yet we still manage them under contract to Vicroads. So there is a standard specification on how potholes and patching is to be fixed and a service level for the maintenance. We have a very short, sharp winter period which gives a rapid deterioration of our road network. Generally it is in the winter period. An example for maintenance or for patching is, ‘Is it a desirable fix or a final finish on a surface, or maybe a hot mix finish in which you end up with a smooth permanent finish?’ Because of the wet nature, we would do an emulsion seal with a stone finish, essentially because you cannot get a two-coat seal or a hot mix within the winter period. The patching seal is not considered to be a permanent thing.

There are issues in terms of road safety, in terms of the surplus stone that is left over the patch. We use the traffic to roll the stone in, but as you would be aware, loose stone is not a desirable finish on a road surface. It is a matter of economics and also a matter of practicalities. To have a hot mix finish, we would be requiring hot mix in small quantities, but the nearest patching plant is in Geelong so it is not practical to have a good finish, or a satisfactory finish, anyway. So we are really left with no option but to apply the emulsion-type finishes, and that raises issues and concerns. Another point would be the line marking. Generally the RACV report identifies that road standards should have good line marking. We would be lucky to get a 12-month cycle out of our lines. A cycle would normally be two years, so within 10 months, because of the narrowness of the roads, the transport would generally drive over the white lines, the edge lines or centre lines. That causes wear. The foliage, once it falls from the trees, and the grit on the road covers them up and makes them a little bit less visible.

One of the things that could also be incorporated into a maintenance-type standard is a performance level for white lines. Rather than saying a white line should be applied every two years, maybe it should be that white lines must have a certain reflectivity and be maintained over a period of time. We have spoken to Vicroads on that. It is really just getting a performance level so that people can be aware that white lines are there rather than the faintness of the road over a period of time. There is also an issue of signage. People coming into this area are generally unfamiliar — we should not say we are different from the rest of the world, put it in that context — but there is a different mix of traffic in the area. The main roads are the C grade roads. They vary from 4.5 metres in width to 6 metres in width. The mix of traffic is timber jinkers, tourist coach buses, cars, caravans.

It is different to what people would normally come across in their travels as a tourist or travelling from one destination to another. What may be of assistance is appropriate warning signage or advisory signage when people are approaching an area, that they may encounter these type of things — they may encounter timber jinkers on the road — and if you have come across them previously, you would understand that they take up or appear to take up a fair section of the road.

  Mr EREN — There is obviously a lot of livestock as well, so there are certain points where livestock crosses.

  Mr DOLAN — Yes.

  Mr EREN — In terms of fencing, is that maintained so that livestock does not wander onto the road?

  Mr DOLAN — We have a lot of stock issues here at almost specific times of the year. It seems to coincide with the early spring time when we have fogs in the area, and the cattle tend to wander at that time. It is not a regular thing. It is something to be aware of. Generally what we would ask for is commonsense — that people maintain their stock fences. One of the great benefits over the last few years with dairy farms in particular has been the underpass program. A lot of underpasses have been put in within this shire and also in Corangamite, so certainly that has been a bonus within the area. But there is the issue of cattle getting out and onto the roads, and that is really a maintenance issue of private fences.

  Mr MULDER — When we move from municipality to municipality in terms of the unmade road network, it is really a matter of available local material in terms of what they sheet with?

  Mr DOLAN — Yes.
Mr MULDER — I notice that Colac-Otway Shire has changed its sheeting material over the last couple of years.

Mr DOLAN — Yes.

Mr MULDER — It seems to be a better material. Could you explain what the rationale is behind that?

Mr DOLAN — We have one local quarry within the area. It provides crushed rock, and we have also have another of local materials, which is a scoria type base, which we have historically used. Scoria breaks down very quickly and there is not a very long life on that, about nine months. So we could spend a lot of money resheeting roads each year for very little benefit.

What we have gone to is the Lismore material which we initially trialled, but it has turned out to be very successful in the northern parts of the shire. It comes from outside the shire, but it is more of a yellow gravel. It goes down hard and provides a crust over the top, so if we can get a good profile on it and we have the right traffic, we will certainly get longer life out of it. It is not as good to use in the Otway area where there is a lot of rainfall, but certainly in the northern part of the shire it has been very good.

Mr MULDER — Can you expand on the line marking you were talking about with the major roads? With local line marking, on your local roads, what sort of a cyclic maintenance program do you run on those?

Mr DOLAN — Ideally we would have two years. It is not at two years. It would be beyond that. It is as required. Mind you, the local roads do not carry the volume of traffic that the main roads carry.

I want to talk about the road environment. There are really two areas to talk about. One is the natural environment and one is the introduced environment. Through the Otways the trees are essentially considered to be the natural environment. There are certain issues with trees. The interesting point that we find is that the ownership of trees is generally with the Department of Sustainability and Environment while they are standing, and yet when they fall, all of a sudden, it is not their trees any more. It is the responsible authority’s trees. So there are issues in terms of vegetation that we can remove and there are also conflicts between the environment components and road safety components. On clearways it would be great to have it clear six metres from the sealed edge, or certainly a reasonable distance, but then we run into issues with our environment people who say, ‘There is a native vegetation component here to consider’ and there are conflicting or competing issues.

The CHAIR — Gary, can you describe the process that you need to go through. When you have identified a tree that needs to be removed, what process do you need to go through, and do you have difficulties with that process?

Mr DOLAN — Terry may be familiar with one on our local roads, Shervilles Road. We had a section of local gravel road earmarked for major maintenance including resheeting and drainage and trees had also grown very close to the road formation. We need to get permission from the Department of Sustainability and Environment to remove the trees, and at times we need to go through a planning process to have them removed. There is a formal issue; we just cannot go out and make roads safe in terms of road safety measures. We need to get permission from other departments just to remove native vegetation and trees to get that clear way.

The CHAIR — How long does that process take generally?

Mr DOLAN — It can take from one month to several months.

The CHAIR — Are there trees still in place that you have identified as needing removing but which remain because of the process?

Mr DOLAN — To my knowledge, no.

The CHAIR — So through the process, the trees are generally removed. They are recognised as a genuine safety issue?

Mr DOLAN — Yes, they would be, where permission can be gained. School bus stops is another issue in terms of road safety where we run into a bit of trouble. In rural areas buses often use driveways as bus stops and that had been happening. Our works crew went out to remove some vegetation — it was not trees — an unskilled person would call it foliage and shrubs, but they ran into difficulties because it was native vegetation that could not be removed, but had to remain. So the sight distances are not great in that area.
Those are the types of issues that we run into, particularly with native vegetation. It is also the introduced area and one of the significant issues that you see as you drive around the area — not just this area but all areas — is guard rails over major culverts and bridges where there has not been any protection put on the guard rail system — although that has not happened in recent times. There does not appear to be a program in place to upgrade that to the current standards, so you can come across a guard rail on either side of the road over a culvert but there is no end protection. So that is certainly an issue that would be good to address in terms of run-off-road accidents.

The CHAIR — How many examples of that would you have? Dozens, hundreds, two or three?

Mr DOLAN — Probably greater than 20 and less than 50. That is on main roads. In terms of severity of crashes on unsealed roads, a report was put up to council earlier this year. We sought permission from the minister to investigate the feasibility of introducing an 80 kilometre-an-hour speed limit on unsealed roads. We realise that it is not just a local issue: that would be a statewide issue. We also recognise that there has been general concern within the local government areas, particularly in municipalities throughout the south-west on us. Where it is beyond the scope of a local government authority investigate is the levels of ownership of the roads because there are state roads, local roads and also the Department of Sustainability and Environment’s roads.

The CHAIR — Have you received any response from the government in regard to that?

Mr DOLAN — Yes, we have. We received a response that it has received our correspondence and also that VicRoads are looking at it through their speed limit advisory board, but that is the last we heard on that. We also received some correspondence from John Vogels, being one of the local members, who did not support the 80km speed limit on unsealed roads.

The CHAIR — We have met with a dozen or so councils now. One or two are strong advocates for an 80 kilometre-an-hour limit on gravel roads, and others disagree. There is obviously a variance between councils.

Mr DOLAN — I would imagine that. You would probably not get much support for an 80 kilometre-an-hour limit up in the north, especially the gravel ones. It is not just a road safety issue; there is also an economic issue because there are cost issues for transport times to get from A to B. The issues that we spoke about in terms of the purpose of rezoning, funding issues in introducing a program, community awareness and acceptance of a program. There needs to be an economic evaluation to see if the benefits were there. Continuity across the state and also the network ownership, and also input from all stakeholders. So we recognise that it is not an easy issue; it rolls off the tongue pretty easily, but it is certainly a bigger issue.

The CHAIR — What made the shire initiate that position? Was it crash history, or did the council recognise a potential problem?

Mr DOLAN — The analysis of the crash statistics would indicate that there are not a great number of accidents on the unsealed road network. It is more a question of whether there is something that can be done to make the area safer.

Mr MULDER — If you signposted a road as 80 kilometres an hour, it would not necessarily mean that it should be maintained in such a manner that a car can safely travel over 80 kilometres an hour throughout the year?

Mr DOLAN — We would not be trying to use an 80 kilometre-an-hour speed limit as a de facto maintenance regime. We have certainly received correspondence indicating that was our intention, but that would not be the case. Some roads can be driven at 80 kilometres an hour; some can be drive at in excess of that, but on other roads 80 kilometres is beyond the speed limit as well. Certainly that is also the case on sealed roads. It always come down to driving at the most appropriate speeds for the conditions and within your skill limitations. There is a bit of information on what we have done in regards to that. Initially there was a push from the Warrnambool City Council in regard to that.

A number of strategies have also been undertaken in recent times, and you would be aware of the Great Ocean Road strategy as one of them. There is also the Princes Highway corridor and in the local Geelong region there is the G21 strategy.

The Great Ocean Road is a great one. It provides vision and a number of policies relating to initiatives for this area. One of the things it identifies is access between the Princes Highway and the Great Ocean Road, and it picks up on road safety, but it discusses it in terms of investigating improvements or considering improvements and increases to road safety measures.
Mr HARKNESS — Just on the Great Ocean Road, Gary, another council that we have spoken to indicated that there are a disproportionate number of motorcycle accidents on the Great Ocean Road and also a heavy number of accidents that occur on Sundays. Is that the experience in this area too?

Mr DOLAN — It depends on who you are talking to, but that would be consistent with what happens through this area, too. If you look at the crash statistics, on certain routes that lead to the Great Ocean Road and on the Surf Coast it would be the Deans Marsh Road, and here it would be from here to the Great Ocean Road. There is also the Apollo Bay Road and also Lavers Hill Road in Colac. They are all similar issues with run-off-road accidents and motorcycles are overrepresented in the statistics. You do not have to be a rocket scientist to understand that.

Some of the measures that are being introduced — and the 80 kilometres an hour along the Great Ocean Road is a good one, not necessarily to pick up everyone who is doing over the limit, but certainly to pick up the peaks. There was a public consultation process on that and the good things that came out of that were to say that introducing an 80 kilometre an hour speed limit would help things, but unless it is accompanied by a package of measures to improve the road conditions, it is not going to be much good. The road is not flash at the moment, and with the increasing numbers of people, it really needs a package of widening, sealing and maintenance — the proper regime — to make it beneficial.

The CHAIR — Do you have any part of the Great Ocean Road in your municipality or is it really main access points?

Mr DOLAN — The section we have is from essentially Cumberland River through to about 10 minutes this side of Princetown, so we have a fair chunk of it, probably a third of it.

Mr MULDER — Does Colac-Otway shire have a road safety officer?

Mr DOLAN — No, we do not.

Mr HARKNESS — Are you planning to get one?

Mr DOLAN — No, we are not. The role of road safety generally falls within the infrastructure area, but recognising that it is broader than just an infrastructure or engineering type thing. When we developed our road management plan a number of years ago we incorporated people from all parts of the organisation, and that is the way it should be seen rather than just a particular person.

The CHAIR — Does the shire conduct safety audits or regular safety reviews of your road network?

Mr DOLAN — We have not in the past. We are able to do that now because we now have a person who is qualified to do auditing. That is something we will undertake on our designs and also our constructive works.

Mr MULDER — Do you have any applications for black spot funding currently before the state or federal governments in the shire?

Mr DOLAN — In the last program I think we put up a lot of proposals, but at the moment we have a number that are to be constructed within the next 12 months.

Mr MULDER — Have any been approved and will they be constructed?

Mr DOLAN — Just identifying the Great Ocean Road strategy is a good one. The Princes Highway is also a good one, and the G21 is a positive one as well. Improvements that have been made along the Princes Highway are good in terms of sealing and tactile line marking.

I have just summarised the key things in the submission. The black spot program should continue. I consider that there should be a program developed to upgrade C category roads concurrently with the Ms, the As, and the Bs. It seems to be that in the past they are left, or discussions will indicate that they will be done after the As and Bs have been treated. It appears to be that there is not that bucket of money that will ever get to be channelled into the C category. They really should be done concurrently, and it should be its own separate program, not supported or propped up by other programs. We have had some major work done on the Colac–Lavers Hill Road. That was through the black spot program. That included shoulder sealing and line marking and kerb and channel. We would consider that should be something that should be undertaken as capital works for normal C upgrades.
We would like the investigation of the 80 kilometre-per-hour speed limit to be undertaken, and also rather than consider it, that we actually implement the road safety initiatives identified in the Great Ocean Road strategy — the reason being that those roads are identified in the Great Ocean Road strategy as routes between the inland and coastal areas that are overrepresented in the accident statistics at the moment. By promoting them further with the Great Ocean Road strategy, it will only build on those statistics, so there really is a strong argument for having sections of the road upgraded. That is essentially our submission.

**Mr HARKNESS** — How many fatalities or serious injuries have there been over, say, the last year and what proportion of those were due to a vehicle hitting either an embankment, a pole or a tree?

**Mr DOLAN** — The police would indicate that our fatalities have been very low in this area. I think it is only in the order of one or two, and that has been a very strong point. It is more the casualty accidents that do happen, essentially the run-off off roads, and run-off roads on bends. The fatalities that have occurred, for reasons that probably Michael could go into, have a strong relation to fatigue as well as the road conditions. Michael could give you a presentation from the road safety perspective.

