ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll

Geelong – 8 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

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

Witnesses
Mr T. Makings, General Manager;
Mr A. Boseley, Section Leader, Transport and Traffic Engineering; and
Ms M. Busch, Road Safety Officer, City of Greater Geelong.

Necessary corrections to be notified to
executive officer of committee
The CHAIR — Welcome to the parliamentary Road Safety Committee and our inquiries into country road toll and crashes involving roadside objects. Thank you for your time, Terry, Anthony and Margot. As you aware, we have two concurrent inquiries at the present time — our inquiry into the country road toll and also crashes involving roadside objects. These are the second of our hearings, which will take place right across rural and regional Victoria and will be conducted throughout 2004.

These are public hearings. We are taking transcript of the proceedings which we use for our own purposes when looking at our inquiry. What you say today therefore is protected by parliamentary privilege, which means that what you say cannot be used against you legally; so, go for it. Thank you for your time and input. You may like to open up with your brief submission and then we will get into a bit of dialogue. We will ask questions as we go along. Thank you for the hospitality in allowing us to use the council chamber for our inquiry today.

Mr MAKINGS — I am quite new to the Greater Geelong City Council as an employee, although I am a Geelong person originally.

I think in the main I would like to say that Geelong has probably been the recipient of state initiatives over a number of years — namely, the black spot program and other initiatives, and I think they have been well received by Geelong, and it certainly appreciates any input that the state makes in this particular region. We are obviously very keen, as the state is, to do something about the state toll.

With respect to the level of deaths that occur in this region, they are significantly high and we believe represent an abnormal proportion of what is happening in the state, so we are quite keen to participate in any state-driven initiatives that might positively influence those numbers and bring them down. For instance, when we look at the numbers between 1998 and 2002, whilst there have been improvements made in some areas of the state, we believe we are still at that level of incidence that it should be of concern to both the inquiry and to others who participate in road management issues.

I feel there has been a lot of focus put on the engineering side, and that is particularly important. The education side is something that remains paramount as well, and anything that can be done about changing the behaviour of drivers in our region, we are obviously keen to look at what those initiatives might be and to participate in those. The fact that there have been 50 fatalities and that 13 have occurred on local roads is of concern. Basic things like line marking, and whatever, are quite important, and it is our belief that provided the engineers get a fair go at identifying what these things are, we will be able to make some difference.

The capacity of this council to contribute financially to overcome what are in some cases simple engineering issues is stretched because there is a priority of issues, particularly around us just trying to manage what is happening in the metropolitan part of our municipality. But at the end of the day the rural side of things is still exposed to relatively high risks. I believe they are quite well known to Vicroads. I think our relationship with Vicroads is very strong and positive as well, and I think their openness with respect to local issues is commendable. We want to build on that, and we think the way Vicroads is currently going about its business is very important for us and is making some difference.

We have prepared a document that we are more than happy to provide to the inquiry. I do not know whether you wish me to work our way through this.

The CHAIR — If you want to perhaps just go through the major points or the highlights of the report.

Mr MAKINGS — I think the first question you had on the paper was about the causation of incidents — whether they be through speed, drugs or alcohol — we find that the actual information that is provided to us to enable us to specifically hone on in on these areas is very limited. There are some problems in us getting up-to-date information. Whilst I quote some numbers to 2002, it is quite difficult for us to access the state information. Some of it I think is treated because of its private nature, and it seems to us there is a need to cull out some of that information that might be of concern to people that have put the data together and look at how to get that general information out.

This is, to us, quite obvious when you see it advertised on television, that, ‘This is the number of deaths we have today’. Yet trying to get the specifics around that — where they might be — if we have not collected that data ourselves from the local newspaper or other information, we are not in the mainstream of information there. So we think that is something that needs to be attended to.
The CHAIR — With regard to that issue, you are saying the council finds it difficult to get specific information with regard to road safety issues or traffic issues?

Mr MAKINGS — It takes a little time.

The CHAIR — Where would that information be coming from — mainly Vicroads?

Ms BUSCH — We have access to the public crash stats information database. That is usually six months behind, and that is where we strike some of our problems, trying to get information. Trending information across the most recent six months, we do not have direct access to that ourselves. We can contact Vicroads staff and ask them on an issue-by-issue basis for their most current date?, and you will see on this hard copy that we have here that this kindergarten addition at the end there was an inquiry that I made through our Vicroads staff who have fairly up-to-date information.

They have information up to the end of November that we do not have access to ourselves, so that is an addition that I made by hand the other day. So we do not have the most up-to-date information that is available to people like Vicroads. I am not sure whether the police can inquire on the Road Crash Information Service (RCIS) system, but it would certainly be helpful if we could have access to more current information.

Mr MAKINGS — It might seem like we are being a little pedantic because with statistics obviously when you parcel that up it is important to have a trend over some time, but with councils operating quite often on a fairly immediate budget, like an annual budget, for us to look at manipulating that, it does help.

Mr BOSELEY — In relation to the role of speed, drugs and alcohol, and fatigue we have limited information apart from what we receive through Vicroads. I think we want to apply a local context to that so we can have access to local information on those particular factors. That would be very valuable in how we address our campaigns for local road safety.

Ms BUSCH — We work from the current estimates. I was just looking at them. Speed contributes to 30 to 40 per cent of fatal and serious crashes; drugs and alcohol, 25 per cent. So they are just generally accepted factors around the state and probably around the nation. We just apply those to our own figures and say, ‘Well, this many people must have been affected in accidents caused by speed or accidents caused by’ — it is a guessing game, really.

Mr MAKINGS — If we move on to point (b), which is around roadside environment, we do not have any particular issues, although there is some conflict we are finding with respect to environmental issues. Whilst we do not have green environment issues around conservation areas, there are a lot of issues around just general management techniques — whether they be through some aspect of fire prevention or other aspect around the environment.

If you look at the particular issues, there are some conflicts with respect to environmental issues including green environment issues around conservation areas where there are a lot of issues about general road management techniques, whether they be through some aspect of fire prevention or other aspects around the environment. Then when you look at bringing the road safety aspects into that, we sometimes find that they are in conflict and there can be some confusion about what legislation takes precedence. So we get down to that fine detail and there is a bit of argy-bargy then about who should be doing what.

In more recent times we have taken a more aggressive position on this, to say, ‘We hear what you say about the green environment but at the end of the day we have got to make sure that the community is safe, and we are looking to pursue those particular elements’, but it does cause a bit of grief when you get into the back office and we are starting to move ourselves around and work out what we can do. It is quite difficult when you are looking to minimise what is a logical argument about how you have to look after the environment. It does mean that from the executive down we have to have an appreciation of where these things come together and how they are dealt with, because it is proving to be an interesting issue for us now.

Mr MULDER — Does the council have a position on inappropriate plantings in relation to roadside objects at this time? It has been raised with members of the committee, particularly by one of the inspectors in south-west Victoria in relation to the types of trees on roadsides and absolutely inappropriate planting and that there should be a program in place to replace such trees with a more appropriate type of vegetation, maybe native vegetation that does not pose a risk.
Mr MAKINGS — That is a very good point, and it is a constant battle. It is one of the elements that we have looked at very closely. Vicroads operates a policy and criteria that is quite conservative in some aspects, and as a local government we are probably looking at being a little more conciliatory in respect to that, and that is when it gets quite difficult. What you can do is not necessarily black and white. It is a definite consideration and that is probably the most pertinent point that we are looking to sort out, including the size of tree trunks.

It is okay now, but in 10 years time we might have a strategy that says you have got to take them out, and that is where it gets awkward. So it is about what we are actually delivering into the future. It is not about community projects that are done today that are not really well accepted; it is making sure that we are accommodating future generations and getting it right.

Mr HARKNESS — I am looking at the photos of the hazardous power poles. What intentions do you have to rectify that situation?

Mr MAKINGS — That was a question that we were going to put to you! They are all on state roads.

Mr HARKNESS — They are all on state roads.

Mr MAKINGS — I know you are going for a drive around this afternoon. I am on one of the traffic committees, and when I saw the photos last week I thought they seemed quite dramatic. It is a bit of a shock to think we can put those there in this day and age.

Mr MULDER — Can I just ask a question on that? Are the poles at previous accident sites or are they just poles that have been noted as being in dangerous positions? Do they have an accident history?

Ms BUSCH — They have been noted as being dangerous.

Mr MULDER — They do not necessarily have an accident history?

Ms BUSCH — No.

Mr MULDER — But have been identified as being dangerous?

Mr MAKINGS — I suspect the reason they are there is as a consequence of a risk management strategy because poles are relatively high risk. The fact that they have not been part of a black spot scheme to date shows that in the pecking order of things — they have not put a power pole in the middle of the road or inside that boundary — some of the other black spots must have been pretty awful.

Mr MULDER — Are they local roads, or are they Vicroads — —

Mr MAKINGS — They are main roads.

Mr MULDER — They are main roads, okay.

Ms BUSCH — We selected these down to just a few roads.

The CHAIR — With regard to roadside objects, for example the trees that Terry referred to before, is it a difficult process to have a tree removed from the side of a road?

Mr MAKINGS — In the short time that I have been in Geelong I can say it is much easier here than in some other places. There is a much more commonsense approach to it in Geelong, which is quite pleasing. We have found that providing we get the mechanism right and we let people know what the reason is, we can have a tree removed. If it is a healthy tree and it is more than 750 millimetres from the kerb, that is slightly different, but in the main, if a tree is in a main road and in a high-use area, which you expect all main roads to be, I do not think we would have an acute problem.

Mr HARKNESS — It depends on the attitude of the local community as well I suppose.

Mr MAKINGS — Yes. But I suspect that in Geelong, while there is a fringe element that takes extraordinary interest in anything like that, we feel that in the main the general public understands that we will not just take the trees out: that does not happen any more.
The CHAIR — I am sorry, we have diverted you from your report. Do you want to continue on? I am also mindful of the time.

Mr MAKINGS — We did not really have a specific issue around the cruise control concerns. That was not something we looked at, although I could not survive without it in my personal driving. With regard to the enforcement issues, whilst it is not really for us to tell police where they should do their business, having said that we think that the traffic management unit has been reduced in actual numbers and enforcement is a critical part of any program you want to put in place. While we can engineer many things out, there are many behavioural things that need to be teased a little bit by how many police vehicles there are in the area. While the police are under extraordinary pressure just to do an enormous number of different things, we feel that by reducing the traffic management unit — I am not sure of the numbers, but I think it went from 19 or so —

Ms BUSCH — In that order.

Mr MAKINGS — Which is not a lot for a region of this size in any case. I can only think that while it must have been reasonable at the time, given that we have not had a dramatic reduction in accidents and fatalities, it seems that it is an inordinate shift in the numbers. Now it may be covered in some other way that we do not know of, so I am not saying it has been reduced in an inappropriate way, I am saying that it is an obvious reduction in the numbers from our perspective, and it is not obvious to us that that is a good thing.

Mr MULDER — Where were they employed?

Mr MAKINGS — The traffic management unit? That is the dedicated traffic police — I forget what the old name was.

Mr MULDER — The traffic operations unit.

Mr MAKINGS — Yes, and this may have translated across into outsourced traffic cameras and all that, so that is where we need to get a balance. I am not quite sure, that might well be a legitimate outcome. We have an ongoing investment in a number of ways. We have bought a speed trailer which comes up with the digital numbers showing if you are exceeding the speed limit. We then have to work out an arrangement with the police about when we use that but the police have so many competing things that it is quite difficult at times to guarantee that they will be able to follow us in later. That can minimise the importance of the trailer because that could be seen as a specific issue identifying risk in a local road. If you get the community to appreciate those two things — that they are in tandem —

The CHAIR — Is that speed trailer operating today?

Ms BUSCH — The battery is being charged at this very moment and it is going back out on the road today.