**Mr HARRISON** — We have a strong belief and have had for a long time that just tackling the speed issue is not working in the country because speed is only an issue when something has gone wrong, and it is what is causing something to be wrong that is what we should be tackling. We as a community road safety council have taken a number of initiatives on that — one being our Driver Reviver program that is open right through public holidays to encourage people to come off the road and take a break, because of the fatigue issue and the distances people travel. It is not 2 hours from Melbourne. It is 2 hours from the central business district, and most people do not live in the CBD. It is more like 3 to 4 hours travelling that they are doing, then sightseeing, and then attempting to drive home. It becomes a really long day.

Then we have the issue of the long distance truck drivers et cetera who are working extremely long hours. So the Driver Reviver and the fatigue issue are enormous issues that we should be tackling, putting in roadside stops, for instance, and sleep opportunity places, even if that is a partnership between service stations or shopping centres in towns.

The other one is the conditions of the road. We couple that with fatigue. The Princes Highway, for instance, from Geelong to Colac is in a deplorable state. In wet weather it is particularly bad because of the rutting in the road. You do not have an opportunity to move out of the ruts because the road surface is not that wide. It is the same as the roads through the Otways. They are narrow. They do not have sealed shoulders. Often after the shire has repaired roads, the trucks have chopped them up in wet weather, so you have ruts on the edge of the shoulders up to 6 to 8 inches deep. The car gets into that and drivers are fatigued and they are going not above the speed limit but faster than they probably should in that circumstance.

You put all that together and you have an enormous problem. So we believe shoulder sealing and the rumble strips would help with the fatigue issue on all our hinterland roads — the Lavers Hill Road in particular, which is going to be increasingly a tourist road. We are coupling that with buses — school buses, tourist buses — log trucks and milk tankers, and we get a fatigue issue on that road, because from the eastern suburbs of Melbourne to Lavers Hill is approximately 4 or 4½ hours. The fatigue issues comes in and there is no room for error. The trees are right on the side of the road. If you hit a rut, and you are not with it, you are in trouble.

In my business — I have a taxi company — we are seeing through the summer more and more accidents that are not reported accidents. People run off the roads, they damage their vehicles, they ring up the various RACV extra care and insurance companies, and my company goes out and picks the people up and takes them home. Because there is no hospitalisation or injuries — they may be injured but not to the point of hospitalisation — that is increasing. Through the summer we can expect two of those a week, and even the police are not notified because they have just run off the road, and for all sorts of reasons, other than their insurance companies, nobody knows about those accidents, but they could potentially be fatalities. So whether it is good luck or good management, sometimes we do not know. So fatigue, we believe, is the no. 1 issue, not speed.

**The CHAIR** — Fatigue with the tourist mob, you are saying?

**Mr HARRISON** — Yes, because of the mix of that traffic in the country. Inevitably it is tourists that run off the road. It is true that locals often get killed. That is another issue of fatigue; when they get close to home they tend to switch off — ‘I’m nearly home’. That is well documented. There is Phillip Swann’s work on that.
Mr HARKNESS — Of the accidents that are reported that you are aware of, do you collect any data on where those people come from — whether they are from the eastern suburbs, whether they are from Sydney, or Germany, or wherever?

Mr HARRISON — The taxi company does not, no.

Mr HARKNESS — But Roadsafe or the council?

The CHAIR — Or VicRoads?

Mr HARRISON — The upgrading of the Princes Highway, we believe is essential.

The CHAIR — Between Geelong and Colac?

Mr HARRISON — Geelong and Colac. With the amount of traffic it is carrying now and what we will be carrying with the 300 000 visitors to the treetop walk, of which we believe a third will come through Colac at this stage. The others will either enter from the Great Ocean Road and return back to the Great Ocean Road.

So then those hinterland roads need to have shoulder sealing with rumble strips as a matter of urgency. Maybe the speeds on those road should then be reduced in parts to recognise the dangers of that road. You mentioned livestock before; we also have kangaroos and they are not controlled so people who are not familiar with the area quite often unexpectedly meet a wallaby or a kangaroo in those areas which can either cause them to run off the road and there is nowhere to go, or they hit the kangaroo and have a problem.

The road safety council has a good working relationship with the shire on a lot of these issues, but it is limited with funds. A shire representative and a councillor sit on our road safety council. Our council has representation from a wide cross-section of the community. We have representatives from the police, ambulance, fire brigade, trucking companies, bus companies, taxi and the general public. It is a hands-on road safety council: the people actually go out and work in the field.

Mr MULDER — How many people visit your Driver Reviver stations in Colac, and how widespread are they across the state?

Mr HARRISON — It is fairly widespread. It is mostly run by the Lions clubs or the SES. Colac did not fall into that category: we have it attached to our community road safety council, so it is open more than the average. I am not sure of the numbers of people. Cliff, would you be able to say how many people you have on Driver Revival?

Mr McALIESE — Last year 5800 people visited us on the 36 nights we were open. At Christmas last year an article went into the local paper here, entitled, 'Take a deep breath and repeat this'. It then listed 38 entries that visitors to Driver Reviver had signed in our visitor’s book over the Christmas period alone. I think at Christmas we had 2700 people over 16 days.

The CHAIR — For the purposes of the transcript, what is your name and what organisation are you with?

Mr McALIESE — My name is Cliff McAliese and I am deputy chairman of the road safety council, and also treasurer of the Driver Reviver program and I keep the statistics for that program.

Mr HARRISON — Our other concern is the increasing number of cyclists on the Great Ocean Road. Overseas that road is being marketed as a good road to cycle on. We differ; it is not a good road to cycle on. It is narrow, there are very few bike lanes and if you get two cyclists riding side-by-side, even if you come around a bend at 80 kilometres an hour, it can be a dangerous situation.

The CHAIR — Or tourist buses.

Mr HARRISON — Or tourists buses, yes. That is a great concern. We have already mentioned motorcyclists. There is a huge concern when we patch roads and loose gravel is left. For a motor car it is not noticeable; it is almost a suicide patch for motorcyclists. If a motorcyclist happens to hit that gravel on a bend and a motorcyclist — not necessarily speeding, but going at the legal limit — he can lose the bike, and we are seeing an increasing number of fatalities on motor bikes and we do not believe that it is all because of speed; it is often because of the road surface and other traffic, not the motorcyclist.
The CHAIR — Gary and Stewart, what is the council’s position on the Colac–Geelong road?

Mr DOLAN — I do not think council has a formal position on it. We certainly support the G21 strategy and the bypass around Geelong to get people into the area. I think that should happen, and then the duplication of the road. There are a number of other things that can be done as well including the railway crossing near Birregurra. Another strategy relating directly to Colac is either a bypass or an alternative transport route around Colac. We certainly support the upgrade and duplication because the major commercial and heavy vehicle traffic is between those two townships of Colac and Geelong — I think it is in the order of 15 per cent; it is greater than the other parts of the Princes Highway West.

The CHAIR — So the council’s position is that the Geelong bypass should first be completed, followed by the duplication of the Colac–Geelong road?

Mr DOLAN — That is more of a personal opinion rather than the council’s position. Logic would almost say that that is the sort of thing that should happen.

Mr HART — Generally councillors are of the view that both should be done about the same time; one goes hand in glove with the other. We are all looking forward to that happening. we feel that Colac is a very busy centre and needs to be serviced by bypassing Geelong. The general development in the south-west has been exposed in the last few years, to say the least, and roads in general have not kept up with that growth and the increase in traffic.

Mr HARRISON — One last concern again with fatigue on the link roads between the Great Ocean Road and Colac is the lack of overtaking opportunities. If you get behind the logging trucks and so on it can be quite frustrating for motorists. If they are not aware of how far they have got to go before they can overtake the truck, they get very frustrated and will take overtaking chances. There are no opportunities to overtake between Apollo Bay or Colac and Lavers Hill. It is approximately 1 hours drive for both those roads. That is a huge concern.

Mr MULDER — With the patching that is taking place on the road mainly between Winchelsea and Geelong, but certainly I think it will come this way with the Princes Highway, they seem to be using a hot mix material for the patching, and inside that there is a bitumen or a rough finish on the road. Is that going to create some problems in relation to braking on two different surfaces?

Mr DOLAN — Yes, it may be if there is lamination between the two surfaces. You would aim to get the new patch within the confines of the work rather than spread over the old surface.

Mr HART — If I could just run through some points. At the risk of repeating Gary’s comprehensive report and Michael has covered a lot of important issues, I would like to just remind you that in the Otways we measure our rainfall in metres — 2 metres or 6 feet. It is not the measurement, but the fact that it is so wet is quite often overlooked and it presents a lot of problems with road maintenance.

There is a bad mix on our local roads — I think Gary referred to them as C grade roads — where we have narrow pavements, unsealed shoulders and this mix of wide trucks with small cars. Tourism has gone crazy in the last few years especially since the opening of the Otway Fly. There was an estimated 300,000 visitors during the September holidays. I went there and could not believe that I could only just get a car parking place — admittedly it was school holidays — but it was freezing cold weather, and 1500 visitors were recorded on the busiest highest day in September. Admittedly it has tapered off a little bit but it is still extremely busy, and it adds to what I call the bad mix of heavy and light vehicles on a narrow road. Out on the highway it does not matter; there is plenty of room for people to get around. As has already been mentioned, drivers get impatient and I find they make the wrong move at the wrong time. I often move over for drivers to pass me, and they will sit there and get so impatient that they will pass at the wrong time and cause a near miss.

Between the shire, the road safety council and cooperation with the infrastructure department we have fixed a lot of the school bus problems. We needed more pull-over bays; we have taken that in hand and looked at that problem.

As has already been mentioned, on the motorbike issue, it is well established in motorbike circles, ‘If you want a buzz, go down the ocean road or the Deans Marsh road, or the Black Spur up at Healesville’ — they all know these roads, and we cannot help them wanting to have an exhilarating time, but I feel the 80 kilometres an hour will penalise other motorists and will not slow down the problem. The problem is motorbikes in general. If it were better policed and it became known that there were cameras in the area, then they might slow down a little bit and there would be less trouble. I am sure the last 5 or 10 kilometres an hour is the bit of speed that gets them into
trouble. It has been mentioned that with stones on the road, it is very hard to keep a pavement clear of every stone, but they are deadly for motorbikes.

The CHAIR — Just on that enforcement issue, what you are advocating is there should be more enforcement of speeding restrictions on the Great Ocean Road. What about across the whole municipality with regard to enforcement — initiatives that as a government we could take?

Mr HART — I believe so. It is a very unpopular decision, but I will speak up and say I think it is absolutely necessary that there are intermittent cameras. I heard the other day that you can have a camera in the little cat’s eye in the middle of the road that can pick up speeding vehicles and photograph their number et cetera. It is the only thing that is going to slow people down. I had it on my list, but I was not going on mention it.

The CHAIR — It is an important issue.

Mr HART — I would like to add weight to it if I could. That is about it from me. Thank you for the opportunity.

Mr EREN — The road between Barwon Downs and the township of Forrest is a fairly windy road up. Until recently it was 100 kilometres an hour through certain sections which you would be crazy to do 100 kilometres an hour on, but they have recently reduced it to 80 kilometres. Do we have any statistics of prior and now in terms of prevention of accidents after the change in the speed limit?

Mr DOLAN — I could get statistics. I am not too sure if VicRoads would have the statistics at the moment. Are you sure it has gone down to 80 kilometres an hour between those two townships?

Mr EREN — Yes, certain sections of it, yes.

Mr DOLAN — We could follow that up and see if VicRoads has any statistics on that.

The CHAIR — I am mindful of the time, but we have talked about the Great Ocean Road at length because it is an important road. You said before there should be measures taken to make a road safer. What measures do you believe should be taken to make the Great Ocean Road safer?

Mr DOLAN — There was a meeting down there recently with VicRoads and the speed advisory group. The issues we spoke of were the number of pullouts where visitors informally pull to the edge of the road to get a better viewing point and then drive back onto the road, bringing gravel back onto the road. That is a key issue. So it is matter of trying to restrict those, or formalise more viewing points. There is the issue of the types of methods that have been used to fix patches. There are issues of appropriate road width. The carriageway seems to be sealed, but there are no verges or the shoulders are not sealed. Those are typically the measures. There is a lot of guardrail on the road which is appropriate. There are appropriate chervons, appropriate cambers on corners. Some of the spots that we looked at had the wrong cambers on the corners, so although it was adequate for cars, that was not the case for motorbikes. It is general commonsense. It is trying to pick up the practical things and use them.

The CHAIR — Turnouts?

Mr DOLAN — Turnouts are something that was raised, and that is something that could be incorporated with the Great Ocean Road strategy up to the inland area. With turnouts people need to understand what they are there for. They need to have appropriate distances to pull into because often the turnouts are very short and sharp, and also appropriate distances to pull back in. Turnouts seem to be a foreign thing to people in Victoria and people who are travelling through. A lot of people just do not understand what they are there for, but it is difficult trying to get a sign that actually explains what they are for.

Mr MULDER — You said that the nearest patching plant for hot mix is Geelong. Are there no technology mini-patching operations to use hot mix in terms of a maintenance program?

Mr DOLAN — There is what you would call a cocktail or premix, but it does not have the same durability or long life, and often those type of patches can get pushed out with the type of vehicles we have in the area as well, which is a problem.

Mr HARRISON — On improving the safety, we have advocated for some time that there should be large arrows on the Great Ocean Road indicating that you should be on the left, like they use in Europe, because a lot of tourists who drive on the opposite side of the road in their normal day-to-day life, visit us and whenever they have
an emergency they will revert to a natural instinct which is to do what they did in their country, which is the opposite to what they should be doing. If there are arrows and they are large arrows constantly on the road indicating to keep left, that would make, we believe, a large difference and would not be very expensive.

The other one is to improve those link roads. We need to make it attractive for the non-tourist traffic to come inland and go down the Princes Highway rather than the Great Ocean Road, therefore reducing that traffic. It will not happen until we improve those link roads.

The CHAIR — No further questions. Thank you, Gary, Stuart and Michael for your time. We are taking transcript and will provide the shire with a copy of the transcript over the next couple of weeks.

Cr MERCER — Excuse me, Chair, as a councillor can I add a couple of points?

The CHAIR — You are a councillor with the Colac-Otway shire?

Cr MERCER — Yes. I have been here nearly 40 years and have watched the roads deteriorate. My name is Peter Mercer. These are points that have not been raised. Mention was made of road rutting, but no mention was made of the wheel tracks, the road indentations on our roads. They are all right when the road is dry, but when they fill with water, particularly with lighter vehicles, you get aquaplaning. VicRoads takes no notice at all of that because when it tests it with its machines it still gives a smooth ride, but there are sections, particularly on the Colac-Apollo Bay road, which are particularly bad for aquaplaning, and small vehicles being lost.

John Eren asked a question about stock on the roads. The major cause of stock on roads at the present moment is, as mentioned earlier, that trees are not allowed to be cut down. Even where a farmer knows a tree is going to fall across his fence, he is not allowed to cut it down, so the tree falls across the fence and then lets his stock out. And there are some sections of our roads where that is a frequent occurrence. When I say ‘frequent’, it may even be fortnightly that it is occurring, and because they are lovely old trees full of white ants, they have to stay there.

Mike Harrison mentioned that there is no overtaking on some of these roads between the Princes Highway and the Great Ocean Road or the coast. There are not just no overtaking lanes, there are not even pullovers. I have noticed a tremendous courtesy of drivers on these roads, quite prepared to pull off when they know a vehicle behind them is travelling faster than they are, but they cannot find anywhere to pull over, and that of course leads to — —

The CHAIR — Even if they do, they subsequently pull onto the gravel shoulder.

Cr MERCER — The road is not wide enough to pull onto the gravel shoulder, so people sit behind, getting more and more frustrated and then take the risk when it does look as if they might be able to pass.

The only other thing I would mention is the whole problem that there is not enough funding either for the major roads or on the shire roads, and I think it is important for the panel to realise that nearly a third of our shire is unrateable, and on average every six ratepayers have to maintain one kilometre of roads, and that is just not bearable.

The CHAIR — Thank you for your input. We appreciate it. You will receive a copy of the transcript.

Witnesses withdrew.
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll

Colac – 9 December 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 P. Nelson

Witness

Mr P. Younis, Group Manager, Infrastructure and Development, Shire of Corangamite.

Necessary corrections to be notified to executive officer of committee
The CHAIR — Welcome, Paul. As you are aware, we are the parliamentary Road Safety Committee. We are taking a transcript and the shire will be provided with a copy of it. We are conducting concurrent inquiries: the first is an inquiry into the country road toll, and the other is one on crashes involving roadside objects. What you say today is protected by parliamentary privilege, which means that anything you say cannot be held against you legally in the future. If you would like to present your submission we will ask questions as we go along. We look forward to what you have to say.

Mr YOUNIS — Thank you, and thank you for the opportunity to present issues relating to road safety to the committee. I have some overheads to show and I have done some copies of them. I apologise for the small size of the copies. There is also a map of the shire, and I apologise for its large size, but as an engineer it is important that maps are able to be read. I will go through some of the background of the shire and tell you some of the issues that impact on road safety. I will then go through some of the strategies that we have implemented that we believe will make a difference, and some of the things that we believe can be done in the future to make a difference.

Overheads shown.

Mr YOUNIS — The overheads are a guide, but it is also important to have an image of some of the issues as we go through them.

Our shire covers 4600 square kilometres. It goes from Port Campbell in the south right up to Skipton in the north. It is a large shire with a diverse range of activities in it as well as diverse conditions. The total expenditure in our shire is around $30 million per year. We have a rate revenue of around $9 million, and we spend over 50 per cent of that on our road network. We have 1200 kilometres of local unsealed roads and about 900 kilometres of sealed local roads, so it is an extensive local road network on top of the declared road network of 600 kilometres. That includes the Hamilton Highway, the Glenelg Highway, the Princes Highway and the Great Ocean Road. All of those highways run through a section of our shire.

I heard you talking before about the balance between roadside vegetation and roads. It is certainly an issue, particularly in the south of our shire. One of the measures that we have introduced in some areas is to provide kerb and channelling to retain some native vegetation and to satisfy the requirements of the Department of Sustainability and Environment while trying to retain a safe and wide-enough road surface.

The CHAIR — We can see the kerb and channelling in that overhead. What lengths of kerb and channelling do you have?

Mr YOUNIS — We would do it only on limited areas, just on small sections around particular impacts. It is very expensive and we limit it to significant vegetation areas. You can see that on the inside of a kerb and it is less of a safety issue and more of an environmental issue.

Mr MULDER — Is there also an issue of drainage?

Mr YOUNIS — Certainly, to put a drain around that would mean the removal or damage to the vegetation. So the kerb and channel is there for drainage and to make sure that you can get a wide enough road surface.

Mr MULDER — Okay.

Mr YOUNIS — Some of the impacts on road safety are not only from the environment but also in relation to our high rainfall which impacts on the road conditions, and also the demographics of our shire: we have an ageing population. Despite that, the young people are overrepresented in our casualty accidents. More than 50 per cent of our population live outside the main population centres, so we have a significant proportion who need to travel every time they need to do anything. So there is a lot of lengthy travel on the local roads. Clearly there is no public transport for that population and they need to travel for all their activities, whether it be schooling, cultural or sporting activities or for health.

Mr EREN — So what would be the age demographics?

Mr YOUNIS — The over-60s are increasing although I cannot remember the exact figures, but at the same time, in the last census there was a slight increase in the population of under-20s. People who have just finished school go away, and there is a drop in that category but it is increasing in the over-40s compared to state averages. So we have a higher state average of people over 65 years.
Mr EREN — And obviously mostly reliant on their vehicles?

Mr YOUNIS — Very much reliant on their vehicle. There is limited provision of public transport for elderly people and the majority have to travel on their own.

The shire comprises heavy dairy industry; there are over 1500 dairies and that industry has been growing at a rate of 7 per cent to 8 per cent consistently for the last 10 years. There is significant farm-gate value in the dairy industry, and it has a major impact on the road condition. We have one heavy vehicle travelling to every farm gate every day on all of our local roads including our unsealed roads. So the heavy vehicles are not just concentrated on our highways; they are concentrated across our entire network.

Gas production has emerged in the last five or six years and been significant. One major gas plant has already been constructed, one is being constructed and a significant plant is being proposed to be constructed early next year subject to approvals. That Woodside plant will add in excess of 40 B-double transport trips a day of condensate, which is a by-product of gas and/or liquefied petroleum gas so it is highly flammable material. So just that one plant will generate 40 B-double truck trips a day — and that is growing.

The CHAIR — On what roads will those trucks travel?

Mr YOUNIS — That is part of the panel discussions. The council is certainly keen for them not to travel through any of the towns, particularly Timboon. The proposal from Woodside is that Timboon be one of the routes. We certainly do not believe that should be the case. It will be a mix of local and main roads. The plant’s location means it has to use local roads.

The tourism industry clearly is a major industry with another different mix of traffic and different pressures. There are 120 000-odd vehicles a year to the Twelve Apostles. The traffic volumes are increasing by over 4 per cent a year. I think one of the significant issues in relation to the tourism industry is the low familiarity with the road network and the expectation that in travelling to an international icon, being the Twelve Apostles, the expectation is that they will have an international standard road, and that is not the case. They travel along the Great Ocean Road, back through the hinterland, and the roads are typically very narrow, windy and have failures in them, and that is not an expectation that they are prepared for.

The CHAIR — How do you think we can resolve that issue?

Mr YOUNIS — Clearly, education is a component. A significant issue is raising that expectation that it is a day trip to go to the Twelve Apostles from Melbourne — that with the road conditions, the environment and the fatigue issues, it is more than a day trip. It is clearly marketed in many sectors in Melbourne that it is a day trip — the industry does want them back there — and it is marketed as a day trip, and it clearly is not.

The CHAIR — So they should have education and information prior to setting out?

Mr YOUNIS — Prior to setting out, yes.

The CHAIR — And responsible travel operators.

Mr YOUNIS — I suppose it also gets back to information from the tourism industry provided in the aeroplanes on the way over. Every aeroplane you go in, there is an image of the Twelve Apostles.

The CHAIR — And plenty of time to read.

Mr YOUNIS — Yes. So that point we believe would be a good point, but certainly it is prior to travel that that needs to be done.

Another interesting part about our environment and the road conditions and the impact on it is that as a shire we concentrate our road safety initiatives on the road condition. Clearly there are speed, fatigue and alcohol issues in relation to casualty crashes and fatalities. As a shire we believe the road condition, although it may not be a contributing first-off factor, means the margin of error that is provided for in our roads is very small, and the conditions of the road are such that in the end if it is fatigue or speed that is the primary contributing cause of the accident, certainly the road condition, if it was better maintained and better controlled, would minimise or limit the damage that is caused from that. Eighty per cent of our sealed road network on a daily basis has heavy vehicles over it, and over 50 per cent of our unsealed gravel roads have heavy vehicles over them every day.
Mr Mulder — Have the roads taking those heavy vehicles been upgraded in recent years to cater for those heavy vehicles, because a lot of those older roads in the backblocks were really designed for a tray truck and a milk can. How are you going in terms of a shire in getting on top of the upgrades of those roads?

Mr Younis — Very slowly. The majority of our roads, particularly in the Heytesbury settlement network, were really pushed up with dozers and a track put in, and that was it. They were all put in at the same time. They were put in to a very low standard, and they are continually a burden on the community in relation to maintenance and upgrade. The vehicles that are on them now — 19 metre B-doubles — are allowed on every single one of those roads, by legislation, by right, and they do use them, and they cannot cope with that size vehicles. But it is also the volume. When you talk about a 7 to 8 per cent increase in the dairy production each year, it is not just the amount of that milk going out of the gate; it is the supplementary feed that is coming in, and the amount of traffic increase all added to that introduction is significant. It is not automatically affected in volumes, because instead of taking a 12 tonne truck there are 40 tonne trucks going in, so it is spread over the same number of trips, but certainly the volume travelling on the roads is significantly increasing.

The Chair — A number of councils, including Colac-Otway shire, have advocated for an 80-kilometre-an-hour speed limit on gravel roads. Does Corangamite shire have a position on that?

Mr Younis — Yes, Corangamite shire does not support that position. There were a number of reasons when it was considered by council. Primarily, however, it is about particularly our gravel road network. There are many times of the year where 80-kilometre-an-hour is not a safe speed to travel on those roads. The condition of the road can vary dramatically very quickly. With high rainfall and heavy truck usage, the condition varies dramatically and overnight can go from an 80-kilometre-an-hour road to a 40-kilometre-an-hour road. What we support is a program of education to drive in accordance with the conditions, and we are concerned that by advertising an 80-kilometre speed on that road, or the ability that that road can be used at 80 kilometres an hour, you are encouraging — —

Mr Eren — So when the road deteriorates to the extent that it is only safe to drive at 40 kilometres an hour, do you then put up signs?

Mr Younis — No, not necessarily. The nature of the roads themselves — —

Mr Eren — So if the driver is not particularly familiar with that area, how would the driver know? How do you educate somebody if they are not familiar with the area?

Mr Younis — I am certainly no expert on how to provide education to people, but one of the areas that we have identified is advisory signage. One of our road safety audits has identified a lack of advisory signage on kerb speeds, narrow pavements et cetera, and the increase and expansion of our advisory signage program would be beneficial in those circumstances — keeping in mind also that on a lot of our gravel roads there is not a high level of traffic on those roads that are unfamiliar with it. They generally are people who are familiar with the roads.

The Chair — Local traffic.

Mr Younis — It is local traffic. The sealed road network has a lot of tourist traffic on it, but not the gravel roads. There are people who are unfamiliar with them, but it is not a significant issue. So they are familiar with the roads; it is just that the conditions vary. They can vary within an hour. If we get a heavy rainfall and two or three heavy transports over those roads, and there is a significant pothole or soft spot that arrives, or you get a snap dry period and all of a sudden you will have very loose materials on the shoulder within a couple of days, and the next time they go across there and around that corner, which they could travel at 80 kilometres an hour last week, this week it is 40 kilometres an hour.

Mr Eren — Basically it is commonsense stuff?

Mr Younis — It is commonsense. It is about knowing how to drive, particularly on gravel roads. The problem we have with our sealed roads is the shoulders are very poorly maintained. We really do not maintain the shoulders properly, and people get into that situation off a sealed road, onto a gravel shoulder, onto a gravel road, and many people do not know how to handle those situations. Some of the statistics for our shire — and we are not dissimilar to most shires — is that most of the accidents are not at intersections; they are on straights and curves on rural roads, they are during the daytime, they are in clear conditions. There is nothing particularly that stands out that says this is a black spot, or this is a particular problem.
It is interesting to note that although we have a significant volume of heavy vehicles on the roads, they do not necessarily show up in the statistics. Eight per cent of our accidents involve heavy vehicles, whereas typically our roads would have between 12 per cent and 20 per cent of heavy vehicle usage on them, so they are not over-represented in the casualty crash statistics. Having said that, they cause significant road damage which can then contribute to the other accidents. Generally we have around 70 to 80 casualty accidents a year across the shire, although last year there was a drop down to just under 60. That has not really changed for the last 10 years; it has typically been that, so we have not had a sustained reduction. Sixty-five per cent of accidents are due to loss of control and hitting an object — over 30 per cent hit trees or fences. Young males drivers are highly represented in the figures, and our townships are not over-represented, which is interesting, although the volumes are high in our townships. However, having said that, although our statistics do not show it, we have implemented a program of safety improvements in our townships through pedestrian crossings, and that is as a response to our changing demographics. We have an older population and we certainly see that being an issue — or a potential issue — in the future.

Mr EREN — Do you have problems with motorcyclists?

Mr YOUNIS — They are not overly represented at all. The Great Ocean Road, which is typically the area where motorcyclists come to grief, is primarily in the Otway region. The Great Ocean Road in our region starts around Moonlight Head and goes through to Peterborough, and that is primarily the winding section just coming out of the Otway region and onto the flatter plains. So the statistics for motorcycle accidents do not show up as being overly represented in our shire — but go 5 kilometres to the east and they certainly are.

Mr MULDER — Do you have a break-up of what roadside objects are involved in accidents?

Mr YOUNIS — Yes, it is mainly trees — 25 per cent trees. Fences represent in the order of 10 per cent to 15 per cent — I cannot remember the figures exactly.

The CHAIR — Would I be right in saying that fences are far more forgiving than trees?

Mr YOUNIS — Certainly, yes. Fixed object casualty accidents account for 35 per cent, which is primarily trees and fences. It is interesting with fences; I tried to pull out some of the statistics when we did our roadside strategy on fences last year to try and see why they seemed to be higher than in most other areas. I really could not pick out why. It may be the particular way that the police and other people report them; it could just be a vagary like that.