Mr MAKINGS — Margot, who looks after that, has probably had her mind on something else today!

The CHAIR — We could have gone and had a look at it, because I have gone past it a couple of times.

Ms BUSCH — I may be able to arrange that. It is being located here today. We may be able to visit it in Belmont.

The CHAIR — We will just keep a tab on that. If we can, that would be good. It is on the way to Colac.

Mr MAKINGS — If I may move on to (c) where we talked about the measures to reduce the incidence and severity of crashes, I suppose for us the principal activity around that is the black spot funding, and Geelong and its region has done relatively well out of that program in recent times, and we are keen to pursue any initiative or proposal from the state where that would continue.

We think that has been an extraordinary success, and it is one of the obvious ways where the state can be seen to help our region, and we feel that for that to continue is really instrumental in us being able to pursue that.

Ms BUSCH — These are not black spots per se, but this is to give you a bit of an idea of the distribution of accidents in a five-year period in Geelong. It is not the most recent five-year period, but it is fairly representative. That is our rural area. I think you have a copy of that in your notes as well.
Mr EREN — Those big blue circles where obviously a high number of accidents occurred, where is that exactly?

Mr BOSELEY — Princes Highway.

Mr MAKINGS — That is on the Melbourne road.

Ms BUSCH — That is pre the Melbourne road being redesigned.

Mr HARKNESS — There is a heavy concentration down in Ocean Grove. What are the factors that have led to that?

Ms BUSCH — Some pedestrian accidents. We have a higher coastal rate of accidents over the summer period. It actually doubles from about late December through till about April, and that is, we would assume, because of the doubling of the population over that period — not to say that our visitors are causing the accidents, but just the greater traffic on the road and the greater number of pedestrians contributes to a higher rate over that period. This is our city area and our suburban area.

Mr BOSELEY — Accidents are presumably occurring on major corridor spines, but as you saw on the previous map, there are some localised areas, such as Ocean Grove. We will show the overhead relating to the black spot program. I think if you take these results, you see the positive features of the black spot program. The difference between 2002 and 2003 appears to be a 30 per cent reduction in accidents in Geelong.

Overhead shown.

Mr MULDER — Do you put that down to addressing the black spot issue?

Mr BOSELEY — In part, yes.

Mr MULDER — Did you do a lot of work in that period of time between 2002 and 2003?

Mr BOSELEY — We received the most amount of money during that time. I think it was in the order of $2.5 million.

Ms BUSCH — And of course it will be another year or two before we can actually equate crash stats back to the completion of works, but I think you have this in your notes as well. There is a significant change in the sites from a couple of years ago once we have tracked the most recent accidents at those sites.

The CHAIR — The parliamentary Road Safety Committee a couple of years ago went to New South Wales on another inquiry. Nearly all the councils up there had a road safety officer. Not many councils in Victoria have road safety officers, but in Margot, you have a road safety officer. I would be very interested in the type of role that Margot plays. Perhaps Margot may participate in the answer, but I would be very interested in what type of responsibility Margot has and what she actually does, because I have been a major advocate for road safety officers being employed by councils.

Ms BUSCH — You would probably be pleased to know that there are close to a dozen around the state now in municipalities. I guess I am one of the more recent ones, having been appointed earlier this year. My role I guess is to really develop some community awareness and education around our road safety issues here, which will complement the engineering works that the city undertakes and that VicRoads undertakes, and the enforcement work that the police and other services undertake.

Terry has already mentioned one of the programs I am involved with, which is the speed trailer, and we operate that in conjunction with the police traffic management unit. As Terry explained before, we endeavour to have the police follow up our speed trailer sites, so that people are on the one hand getting a bit of advice and education, but within a matter of days or weeks afterwards there is some follow-up enforcement. That is one of the programs.

We will be embarking on an older drivers program from early next year. That is with some assistance from the safe roads funding program. I will be looking at older drivers needs — their own perception of their needs around town, how they are managing their own transportation issues, particularly if driving is becoming a bit challenging for them.
We might also look at some youth-based programs down the track as well, knowing that, like probably most of Victoria, some of the highest crash stats come from that 18 to 25-year-old age group, and if we have young people getting up to 120 hours of driving experience before they pick up their probationary licence, they are likely to reduce their risk of a serious crash by about 30 per cent.

We will also look at some pedestrian programs next year, too, knowing that particularly in Geelong and most particularly around our central activities area, just near this building, we have quite a significant pedestrian accident rate. Again engineering treatments have assisted with those on some of our streets, but we need to make people aware of their own behaviours as a contributing factor to those stats. So they are a few of the programs.

Some of it is about letting the community know what our localised accident problem is, and while I think most people around Victoria could quote you roughly what the Victorian road toll is at present, I do not know that too many Geelong people could tell you what our own fatality rate might have been for last year, or our serious accident rate, where those accidents might be occurring and how people are contributing to those themselves. We are also aiming to run a campaign that will focus on our local road safety issues and help people understand what is happening in our own backyard, and not just thinking about road safety encapsulating one single toll that applies to the whole of Victoria.

**The CHAIR —** With regard to, say, older road users next year when you go through that program, you will liaise and work I presume with various groups?

**Ms BUSCH** — Internal and external, so we will calling in our aged and disability service staff to be a part of that. It may be that the community road safety — Barwon Roadsafe — has a role, and some aged and disability organisations that sit outside of the council, Barwon Health.

**The CHAIR —** Do you work closely with Vicroads?

**Ms BUSCH** — Most particularly through the Road Safety Council. I would say that is where my greatest role is, but I do liaise with Vicroads staff.

**Mr MAKINGS** — I have got a view about this that may be contrary to the fact that we have a road safety officer. It is about how councils manage their traffic management issues, and this council has a minor issue which I feel I am obliged to correct, and that is that it has traffic management aggregated across a number of functions, so you do not get traffic management which in fact should see absolutely everything that is being done in the council, in our regions, and pull it together so you get a professional overview of what is happening in respect to the behaviour of people that are using the public highway — whether they be pedestrians, walkers, cyclists, motorcyclists, and all the way through public transport.

We find that they are all divided up into different segments and you do not get that overview. The best thing about having a road safety officer is that it gives us access into these other areas and people pay attention, but there is a higher order of things around how organisations such as ourselves manage traffic management overall, and I feel that is where we do not get the best bang for the buck: we are spread quite thinly and that is a bit of an issue. I think it manifests itself in things like accidents when people do not actually know all the bits that are going on, subdivisions, event management and all those things. At the end of the day the gateway should be through traffic management, not other delegations to give you a permit. That is proving to be an interesting situation and Anthony will be happy to give you some more information.

**The CHAIR —** Yes.

**Mr BOSELEY** — I might just add that we do know that in all the accidents that occur, the human factor accounts for 90 per cent or more, other factors being the road environment or the vehicle itself. But the human factor is the prime cause. Engineering can only go so far in adjusting the environment.

**Mr MAKINGS** — I think we are looking to parcel up any financial support we are able to get from other government areas such as federal, state or surrounding councils and any private contributions, to undertake our own fairly aggressive education program. We want to take the Arrive Alive program and see how we can use it to make our own people more aware, so that when they see it, it becomes a sign which says, ‘You had better pay attention, this information is important’. We are doing everything we can. Hopefully we will see that come on stream next year in one way or another with quite an aggressive campaign.

**The CHAIR —** Is Margot’s position fully funded by the council?
Mr MAKINGS — Yes, at this time, and I do not see that diminishing over time. We want any resource we can get into this area and we are looking to make sure that we have all that dovetailed into everything we do and with all the new programs that come on line so that we at least get some overview that gives us a common outcome, particularly with the design of roads.

It is an interesting thing to negotiate with developers for instance, where they introducing some very snazzy architectural themes doing this and that — things like doing away with kerbs and channels. When the Romans put those in place 2000 years ago they did a pretty good job and we have not seen anything else to take over from that. But there are a lot of ideas around and sometimes the engineering side can be seen as quite conservative because they want to maintain a certain order of things, but it is really done to make sure that we can deliver flood-free, safe motoring and particularly walking areas. I think we are all on about the same thing — it is how we get there.

We have a few other things in place with our road safety strategy. We have something like 60 actions in place looking at how we cater for things across the whole realm of road safety. Probably the most important is our connection with people with special needs. We have a couple of committees under way now; one is specifically around street access and the other is a general program where people with special needs meet with the council to look at the things to do with the public highway and associated places to make sure we get it right, because they are all road users and there are some fairly important things under way there.

We have no comment about the legislative requirements. I suppose there is a small connection with what I said before about roadside management and how environmental acts button in, but that is about it.

Ms BUSCH — Can I just take us back: you have already covered some of the material around it, Terry, but I just wanted to make the point about a statewide campaign. Perhaps the Transport Accident Commission might run it, or whoever it might be. My comment does not come from any empirical research whatsoever, it is mostly collected when sitting around a barbecue with half a dozen people and as soon as they hear that you are a road safety officer, everybody has a point of view —

The CHAIR — You can say that again!

Ms BUSCH — The common things I hear are not about how the council should fix this or how VicRoads should do that but that the worst drivers on the road are the ones who lack courtesy. They do not indicate, they weave in between cars and they do not look where they are going. The issue of older drivers pops up from time to time, but it seems to me that the major media campaigns in the last few years have been very effective in helping people to understand that the gap between life and death is very sudden or quick, or between life and a serious injury if they choose to drink and drive or if they choose to speed or drive when they really should be in bed. I do not believe that we have had any major campaigns around those courtesy and patience issues on the road and just being better behaved drivers.

With the distance issue and the distance between cars on wet days, it always takes the first half day of a wet day on the road for people to adjust their driving, and you can hear the smashes happening outside this building. So I wonder if there is some opportunity for media campaigns to pick up on some of the things that seem to be smaller contributing factors, but according to barbecue talk they are the greater contributing factors — or as great as the major speed, fatigue and drink-driving issues.

The CHAIR — And mobile phones.

Ms BUSCH — And mobile phones. Telstra did pick that one up and it was pleasing to see its campaign around that. An advertisement was run earlier this year — I have only seen it a couple of times — about a young woman in a car learning to drive. It was an amusing advertisement and I think it made a connection with a lot of people but it has perhaps not been around long enough.

The CHAIR — Yes.

Ms BUSCH — And of course we have had the worst example you could possibly have in Geelong not so very long ago.

The CHAIR — We are meeting with Mr and Mrs Marsh this afternoon.

Mr MAKINGS — With respect to the roadside objects, I think the most significant thing for us is probably the position of power lines, which are the photographs that you have seen. The other issues revolve around how one might put risk management plans in place and to identify sight lines and so forth. There are
quite a few policies around that should help with that, but the main thing for us is the undergrounding of power lines and the huge resistance — because of the cost, no doubt — of undertaking those sorts of works. That is proving quite an issue for us, but in the main I would just like to repeat the earlier comments that there have been some terrific programs that have helped local government and this region in particular, and if things like the black spot program continue, it will be of great benefit to us and we look forward to that. That is probably about all we have got to say.

Mr EREN — Just before you go, one of the photos shows the corner of Lock Street and St Albans Road in Geelong East and if you look at it there is a big tree that is thick and dangerous. Is the council taking any action on what is planted on nature strips?

Mr MAKINGS — Yes, from our perspective we plant the trees on the public highway so if somebody wants a tree in front of their place in the nature strip on the public highway, we select and plant it. If they ask for it, we say, ‘We will come and put it in’. We are trying to minimise the incidence of a house owner planting trees outside their property on council property. With the location of any objects behind the kerb we are looking to ensure that that happens beyond where a car can pull up and get the door open, and also travel safely if they come over the kerb, so trees are planted a minimum of 700 millimetres to 750 millimetres from the kerb. If it is in a fast lane, there would be a greater distance. In the main these tend to be general VicRoads policy issues and they run a fairly hard line with those so we would not be looking to counteract any of that. Hopefully that answers the question.

The CHAIR — Are there any further questions? I am mindful of the time and I would like to keep to the schedule. Thank you for your time Terry, Anthony and Margot. We appreciate it. A copy of the transcript will be forwarded to you.

Witnesses withdrew.
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

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Geelong – 8 December 2003

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Witnesses

Cr B. Davidson, Mayor; and
Mr R. Bain, Engineer, Surf Coast Shire.

Necessary corrections to be notified to executive officer of committee
The CHAIR — Welcome to the state parliamentary Road Safety Committee hearing. We appreciate your time and input into the committee’s hearing. As you would be aware, we are running two concurrent hearings at the present time. The first inquiry is into the country road toll and the second is into crashes involving roadside objects. These are the second group of our hearings, and we intend, as a parliamentary committee, to travel throughout Victorian regional and rural areas over the next couple of months to hear from organisations such as yourselves.

These are public hearings, and therefore we are taking transcripts. The proceedings will be used for the purpose of our inquiry. What you say today is protected by parliamentary privilege, which means that what you say cannot be used against you legally into the future. Having said that, please feel relaxed, and we will keep this as informal as we can. Again, thank you for your input, Beth, as the mayor, and we appreciate your time. If you would like to make your submission, we will then get into dialogue as we go through the submission.

Cr DAVIDSON — Thanks very much, Ian. Thanks to yourself and the members of the committee for the opportunity to input this morning. You have all got a copy, I think, of the submission here. Briefly I will do the overview of the shire and the crash statistics, just to paint the context of how the shire sits; Richard Bain, who is our project development engineer, will speak in more detail of the situation as it exists in Surf Coast and what the statistics are telling us now, and then I will be wrapping up with what we think are some ways forward.

Just in setting the scene regarding Surf Coast, I know a couple of you are probably quite familiar with Surf Coast. We are one of the fastest growing non-urban municipalities. Our growth has been at 3.2 per cent annually for something like the last 15 years. I meant to get the statistics on the way in, but our population has actually doubled, so that gives a context of how fast and rapid the growth has been.

Our permanent population is about 20 000, and that at least doubles in holiday times, and many people say it in fact it even triples. I am not sure of the exact figures. We are increasingly popular as a permanent place to live, and approximately 45 per cent of our ratepayers are part-time residents. So that is quite a different situation from many places, particularly along the coast where we have such a high proportion of non-permanent ratepayers.

The Great Ocean Road, as you would be aware, starts in Torquay, and it attracts 2.5 million visitors a year along that road. Many of those are also international tourists. Our geographical area, as it says here, is 1560 square kilometres, and along the coastal area our main townships are Torquay, Anglesea, Aireys Inlet and Lorne. Over on the Princes Highway, which is one of the major inland roads, Winchelsea is the large township.

Geographically our municipality is dominated by the Otway Ranges. We have the coastal areas and then the hinterland on the other side. The three major roads are the Surf Coast Highway, which goes down to Torquay, the Princes Highway, which cuts right across south-western Victoria, and the Great Ocean Road — that major tourist icon. All these roads pass through major townships, and that often presents a conflict between the needs of the through traffic and the needs of the townspeople and the tourists to even walk and move about safely within those communities. We have a road network, including 500 kilometres of sealed road and 500 kilometres of unsealed gravel roads, so that sets the scene of the geography.

Moving on to how the traffic moves, we are all aware that road fatalities are a tragic element of our society, and injuries are a major burden on health and wellbeing. With the number of casualties per 100 000 of population measured across the 46 rural municipalities, Surf Coast ranks quite highly. It is eighth worst overall, fourth worst for motorcycle casualties and seventh worst for pedestrian casualties — and of course when one thinks about the visitors, particularly along the Great Ocean Road and the Princes Highway, that is not a surprising statistic.

In the five-year period to 2000, there were 667 casualty accidents in our area, and that averages out at one every three days. Fifty-eight per cent of those crashes were outside the township boundaries, so that means they were in the rural areas, and those crashes have increased by approximately 3.5 per cent per year over the past five years. I am not clear on what the traffic increase has been over that time. Sixty per cent of all those crashes were due to the loss of control of a vehicle resulting in either running off the road or hitting an oncoming vehicle, and 63 per cent have occurred on that arterial road network that I mentioned earlier.

As you move through to look at the tables that Richard has included in here, you will see that a high percentage of accidents also happen on Sundays. Sunday is by far the worst day for accidents.

Mr EREN — The statistics that you had for the five years, are they from 1995 to 2000?

Mr BAIN — That is correct in relation to the summary on page 3.
Mr EREN — Do you have any updated ones to 2003?

Mr BAIN — We do. The graphs that are attached are upgraded in terms of the specific relevance, but we have updated the rankings on page 3 against the other rural municipalities.

Cr DAVIDSON — I will hand over to Richard now to take you through our road safety strategic plan, which is what we have used for this submission.

Mr BAIN — The first graph is the comparison between urban and rural, and it highlights, particularly in the rural area, that the fatalities are very significant. So three-quarters of all our fatalities are in the rural area. The second graph is in relation to the type of vehicles that are involved in the accidents. The point that I think is most pertinent is the high percentage of motorcycle accidents within our municipality. We have in the order of 20 per cent.

Mr MULDER — The Great Ocean Road, which category does that fall into — urban or rural?

Mr BAIN — It would be rural. It would be rural whilst it is outside the township boundaries.

I might add that these statistics are based upon the last 10 years of fatalities but only the last 5 years of injuries. We have increased the number of years for fatalities to get a statistically representative group. The third graph relates to the declared road network — the road network that the state has responsibility for at the current time — and includes the state highways, the Great Ocean Road and the main roads. Again it is indicative of the number of accidents occurring on those arterial roads rather than on our local road network.

Mr EREN — Richard, you have 500 kilometres of sealed roads and 500 kilometres of unsealed, gravel roads. I am not sure whether you will have this information to hand, but how many of the injuries that are sustained occur on local gravel roads?

Mr BAIN — We would be able to obtain that information, because I suspect that the crash statistics would indicate what the type of surface is. We do not have that information here, but if it is pertinent, it would certainly be — —

Mr EREN — It would be good if we could find that out.

Mr BAIN — The 4th graph indicates the objects that have been struck, and significantly the poles on the last line indicate the severity of those accidents and that the ratio between the fatal accidents and the casualty accidents is approximately double. We felt that that might be significant in terms of your inquiry into roadside objects. A graph shows the days of the week — —

The CHAIR — Can I just go back to that issue of the poles where the actual figure for fatalities is twice as much, did you say?

Mr BAIN — Yes.

The CHAIR — I am just looking at the next line up, where trees are nearly on a par — —

Mr BAIN — Yes.

The CHAIR — That is what that indicates to me. It is an interesting graph.

Cr DAVIDSON — So more people hit trees, but as a percentage it is not so severe if you hit a tree.

The CHAIR — If you hit a pole, it is not as forgiving.

Mr BAIN — That is correct. By day of the week, Sunday is by far the most serious in terms of accidents, both for casualties and fatalities. In fact Sunday represents 35 per cent of the total fatalities in the municipality. I suspect that this is not unexpected, given that we attract a large number of day trippers.

Mr MULDER — Do you have a break-up of whether it is locals who have been involved in the accidents?

Mr BAIN — One of our recommendations is that we would like to be able to obtain that information from the crash statistics, but our work to date has not been able to achieve that. If we are going to try and focus on an
education program, it would be really helpful to know where people live or how far away from home they are. If, as we suspect, they are from outside our municipality for example, there is clearly not a great deal to be gained if we are going to have an emphasis on educating our own population.

The CHAIR — It is interesting to compare that graph for Sunday to the percentage of motorcycles and the Great Ocean Road — and as a local you can paint that picture in your mind pretty quickly.

Mr BAIN — Yes.

The CHAIR — We should not jump to conclusions, but it is a good indication of what most locals would know.

Cr DAVIDSON — That is right.

Mr BAIN — The last graph relates to the type of accident — where it has occurred. We felt that the significant element was the head-on crash, not an overtaking crash where again the fatality ratio is significantly higher. Mark Hennessey, who undertook our road safety strategy, suggests that this represents a loss of control. So these are vehicles travelling along a rural road and their drivers lose attention and go into a gravel shoulder, losing control and then veering across into oncoming traffic, which would indicate why there is such a high ratio of fatalities compared to injuries. The speed of the accident would be indicative of the fatalities. So those are the graphs that we have attached.

We might go back to our municipal road safety strategic plan, which has only recently been adopted by council, and we have tabled a copy of that. Within it six targeted programs are listed. You will note on the last of them that we have included motorcycle safety and how important it is, again as a result of the assessment of the crash statistics. Many of the others relate to urban elements of road safety, so I will not labour that. But within the plan there are 36 individual actions over a four-year period. What has come out and is really important is that it is not something that the shire can take responsibility for alone. It has certainly done excellent work to get to this point, but we see that if we are to move forward and achieve the actions that we have set out, then we need a partnership with Victoria Police, Vicroads, Barwon Road Safe and the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria as the key stakeholders. In each of the action statements we have indicated who the lead agencies would be.

The CHAIR — Organisationally, who would take responsibility for the implementation of the strategic plan, ensuring that action takes place?

Mr BAIN — Council acknowledges that it has a leadership and coordination role, but one of our recommendations is a strengthening of the coordination that is necessary between all of the key partners. Without that we do not think we are going to have success.

Cr DAVIDSON — That is always one of the challenges when you have a plan like this, and we find the same with a range of different plans that the council may have — for instance, the community fire safety plan is very similar. Local government can be a coordinating and facilitating agency, but often it does not have the authority to undertake all of the actions that have been identified as critical, and that is why the partnership approach is so important. You will see on the next page that it has identified lead agencies, being Vicroads, Victoria Police and Barwon Road Safe. That is something that comes out quite strongly for us, and we will be recommending strengthening the role of Barwon Road Safe in being able to see that a number of these are implemented.

Mr MULDER — Can I just ask a question in relation to issues raised on page 4, entitled ‘Roadside hazards: the code objectives include …’ and it shows your objectives of protecting and maintaining indigenous vegetation, maintaining wildlife habitat and protecting cultural and heritage value important trees. If you then turn to charts 8 and 9, the greatest impact in relation to fatalities and casualties is vehicles leaving the road and hitting a tree. It is a difficult balance.

Cr DAVIDSON — Just to go back to page 4, you will see that the code objectives are the code of environmental practice for rural roadsides, which is a different document to the road safety strategy, and as you say that is quite a difficult balance. Council recognises that it needs to be a balance. Our community has sent a very strong message that it values the roadsides for areas of biodiversity and remnant vegetation protection, and so there is that constant balance of how one manages to get that.
Mr MULDER — Has anyone got any advice for the Road Safety Committee to take away in relation to the fact that we have a real problem with trees, particularly in rural areas where vehicles leave the road? That is where most of the accidents occur — a vehicle leaves the road and hits a tree or a solid object.

Cr DAVIDSON — I think that is what we would like to come to in driver education, because you put the keywords there, Terry — when the vehicle left the road and hit the tree. We do not see the trees leaving the roadside and coming onto the road pavement, and I think this is an issue we would like to pick up when we talk about driver behaviour and driver education.

Mr MULDER — But you cannot put it all down to driver behaviour. I drive in the city and I drive in the rural areas. If you drive in the city, you have divided highways, barriers to the right, controlled intersections; you do not have the problems we face with roads with rough shoulders, quite often broken-up roads, bends in the road. You are not divided from oncoming traffic. It is a totally different driving environment. We do have a significant problem in relation to trees close to the side of the road. There is a balance there, I understand, but we would like it if anyone has any ideas on how that balance should occur, how those decisions should be made.