Mr MULDER — How prominent are tourists in your crash statistics?

Mr YOUNIS — We do not have statistics that say where people come from. However, anecdotally and from my knowledge of fatal accidents, we have around 3 to 5 fatalities a year, and in the last two years, 4 of those have been tourists.

Mr EREN — On sealed roads?

Mr YOUNIS — On sealed roads. Three of the fatalities were travelling on the wrong side of the road. Anecdotally I would say that they appear to be overly represented in the fatalities, but I certainly do not have the statistics to back that up. If I am travelling into Port Campbell early in the morning, many times before 10 o’clock or 11 o’clock, I am very conscious of people driving out on the wrong side of the road.

Mr MULDER — We had evidence at one of the other locations yesterday suggesting that when tourists pull out of a side road, they typically turn out onto the wrong side of the road.

Mr YOUNIS — That is the case. When you travel past London Bridge and people are pulling out of there or the Twelve Apostles, I am always conscious that they may pull out onto the wrong side of the road. I have seen it happen many times. It does not show up in the statistics as casualty accidents, but the potential is certainly there. People driving on the wrong side of the road does show up, and I know of four fatalities in the last three years that are directly related to people leaving their motel, with no other vehicles on the road, and driving out and travelling on the wrong side of the road.

Mr HARKNESS — From a local government perspective it makes any education campaign very difficult.
Mr YOUNIS — Very difficult. We have thought of painting lines on the tarmac at the exit to motels and information in the motels themselves. They are areas that could assist. We do a number of community surveys. This overhead shows a Vicroads road down through the Princetown area with vegetation. Heavy vehicles cause that sort of damage.

Mr EREN — So large amounts of rain is a major cause of damage as well?

Mr YOUNIS — Yes.

Mr EREN — So how quick is the state government or the local council in fixing that?

Mr YOUNIS — We would be looking to get to that type of defect fixed within two weeks. We would not consider that severe in relation to the rest of the network.

Mr MULDER — How is that triggered? That is a maintenance issue, and you have a maintenance contract with Vicroads. Do you have to get permission from Vicroads to do the work?

Mr YOUNIS — No.

Mr MULDER — Or do you do the work?

Mr YOUNIS — No, we do the work. We do a monthly formal inspection of the main road network, and a sliding scale of inspections. However, typically those sorts of defects would come up within a day or two days and we would rely on feedback from the community or our patrols to pick them up.

We do three road-related surveys each year. One is a general survey which includes roads. We do an annual road survey, which specifically targets road conditions, and we also have a complaints system, and in our complaints system over 90 per cent of the issues we get are related to roads. Our community tells us that the road condition and the road standard is the biggest area of concern that it has. We continually score poorly in our performance in the community’s eyes in relation to our roads. Particularly with our road surveys, the biggest issue is road shoulders and the drop-off from road shoulders, and as a council we support that. We believe it is a significant safety issue on our roads. Dust is also a major issue that we get feedback on. So they are the areas that the community is particularly concerned about — narrow seals, edge drop-offs on sealed roads and dust.

The CHAIR — Does the shire do its own road safety audits?

Mr YOUNIS — No. Having said that, we do limited ones in relation to specific issues — for example, we have done one recently in relation to the gas developments. We have done some road safety audits to do with that, but generally, no. They are really only one-offs to deal with any specific issue that we might have.

Mr MULDER — If the council is notified about a hazardous tree in an area, how difficult is it to get it removed? Is it a major issue for you?

Mr YOUNIS — Yes, it is. We are in the process of developing a roadside management plan which attempts to get the balance between roadside vegetation, biodiversity issues and the road environment. As a council we find it frustrating that the control of roadside vegetation is totally in the hands of DSE when we are the major provider of the road surface, that being not only the roads but also the vegetation management. We have a responsibility for vegetation management and we take that seriously, but we are constantly in discussion with DSE regarding the balance between road safety and the roadside vegetation.

Mr MULDER — Who should have the call on whether a dangerous tree comes out?

Mr YOUNIS — I believe it is the service provider — whether it be the council or Vicroads, or whoever is providing that service in relation to the road. The road is the primary use of that corridor. The vegetation and biodiversity is extremely important. However, the primary use is the road surface and that should be the call of that provider.

Mr MULDER — Do you get much call for dust suppression work? Do you do dust suppression work in your region?

Mr YOUNIS — We have a limited program of dust suppression. We get a lot of requests, mainly on health issues, not so much on safety, and it is an issue. Unfortunately, our program of roadworks now says that we
will not extend our sealed road network; we will only maintain what is there. That is no comfort to those that are on gravel roads, but we do get a large call for dust suppression and we have a limited program of $30 000 a year allocated to that.

We have worked very hard over the last four or five years to increase our funding on local roads, and we believe that the road condition does impact on road safety issues. It is a direct impact and it is something we need to do. We have increased our local funding provided from our rate revenue over the past five years by 42 per cent on local roads; that is in excess of a $1 million increase in road expenditure in the last five-year period, and we have been targeting those areas that relate to long-term maintenance of the road, and contained within that have been our reseals and our gravel resheets. We are trying to increase those areas.

We have received in that period an additional approximate $900 000 from the Roads to Recovery program, and that certainly has had a significant impact on us being able to increase our resheeting program on our gravel roads. Where we are lacking now is still our roadside shoulder maintenance. We do not do that well and that is underfunded. Our aim over the next three years is to increase our own funding to try to cover that area which we believe is deficient. But in relation to road funding with the Roads to Recovery program, we will see — it finishes next year — a reduction of over 14 per cent of the roads that we categorise in the poor condition. We have regular surveys of our roads and what conditions they are in, and with the Roads to Recovery program, poor-condition roads were reduced by 14 per cent, which is significant. The continuation of that program is clearly important to us.

What we have targeted is delineation. We have had a program over the last three years of increasing and improving our centre line marking, our signage and our guideposts. It has been a targeted program directly as a result of the statistics that indicated run-off-road accidents as being a particular concern. As I said, our next aim is shoulder maintenance, and ideally we would be widening our narrow seals, and I am sure the program that Vicroads has of no upgrades to roads in relation to widening seals is coping a lot of criticism. Certainly our council is very critical of that approach of C class roads not being widened, particularly when the opportunity arises when an upgrade is done, where rehabilitation is done. We have been very critical of that.

We have not played a significant role in education. It has been a deliberate strategy of ours that we believe that where we would have our most immediate impact and where we, as the only provider of the service, can provide it is to upgrade the road network and the road condition, and that to divert funds to education components specifically we have felt would then reduce the amount that we have to provide to our road network condition. It is unfortunate. We believe there are many opportunities to provide local education initiatives, and we would certainly like to do that, but it is a matter of priority. We do limited small programs, particularly in support of the Road Safety Committee, but as a council we do not employ a road safety officer, and that has been a deliberate decision. We were invited to share a road safety officer with Moyne and Warrnambool. We declined that on the basis of our prioritised funding.

The CHAIR — Do Moyne and Warrnambool employ a road safety officer?

Mr YOUNIS — They do now, yes. We believe there are advantages in local road safety initiatives education. However, we have 10 townships, we have very different communities, and spreading that load with one person over Moyne, Corangamite and Warrnambool, we did not believe the effectiveness would be there. It is too widely spread, and would not have the impact that I think we would want. I have mentioned before that we have a program of township safety improvements and we certainly support the recent initiatives of reduction in speeds through towns and at school zones.

Some of the areas that we believe in the future need attention — and we have touched on some of those — are vehicle mass limits. The council has had little control over the load issues in relation to the loads that can go on our roads. We believe that with increased loads, there should be funding provided for roads to be able to handle that increased mass. We certainly see that there are significant benefits in increased mass on roads, and the industry needs to be able to be competitive in relation to that, but our intersections have not been designed for heavy vehicles on our small roads. Our road geometry in many of our minor roads has not been designed to take heavy vehicles, and some of the legislation in relation to allowing high mass on roads has not been supported with funding.

With targeted funding, as I said previously, we believe the Vicroads program of no widening of seals is not correct. We support the black spot program. However, its effectiveness in rural areas is limited. It is not necessarily black spots. If you have a look at the statistics and the spread of casualty accidents across the shire, it is rarely in any particular point, which is where the black spots are targeted. We certainly supported the change in the black spot

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program where it allowed for potential black spots. However, it is the issues of long length of road with shoulder maintenance, delineation, vegetation management across the entire network that needs the funding. It is not necessarily the Y intersection or the particular black spot. They are not easily identified in our network, and having a black spot program that does not encompass the entire network does go against our programs.

The CHAIR — So you would advocate something like black length type?

Mr YOUNIS — You can call it what you will, but if someone said to me, ‘What is the most significant safety issue that you have in your shire here?’, and ‘Here is a bucket of money to put to it’ I would be saying roadside shoulders, and that does not fit into the black spot tick box. It is across the entire 900 kilometres of sealed roads. We spoke about vegetation management. We believe there should be a freeing up of the legislation in relation to who makes that call. We have spoken about that. I will not go without mentioning utility providers, in particular Powercor. We have had instances where the location of power poles on roads have not taken road safety issues into account at all and despite us protesting, and our local member assisting us with that, that has not been an issue in relation to Powercor’s criteria. We now have a most recent situation where an upgrade of power lines was going ahead — which we support and think is absolutely necessary — but they were put on the opposite side of the road to the existing power poles. So we now have power poles running down both sides of the entire length of the road within 2 metres of the road shoulder.

The CHAIR — That is despite the shire raising that concern?

Mr YOUNIS — Despite the shire raising that concern. We were advised that they could all go on the one pole on the one side of the road, but that we would have to fund it. Apparently road safety is not one of the issues whereas hitting roadside objects is clearly a road safety issue in rural areas.

The CHAIR — Powercor will also be appearing before the committee, so we will raise that issue.

Mr YOUNIS — With the exact example!

The CHAIR — I do not have to spell it out?

Mr YOUNIS — Do not worry, they know it. I have spoken about education and how the council is not strongly involved in education although we do it on a smaller scale. The difficulty there is that the current programs offered by VicRoads are often targeted towards metropolitan situations. For example, the speed reduction awareness program is particularly targeted to 50-kilometre-an-hour zones, which is not an issue in relation to our shire; the speed on the local open network and driving to conditions is more of an issue. That type of program would better suit us. The programs that are currently prepared by VicRoads do not necessarily fit our rural situations, and they do not come with the funding. They come with dollar-for-dollar funding, which is fantastic, but dollar for dollar means that council’s resources have to be taken from the current programs of road safety, which we have decided will be infrastructure, into the education component. So there has been an expected shift in education from state to local government and over the past few years there has been an expectation that local government will pick that up and pick up the tab. At this stage, we have not got the tab for it.

The CHAIR — Just getting back to Powercor and the example you gave us, can we get that example from you so that we can show that to Powercor?

Mr YOUNIS — I will provide that. I took some photos yesterday and I was going to show them but it would not work. That is really all I have. Once again I welcome the opportunity to make a presentation.

The CHAIR — Thank you for your input Paul. We will provide the shire with a copy of the transcript in the future.

Witness withdrew.
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll

Colac – 9 December 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 P. Nelson

Witness

Mr G. Rundell, Director Physical Services, Shire of Moyne.

Necessary corrections to be notified to
executive officer of committee
The CHAIR — Welcome to the parliamentary Road Safety Committee, Glenn. As you are aware we are running concurrent inquiries: the first is the inquiry into the country road toll, and the second is an inquiry into crashes involving roadside objects. We are taking a transcript and we will provide the Shire of Moyne with a copy. Our proceedings are under parliamentary privilege so what you say cannot be used against you legally in the future. So if you have got any frustrations, let rip! Having said that, once again thank you for your input. If you want to speak to your submission, then we will get into some dialogue through questions and answers.

Mr RUNDELL — Thank you. Moyne shire welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the committee. It is timely for us because together with Warrnambool City Council we have recently appointed a part-time road safety officer, and we are going through a process of reviewing our road safety strategy. I have a draft here which I can leave with you.

The CHAIR — Thank you. Could you just point out what geographic area Moyne shire takes in?

Mr RUNDELL — Yes. I apologise that I have not brought a map, even though I had a note to do so. Moyne shire has a population of about 15,500 and covers 5,500 square kilometres. We cover the south coast surrounding Warrnambool. To the west we go as far as Yambuk, getting close to Portland; to the north-west we reach north of Macarthur heading towards Hamilton; north-east above Lake Bolac heading towards Ararat, and we go as far as Peterborough to the east. We do not reach as far as Port Campbell. In the east we link up with Corangamite, Ararat to the north and the southern Grampians, and to Glenelg in the west. We took the opportunity of putting pen to paper and making a few notes for the committee and that has recently been forwarded to you. I will briefly go through that and then I can answer any questions.

The CHAIR — Fine, no worries.

Mr RUNDELL — In 2000 Moyne was one of the first rural municipalities to obtain a grant to prepare a road safety strategy for the council.

The CHAIR — So that was a state government grant?

Mr RUNDELL — That was a state government grant. I think it initially commenced with metropolitan councils and then branched out to rural municipalities. Our council took the opportunity to apply for the grant and prepare a road safety strategy. A couple of key actions came out of that. One of them was that we really needed to appoint a person responsible for road safety in our municipality. Being a small municipality, we have our engineering and planning staff but we do not have the funds or resources to concentrate purely on road safety, which is a multidisciplinary area. So one of the key actions was to appoint a regional road safety officer, and the thought was that we would share that position with our neighbours. So we approached them on the basis of appointing someone full-time shared between five municipalities. Unfortunately, some of our adjoining municipalities had other priorities, and we were only successful in getting the good cooperation of the Warrnambool City Council.

In September this year we appointed a part-time person on two days a week shared between Warrnambool and Moyne. We have fairly strong links with Warrnambool as our shire surrounds it.

The CHAIR — I would be interested in getting a copy of the position description of the road safety officer.

Mr RUNDELL — That would be no problem, we can forward that to you.

The CHAIR — Including their responsibilities? What type of thing would that person be doing?

Mr RUNDELL — The first action for that person was to re-hash our road safety strategy: it was three years old. We wanted to look at the statistics up until the end of the 2002–03 financial year to see if the same issues were there. It will not be a surprise to you that the main issue is of single vehicle, run-off-the-road accidents. Then in conjunction with VicRoads and some of its resources, to use their resources to hone in on some of the actions that we believed could affect that single vehicle, run-off-the-road instance. She was appointed in September and we now have a draft road strategy, which I can leave for you. There are still some typographical errors — —

The CHAIR — So that officer was integral in producing that strategy?