Cr DAVIDSON — You have highlighted very much two different driving environments. It is about how we recognise in our normal life that we have to modify our behaviour according to the environment we are in. If it is a hot day, we wear sun screen; if it is a wet day, we take an umbrella. You modify your behaviour according to existing conditions. Would you like me to talk more on that now, rather than later on?

Mr MULDER — There are probably two different approaches. One is driver behaviour; the other one is roadside objects. I understand there is a definite connection between the two. There have been suggestions. I know there was a police inspector from south-west Victoria saying there is a whole host of inappropriate planting along road reserves; those types of trees should never have been planted there; and should we go down the pathway of removing them and putting in more suitable types of vegetation? I am not sure how that —

Cr DAVIDSON — What we have talked about here is not plantings; it is about remnant vegetation, which is a different issue again.

Mr BAIN — In some recent work on the Surf Coast Highway within the Torquay township we have undertaken quite extensive plantings within the road reserve, but the planting is of species which are appropriate and have offsets which meet the current standards which are considered appropriate for that speed environment. In terms of the rural situation, I think we are faced with a very different situation where we are dealing with trees and vegetation which is indigenous. It has been there from the outset, so it does present us — and I think we acknowledge that — with a particular challenge. We felt as a municipality when we were preparing this for you that in looking at the roadside hazards or roadside objects we would list four points there with regard to our road safety strategy which relate to roadside hazards, but then balance that with the recent work which has been done with regard to the environmental practice for rural roadsides. I think this is a challenge that the Surf Coast Shire faces, and I do not know whether others do to the same extent, of balancing the development which we are seeing, and the development brings increasing traffic volumes, with the environment which people so desire. I think it could be reasonably argued that people are coming to live in the Surf Coast Shire because of the environment, which includes the vegetation.

The CHAIR — In identifying hazards along the side of the road, does the council already conduct a systematic safety review of the road network?

Mr BAIN — No, we do not. Our approach to our capital works to date has been of identifying a range of road safety projects and then prioritising them. It has not been to this stage going out and undertaking audits perhaps of areas that we could identify which others have not brought to our attention at this stage.

The CHAIR — Although I do note that under your strategic plan you have ‘Planning and managing a safe road ... network’, which I guess is going along — pardon the pun — that road.

Mr BAIN — This is what has been in the strategy which we have just adopted, so we are saying, yes, that is an appropriate way in which you can go.

The CHAIR — A proactive approach to it?

Mr BAIN — Yes. I was responding to I suppose what passed in the status — —
The CHAIR — Fine.

Mr BAIN — If we move from the roadside hazards down to the country road toll, at the bottom of page 4 there is mention of the state’s Arrive Alive campaign and the improvements which we are currently seeing, but the road trauma is remaining a concern for the shire. So what are we doing about it? On page 5 we have said that for the first time this year we have a road safety strategy implementation item on our capital works budget of $80 000, which is complemented with a program which we have had for a number of years involving the sealing of gravel road intersections. So we have made significant inroads into gravel road intersections; we seal 20 or 30 metres back from the intersection, and this provides the benefit of improved definition of the intersection, it improves the braking, and it removes the loose stones. Historically, if you have had a crossroad with a sealed road and gravel road approach to it — —

The CHAIR — We met with a number of central Victorian councils talking about gravel roads, and two advocated 80-kilometre-an-hour speed restrictions on gravel roads. Does the shire have a position on that?

Mr BAIN — We do not have a position at this point on that, but with 500 kilometres of gravel road it would certainly be something that we could form an opinion on.

The CHAIR — There were one or two councils that strongly advocated a speed restriction of 80 kilometres per hour on gravel roads.

Cr DAVIDSON — The council has not formally discussed or taken a position on that, but would be open to consider it.

Mr EREN — So currently there would be an average of 100 kilometres per hour normally?

Cr DAVIDSON — Speed restriction? I suppose it depends (a) on the condition of the road; and (b) on how familiar you are with it.

Mr MULDER — It really is a matter of drivers modifying their driving to the conditions as they are driving along. I know it was mooted as a trial program in one of the areas in the Colac Otway shire as a trial, but it got back to how would you possibly trial it when you have all these roads adjoining other municipalities. It would be difficult unless you signposted every road that adjoins in an adjoining municipality, so it would have to be a statewide position, I believe, if it were to be taken up.

Mr BAIN — I think it is an interesting position we find ourselves in at the moment statewide. Certainly my perception at Surf Coast Shire is that people are increasingly expecting the municipality to support a change in the speed zone to reflect the geographic conditions that a driver might find themselves in, whereas historically we have said, ‘Once you are outside an urban area, you are in a 100-kilometre-per-hour zone’. We might put up warning signs where the appropriate speed is lower for a curve or for a particular hazard, but what I am finding is that increasingly approaches are being made to me saying, ‘How are you putting up 100-kilometre-per-hour signs and then within 500 metres you have a curve in the road that is at a lower speed than that’?

The other initiatives in terms of the shire’s plan relate specifically to the country road toll, the elimination of road hazards — things like uneven road pavements. They tend to be at this point focused on maintaining the existing asset we have rather than enhancing it because of the financial constraints.

The second point we are making there is the investigation of local traffic issues, which we have mentioned briefly. Where people do raise them, they are investigated. As to addressing speed and high-risk driving along with a couple of those others, you will see that the lead agency tends to be other than the municipality.

The last one is the safer road conditions for motorcyclists, and we see Vicroads having a role to play on the Great Ocean Road, and the shire on the local road network.

The CHAIR — Was any thought given to the issue of fatigue, especially on the Great Ocean Road, where you have tourists who think they can get to Port Campbell and back within half a day?

Mr BAIN — It is mentioned. In our presentation we have said that the Great Ocean Road is the icon road of Australia, and yet it has a statistically higher number of crashes in relation to other roads. The report includes a few comments about what it is like geographically. It is highly attractive to motorcyclists. There have been some recent state government initiatives including the sealing of the shoulders, the proposed reduction of the speed limit...
for much of its length and a recent $3 million allocation towards minor improvements. The shire’s strategy in relation to the Great Ocean Road lists a number of further elements which we feel are important.

**Cr DAVIDSON** — The third dot point picks up the issue you raised — realistic information to intending tourists about travel times and fatigue.

**Mr BAIN** — Our strategy is not an engineering-focused document; it tends to talk about enforcement and education. So you will see in our comments about the Great Ocean Road that we have talked about ways in which we can promote alternative routes and educational responses to people such as tourists and motorcyclists.

**Cr DAVIDSON** — Could I just make a point about international tourists. Anecdotally — and we do not have any figures on it at the moment — there is an issue about some of the overseas tourists, particularly those who have come from an iconic destination such as Bells Beach and who turn onto the wrong side of the Great Ocean Road. They change from one road to another and revert to their previous behaviour, which might be as a right-hand driver. We are getting more and more feedback about international drivers on the wrong side of the road. That is an emerging issue for all of us.

**The CHAIR** — Could I get you to expand on the third last dot point, which is the review of the design adequacy and management of slow vehicle turn outs?

**Mr BAIN** — I do not know whether you have heard the term ‘slow vehicle turn out’ but I suspect it might be unique to the Great Ocean Road. It is where use has been made of what might have been a stopping point for a scenic view — which have been sealed in recent times — and they have now been signed along the length of the road encouraging slow vehicles to use those points to pull over and allow through the traffic behind them.

**Mr MULDER** — Richard, in relation to your unsealed road network, how do you go for availability of material? Do you use local material, and does the availability impact — —

**Mr BAIN** — We are extremely fortunate because we have some naturally occurring material within our municipality for that purpose. I am conscious that we have that advantage in contrast to many other rural municipalities. However, because the material occurs naturally, it is variable in quality, so there are occasions where our re-sheeting program ends up having some challenges after wet weather, and we are just modifying our current practice with regard to that work.

Lastly on the Great Ocean Road, the shire’s strategy makes reference to motorcycle safety, and the elements there include the promotion of a culture of riding in harmony with the Great Ocean Road and guidance to motorcyclists. I might be stealing the thunder of the Barwon Road Safety Council by bringing to your attention a recent brochure which it produced which focuses on providing guidance for motorcycle safety — but perhaps it will make further comment on that. Other elements include encouraging motorcyclists to report hazards and the training of staff in road maintenance to understand the standard of road surface necessary for motorcyclists.

**Cr DAVIDSON** — I will just pick up then on the way forward and what can be done in relation to the country road toll. There are a number of different headings in our report, and the Great Ocean Road is the first one. We are aware that there has been some increased funding for that road, and we welcome that. However, we are looking at what can be done around information and awareness education programs that recognise the iconic nature of the Great Ocean Road, its international fame and, as I indicated earlier, the number of people who are not familiar with the challenges of driving on the Great Ocean Road and on Australia’s left-hand roads. We see that as a real issue.

As far as the road standards go, as we know local government has historically received funding from the state and federal governments towards improved road construction standards, but we all recognise that the current level of funding is no longer sufficient to even maintain the existing roads at their current standards. You would be aware of work done by the Municipal Association of Victoria that looked at the infrastructure gap. For municipalities like the Surf Coast Shire with significant growth, the gap between the existing road conditions and acceptable standards is widening year by year. We will certainly be joining with the Municipal Association of Victoria and other local government authorities throughout Australia to lobby very hard for the retention of the federal government’s Road to Recovery funding, which we see as absolutely essential.

Regarding the implementation of the municipal plan, the preparation happened with the support of the state government. Again we see that as being important, but as we indicated earlier it requires the coordination of a number of agencies to make it happen. We see the strengthening of a multi-agency approach as necessary to
drive forward municipal plans — and not just ours. At the moment it relies on goodwill, and while we know that goodwill and good relationships can be very powerful at driving things forward, we would really like to see a strengthening of that multi-agency approach and would recommend consideration of strengthening the role of Barwon Road Safe, giving it enhanced resources and a stronger framework for action, so that you do not have issues being just on a municipality--by-municipality basis, but a more regional approach. Barwon Road Safe has a very good reputation with the work that it has undertaken to date, so we would like to see that strengthened.

That perhaps leads into what we have listed in our report as driver behaviour. At this stage we are not aware that there has been much evaluation undertaken of the current programs to ensure that state funding is used most effectively to reduce the road toll. You may or may not be aware that recently an international speaker was brought to Victoria — and I think a lot of state government bureaucrats were part of workshops even last week. The workshops highlighted the fact that the information-rich and attitude-based programs have very little correlation to behaviour change. We know that those information-rich programs — whether they are television programs or brochures or whatever — are very expensive, and we strongly encourage the state government to undertake an evaluation of the effectiveness of those programs at bringing about behaviour change and reducing the road toll. In lobbying for more education and awareness programs, they are expensive. How do we target them to get the best bang for the buck?

At the moment until we have had a strong evaluation of the programs that have been put in place we would argue that we cannot target them at the best place; that whether you have a road safety officer, or whether it is about just producing brochures. It has been found that brochure production on its own does not correlate with behaviour change.

How do we get behaviour change so that there is awareness of the conditions that you are driving in and the sorts of things that you and I know? Like yesterday I was overtaken three times on a double line. How do we really target our programs to be reaching those whose behaviour we are really trying to change? That links in, too, with what we see as an expectation in the community of local government having a stronger enforcement role. We find people are contacting us saying, ‘What are you doing about people speeding down X road or Y road?’, so we would really like to be looking at the effectiveness of current programs, whether those are the speed cameras or any of those things, and how they are changing those behaviours, because local government’s traditional role has been around ensuring that the design is right and that the road is maintained in a safe condition. But we are seeing community expectations now wanting local government to pick up that enforcement role, and I think, in light of the recent cost-shifting inquiry that has been handed down at the federal Parliament, that perhaps we would all recognise that to be shifting more and more of that work onto local government is really unrealistic. In a nutshell, those are some of the ways that we would like to see things move forward.

The CHAIR — Thank you very much for your time and input into our inquiry. As I said, we will have a transcript of this, so copies will be sent to the Surf Coast Shire.