Mr RUNDELL — That is correct, yes. That was her first task for us and we now have some key actions that we want her to follow through. We have developed a range of actions and there are about 15 key ones that we
would like to get our teeth into over the next 12 months. Our previous strategy was developed prior to the Arrive Alive strategy, so we needed to align it with the state strategy as well as the federal strategy.

Mr MULDER — The 15 issues you mentioned: are they major funding issues or are they just local education programs, or a mixture of both?

Mr RUNDELL — A mixture of both. One of the key criteria we used in selecting this person was that we believed education was a big part of the project. The four areas or the key contributing factors to the statistics in our shire are speed, alcohol, fatigue and what we call the unforgiving roadside environment.

The first three — speed, alcohol and fatigue — are driver behaviour problems, and that is where education and enforcement play a role. We are not in the enforcement side of things, but we can work in partnership with the other tiers of government in terms of education. So for this person we appointed, one of the key criteria was some sort of background in working with community groups, being a good facilitator and having good communication skills. That is the key person we were trying to attract.

To give you a few statistics, they are not bad when you compare them with the rest of the state, but any casualty accident is bad. Over the past five years we have had 14 fatal accidents in the shire. We have had 14 deaths and 230 casualty accidents over that five-year period, and 101 were serious injuries. Sixty per cent of all crashes in the shire are single-vehicle accidents, which points to the fact we mentioned before of single vehicle run-off-the-road accidents; 86 per cent are in 100-kilometre-an-hour zones; 90 per cent occur on sealed roads, not gravel roads; and young drivers are involved in the highest percentage of crashes, around about 36 per cent.

Mr HARKNESS — What proportion of those people who have either suffered a serious injury or a fatality live locally, and what proportion would be from outside the municipality?

Mr RUNDELL — Ninety per cent of all our casualty accidents are people who do not live in our municipality.

The CHAIR — Ninety per cent are outside the municipality?

Mr RUNDELL — The size is 5500 square kilometres and the population is 16 000. We have a lot of accidents involving tourists, particularly on the Great Ocean Road and the Princes Highway, and when they are running off the road, 29 per cent of them hit a fence or a wall, 26 per cent hit a tree, others hit an embankment, a pole or roll over. As I said, it is believed that alcohol, speed and fatigue are the major contributing factors, but once you make a mistake it is the unforgiving roadside environment.

The CHAIR — What I would suggest — and I have picked this theme up today, I suppose, from talking to various groups and organisations and councils around this area — is that it is not only speed, alcohol and fatigue; it is also inexperience.

Mr RUNDELL — Yes.

The CHAIR — Whether it is inexperience of younger drivers or inexperience of tourists. So it is those three major ones, plus inexperience.

Mr RUNDELL — Yes, I would agree with that, for sure. In fact I think we have a statistic here on young drivers involved in 36 per cent of our crashes, so that is, I think, up to 25 years old.

The CHAIR — But not only the inexperience of younger drivers, but the inexperience of tourists.

Mr RUNDELL — Yes. There have been issues of tourists driving on the wrong side of the road being involved in accidents, particularly on the Great Ocean Road. VicRoads has recently installed extra signage at car parks along the Great Ocean Road tourist attractions, pointing out that everyone has to drive on the left-hand side of the road.

Mr MULDER — How many fatalities have you had in your shire for the — —

Mr RUNDELL — In the last five years we have had 14. The last calendar year we had two. We have already had two this year. Sorry, the last financial year ending July we had two, and this calendar year we have had another two. We have been averaging around about three.
The CHAIR — Have they again been locals or have they been outsiders?

Mr RUNDELL — I could not tell you how many of those fatalities were locals. Certainly one recently was a local. The last two have been single vehicle run-off-the-roads — not on our network. We manage the main road network. One was on the main road network; one was on the Hamilton Highway. So from our point of view they are the major obstacles we see in regard to addressing the roadside environment. I believe we need to be able to fund a system of road safety audits. Most of these single vehicle run-off-the-road accidents occur on bends, so I think we need to carry out safety audits to identify those high-risk areas, which might be, for example, a straight run of reasonably high design speed and then you come to a substandard corner, and it is usually those corners where they are running off the roads, and the odd one where they go to sleep on the straight, but it is usually on the bends.

The CHAIR — In the past you have not conducted safety audits?

Mr RUNDELL — Our road maintenance crews do audits of road conditions on a daily basis and identify defects in terms road maintenance. These crews do not have the skills to identify design problems or something like that. Only when we are preparing a submission for black spot funding will we carry out a road safety audit, but we do not consistently. It is a fairly expensive item to carry out road safety audits, and that is one of the key obstacles we see to having an impact on the cause of accidents. The three key issues we see are funding these road safety audits, roadside conservation issues — an issue of what takes the highest priority, whether it is a road safety issue or a roadside conservation issue — and then obviously the funding of any works to remove hazards on the roadside.

Mr MULDER — Do you experience difficulty if you want to remove a dangerous tree, or what the council considers is a dangerous tree, going through the process of consultation with DSE?

Mr RUNDELL — We have got a fairly good relationship with DSE. We work with them on an annual basis to look at our road works, and if we need to remove native vegetation we go through a consultation process with DSE. Generally they are pretty good. I cannot remember an instance where we have had a dangerous tree as such, but we have had issues where we will go along and clear an area, just for drainage — table drainage, for instance — and there will be community backlash just at removing vegetation for maintenance of the road, let alone a safety issue. So there is a strong campaign, I suppose, by certain elements of the community that have a very high priority for roadside environment, so we need to have this debate, I suppose, about in what instance does a safety issue take priority over a conservation issue and vice versa.

Mr MULDER — Who finally makes the call?

Mr RUNDELL — I think if it is a safety issue it should be the road authority. If the road authority believes, for whatever reason, that there is a safety issue, that should override the conservation issues. However, if it is not a road safety issue, then the conservation issue should override. It is difficult times and there are grey areas.

The CHAIR — That is right. It is a balance.

Mr RUNDELL — In terms of road funding, I was just listening to Paul before. We have similar problems to Corangamite at Moyne. We have a very poor local road network in terms of its condition. We carry out major condition surveys about every three years, and we look at segments of the road and carry out these condition surveys. We did one in 1999, and have just completed another one in 2003, and it is showing that despite the Roads to Recovery funding our road network conditions are still deteriorating. So we prioritise our road works based mainly on safety issues and refurbishing what we already have. Like Corangamite, we also have a policy of not widening any roads unless there is a safety issue with a bend or a crest, and we are finding it very difficult to meet the funding gap for maintaining our road network.

Looking at all our road expenditure, this year we are spending about $11 million. That includes things like streetscaping improvements and stuff like that. We are probably spending about $9 million directly on rehabilitating the road assets. We have identified a funding gap of about $4.9 million per annum for the next 10 years to get our road network up to what we would consider to be a desirable standard. We are fighting an uphill battle. The Road to Recovery funds are worth about $1 million per annum to us, but that may be completed at the end of 2005 which will have a huge impact on us. Council rates and other income contributes about 52 per cent of our overall road expenditure, and that is a fairly high proportion. The other major source of funds is through the commonwealth.

Mr MULDER — Were you a heavy user of the black spot program? Did you get much through that?
Mr RUNDELL — We had one particularly bad site where there had been a couple of fatalities, and we were successful in getting funding for that. We had a number of potentially bad sites that we got funding for through the state program, but we do not meet the criteria for individual sites for any further funding. I was listening to Paul before and I agree, it is the overall condition of the network. The fatalities that occur do not reoccur in the same location; they just occur over the network.

We believe the best way to reduce the risk of single vehicle accidents in the 100-kilometre-an-hour zones is to have a programmed system of road safety audits, and come up with some criteria to rank the risk. If a road has been ranked as high risk, then roadside conservation issues should have a lesser impact on decision making, and vice versa; if the area is low risk then you can afford to have your vegetation encroaching a bit closer to the road. But it is a matter of coming up with a system that all authorities adhere to, and then funding should be prioritised based on risk. Council is battling to maintain its current assets, let alone looking at yet another program of assessing roadsides and so on.

Mr MULDER — What is your break-up of unmade and sealed roads through your network?

Mr RUNDELL — We have a bit over 1600 kilometres of sealed roads and a little over 1000 kilometres of gravel roads. There are probably 300 or 400 kilometres of formed roads.

Mr MULDER — What sort of material do you use on your gravel roads? Is it locally-sourced material?

Mr RUNDELL — We use local materials. We try to use the most cost-effective materials. Council has its own gravel pit in Mortlake and we have other sources of private gravel pits around the shire, but they vary from limestone to scoria to tuff depending on what is within economical carting distance. They all have their pluses and minuses. In terms of extending our sealed road network, we have a lot of pressures to seal gravel roads, particularly in townships; we still have quite a few gravel roads in our townships. We get the odd request to seal a rural road. As I said before, council made the decision that there will be no extension to the sealed road network and widening only occurs where there is a safety risk.

The CHAIR — Glenn, with regard to the unmade roads, we have asked each of the shires this question: what is your position on speed limits on gravel roads? Some of the shires — for example I think it was Baw Baw Shire — strongly advocated for 80 kilometres an hour. Others do not advocate for that speed limit. Does your shire have a position on it?

Mr RUNDELL — I put a report up to council when the Warrnambool City Council first proposed an 80-kilometre-an-hour zone. My recommendation was that we should have an 80-kilometre-an-hour limit, but there was great debate about it. There is the other side of the coin, that people should drive to the conditions of the road. I suppose there are some gravel roads where you can safely do 100 kilometres an hour, but not too many in our shire. Council’s official position is that it supports it.

The CHAIR — They support the 80 kilometres an hour?

Mr RUNDELL — They support the 80 kilometres an hour: that was a council resolution, but it was not a clear-cut vote.

The CHAIR — But it was a majority?

Mr RUNDELL — It was a majority.

The CHAIR — Thank you for your input Glenn, and for travelling to Colac for us today. We appreciate it. We will make sure that the shire gets a copy of the transcript.

Witness withdrew.
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll

Colac – 9 December 2003

Members

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Mr T. W. Mulder
Mr E. G. Stoney
Mr I. D. Trezise

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

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms A. Douglas
Research Officer: Mr P. Nelson

Witnesses

Mr S. Threlfall, Chair; and
Mr D. Roche, Roadsafe Western District.

Necessary corrections to be notified to executive officer of committee
The CHAIR — Welcome to Shane and Des from Roadsafe Western District. We are the parliamentary Road Safety Committee and we are conducting two inquiries. The first is an inquiry into the country road toll, and the second is an inquiry into crashes involving roadside objects. We are taking a transcript and will provide your organisation with a copy of it. This is a public hearing, and the hearing is also under the auspices of parliamentary privilege, so what you say cannot be held against you legally into the future. Again welcome, if you have a submission, perhaps you would like to provide it and we can then ask some questions.

Mr ROCHE — I have not got a submission because our computers are down and we could not print anything off.

The CHAIR — That’s fine.

Mr ROCHE — But I can make one available to you.

Mr THRELFALL — We can forward it on.

The CHAIR — That’s fine. Perhaps I could kick off by asking what geographic area does Roadsafe Western District cover?

Mr ROCHE — We cover the shires of Moyne, Southern Grampians and Glenelg and the City of Warrnambool.

The CHAIR — So from here to the South Australia border?

Mr ROCHE — From Warrnambool to the South Australian border.

The CHAIR — Who makes up the committee?

Mr ROCHE — We have representation from a good cross-section of the public, police, ambulance, fire, Vicroads, local government and teachers. There is a rough cross-representation of the population.

Mr MULDER — As a group do you receive any funding at all?

Mr ROCHE — The same as all other road safety councils, funding is through Vicroads for an approved program, and there is other funding for administration and also one-for-one sponsorship.

The CHAIR — What would you see as the main road safety issues confronting your large area?

Mr ROCHE — Well, I am swayed a little bit by an article in the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria magazine about the condition of the roads. In my opinion the condition of the roads influences things like driver fatigue. Where you have people who are driving on roads that are less than what we would want, inadvertently that leads to some sort of driver fatigue. That is my opinion.

The reason why the roads are in disarray or damaged is because the freight industry is a problem; the movement of freight is damaging the roads in the area. I am looking at the rutting in the roads and particularly in wet weather when, instead of driving down a bitumen road, you are asked to drive through two rivulets. So the wheels of your car are in water and to counteract that you either drive with one wheel on the white line and one in the hump between the ruts, and then when you have oncoming traffic — particularly if it is an oncoming truck — you traverse the two rivulets and put one wheel on the outside shoulder and on the edge line and the centre. That type of driving cannot do anything for the driver because their concentration is right up there, they have to deal with that problem. So therefore I believe the results of that sort of driving could result in some of the run-off-road and fatigue single vehicle crashes.

The CHAIR — So you are saying road maintenance is a major issue and fatigue is also an issue?

Mr ROCHE — Yes.

The CHAIR — Does your area take in the main road to Adelaide or is the Adelaide road above yours?

Mr ROCHE — No, it is the Western Highway. That is Ballarat.

Mr EREN — Do you think that roadworthiness of vehicles has an effect as well?
Mr ROCHE — No, not really. It may be a contributing factor — in other words, if you have some young kid who cannot afford those new tyres for his back wheels, and he then finds himself trying to drive in those rivulets caused through rutting, sure, it is going to be a contributing factor.

Mr MULDER — It is pretty fair to say when driving a small vehicle and it is raining that when you hit those ruts you will get thrown across the road.

Mr ROCHE — Particularly front-wheel drives too.

Mr MULDER — They are even worse.

Mr ROCHE — They tend to skip and then grab, and if you are not experienced with the handling aspect of a front-wheel drive, sometimes when you are driving fleet vehicles and you go from one car to the other it can give you a bit of a fright from time to time.

Mr MULDER — In relation to being in a rural area — and as we start to travel around we see it more — do you think the grass and roadside vegetation is controlled properly or does that play a major role in terms of accidents? I am talking not just about trees, but general vegetation on roadsides. Do you think it is controlled properly and does that create a problem in your area?

Mr THRELFALL — Certainly some parts would be worse than others. The phalaris and that roadside grass certainly would be a vision blocker at some intersections, but it is hard to measure whether it is much of a contributing factor, because in a lot of places where that is, the locals would be aware of the dangers of that intersection, so it is probably more non-locals driving through that that would be a concern for. Certainly it would be dangerous in some parts.

Mr MULDER — Do you have a break-up of the accidents in your area in terms of tourists? Do they figure prominently?

Mr ROCHE — We have done that. I have taken the opportunity to photocopy a couple of standard news items out of the Warrnambool Standard, which indicate that tourists could be a problem on the wrong side of the road, particularly on the Great Ocean Road.

Mr THRELFALL — The Great Ocean Road is prior to our area, but then from the Great Ocean Road they do the loop from there up to the Grampians, so we get quite a number of complaints from the Hamilton end of our area with drivers on the wrong side of the road and not understanding speed limits, and also about the literature at the tourist information centre.

Mr ROCHE — Quite often they are unaware of the likelihood, particularly at sun up and sun down, of kangaroos and stray animals on the road. That is something that filters down from the Grampians area.

Mr THRELFALL — In terms of tourists, it is more that end of our area that we get the complaints.

The CHAIR — I guess there is also the issue of fatigue. People are getting down to Port Campbell and saying, ‘Now we’ll head up to the Grampians and stay overnight’, and they are into their 14th or 15th hour of driving

Mr THRELFALL — They do not realise the distance. They think it just a short trip from the Great Ocean Road to the Grampians. They are unaware of the distances involved.

Mr ROCHE — Dennis Wheelhouse, who is on our council and also the sergeant up in Hamilton, says there are speeds of 180 and 190 kilometres an hour, and we will not give a nationality, but they think they on the autobahns or something. It is a combination of what they are allowed to do in their home country, I suppose, plus they have been confused by the distance versus the time, and they have got a plane to catch or some other engagement.

Mr THRELFALL — Quite a number of the excuses that Dennis gets would be that ‘We’ve got a plane to catch’, or ‘The hire car has to be back by a certain period of time’, because they have been caught out with the time and distances.
Mr ROCHE — I am not aware that they are the ones that are involved in serious crashes, but it is a concern of ours that your expectation as a local driver, having someone coming at you at 180 kilometres an hour is certainly — —

The CHAIR — In unfamiliar conditions.

Mr HARKNESS — Do you think the length of time taken to get from certain tourist destinations to other tourist destinations should be added to the signs next to the — —

Mr ROCHE — I like that idea. They have done that down on the Great Ocean Road.

Mr HARKNESS — They have already?

Mr ROCHE — Yes, and I think that is a very positive move, because if someone gives you a map and you are not familiar with it, the scaling of that map is very hard to comprehend, and when you look at a map of Europe — —

The CHAIR — What do they do on the Great Ocean Road? Do they have distances or hours?

Mr ROCHE — They have both

Mr THRELFALL — We have put some literature in the tourist information centres in different languages giving that sort of information, so they are a bit more aware of those issues.

Mr ROCHE — There is a new pamphlet out that is in about seven different languages. It must be nearly ready for publication. I am not too sure on that.

Mr EREN — What are your views on speed limits on gravel roads?

Mr ROCHE — It is a difficult one.

Mr THRELFALL — It should be reduced in my opinion.

Mr ROCHE — Probably that is my opinion as well, but I do feel for the farmer who travels on gravel roads, and the condition of the gravel road can alter so much from one week to the next. Some weeks that gravel road might be as hard as a tarmac and he would have no problems in driving at 100 kilometres an hour — I mean a local who knows the road. But then other times it is dry, there is loose material on the top, so 80 kilometres an hour makes good sense and even less maybe in some cases.

Mr THRELFALL — It is a bit like the roadside blockers. The locals probably are not going to get into too much trouble because they know the conditions. It is more the people who do not use it regularly that get into trouble.

The CHAIR — But your committee does not have a formal position on that?

Mr ROCHE — We have. We are backing the 80 kilometres an hour on gravel roads. That was my personal opinion about feeling a bit sorry for some of the farmers.

Mr MULDER — Do you think that poses a problem for international travellers when they see a road sign posted at 80 and they are not familiar with the changing road conditions in Australia, that they may then form an opinion that that road is safe to travel at that speed all the time?

Mr ROCHE — I am not sure. I am not sure of the experience that international drivers would have on gravel roads.

Mr THRELFALL — If they are doing the regular tourist routes, they would not hit gravel roads too often.

Mr HARKNESS — Do you engage in the big operations like Clampdown and some of those other initiatives, and which ones are successful?

Mr ROCHE — We are informed by our enforcement people that they are going on. We do not have a lot to do with it. We do run roadworthy checks in some of the smaller towns, but what we have found is that we will
get the people who know their car is roadworthy, and they are doing the right thing. There has only ever been one lady — and possibly that is one area we do pick up, single mums who in today’s garages do not mention to you, ‘That front tyre looks a bit flat or bald — we had one single mum and we jacked up the front of the car and the front end nearly fell off. So in all of the time we have been doing it, that is about the only one where I could seriously say, ‘Yes, we had a good effect that day’, because this woman just had no idea of the condition of the car.

Mr HARKNESS — Because if you have it set up prominently and other people are driving past but not stopping, at least it is registering something, ideally.

Mr ROCHE — Yes, and the advertising — asking people to do it, check their cars — might encourage them to have a look and see if there is tread on their tyres — a bit like that headlamp check that we had a month or so ago. I do not know how many people took the advantage of going to their local auto electrician and getting the lights fixed, but at least people were talking about it.

The CHAIR — Terry alluded before to roadside objects. Trees are obviously the major concern from a road safety point of view. I would be interested in your comments in regard to trees in your area.

Mr ROCHE — We have some big red gums very close to the road in some areas, and there is no doubt in my mind that they are a road safety hazard, but environmentally I am not sure, as a weighing up of our priorities, if you like — I guess if you have got your hand on your heart and say you are a road safety expert, then you would get the chainsaw out and move them, but by the same token, it is — —

The CHAIR — Does your committee get involved with the progress of whether the tree is taken out or stays there?

Mr THRELFALL — We have not really engaged in that at this stage. But it is interesting that when I received this information we drove from Warrnambool to Hamilton — we alternate our meetings between Warrnambool and Hamilton — and because it was fresh in my mind I took notice, and there are certainly lots of places where there are not only trees but also big boulders where some underground works have been done — and some great big boulders are just stashed beside the road. So as well as trees there are quite a few other things that you notice once you become aware of it, that if you ran off the road you would be in trouble if you hit them, and some of them are quite close to the road.

The CHAIR — So what type of works would have been taking place to finish up with boulders on the side of the road?

Mr THRELFALL — It must be the underground electricity. A gas line also went through.

Mr ROCHE — But there are even natural outcrops, so if you go through places like — —

Mr THRELFALL — Yes, they could be natural, and the area has been cleared and it has been stacked on the side of the road. Certainly trees would be the major one, but I was amazed because many of those rocks that would cause a lot of damage if you hit them. There is certainly an issue with roadside obstacles.

Mr ROCHE — And there are man-made structures too, like culverts and bridge ends which we try and protect, but by the same token you would not want to hit them at 100 kilometres an hour.

Mr EREN — Do you find there is a bit of a problem with livestock and fencing? I know kangaroos — —

Mr THRELFALL — Yes, we had a fatality in Warrnambool from a livestock accident not that long ago. A motorcyclist hit a cow; that was just outside the city limits — almost in Warrnambool, so it is certainly an issue. I do not know if it is a major one with us.

Mr ROCHE — During certain times of the year when grass in the paddock is scarce a farmer should be paying a bit more attention to his fences to make sure that the animals remain inside the fence rather than leaning over the fence to feed on the road reserve because then it is only the next step for them to fall or tumble over and then they are on the outside. But at certain times of the year domestic stock on the road becomes a problem. In the past we have put a message on the local radio station asking people to check their fences, so we are aware of that problem, but I would like to think that it does not happen all that often. Up around the Grampians kangaroos are a concern, but all you can do is remind — —

Mr EREN — Cows are a bigger concern, I think!
Mr ROCHE — Remind drivers that they might experience that and to be aware.

Mr HARKNESS — Are there still instances of people in the Western District not wearing seatbelts?

Mr THRELFALL — Without having any statistical information, our information would be that it is pretty well controlled now. The police will comment that it is not really a big issue any more. I know with my own kids I cannot get in the car any more without them telling me, so I think the next generation coming through are really well educated on seatbelts. I am sure there are still times when people have not got them on, but I would have thought that it is a lot better than it used to be.

Mr MULDER — What about drink-driving? Do you feel that is still a major issue?

Mr THRELFALL — We thought we were getting a handle on it, but recent statistics are saying that it is becoming an issue again. Certainly one of our methods of educating people is through our local radio and speed, fatigue and alcohol is again our big push, so alcohol certainly seems to be an issue. I would say — and it is written down here — that drugs are also becoming a big issue. The detection of drugs is the difficult part. We have the breathalyser for alcohol, but you do not seem to get a drug report unless it is through the coroner, so we are not getting as many statistics as we would like on the use of drugs.

Once again, without any statistical information, the scenario with young people seems to be that they are going out later. When we were growing up we went out early: they seem to go out later. They are very good at having a designated driver, so the alcohol education has pretty well worked with them, but then they are filling up on some other substance and driving without sleep. So the issues become drugs and fatigue, plus the rest of the people in the car who have been on the alcohol.

The CHAIR — So you think that alcohol is slowly creeping back in?

Mr THRELFALL — Yes, but I am not sure it is with the younger drivers. I reckon we might be heading back towards the middle age-type drivers with alcohol. But once again that it an opinion without — —

Mr ROCHE — We are currently running a Looking after our Mates program with the football league, and we have had talks with the Western Border Football League and leagues up in that area. We started off dealing just with the under-18s, but when the club officials saw the program they asked us to come back and do the whole of the club, which is good, because we got the first and second teams, their friends and everyone.

The CHAIR — So the clubs are responsive to that message?

Mr THRELFALL — They have been fantastic; we have had some really good feedback. We had a letter from last year’s under-18 premiers — South Warrnambool. They gave us some feedback on the kids. One kid went to the local police station the next morning, after their grand final, to ask if he could be breathalysed to see if was able to drive. The message had got through that the next day is just as bad as the current day, so we have been getting some good feedback.

Mr ROCHE — That will vary from South Warrnambool, which is a good club anyway as far as responsibilities are concerned, to other clubs. There would still be the odd club and the odd individual around our area who would think nothing of drink-driving.

Mr MULDER — Do the police offer an early morning voluntary breathalyser test for anyone who walks in the door?

Mr THRELFALL — I do not think that they can refuse it, but I do not think it is common knowledge. But they certainly did the test for this young person.

Mr HARKNESS — The metropolitan road toll has been plummeting, but the country road toll has remained stagnant. In your opinion what are the key things that lead to that?

Mr THRELFALL — I reckon they are fatigue, alcohol, drugs and speed. We always come back to the same ones.

Mr ROCHE — And the condition of the road.
Mr MULDER — Can I just talk about the alcohol issue. I think the police annual report shows that one in every 500 breathalyser tests conducted in country Victoria were positive, and one in every 200 came up positive in the metropolitan area. It shows that the problem in the metropolitan area is far greater than in the country.

Mr THRELFALL — I think it becomes an issue when it is a combination of fatigue, alcohol and road conditions. It is hard to isolate.

Mr HARKNESS — Difference in enforcement?

Mr THRELFALL — Yes.

Mr ROCHE — The other thing is that the country driver does not have many options. If you are out and think that you are on the limit, what are you going to do? You might have 20 kilometres or 30 kilometres to cover and there is no public transport. Taxis are expensive if you can get one. I tried to get a taxi home from Warrnambool at 2 o’clock — —

Mr MULDER — It must have been a big night!

The CHAIR — It might have been a quiet night!

Mr THRELFALL — I have been breathalysed a couple of times in Colac when I was driving through back from Melbourne, so I reckon they are pretty hot here all the time.

Mr MULDER — It was okay, thank heavens. They seem to be very prominent in country areas. Do you find that to be the situation?

Mr THRELFALL — I have been breathalysed a couple of times in Colac when I was driving through back from Melbourne, so I reckon they are pretty hot here all the time.

Mr MULDER — Yes.

The CHAIR — Would you have the same experience, say, in Warrnambool?

Mr THRELFALL — They are prevalent in Warrnambool.

Mr ROCHE — In my experience — not that I am out every night of the week — but I have seen them in the middle of the day stopping everyone down near the breakwater. I wonder if they are there to fill up their books, or whether it is a good use of police resources. I do not know.

Mr MULDER — You are talking about the time factor?

Mr ROCHE — Yes, middle of the day, mid-week — —

Mr MULDER — Mid-morning?

Mr ROCHE — I can understand the site because you are committed to going down to the breakwater, there is only one way in, and one way out so you cannot do a U-turn or anything like that.

Mr HARKNESS — But it reinforces the idea of anywhere, anytime, doesn’t it?

Mr ROCHE — Yes, but then I am not out and about every weekend, so I do not know what the prevalence is.

Mr THRELFALL — They are very good at major events — for example, the May races and the local grand finals. You can always be pretty sure that they are going to be pretty thorough then.

Mr HARKNESS — If you were given a bucket of money to spend on a road safety measure, what would it be?

Mr THRELFALL — Obviously road improvement would be an issue. As a school teacher I think that traffic education should be mandated in schools. I would like to see that.
Mr HARKNESS — So education. With the condition of the road, do you mean just shoulders or widening — —

Mr ROCHE — How much money have we got?

Mr HARKNESS — I do not know.

Mr THRELFALL — The roads could certainly be improved.

Mr ROCHE — The mixture of our traffic is those huge trucks and small sedans. We dropped the speed limit in residential areas to 50 kilometres an hour because we were concerned about the weight ratio between a pedestrian and a car. I think a Holden outweighs a pedestrian 11 times or something, 11.6, but a Holden is outweighed by a normal semitrailer of 42 tonnes, by 33 times, and yet we have them coming at each other at 100 kilometres an hour, so if I had a bucket of money I would get some separation better than a white line and a driver who may or may not be concentrating.

The CHAIR — Are bicycle riders of concern to the committee?

Mr ROCHE — Bicycle accidents in Warrnambool are certainly up there.

Mr THRELFALL — It has certainly been an issue that we have addressed with cycling. We have certainly got bike education back into a lot of our schools, which has been good. We had a period where bike education became non-existent in schools, so we have hit the education of it a little bit. We have certainly done some radio stuff on cycling, and some other stuff we have done with — —

The CHAIR — What about your long distance cyclists, your tourists or backpackers on the bike?