Witnesses withdrew.
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll

Geelong – 8 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 A. Curran, Engineer, Borough of Queenscliffe.

Necessary corrections to be notified to
executive officer of committee
Welcome, Adrian, to the parliamentary Road Safety Committee inquiry into the country road toll and also crashes involving roadside objects. This is the second of our hearings. We are conducting them throughout rural and regional Victoria over the next couple of months. They are public hearings, and we are taking transcript. The borough will be provided with a copy of the transcript. You are also protected by parliamentary privilege, so what you say today cannot be used legally against you in the future.

I am aware of the fact that the Queenscliffe borough has a small road network as compared to some of the other councils that we have looked at, such as the Surf Coast Shire. I also realise that you have probably been roped into this over the last couple of days, so we will take that well and truly into account. Having said that, relax, and if you want to give us a submission, we will get into dialogue through questions and answers as we go through. Perhaps you would like to start by describing Queenscliffe for us.

Mr CURRAN — I might give a bit of background on myself as well. My role at the borough is as the borough engineer. I cover a vast range of roles, but the road network falls under my control. As Ian said, unfortunately I have been called in at the last minute on this one, so I have not got a lot of information with me at the moment, but I am sure I will be able to answer any questions that might come out of it.

I brought a couple of maps of the Borough of Queenscliffe. Unfortunately I could only get three copies done this morning. Queenscliffe is one of the smaller — if not the smallest — municipalities in the state. It is mostly built up, with very limited scope for any development. There is not much vacant land. Most development that takes place down there involves splitting single lots into two.

The total road network itself is only approximately about 45 kilometres in length, of which less than 1 kilometre is unsealed. The great majority of the streets are local streets that fall under the 50-kilometre-an-hour speed limit, and there are only two sections of road within the whole municipality that are greater than that. There is a 2.5-kilometre section of the Bellarine Highway that leads into the municipality that is 70 kilometres an hour and a small section of one of the collector roads, Fellows Road, which is 60 kilometres an hour.

Looking at the road crash statistics as supplied by Vicroads, and particularly at the roadside collision incidents, since 1987 there have only been nine accidents within the borough involving either poles or trees, and two of those were fatalities.

The CHAIR — Since when, did you say?

Mr CURRAN — Since 1987. That is information from the crash statistics from the Vicroads web site. I believe the two fatalities were more than five years ago — prior to 1998, I think. The council mostly has control in the roadside area over vegetation and the like, other than utility poles, and most of the area throughout the borough has extensive roadside vegetation, which the borough is fairly keen on maintaining as part of the atmosphere of the area. Generally if there is a new proposal put forward, we try to maintain that within the set road design guidelines and standards that are adopted mostly through the Vicroads standards these days. So that is where we stand as far as I could get with the roadside object issue.

The other issue that the inquiry is looking at is the country road toll, and as best I could tell — unfortunately I brought the wrong sheet of paper with me — I think it was from the Vicroads statistics on the crash stats on the web site, there have been only either three or four fatalities since 1987 within the borough, of which, as I said before, two of those were related to roadside objects and the other related to the incident or crash itself. I think one of the benefits the borough has in that regard is the fact that it is mostly a low-speed environment, which tends to be a major contributor to a lot of these incidents, and there are not as many major black spot, for want of a better term, type intersections or areas within the municipality. I think that is one aspect of it that keeps that type of incident low within the municipality.

Mr EREN — What is the population?

Mr CURRAN — The population is about 3600 at this stage. There is a fairly large non-resident population as well, being a coastal holiday area. The population does swell considerably over the summer and holiday periods to around about, I think, the 8000 to 10 000 mark, but the population is about 3500.

Mr EREN — Does the incidence of accidents mostly occur at those holiday times?

Mr CURRAN — I would not be able to comment, John. But I think that is pretty much all I could glean in the time that I had, unfortunately, so if there are any questions, I am sure I would be able to — —
The CHAIR — I guess the other part to the road accidents and fatalities would be pedestrians as well. I guess you do not have the figures with regard to pedestrians and the breakdown?

Mr CURRAN — There were a couple. I do not think there have been any pedestrian fatalities. In the information I have back to July of 1998 the crash statistics indicate that no fatalities occurred. There were five incidents involving pedestrians.

The CHAIR — It is an older population, too, I would guess.

Mr CURRAN — Yes, it is one of the older demographic populations in the state, so there is particular concern with the main shopping strip areas with the movement of pedestrians that we are considering at the moment, and the elderly component of that is one consideration that needs to be considered fairly heavily in the area.

The CHAIR — The main street is also pretty wide, is it not?

Mr CURRAN — It is, and we have done a reasonable amount of development there over the last couple of years. There are some investigations at this stage into some pedestrian refuge type accommodation in the middle of the main street. It tends to be an issue, as I said before, with the influx and the popularity over the summer period of traffic, and even to a greater extent now on the weekends. It is becoming a fairly popular tourist area.

The CHAIR — What is also peculiar to Queenscliff is the fact that you have the ferry coming in over the holiday period. Platoons of traffic come off the ferry and through on an hourly basis.

Mr CURRAN — It is an issue. I know that at different stages the council has considered alternatives to routing the traffic through the main shopping strip, but then there are competing factors from the business and commercial side, wanting to maintain a good flow of customers through the main street.

The CHAIR — Has that type of traffic been a concern to the council?

Mr CURRAN — Not a major concern. It has built up markedly over the last couple of years now that the ferry runs on a regular hourly basis. There is a steady stream of traffic and a lot of people have mentioned to me that they tend to pick the half hour mark to do their normal shopping for the paper so they will miss the ferry traffic. There is not a huge amount of traffic, but it is an unfamiliar thing for Queenscliff because it has built up over time.

The CHAIR — A lot of it would be passing-through traffic.

Mr CURRAN — The majority of it is passing through, especially during the main part of the year; it is used as a through route. It is only in the summer or in holiday periods where we tend to get more drop-off, tourist-type people coming through as well.

Mr MULDER — Have your schools been posted with the 40-kilometre-an-hour speed limits yet?

Mr CURRAN — Not as yet, or as of Wednesday when I was last down there. I noticed that markings had been made on the roads for the location of the signs, so I assume it will not be far away.

Mr EREN — From some of the statistics that you have just revealed it is obvious that your traffic management is working to a certain extent. That is a remarkable feat.

The CHAIR — You have some pretty unforgiving cypress trees on the way in.

Mr CURRAN — Certainly the cypress trees are an issue that has come up in my time — not through accidents, but just considering their location in relation to the road and their age and the type of trees that they are. I know the borough is keen to maintain that avenue entrance — through the narrow section at least, if anyone is familiar with the area. A few in the residential area are of concern, and we will be removing upwards of about 14 of the larger trees through Point Lonsdale Road over the next couple of years, because of age and proximity to road and concerns with road safety issues as well.

The CHAIR — I have noted that the speed limit is well policed.

Mr CURRAN — One aspect of the borough — and I have been involved down there for about the last 18 months — is the fact that we have those lower limits, especially on the main roads, and even on the highway there is a 50-kilometre-an-hour limit through the township, which is not all that common these days. I think that...
assists. The local residents are fairly happy with the way the system works. The town has the traditional grid layout, which assists with the traffic management issues. You do not have those nasty five-way or angled intersections which can become an issue.

Mr EREN — The fact still remains that there are huge numbers of people who visit the area, but the statistics do not change very much. Is it the frame of mind of people that as soon as they get into that area they change their driving patterns?

Mr CURRAN — It is difficult to say. I know from my own experience in driving around, particularly in the Point Lonsdale area of the municipality where there is a lot of roadside vegetation — and it is not heavy vegetation, it is tea-tree-type vegetation — that it tends to have a channelling effect; it tends to slow you down. You tend to drive at a slower pace. I am not sure whether that is my own reaction or whether it has the same effect on other people, but I know that, with the people I have spoken to who come down to holiday in the area, that slower lifestyle has a calming effect on them, and it may have a calming effect on all aspects of what they are doing in the town.

The CHAIR — Are there any further questions?

Mr EREN — I would like to find out more about the statistics and whether they increase over the summer period. Obviously the population more than doubles over that period. Do the statistics pertain to those times of the year?

Mr CURRAN — Without going through them all in detail, and I would probably have to go back and check the dates, I do not know that there is necessarily any correlation. There is a limited amount of data anyway; there may not be any significant trend that would come out of that low number, but it is something — —

The CHAIR — We would be more than happy to receive that sort of information.

Mr CURRAN — I can certainly look at that and detail the dates and send it through. That would be fine.

The CHAIR — Thank you for that. We appreciate your input; you have done a good job.

Witness withdrew.
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll

Geelong – 8 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

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

Witnesses

Ms C. Maplesden;
Senior Sergeant S. Coles;
Mr D. Briggs; and
Mr L. Schroeter, and
Mr C. Cotterill, Barwon Community Road Safety Council.
Welcome to the parliamentary Road Safety Committee and our inquiries into the country road toll and crashes involving roadside objects. We appreciate your council’s time and input into our inquiry. We are taking a transcript of the proceedings, and we will provide your council with a copy of that transcript. This inquiry is conducted under parliamentary privilege, which means that what you say cannot be used against you legally in the future. I might ask each member of the committee to introduce themselves.

Mr COLES — I am Shane Coles. I am the senior sergeant in charge of Geelong traffic management. I cover all of Geelong and technically oversee the Surf Coast and Wyndham as well.

Mr BRIGGS — I am David Briggs. I am a community representative with Barwon Road Safe. I live at Woori Yallock, and that is probably as much as I need to say.

Ms MAPLESDEN — I am Caroline Maplesden. I work as a mobility instructor for the Vision Australia Foundation. I teach vision impaired people about pedestrian safety. I have been involved with Barwon Road Safe for about eight years as its chairman and deputy.

Mr SCHROETER — I am Lindsay Schroeter. I am a community representative from Winchelsea. I am the only community representative on this committee, and at present I am its chairman. I am not too sure how long I have been the chairman.

The CHAIR — It has been a while, Lindsay; that is good. We like committed community people.

Mr SCHROETER — Thank you.

The CHAIR — Did you want to provide a submission? If so, perhaps you would like to provide it now and then we will ask questions as we go along.

Mr SCHROETER — Caroline will start it off.

Ms MAPLESDEN — I drew the short straw to kick off with the introduction and then it was divided among us for different subjects that we are particularly interested in.

A map will be provided showing the spread of fatalities around our region. Geelong is the largest regional centre, with a population of about 200 000. The map shows the location of fatal crashes between 1998 and 2002. It also shows that most of those crashes occurred in the Geelong area. However, there are a significant number of fatalities on the rural roads throughout the region. Ballarat, Morwell, Shepparton, Wodonga and many other cities have a bypass; Geelong does not, and yet it is much larger than those other cities.

Crashes occur on routes through Geelong but also on the minor roads of Golden Plains shire with drivers trying to avoid congestion in Geelong. Latrobe Terrace through the city is the only direct route that visitors and locals can use to reach the Bellarine Peninsula, the Surf Coast Highway, the Great Ocean Road or Warrnambool. As an acknowledgment we would like to congratulate the state government for allocating funding to building our ring-road — hopefully in the future — and we continue to promote the importance of that initiative. Our recommendation is that the government continues to support the achievement of that bypass road for Geelong.

In terms of the road safety issues specific to our region, the region includes the City of Greater Geelong, Surf Coast Shire, the Shire of Golden Plains and the Borough of Queenscliffe. Our members believe individual road safety issues need to be quantified and require a multi-action approach. While that approach needs to include road safety improvements to the condition of the road, it also requires educational activities and police enforcement. Relying on one approach alone is unlikely to produce the required outcome.