Mr ROCHE — We have had a couple of accidents there. Once again with one of them in particular it looked like the lady forgot that you ride on the opposite side of the road. She came out of a scenic spot and bounced off the first van coming past her, and it almost indicated to us that she had gone to the wrong side of the road.

Mr MULDER — What is the committee’s opinion in relation to multiple speed zones that are starting to occur now? I know I raised the issue coming through the town here with the 40 kilometres that are going to be in front of schools. We go from 100 to 80, to 60, to 40, to 60, to 50, to 60, to 40, to 60, to 80, to 100. We have had a road safety committee dealing with older drivers. I have always been concerned about this issue of how on earth they are supposed to absorb that amount of information. Do you have a opinion on that as to changes in speed zones and what are appropriate speed zones? Who makes the call, the decisions and so forth?

Mr ROCHE — I have no concern. The posted speed limit has been worked out by somebody, and I am quite happy to go along with it. You have got a brake and you have got an accelerator. You do not have to be Einstein to know which one to use to bring you down to the speed limit. Some of the speed limits I would query — some of those 80 kilometres an hour through some of those hamlets. They look like they could be less in some cases, and they look like they could be more in some cases. But in general I am quite happy with the posted speed limit. You have a licence to drive, and you have agreed to drive according to the law, and if the law says 100, you can do 100; if it says less, you should be doing less.

Mr MULDER — So you do not have a problem with the 40s, 50s and 60s in the residential areas?

Mr ROCHE — Forty, I think, is brilliant around schools, and I have no worries with 50. I have done the calculations, and when you have got the research telling you that a human body can stand a collision of about 38 kilometres an hour with a car, 50 I think is a little bit high. They are our dormitories, if you like, and I do not see anything different between my track that runs into the farm — and I do not like people doing over 40 down there because I have to pay for the gravel. I do not see any difference between that and the local streets. You have kids, dogs, Mrs Smith going to the kindergarten. If you are doing 40, 50 or 60, you are only saving a couple of seconds — and what are most members of the population going to do with those seconds? They go home and sit in front of the telly. Let us be a little bit more careful when we are driving.

The CHAIR — Good answer.

Mr EREN — Mobile phones have been raised as an issue when people are using them while driving, and some people have said that the fines should be much more than they are at the moment. What is your view on that?
Mr ROCHE — I would have to go along with that.

Mr THRELFALL — I would have to agree. Mobile phones would be a bit like seatbelts, I reckon; eventually the next generation will probably be pretty good with them, once all the advertising and the fines et cetera kick in. But it is certainly an issue. There was a fatality at Hamilton — a truck hit a car and it was believed the motorist was on his mobile, or just putting the mobile down, so it is certainly an issue, and I would not hesitate to increase the fines if it is going to deter people doing it.

Mr MULDER — What about other devices that are in cars — five-stacker CDs, all those travelling entertainment units? Do you think that is an issue as well?

Mr THRELFALL — We are told that the last fatality in Warrnambool was a pedestrian, and the driver of the vehicle was reaching down to do something with the CD player, so once again it is an issue, but it is a fairly hard one to control.

Mr ROCHE — You would like to think that people are responsible with how they are using their in-car entertainment, but with a mobile phone you have little or no control. Once you have answered that phone, it can be anything from your mother-in-law to something — all I am saying is that it is something that might distract your attention from what you are doing when you are driving, and they do not know what intersection you are coming up to and what decisions you are trying to make, and yet they are still in your ear about something or other. It might be an inane conversation or it might be something that really draws your attention to the phone call rather than what is happening in front of you, so mobile phones, I think, are a concern.

Mr THRELFALL — It is a bit like the education process though; it took a while for the seatbelt stuff to kick in, and the alcohol. Mobile phones eventually will be, I would imagine, okay once education kicks in. Probably it will be another generation. It seems to go in generations.

Mr MULDER — Who knows what you will have then to use!

Mr THRELFALL — That is the other thing — there will be something else that is an issue then.

The CHAIR — Any other questions of Des or Shane? If not, thank you for your time. We appreciate it. As I said, a transcript is being taken, and we will provide your committee with a copy of the transcript in time.

Mr THRELFALL — We will forward on the report we had.

Witnesses withdrew.
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll

Colac – 9 December 2003

Members

Mr B. W. Bishop
Mr J. H. Eren
Mr A. R. Harkness
Mr C. A. C. Langdon

Mr T. W. Mulder
Mr E. G. Stoney
Mr I. D. Trezise

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

Staff

Executive Officer: Ms A. Douglas
Research Officer: Mr P. Nelson

Witness

Mr T. Russell, Roadsafe Colac.

Necessary corrections to be notified to
executive officer of committee
Mr RUSSELL — Are we able to make comments from the gallery?

The CHAIR — If you would like to, you can come forward.

Mr RUSSELL — My name is Tossy Russell, I belong to Roadsafe Colac. I have spent a good few years on the highways in heavy trucks. It seems to be the underlying thing is that money is the biggest problem, with lack of road maintenance. But one issue — just reading between the lines there when they talked about in-car entertainment — cruise control is almost part of every vehicle on the road these times, the new ones, and if drivers are starting to become a little bit fatigued they are starting to lose concentration, but the car is still under full power at 100 kilometres an hour. I do know of some transport companies where they had two or three accidents in a reasonably short time to the stage where their insurance companies were starting to question whether they should keep on insuring them. They then had the cruise control on the truck disconnected because normally — I know in my case whether it is a car or truck — when you start to get a little bit weary, your foot seems to come off the accelerator, and naturally you slow down, whereas if you have the cruise control set, whether it is a big powerful truck, you are still going along at 100 kilometres an hour when you run off the road.

Mr HARKNESS — You are much less interactive with the cruise control on, but I find it is a very disciplined way of keeping on or under the speed limit. I see that as a positive thing, not creeping up to 110 or 120.

Mr RUSSELL — That is one advantage, or probably the only advantage. Yet the vehicle that I currently drive does not have a cruise control, and it is not the end of the world. I can still drive without varying any more than 2 or 3 kilometres an hour. There was a big thing made of it here recently when the police started to book drivers for being only a few kilometres over the speed limit. People were claiming that they had to look at the speedo instead of looking at the road, but I think that was really exaggerated out of proportion.

The CHAIR — So you are saying that speed control and driver fatigue can become a danger.

Mr RUSSELL — Yes.

Mr HARKNESS — But also blatant scaremongering.

Mr RUSSELL — I beg your pardon?

Mr HARKNESS — You are saying that you are disciplined enough to stay within 2 or 3 kilometres of the limit?

Mr RUSSELL — Des and Shane mentioned about radio and compact disc players. They are a really big disadvantage too, because as the other chap stated, it obviously caused a fatality. While you are doing something with a CD, a radio or a tape you are not concentrating on where you are going.

Mr HARKNESS — There are a lot of distractions in a vehicle, aren’t there?

Mr RUSSELL — That is right. I mentioned to Terry before that in the last 15 years the legal gross weight of a truck has gone up by 20 per cent whereas the roads have not been increased in strength to counteract that weight. That is probably why the pavements are breaking up and why the roads are rutting. Those sorts of things are real problems because of the increased weights that are allowed on vehicles — obviously mainly trucks rather than buses with air suspension. It has been written that they are road-friendly suspensions. At one stage somebody made an anecdotal quip that now the roads are breaking up and becoming rough what about having suspension-friendly roads?

I have noticed, particularly from following trucks, that there is a section of road not far out of Colac, just over the railway crossing, where for about half a kilometre the pavement is only about 11 feet from the white line to the fog line, whereas a bit further on it widens out and in a lot of places there is probably 12 feet from the white line to the fog line. So certain sections of pavements are narrow even though it is on the Princes Highway.

With all the discussion with different councils about whether they are in favour of having the 80-kilometre-an-hour speed limit brought in for gravel roads, an ex-councillor from the local shire wrote in and queried whether that was a reason for the local council not maintaining those roads to the standards that they should be, and an easy way out was to reduce the speed limit. I have had my licence for quite a number of years — I got it the day I turned 18 years — and I learnt to drive on gravel roads. As you become older you become a little bit wiser and you drive to conditions; I have no problems with gravel roads, but it is probably a different situation for younger drivers.
The CHAIR — Inexperience.

Mr RUSSELL — The bottom line with everything is that you drive to conditions and we should be responsible for our own actions. I suppose it is mainly lack of money and the increased weight of trucks and more traffic of all sorts that has caused the deterioration in the roads.

Mr HARKNESS — What are the big road safety issues at the truck stops? What do truck drivers complain about?

Mr RUSSELL — Not nearly as many roadside stops as there should be.

Mr HARKNESS — You have to drive longer distances between stops?

Mr RUSSELL — Yes. If you start to feel fatigued it might be many kilometres before you can find a truck stop on the left side of the road. A lot of drivers will risk doing that rather than run the danger of pulling to the wrong side of the road into a truck stop. The worry is that at certain times of the year when you wake up to get going when it is foggy, especially in a B-double, by the time you come back out onto the road from the wrong side and cross over and get fully onto the right side of the road, doing a reasonable speed traffic coming up behind you might run into the back of you, and that is a big problem. B-doubles can taken anything up to a minimum of 1 kilometre to get up to a reasonable speed so that in the fog someone doing a reasonable speed cannot see you and might run into the back of you, without seeing you.

The CHAIR — So you think the distance between truck stops is important?

Mr RUSSELL — Yes. I have two sons and they have both mentioned it in recent times. Going back a few years when the Princes Highway the other side of Winchelsea was being improved and they put in a passing lane, Vicroads used one of the roadside stops to store all its road-making materials. That cut down on one available stop. The biggest problem is the increase in the number of vehicles and their weight, even though it is allowable, but the roads have not been upgraded to the same standards to compensate for the weight of the trucks, and as they deteriorate more and more it is going to cost more and more to improve them to a reasonable standard.

The CHAIR — Thank you for that.

Mr RUSSELL — Thank you for the opportunity.

Witness withdrew.
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll

Colac – 9 December 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
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Staff

Executive Officer: Ms A. Douglas
Research Officer: Mr P. Nelson

Witnesses

Mr L. Merritt, Chief Executive; and
Mr P. Reeve, Director Physical Services, Warrnambool City Council.
The CHAIR — Welcome to Lindsay and Peter from Warrnambool City Council, and we thank you for your time. As you are aware, we are running two inquiries at the present time. One is an inquiry into the country road toll and the other is crashes involving roadside objects. We are taking transcript and we will provide the council with a copy of that transcript in the not-too-distant future. We are operating under parliamentary privilege, so what you say cannot be used legally against you into the future. Again thank you for your time and effort in coming up from Warrnambool. Perhaps if we could open up by the council providing a submission and then we will get into questions and answers. You might like to start by you describing the geographical area of what Warrnambool takes in.

Mr MERRITT — We appreciate the opportunity to speak to the committee on this important inquiry. Just a few words about Warrnambool City Council. Warrnambool with its population nearing 31 000 is the regional centre of south-west Victoria. It has a growing population. In fact it has tripled in population since roughly 1945, and we confidently expect it will continue to grow by at least 400 or 500 per year. However Warrnambool is relatively small geographically; it is only 120 square kilometres, and its municipal district does not go too far outside the urban limits of the city. Therefore Warrnambool does not have an extensive rural road network. We certainly have roads that are rural by character, but nonetheless the community of interest of Warrnambool goes well beyond its municipal boundaries, and Warrnambool naturally plays a leadership role within the region and issues that affect the safety of the community and transport are vital to the welfare of the community and to the economy of the south-west. So naturally, Warrnambool City Council has a vital interest in aspects of road transport and certainly the safety aspects.

As I said earlier, the community of interest from Warrnambool generally extends perhaps 80 to 100 kilometres, depending on whether it is social, commercial, recreational or cultural interests. Often it is said that it cuts out somewhere near Stoneyford, but it certainly has a wide sphere of influence. We are well aware, of course, that part of the reason for this inquiry is the tendency for road fatalities to increase in country Victoria whilst there has been some decrease in Melbourne, certainly within the last one or two years. That is part of the challenge as to how to address all of the causative issues.

Perhaps I can make comment on road crashes, and I will call them crashes in the Warrnambool district, even though our figures are probably somewhat outdated compared with other information the committee would have. Between 1996 and 2000 there were seven fatalities in the municipal district. Two of those were drivers, one was a passenger, three were pedestrians, one bicyclist, and there were no motorcyclists. During the same period, 1996 to 2000, casualties — that is for all road users in the municipal district — were 508, but this was, in fact, well down in the state ranking, being 75 out of the 78 municipalities in terms of fatalities per 100 000 population. In other words Warrnambool’s casualty record in that period is relatively low. However, during the same period we were featured in the top 11 to 20 per cent for crashes at intersections, which is not surprising because of the urbanised nature of the municipality, and also we were overrepresented in accidents involving cyclists — once again, primarily because of the nature of the urban municipality. I think that is probably all I need to say in introduction.

We have been very supportive of the Arrive Alive strategy, and, of course, local government was consulted fairly heavily when that was introduced. I suppose most of our discussion is primarily on the issue of road environment. Whilst Council is vitally interested in the role of speed, fatigue and alcohol et cetera, it is probably true to say we do not think we are the experts to comment on those areas. I would add, though, in terms of, for example, alcohol, the Council has gone to some means to facilitate and encourage young people who flock into Warrnambool from many kilometres away for Saturday nights et cetera. We have had a supervised taxi rank station whereby the community and Council have contributed to safer supervision so that young people — anyone, for that matter — are encouraged to take taxis home, but naturally, and as the inquiry would be well aware, many people who come into Warrnambool for social activities often drive very long distances, well beyond the reach of public transport. So I would think it remains a sort of educative challenge as to how to ensure there is the appropriate arrangements and negotiation about who is not drinking, who is going to look after the rest of the people in the party, and I guess in country Victoria that is a continuing challenge as to how to facilitate arrangements for people to get home safely, particularly when you are driving long distances on roads that can sometimes be of variable quality, and, of course, in country Victoria people are obviously much more highly dependent on motor vehicle transport because they simply do not have the public transport opportunities as they would in the metropolis.