The success of that multi-approach is well documented, because the unacceptable 1970 road toll of over 1000 was reduced by multi-initiatives like compulsory seat belts, compulsory BAC tests, black spot funding, speed cameras, establishing councils such as our road safety council and those hard-hitting TAC advertisements. So one strategy alone such as road improvements is not going to slash those figures as we have done now to the 2002 toll of 397. The latest road safety research indicates that the key issues for our area are excessive speed, drink driving, fatigue, pedestrian safety, young drivers, motor cycle safety, the Great Ocean Road, and the older road users.

From the Arrive Alive road safety strategy information we have estimated the number of fatalities between 1998 and 2002 associated with each of those key issues, and they are in an attachment at the back of the submission. Excessive speed was a contributing factor in 40 of the road deaths. Intoxicated drivers, whether they were the deaths of drivers, pedestrians or riders, accounted for 29 deaths, and the driver fatigue, or more precisely...
sleep deprivation, was a contributing factor in 24 of those fatalities. The pedestrian road toll was 23; 16 were young drivers, 11 were motorcycle riders, 7 were older drivers and 5 were cyclists. Nine people alone were killed on the Great Ocean Road. Barwon Roadsafe believes that a multi-action approach is required to tackle each of those key issues. The first one we will pick up is excessive speed.

Mr BRIGGS — In relation to excessive speed, we get a lot of information about excessive speed and how it has contributed to accidents. Current research suggests that 40 per cent of road crashes are attributable to excessive speed. From the Road Safety Council point of view, the message is rather simple. It is: the more you speed, the less time you have to stop.

One of the road safety intervention activities currently being undertaken is a program called Not So Fast. This particular program was implemented by local municipalities and roadsafe groups like ourselves. It has only just commenced in this region. However, in broad terms it involves the identification of local streets that are known speeding areas. Information obviously comes from a variety of sources. Once those areas have been identified, we examine ways to reduce the speed in those areas and effectively to reduce the risk of fatalities and accidents. This may be done in a variety of ways, obviously in consultation with the local road authorities and relevant personnel. These types of activities that we might have undertaken are police enforcement, media publicity, road environment changes to slow the traffic, and the use of a speed observation unit.

Barwon Roadsafe is half-owner of a speed observation unit (SOU) in conjunction with the City of Greater Geelong, and this unit basically gives motorists an idea of what speed they are travelling at, and they can make up their own minds whether they are breaking the law.

Mr MULDER — Does that unit also provide data in terms of who has been breaking the speed limit and the number of motorists breaking the speed limit?

Mr BRIGGS — Data is recorded in the machine and can be downloaded at a later date.

Mr SCHROETER — It does not tell you who, but it can be downloaded, yes.

The CHAIR — We were talking to Margot before from the council, and we think it may be operating in Belmont today, so we will have a look at that before we head down to Colac.

Mr EREN — How accurate are those SOUs?

Mr BRIGGS — I do not have any particular accuracy figures, but I do not believe that they would be inaccurate.

Mr COLES — About 2 or 3 kilometres, and they are used in conjunction with the speed camera. We will put that device in a couple of weeks prior to the speed camera going to that site and see the effect of it in regard to the speed camera figures and how those figures have changed to previous allocations to this site. It has shown there is a significant drop in speeding in that area.

Mr EREN — We have one of those on the Princes Freeway, and you would be doing 100 and it would show that you are doing about 98.

Mr BRIGGS — Is that the one on the overpass?

Mr EREN — Yes.

Mr BRIGGS — They are a separate issue. They are managed by Vicroads. They are fixed speed indicators. The items that we are talking about here are the trailer-mounted indicators that are essentially mobile and can be set up at any particular location for perhaps three or four days at a time.

Mr MULDER — Who maintains and calibrates that particular equipment? Is it Vicroads equipment?

Mr COLES — Which one?

Mr MULDER — The mobile unit that you take around.

Mr COLES — That is maintained by the City of Greater Geelong through proper calibration.
The CHAIR — Are there many of those around Victoria?

Mr BRIGGS — There is one, I believe, in Warrnambool. I think the Warrnambool Road Safety Council has a trailer as well.

Mr COLES — I think there are a large number around.

Mr EREN — They are pretty useful.

Mr BRIGGS — They have been used quite effectively. When the Princes Freeway was under reconstruction in recent years, a couple of them were used down near Werribee, and that tended to slow the traffic up quite a bit through the roadworks zone. The recommendation from the Road Safety Council is that adequate administrative support and financial support is provided to municipalities and community road safety councils to continue with these activities, and also that adequate police numbers are valuable for enforcement activities in Geelong.

The CHAIR — Before we get off the initiative you talked about with the local streets, the Not So Fast program, what is the time line for operation?

Mr BRIGGS — Operation of the program as a whole?

The CHAIR — Operation of the program as a whole.

Mr BRIGGS — I am not sure at that stage. Colin may be able to answer that particular question.

The CHAIR — Do you know the answer to that, Colin?

Mr COTTERILL — They have been purchased by the city and by Barwon Roadsafe, so at this stage it is intended to continue.

The CHAIR — The operation, Not So Fast, the program of examining local streets, do you know the time lines of when we are going to operate that?

Mr COTTERILL — At this stage it is intended to be ongoing.

Mr BRIGGS — Just in relation to that last recommendation, in 1999 Geelong as a region had some 24 police officers specifically tasked with traffic duties, and shortly after that the numbers were reduced to about 9. There appears to be a direct correlation between the numbers of traffic management unit police and the number of fatalities that have occurred. For example, in 1999 we had 10 fatalities in the region. By 2000 it had gone up to 11. By 2011 it was 18. By 2002 it was 24, and to date this year we have had 18, but we have not got through the Christmas season yet. To us that would indicate that the reduction in the numbers of police dedicated to traffic duties and visibility on our roads has a correlation with those figures.

However, we would like to acknowledge and congratulate the state government for the introduction of reduced speeds in residential streets in the strip shopping centres and around schools, and we will continue to support these initiatives locally. However, the disadvantage of this is that by reducing speed limits in a number of areas, we have a lot of public misconceptions about those speed limit reductions and the use of speed cameras, despite the fact that they will eventually save lives. We believe it is important that public perceptions do not undermine the opportunities to reduce the road toll. At the moment there are good opportunities to make the public more aware of the use of speed cameras in reducing the road toll and the principles and procedures that are necessary to set up these speed camera sites. I am talking specifically about mobile speed camera sites.

We have had a lot of publicity lately about the accuracy of fixed speed cameras in the state, and that negative publicity does not really help the operation of mobile operations. We understand mobile operations are calibrated more frequently in the set-up and packing up the equipment, which essentially means every time it is set up and operated, it is calibrated and checked, which is not the case with fixed speed cameras.

We believe we really need to win back that public acceptance of mobile speed camera sites. As we understand it, the speed camera sites are selected only because of the history of crashes or the number of complaints from the public or some other input such as police figures, and that there are regulations and requirements as to where these speed cameras are set up — for example, not on a bend or not on a downhill run and so on. However, our
recommendation is that discussions take place with Victoria Place regarding the issuing of this information to the public, to make the public aware that there are procedures in place, and that these are the procedures.

The discussions should also cover the issue of whether Victoria Police should provide information that can be used by community road safety councils and local municipalities to help inform the public of the criteria used when locating a speed camera. We also believe that there are opportunities to help drivers be aware of the speed zone that they are currently in. We acknowledge that life is not perfect and that people can miss speed signs. One example is where a truck pulls out from a side street and obscures the speed sign and as you drive past you do not see it, particularly if you are a visitor to the area. Often we have speed limit signs on both sides of the road, particularly in the urban areas, but in country areas the speed sign is often only on the left side of the highway or road. Currently we have approximately eight types of speed zones in the state. There is 110, 100, 90, 80, 70, 60, 50 and 40 kilometres-an-hour speed zones, whereas 10 years ago we had a maximum of three speed zones — 100, 75 and 60 kilometres-an-hour. The problem of knowing what speed zone you are in is becoming a little bit more difficult.

We have a couple of recommendations. One is that road safety authorities develop a policy so that whenever possible there are only three different speed zones leading into and out of towns, and also that where possible there are sufficient repeater signs to remind drivers of the current speed zone. We also recommend that this policy is distributed quickly to assist with the installation of further school speed zones; finally, that the road authorities make the policy known to the general public.

The next topic is the issue of infringement notices for speed camera fines. The problem is that the notice issued for a traffic infringement is very difficult to read. They are obviously official documents containing statutory information or other information that needs to be included. However, the design of the notice does not really lead the recipient of the notice to fully understand what that notice is telling them. Specifically, there is a lot of confusion by the general public about what speed they were fined at. The terminology might not be quite correct here, but it is the speed detected and the speed recorded because the traffic camera detects the speed of the vehicle and a certain amount of speed is taken off that reading to allow for the calibration and any other errors in the set-up, and a fine is issued if the person was driving over the limit. A lot of people are saying that they have been fined for doing a minimal amount over the limit when in actual fact, if they read all the fine print on the notice, it tells them that they were detected at a higher speed, a certain speed has been subtracted and they have been fined at a particular speed. We believe that that needs to be shown upfront; it needs to be bigger or bolder and it needs to be clearer about the fact that the person was detected at one speed, but that a small allowance has been made and the person has been fined at a particular speed.

We recommend that the justice department redesigns traffic infringement notices to take account of our concerns. We would also like to see a road safety message included somewhere on the notice indicating that excessive speed is a major contributor to the road toll. This information could be general in nature or it could be a bit more specific. It could refer to the locality in which the speed offence occurred. It could give statistics on the number of fatal accidents, or just the number of accidents in the region where the speed camera offence was noted. Another possibility is the tightening of particular stretches of road rather than regions, and in particular perhaps the Great Ocean Road and sections of the Princes Highway.

The CHAIR — The Princes Highway between Geelong and Melbourne, or between Colac and Geelong?

Mr BRIGGS — I would suggest between Geelong and Colac. I cannot recall a fatality in the more rural areas — although I think there was one accident recently on the new section of road on the approach to Geelong but I do not think there have been any fatalities.

The CHAIR — That was your first one.

Mr BRIGGS — Yes, since the road was redesigned.

Finally, I think the idea behind these recommendations is not necessarily to justify the use of the speed detection devices, but rather to give the public more information.

Returning again to the issue of speed limits, subject to the above recommendations being adopted Road Safe Barwon believes that speed limits should be set primarily based on the road safety aspect of the road itself. In particular, the 100 kilometre per hour speed limits on the Great Ocean Road should be reduced to 80 kilometres per hour because it is really just not possible to do 100 kilometres per hour down that road. The recommendation therefore is that the appropriate sections be reduced to 80 kilometres per hour in conjunction with additional overtaking opportunities being provided; the recommendations above concerning policy as to the number of
different speed zones is made public and that sufficient numbers of repeater signs are erected to ensure that drivers are always aware of the speed limit.

We also have another issue. A lot of the region is rural and from living in a rural area myself, I know that a lot of road hazards exist in rural areas. Unfortunately we see a lot of drivers travelling very quickly in what we might call treacherous conditions and we would like to see some more of those issues addressed, particularly for the non-rural people coming into rural areas, for example, on days of high wind, lots of rain, foggy mornings or after storm damage. We often get trees falling down over roads. There are livestock problems where cattle and sheep sometimes get out and onto the road, and we really need to address those issues in advertising campaigns. There are a whole range of issues that rural road users face daily and those not familiar with them can easily get themselves into a lot of trouble.

The next section is drink-driving. In the past drink-driving has been relatively under control. We have had quite a bit of advertising from the Transport Accident Commission and the community’s attitude has been generally less in favour of drink-driving than it has in the past. However in recent years we believe that the practice has been returning. In the Barwon region between 1998 and 2002, 29 people were killed in road crashes involving a driver, rider or pedestrian having a blood alcohol content over .05. There do not seem to be any trends in these types of accidents. Passengers, pedestrians and motor cyclists are all involved, although we could say 26 were males and 3 were females. Sorry, the figures do not really show whether it is males or females or whether it is drivers of any particular age.

The CHAIR — Why do you feel that that is starting to creep back in? Why do you think there is that acceptance that — —

Mr BRIGGS — I do not really know other than people think perhaps with the advertising campaign that they know what their safe limit is now. Maybe that safe limit changes. We know the safe limit does change per person, depending on the circumstances. Maybe there is a bit of ambivalence.

The CHAIR — Because it is a concern to the government that people with .05 are starting to creep back in, and it is becoming a growing issue?

Ms MAPLESDEN — I was going to suggest that maybe the public perception is that there are not enough police out there to get caught. There is not enough visibility and you sort of take the chance.

Mr BRIGGS — While we do have these difficulties, we can acknowledge the fact of and we congratulate the state government on introducing the alcohol car ignition lock legislation, as many of the so-called drink drivers appear to be repeat offenders, and we will continue to support that initiative. In the past we have promoted and supported programs such as the back street booze patrols, designated driver programs and good sports programs. We note that currently there are a lot of strong advertising campaigns directed towards young males who consume spirits with high levels of alcohol and also drive fast cars. There is also a lot of promotion of happy hours and other drinking type activities at night clubs and some hotels. In the past these sort of things have been under a reasonable level of control through a liquor licensing accord that existed in Geelong. However, that does not seem to be very effective any more.

To counteract this, Barwon Roadsafe intends to develop initiatives in association with other agencies, such as the Victoria Police traffic management unit, Liquor Licensing Victoria, and Victoria Police licensing inspectors. Recently in the area local police have introduced some initiatives such as Dob in a Drink-Driver, and these new initiatives are still in their early stages, however, there have been some promising results on that.

The CHAIR — Can you expand on those results?

Mr COLES — At this stage — I have been on holiday for a few weeks — we have had about 80 people nominated, and I think we have probably got about 18 or 19. There is a lot of weeding out to make sure there is no — —

The CHAIR — How would that work?

Mr COLES — It is advertised through the local media — the Geelong Advertiser and radio — to dob on somebody that you know is a drink-driver. A lot of family members are dobbing in brothers or husbands who drive their kids, and we will look at it first to make sure it is not a reprisal from an ex-wife or something like that, or restraining orders, and if there are some grounds, we will then target that person.
Mr EREN — But legally, if you do not actually catch them committing the crime, how would you proceed with going down the path of booking someone? How does it work?

Mr COLES — We ask the people to give us fairly good information in regard to their habits. If we just get a car number, it is pretty hard to establish. One bloke in Torquay got done three times over .2 within a week, so he was one that we really wanted to get.

The CHAIR — When you talk about their habits, you are talking about — —

Mr COLES — Where they drink. Somebody might ring up and say, ‘This bloke drinks every night after work in his business and he drives home’, so we will target that area and pick him up.

Mr EREN — So you would prosecute those who volunteer the information to you and say, ‘Yes, I have been drink-driving’, or do you have to actually catch them doing it?

Mr COLES — We will target them as a possible drink-driver, and we will sit off, and if they are detectable we will pick them up and prosecute them. Sometimes the allegations may be false, or we may pick up a person and he is not over the limit, but we might just get the message to him — —

The CHAIR — He or she.

Mr COLES — Yes, there are a few shes, that they are being targeted and might change their habits. We had one bloke ring up from Texas in America dobbing in a family member, so the message has got out, so 18 out 80 people dobbed in is a fairly good strike rate. The biggest thing is the conceived perception by a lot of people out there that they may be a target, so hopefully it has changed a few people’s — —

The CHAIR — Is that an initiative within the Barwon zone, or has that also been operating throughout Victoria?

Mr COLES — We started that locally. It was a local policing initiative which the Road Safety Council has taken on and is promoting.

Mr SCHROETER — I know of a couple who were dobbed in in Winchelsea, and I very seldom see them at the pub now.

Mr MULDER — I am a little bit confused about the mobile speed cameras. I understood that they were calibrated and sealed and they go back over different periods of time to have their calibrations rechecked and so forth?

Mr COLES — That is correct.

Mr MULDER — The actual checking that David is referring to is to check everything is operating and running properly; it is not actually a calibration?

Mr COLES — No, it is not a calibration. It is a site set-up and it is checking whether the camera is working properly. You do a radar check with a hand-held radar.

Mr MULDER — You do it against the hand radar?

Mr COLES — Yes, each camera car has a hand-held radar in the car.

Mr MULDER — How often are they taken back for checking the calibration?

Mr COLES — It is 12 months like every other — —

Mr MULDER — Each 12 months?

Mr COLES — Every speed detection device is done every 12 months unless there is some fault. Once they break that calibration tag, it is then repaired and then calibrated again.

Ms MAPLESDEN — As to driver fatigue, road safety researchers regard sleep deprivation as one of the key issues in reducing the road toll. This does not necessarily mean falling asleep at the wheel. It means that if you
drive when you have not slept for 17 hours, you are driving with the equivalent of a blood alcohol of .5. Seventeen hours is not that hard to reach sometimes on a busy day.

Mr ERREN — What about 24 hours?

Ms MAPLESDEN — Again, a multifaceted approach is required. Our recommendation is that in 100-kilometre speed zones road authorities need a range of funded options to remove the objects located too close to the roadside — for example, poles and trees. Such options could include reducing the speed limit for that particular section of the road that is hazardous, installing tactile edge markers that rumble if you put your wheels on them, installing a wire rope safety barrier or something similar; or, as a last resort, removing the object, and if it is a tree, the feelings about that could be balanced by planting four new trees in a safer location for each tree you have to remove.

The flexibility of the funded option is important. For example, there is a section of the Princes Highway between Colac and Geelong that contains electricity poles and they are too close to the highway, and it is a 100 kilometres-per-hour zone. Those poles could easily contribute to a fatal accident. They are mostly wood, so they are going to be replaced with concrete poles, but there is ample space to relocate them closer to the railway away from the highway, but you need flexible funding to fast-track that and replace them and relocate them. It is the flexibility that we are trying to stress there as to which bucket of money we go for.

Vicroads’s second recommendation is they should continue to support the TAC power nap campaign and erect adequate signage, especially on the approaches so drivers are warned in time to pull up rather than miss it; and additional safe locations need to be identified.

Third, adequate support to the municipalities and road safety councils to continue to provide information sessions to community groups and schools about fatigue. It is also a life quality thing as well — creativity and things. Promotion of the safe driving pitch should be continued. The next issue is pedestrian safety. Geelong’s pedestrian toll was — —

The CHAIR — Just before we jump off fatigue, I am thinking of the Great Ocean Road for tourists is obviously a problem within this region as well.

Ms MAPLESDEN — Barwon Roadsafe is involved with the Driver Reviver program and also trying to get information into all of the city tourist information places to try and let the international tourists know that you do not go to the Twelve Apostles and back that easily, because they are dying at about Camperdown on the way back to Melbourne.

As to pedestrian safety, it is an unacceptable toll of 23 between 1998 and 2002, and most of those fatalities are within the Geelong area or central business district. The task to ensure that people cross the road in a safe manner is pretty difficult. Traffic safety education in schools is vital, and the continued efforts to reduce the traffic speed and make the road system as safe as possible from a pedestrian’s point of view is pretty necessary.

Road Safe Barwon and the local municipalities intend to continue to target pedestrian safety in several ways including reducing traffic speeds at identified high crash locations; slowing the traffic by improving the road environment and increasing police enforcement.

An important aspect of the program involves encouraging road authorities to undertake pedestrian road safety audits before engineering project commence, and then implementing the audit findings. There is also an urgent need to address two pedestrian issues; the increasing use of electric scooters by people who are unable to legally drive any more, and smoothing down the angle of the footpath pram ramp so that it is almost flat and goes straight into the vehicle lane. That kind of smoothing is great for wheelchair users but is absolutely lethal for someone with low vision or even you or I if we are not paying attention.

There is also the Australian standard 1428.4 regarding footpath tiles which provide a warning to vision impaired people. The new regulations came out in November 2001 but they require a more balanced consultation and further review. There is often a conflict of interest between what wheelchair users and vision impaired people need.

Recommendations include encouraging road authorities to implement the disability access plans and the pedestrian safety audits; setting up an advisory committee to address the electric scooter issue — and that was brought up at the older road safety users conference; to report on the infrastructure that is required for them and to provide guidelines to support the safe and responsible use of them. The latter might require a review of the definition of
a pedestrian, because at the moment someone on a scooter is a pedestrian, and provide sufficient support, encouragement to schools for the implementation of the traffic safety educations programs such as the road smart program, and continue the efforts to reduce traffic speeds. Do you have any questions on pedestrian safety?

The CHAIR — No, thanks.

Ms MAPLESDEN — In past years Road Safe Barwon has delivered over 200 safety presentations to various community groups — church groups and service clubs. We have also recently hosted two road safety forums for older drivers, the first in conjunction with the Australian College of Road Safety which was attended by 100 older drivers, and the second in conjunction with an over-50s association which was attended by over 200 older drivers at the Geelong West town hall. That was a great day.

It is very difficult to prove or quantify the benefits of education programs or forums but we strongly feel that driver awareness of their personal ability or shortcomings was raised at those kind of forums, and that self-regulations of driving habits is important. Our feeling from those events was that while there was not support for compulsory driver tests — a physical test — based on age, there was support for a compulsory eye and medical test based on age, providing patient confidentiality was protected.

Other activities by Road Safe Barwon and local municipalities were the provision of discounted refresher lessons, so that without fear of losing your licence you can have a good refresher lesson with a qualified driver to find out whether you are up to scratch; also continued presentations to community groups, including safe driving and promotion of the Victorian Older Drivers’ Handbook.

The recommendations are that we support the implementation of new laws requiring eye and medical examinations when renewing a driving licence if you are over 80 years, subject to that confidentiality protection, and that adequate support — financial and human resources — be provided to local municipalities and road safety councils to ensure that the discounted refresher lessons can continue, and that the road safety presentations can continue to be made to seniors to ensure older drivers are kept safe and mobile.

Mr MULDER — Shane, is any information kept if an older driver is reported by someone as driving erratically in the community? Is there any information to support whether those reports are made by driving instructors?

Snr Sgt COLES — We do not get many in regard to that. We pick most of our problems with older drivers from accidents, or by members visibly seeing it. By law you cannot dob someone in to Vicroads. It is a really hot issue. In speaking to a lot of older drivers, their main concern, especially in areas like Queenscliff, is that if you take away their licences, you take away their lives. It is a really big issue.

Mr MULDER — So you are saying that someone cannot report an older driver and say that they are unsafe?

Snr Sgt COLES — They can — —

Mr MULDER — They can instigate — —

Snr Sgt COLES — No, it can only be by a policeman’s observation of a driver, an accident or by a medical practitioner, I think. If someone rings us up and says, ‘Look, mum or dad is really bad’ we would have to sit off and then pick them up in that way. We cannot put a notice in to Vicroads because of a member of a family telling us, which is an issue.

The CHAIR — I might be wrong here but I thought that the process was that if someone does in an older driver — for want of a better term — to Vicroads that Vicroads can approach the older driver. Is that right? I think that is the case.

Snr Sgt COLES — I thought it was only — —

Ms MAPLESDEN — The difference is reporting it to the police perhaps, rather than to Vicroads.

Snr Sgt COLES — There might be a different issue there in the way we process it.

The CHAIR — Has your committee got a copy of our last report on older road users?
Ms MAPLESDEN — Do you mean the proceedings from the conference?

Snr Sgt COLES — Is that a family member?

Ms MAPLESDEN — Anybody can. They ring Vicroads.