I think I might hand over to Peter Reeve, the Director Physical Services, to talk a little bit more about some of the road safety initiatives within the municipality, particularly through the Warrnambool Road Safety Strategy which was launched in about October last year.
Mr REEVE — As Lindsay has said, this Council, along with a lot of others, has adopted a road safety strategy. I am happy to leave a copy of it. We have been working closely with the schools, but when we look at the terms of the inquiry and our municipality, they do not completely relate. We are in a rural area, but because of our size we have 330 kilometres of road network, 300 of them are sealed roads and 30 kilometres of unsealed road. When you go through the statistics, as Lindsay has said, there were seven fatalities. Unfortunately about a month ago we had another fatality, so we are now up to eight over the last five and a half years of actual deaths. We have 109 serious injuries, and other injuries, 432.

But four of those fatalities were pedestrians, so it is the unprotected road user that is the one who is really suffering in our municipality. The cyclist was another, and of those there were only three drivers that were actual fatalities. When I say ‘only three’, I am not trying to lessen it; it is still pretty serious. But it is not like a normal rural road strategy plan, so our emphasis has been, particularly in our inner urban area, if you like, trying to make safer pedestrian crossings because most of them are within our shopping centre. We have been working with senior citizens. We have had funding to provide education opportunities, safer driving opportunities and work with the schools. We have Travel Smart officers and road safety officers who work with the schools in that regard. So that has generally been our focus. But when you look at the accidents and the three that were killed, all of them were on the Princes and Hopkins highways, so they are not on our local roads. The majority of accidents — 54 per cent — are on our local roads, but the serious ones that occur are generally on the main arterial roads, not the local roads.

It is also interesting that, as Lindsay said, this municipality has adopted in principle the Government’s intention to try and reduce the road toll by 20 per cent over the next five years. Last year we put a report up to Council based on the Road Safety Strategy and on our observations of what was happening around Victoria. There was a recommendation that the Council should seek support from other municipalities, the Minister and Vicroads for the possibility of reducing the speed limit on unsealed roads to 80 kilometres an hour statewide. We wrote letters to all municipalities and we have had a reasonable response. We sent out 79 letters; of those — —

The CHAIR — So that was initiated by the Warrnambool City Council?

Mr REEVE — Yes. It had been spoken about a fair bit. We had been to seminars, we had spoken with Vicroads and we thought, ‘Let’s put it on the agenda; let’s see if there is general support for such a thing’.

The CHAIR — For what reason did you decide to put it on the agenda? Was there some history within the Warrnambool City Council?

Mr REEVE — Not within Warrnambool; it did not really relate. We only have 30 kilometres of unsealed road compared to 300 kilometres of sealed roads, but we have found — perhaps because a lot of Warrnambool residents are used to travelling at 100 kilometres an hour on the sealed roads on the outskirts and going into the Shire, and suddenly they are confronted with an unsealed road. We have milk tankers and heavy transport on some of those roads and suddenly the road conditions change. Also the information that was forthcoming was that the road toll in the country areas was increasing whereas in built-up areas in Melbourne the toll was decreasing. The statistics from Vicroads were that under the 80-kilometre-an-hour speed limit zones the road toll was going down. It is also interesting that, as Lindsay said, this municipality has adopted in principle the Government’s intention to try and reduce the road toll by 20 per cent over the next five years. Last year we put a report up to Council based on the Road Safety Strategy and on our observations of what was happening around Victoria. There was a recommendation that the Council should seek support from other municipalities, the Minister and Vicroads for the possibility of reducing the speed limit on unsealed roads to 80 kilometres an hour statewide. We wrote letters to all municipalities and we have had a reasonable response. We sent out 79 letters; of those — —

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So we got together with some of the other municipalities, put up a report and I am happy to leave a copy of it with you. It was based on statistics and a bit of commonsense. We wrote to the municipalities to see how many would support it and how many were against it. We were quite pleasantly surprised by the general support from municipalities. As Lindsay has said, our municipality is unique. When we talk about roadside objects a lot of our statistics show that they are basically crashes at intersections and with pedestrians and cyclists. The demographics showed that it is our younger population and those over 55 years that are in the high-risk categories in Warrnambool.

The CHAIR — With regard to roadside objects, do you have an issue with power poles on the side of roads and streets, and how do you work in with the local power supplier — I guess that is Powercor?
Mr REEVE — We have an issue with them because wherever we try to improve the intersections it generally works out to be a high-cost item and quite often you end up designing around it. It is fair to say that with most of our intersections we have been trying to narrow them down. Warrnambool is lucky because it has quite wide road reserves, particularly in the older parts of the City. We have quite wide pavements in those streets and as a result — and we have done an urban design framework for the city — we are narrowing the intersections. We are finding that we are taking the kerbs out from a lot of the poles.

The CHAIR — You are taking the kerbs out?

Mr REEVE — We are trying to reduce the speed of the traffic in the CBD and in our residential streets, and we are tending to go the other way. In the Warrnambool situation it is not as major an issue as it used to be.

Mr MULDER — Given that Warrnambool Council has a low fatality rate — and possibly a low crash rate in relation to other parts of the state — what was the rationale behind convincing council to take on board a Road Safety Officer? Some municipalities have them, some do not. I think you share yours with the Shire of Moyne.

Mr MERRITT — Yes, we share ours with Moyne. Our Council is fairly conscious of being a city that is safe in all respects — that is, road safety and other aspects of community safety. There had been a fairly high investment in a Community Safety Plan and also we have established a joint Local Safety Committee with Moyne, looking at two aspects: local policing priorities and also other aspects of community safety. That committee has an overview role in reviewing progress and directions under the Community Safety Plan, part of which includes road safety. So that has really lead to the Council having a fairly high commitment to a safe community including road safety, and that is why notwithstanding our casualty rate is well down on the state average this council has committed itself to that resource with Moyne. The Council has also advocated for some years in relation to lower speed limits around schools and we are now pleased that that is being implemented. It all goes with the fact that Warrnambool sees itself as needing to be seen as a safe city in all respects.

The CHAIR — What type of role does the Road Safety Officer play with the Warrnambool City Council?

Mr REEVE — She works with our road safety strategy and sees what we have achieved. This is how we have presented our Road Safety Strategy and worked with senior citizens and with the schools. We found that once we had launched this, the schools took an active role in it. We were particularly getting requests from schools to come out and talk about it. We really did not have the resources to do that and took the opportunity when it came up with Moyne. We see it as much as an educative-type role for the community. The whole focus has been to get away from bureaucratic-type books, if you like, into something that people can relate to. We got a local artist to depict Warrnambool and people can see the main features. The message is there. It is really about working with the community in that regard.

The CHAIR — Can we have a copy of that?

Mr REEVE — Yes.

Mr EREN — In relation to fencing to keep livestock in, previous submissions have outlined that trees are falling and damaging the fences that keep livestock in and as a result the livestock goes onto the road. We have also heard about a recent accident that involved a motorcyclist with a cow. Do you know the specifics of that case? How did the cow get out?

Mr MERRITT — I think I can give you some general coverage. I do not think the coroner’s findings have come out yet, but it was a property just on the outskirts of Warrnambool. It was quite a tragic accident in the sense that a cow was out and a motorcyclist ran into the cow. The cyclist was on the ground, a motorist stopped and then unfortunately the motorcyclist was run over by another vehicle. So it was a tragic accident. But essentially there had been some history of the council talking to that owner about the state of fencing which had not really been heeded. I think it was just a case of poorly maintained old fencing, but it certainly completely reinforced the fact that, particularly in a dairying area, fencing needs to be to a very good standard. I think you asked whether fencing is at risk if trees are falling on it. I suppose that could well be the case; hence there is some conflict maybe at times between retaining a lot of tree growth near fencing and the state of fencing.

Mr HARKNESS — I see one of your notations says that female accident statistics are above the State average. Are you able to tell us a little bit more about that
Mr REEVE — They are above the state average, but once again it is more in the elderly.

Mr HARKNESS — Pedestrians?

Mr REEVE — Pedestrians, yes, and also drivers. We have been successful in getting funding with Moyne. Once again we often work in conjunction with Moyne in obtaining funding to have some education programs put in place. There was an expo about two weeks ago in conjunction with Moyne Health within the city where all driving issues that related to older persons were identified, from changing tyres and putting out safety signs, through to towing caravans and all that sort of stuff, which was very well attended. We received very positive comments. It is about 10 per cent higher than what the state average is. We are working with our senior citizens at the Archie Graham Centre in having education programs through there also.

Mr MERRITT — Through you, Mr Chairman, do you have any comments on the fencing issues?

Mr REEVE — There have been long ongoing discussions and documentation with that property owner on his fencing, and stock have been out previously. When the accident occurred I am pretty sure we knew where the stock came from, but it did not have any ear tags on it.

Mr EREN — Does Council have an auditing system of certain types of fencing, for example, or is it if somebody complains about livestock being on the road?

Mr REEVE — We generally pick it up when we go out for our fire prevention. Apart from that it is probably more reactionary. We do have kilometres of rural fencing, but it is more particularly our fire prevention officer who is our local laws officer. When they go around at that particular stage they pick up any fencing issues.

The CHAIR — Do you conduct systematic safety audits of your street network?

Mr REEVE — We are starting to do that. We have a Risk Officer. We were just talking about it on the way. There is a move to try and get another one on also to do with the road management plan, if you like. Three of our engineers have now got the certification to do road safety audits, so we are now doing that on a lot of our existing intersections. Naturally any problem ones that you have are brought up, and we do it, but we are incorporating that within all of our design work at this particular stage and doing an audit after it. Hopefully we can eventually; we are in a catch-up phase in that regard.

The CHAIR — What are the main safety issues confronting the Council? Is it speed, fatigue, alcohol, anything else?

Mr REEVE — It is probably speed and a perception of speed. Most of the issues and complaints that we get are about vehicles that are speeding or intersection treatments, in particular, splitter islands. We are known as a roundabout city, and people want more roundabouts, if you like. We do not get many complaints about rural areas, to be honest. It is more built-up urban areas or complaints about a family that has grown-up kids and they have six cars, and that sort of stuff, and taking off down the road. We have the speed monitoring. We work in very closely with the police. If we get complaints in particular areas, we put the tapes out, put it into the computer. It is generally a regular car, some guy up the road, so the police go out at that particular time and take whatever action they think is appropriate. But it is more to do with intersection treatments, pedestrian safety, cyclists. We have a pretty good network developing of walkways, off-road bicycle paths. We have been very successful in obtaining funding from the state government over the last few years, even on-road bicycle paths, so all of our schools now are linked up pretty well with bicycle paths.

The CHAIR — Do tourists create any particular problem for the Council?

Mr REEVE — Only in numbers.

The CHAIR — On-road tourists, I meant.

Mr REEVE — Which is not really a problem. I do not believe so, not in the City. It provides congestion and the locals cannot find a parking spot.

The CHAIR — By the nature of the Warrnambool City Council and the nature of the city itself, you do not have the same experience as we have seen with other councils with inexperienced tourists on open roads?
Mr MERRITT — There are obviously some issues with non-English tourists on the Great Ocean Road particularly, where they come out in a very constrained sight line and instinctively go to the wrong side of the road, but that is obviously outside Warrnambool. No, I do not think we have any real issues with tourists to my recollection, apart from the usual issues of, ‘Can you tell me where I go to that location?’.

Mr REEVE — People would want to encourage them, and to that end I think it is fair we fully support the upgrading of the Princes Highway and things like that, which is really a lifeline — the Great Ocean Road is too, but the Princes Highway obviously is going to be if the Great Ocean Road strategy is adopted, that is an incredibly important document for Warrnambool, and the upgrading of the Princes Highway obviously would come from that. I think Lindsay is going to talk about that.

Mr MERRITT — If I can, although obviously not talking about parts of the road network specifically, the Council, together with all the councils in this part of the state, would certainly continue to advocate the progressive upgrading of the highway.

According to the Corridor Strategy launched by Vicroads last year, 23 per cent of the route between Geelong and the South Australian border is above the Victorian average of 15 casualty crashes per 100 million vehicle kilometres, and it is certainly above the State average in the sections between Colac and Warrnambool and between Portland and Heywood, which have quite restricted passing opportunities. There is also a high number of casualty crashes recorded in townships, particularly Colac and Warrnambool, and there have been 23 fatality crashes during 1994 to 1998 with most of these being in the section Waurn Ponds to Winchelsea, Colac to Stoneyford, and Terang to Allansford sections.

Our Council and the councils in this region are obviously strongly supporting the State Government’s advocacy approach to the Federal Government in terms of the strategic network for Victoria and the fact that the Princes Highway West should receive road of national importance status. After all it is Australia’s No. 1 route that connects all capital cities, and is arguably perhaps one of the lower standard interstate routes within Victoria, bearing in mind that none of the towns are bypassed, and the freight task which is serving Victoria’s export earnings is increasing all the time with the increasing production of the industries of this area. Naturally, this Council also supports more of that going onto rail, but nonetheless the freight task along the Princes Highway and the frustrations, I suppose, of not being able to pass, have other counter-effects in incentives for people to take back roads et cetera, which arguably also then introduces other issues of vehicles trying to pass in poor weather conditions on single lane roads and the like, including even freight vehicles taking those directions.

Fortunately in Warrnambool it is a fact of life that many people avoid the arterial road that should take them to Melbourne in preference to other back roads which effectively have a lower level of frustration in terms of being held up behind freight vehicles.

Mr MULDER — Has the establishment of that shopping centre outside Warrnambool made much difference to traffic and pedestrian movement in the City itself — in the CBD?

Mr MERRITT — I would not think so. They have had their own joint roles for a fair while and although we do not have hard evidence, anecdotally most of the shops are full in the CBD. We do not think it has any strong impact. Mind you, we are going through some rezoning for the outer-eastern centre at the moment and it is highly likely that when Bunnings and a few other of the big players are there, that progressively more of Warrnambool’s retail activities will shift to the east. That is quite possible.

The CHAIR — Are there any further questions? Is there anything you would like to add?

Mr MERRITT — Perhaps in closing I daresay the committee has seen the recent RACV report?

The CHAIR — Absolutely.

Mr MERRITT — I will not repeat what that says, but it obviously stresses the savings both in money and in other terms in appropriate investment within the rural road network. Bear in mind that, quoting this, it says that rural Victoria is home to 30 per cent of the State’s population. However, over 50 per cent of the road fatalities, and 35 per cent of the serious injuries occur on rural roads. Once again we appreciate the opportunity of making these comments and we look forward to the committee’s report. Thank you.

The CHAIR — Thank you.

Committee adjourned.