Mr MULDER — That is the issue that I raised. I am aware of a couple of instances where a driving instructor has reported an older driver to Vicroads, and all of a sudden someone turns up and says, ‘You have been reported, you have to take a driving test’. The driving instructor turns up in a big automatic car that is totally foreign to the older person who might have been used to a small manual car. The instructor says, ‘Away we go’.

Snr Sgt COLES — Everybody know that you can open a Pandora’s box with regard to people ringing up.

Mr MULDER — It is a bit of a concern at this time.

The CHAIR — This committee has just finished an inquiry into older road users about one month ago. I have a box of the reports.

Ms MAPLESDEN — I think the issue too is freedom of information. If you give your name to Vicroads, then it would be obliged to provide it if the person forced the issue. So if you dob in, you do not give your name. You simply give enough information for Vicroads to take it seriously.

Mr MULDER — I am not sure how that works under freedom of information legislation. Is it right that they will not provide the name of the person who has made the report?

Ms MAPLESDEN — No.

Mr MULDER — If as you say it is an issue in relation to driving instructors reporting older people, and people in the same industry are conducting tests, I am concerned about how it operates.

Ms MAPLESDEN — My understanding is that if they had the information, they could be forced to give it whereas if they did not have it, it did not put Vicroads in that spot.

Ms DOUGLAS — It is the only thing that Vicroads will not divulge under freedom of information.

Snr Sgt COLES — Young drivers are overrepresented in the road toll and they are currently experiencing a strong publicity campaign by producers of high alcohol and spirits; they specifically target young people. The amount of alcohol on display in places like Dan Murphy’s is incredible. The type of drinks that kids can get — —

Mr EREN — It is the pre-mixed drinks, isn’t it? Some of them appear to taste non-alcoholic, but they obviously contain a lot of alcohol.

Snr Sgt COLES — Yes. Also car manufacturers are undertaking strong campaigns targeting young drivers to buy fast cars, for example Ford utes. That has been an issue for many years and is hard to combat. Road safety researchers have demonstrated that safety is improved if learners obtain more experience while still under the supervision of an accompanying driver. Our recommendations are that traffic safety education resources be made available through the TAC, Vicroads and the education department to ensure adequate programs are implemented within the school system and that adequate human resources be made available through Vicroads and community road safety councils to ensure programs such as the Survival on our Roads program are implemented for those not in the school system.

Other recommendations are that community road safety councils and Vicroads continue to be supported; that follow-up programs be developed for year 11 students to ensure that the new follow-up program covers excessive speed and also alcohol and other drugs; that schools are adequately supported by road safety authorities to ensure that the TAC muck-up day program is implemented to all year 12 programs. I do not know if you have all seen that video Muck-up Day. I did a presentation to the Geelong High School. A lot of them had not seen it, and I have never seen kids more riveted to a video because it is a real-life — —

The CHAIR — What is it, Shane?

Snr Sgt COLES — It was a young boy from a college around Frankston way. They had a muck-up day and he killed his mate. It went through the whole process of the accident and how his girlfriend felt about him; he
got a custodial sentence.

The CHAIR — This is the video you are talking about?

Snr Sgt COLES — Yes. It showed the impact it had on him, his girlfriend, the family and everybody else. It is a very good video.

The next area we are looking at is motorcycle safety. Motor cycle crashes are high in the City of Greater Geelong, the Surf Coast Shire and the Colac Otway Shire. The local government safe roads program Make Motor Cycling Safer has been implemented by Barwon Roadsafe within the Surf Coast Shire and the Colac Otway Shire. This program has great potential to make a difference but needs to be supported.

To date activities have included the following: road condition reviews by experienced drivers; low-cost road improvements; production and distribution of a guide to motorcycling on the Great Ocean Road and the Otways; rider training for local riders; road safety presentations for local riders; and special police enforcement activities on the Great Ocean Road. Of particular note is the high motorcycle crash rate on the Great Ocean Road.

Mr EREN — I noticed a lot of trail bike riders in the Otways, and they do a lot of mountain bike riding and so on. Do we have any statistics on how many accidents occur amongst trail bike riders?

Snr Sgt COLES — The only one to note is the double fatal a couple of years ago where they had been camping and they had a head-on down near Anglesea. I cannot give you the statistics at this stage. Steve Towers, who is the sergeant at Surf Coast, is a very keen motorcycle rider, and he has taken that on board. He is particularly looking at that problem within the Otways area.

Mr EREN — I have noticed there is a particular increase in certain areas of trail bike riders.

Snr Sgt COLES — Steve has previously been on the special solo section of the Otway area, and he is going to target that area. He has taken that under his belt.

On recommendations, as noted previously the 100-kilometre speed limit for appropriate sections of the Great Ocean Road to be reduced to 80 kilometres an hour in conjunction with the following: additional overtaking opportunities being provided; recommendations above concerning Vicroads policy as to the number of different speed zones is made public; sufficient repeater signs and speed limit signs are erected to ensure drivers are always aware of the speed limit; that adequate human and financial resources are available to local municipalities and community road safety councils to implement the Make Motor Cycle Safer program; that attention is made to Vicroads and municipality claims for higher maintenance costs due to the nature of the roads in the Otways regions.

As stated previously these roads are in a very high rainfall area, are narrow and winding and have trees close to the edge of the road. Landslips regularly block drainage systems. A high number of motorcycle riders use them and road maintenance practices need to be allowed for the special needs of motorcyclists. Motorcycles do not handle unexpected hazards as well as cars do.

These environmental factors mean road maintenance costs on the Great Ocean Road and other roads in the Otways are higher than for those other roads, and funding needs to reflect this. Some signs specifically rated to hazards for motorcyclists have been erected on the Great Ocean Road. These are greatly welcomed by riders and this program should be continued. In order to encourage drivers to use alternative inland routes to the Great Ocean Road, special funding be made available to improve the standard of inland roads from Lorne to Geelong and from Apollo Bay to Geelong. This was noted in the Department of Sustainability and Environment Great Ocean Road region — —

The CHAIR — We are obviously operating under adverse conditions.

Mr SCHROETER — Traffic safety education in schools is the subject. Road safety researches have demonstrated that children are very capable learners at a young age and develop attitudes at a young age. Barwon Roadsafe believes it is essential to continue to ensure that road safety is taught in schools. Vicroads, the TAC and others have produced some very effective road safety resources designed by schools. However, regional support to schools has decreased. Support for these programs from road safety authorities and the education and employment department needs to be strong. The recommendations are that support to schools by road safety authorities be increased, not diminished, and that resources available to schools continue to be available to schools and to be expanded by road safety authorities, not diminished.
On other issues, with the road toll now around 350 to 400 deaths per year and a whole host of contributing factors, it is getting more difficult to make statistically sound conclusions as to road toll trends due to the low numbers. For instance, once the road toll is segregated into key issues such as speed, fatigue, drink-driving, pedestrians, young drivers, older drivers et cetera each category has to be relative to the low number of fatal crashes. There is, therefore, a need to report more extensively on casualty crashes. This will improve statistical analysis and improve our understanding of the road toll. Currently the TAC, VicRoads and the police each produce good data, particularly in fatal crashes.

On recommendations, opportunities exist for the three to join to form a special super statistical analysis group. Such a group might be in a position to further improve the quality of police investigation reports and statistical analysis, particularly for serious injury crashes. In attachment 1 we have a summary of the key issues for Barwon region 1998–2002. Barwon region includes the City of Greater Geelong, Surf Coast, Golden Plains Shire and the Borough of Queenscliffe, and no doubt you will get a copy of what is on the back of this.

**The CHAIR** — For your purposes, do you find it relatively easy to get hold of statistics through the various organisations such as VicRoads?

Mr SCHROETER — Colin would be able to answer that better than me, but he has gone. I am not sure that I can answer that.

**The CHAIR** — One of the councils earlier indicated that they find it very difficult to get reasonable statistics out of VicRoads.

Mr BRIGGS — You can get statistics through the Internet site of VicRoads. There are also some other online resources, such as Operation Countdown, that update their figures on a daily basis. However, the official figures or more accurate figures that we generally get are from the police.

Snr Sgt COLES — I use our CAD system, which is our communication system in regard to calls to accident sites, and I can download that for each day and produce that on a map. That is now being produced to the Road Safety Council and it shows individual types of crashes and the seriousness of them. Then you have a look at fatal collisions. They can come back to me. We do the actual investigation. The sergeant does a fatal report audit, which I have here. You cannot get much information out until that matter is finalised. That is our biggest drawback. It might take 12 months for a case to get up and to give out a cause. We know the cause of the accident, but to give that to somebody else may take 12 months. By that time it is much too late.

**The CHAIR** — I only raised that because the City of Greater Geelong raised that as an issue earlier.

Snr Sgt COLES — They are bound by court appearances, but this is the list of our fatals, and each one of those lines is a fatal. The trend this year is cars going into trees. It has changed dramatically.

**The CHAIR** — That is interesting.

Snr Sgt COLES — I go to a lot of the fatals myself and you just cannot work out why people are doing it; it is stupid.

Ms MAPLESDEN — Can I just add one other issue. Our region had five cyclist deaths in the period from 1998 to 2002. Bicycle use on public roads is being encouraged. However, the user-pays thinking does not seem to apply. It might be a daunting task to commence it, but the registration, insurance and licensing of vehicles — because they are vehicles — is really the only fair way to fund the infrastructure that they need for safety — like sealed shoulders and dedicated lanes. The medical and rehabilitation costs of bicyclist injuries also need to be funded.

A single car hitting a tree could be due to many causes. It could be a suicidal mood, loose gravel, heavy rain, alcohol, extreme speed, avoiding a stray animal or a combination of every one of those in one event, and yet you have to categorise it with statistics, and it does not put the numbers very accurately as to where you put strategies for road safety plans.

Mr SCHROETER — My personal view, not as a Roadsafe member, and in view of the girl on the mobile phone who received a suspended sentence, is that the sentence should be doubled or trebled for the use of a mobile phone while driving. It is not good enough in my book. With all due respect to that girl, we have to look to the future and the fine should be doubled and trebled and really enforced.
Ms MAPLESDEN — A lot of entertainment seems to be creeping onto the dashboard of cars, including GPS and reading screens. You simply cannot do both and look out for other road users.

The CHAIR — That is right.

Ms MAPLESDEN — The advertisements on television encourage all the whiz-bang things that are good to have, but they are just not safe to do while driving.

Mr SCHROETER — I have a GPS that I check my speed with.

The CHAIR — I am mindful of the time, so are there any other questions?

Mr EREN — Just quickly, have you made any representations to the federal government in relation to the bypass?

Ms MAPLESDEN — I think the mayor has.

Mr EREN — Your committee has not?

Ms MAPLESDEN — No.

The CHAIR — We appreciate your input and time and the amount of work that has obviously gone into your presentation. Thank you.

Mr SCHROETER — On behalf of the committee, we thank you for the opportunity to present it.

The CHAIR — Our pleasure.

Witnesses withdrew.
ROAD SAFETY COMMITTEE

Inquiry into country road toll

Geelong – 8 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

Witnesses
Mr E. Marsh; and
Mrs S. Marsh.

Necessary corrections to be notified to
effective officer of committee
The CHAIR — Mr and Mrs Marsh, or Sue and Ted, welcome to the state parliamentary Road Safety Committee inquiry. We are running two concurrent inquiries at the present time — an inquiry into the country road toll and also an inquiry into crashes involving roadside objects. We are taking a transcript of the proceedings and we can provide you with a copy of that transcript. We are also operating under parliamentary privilege, which means that what you say cannot be used against you legally into the future. We will try to keep this as informal as we can, so feel free to say what you need to, and as we go through the submission we may have a question and answer session as well. So would you like to kick off.

Mrs MARSH — In 1999 in Japan mobile phone use was banned. They are very obedient to their law. The accident rate dropped 53 per cent after they enacted this law. That is just one statement I want to make.

The second statement is that recently there was an accident in Geelong. A woman was extremely badly hurt. In fact her neck was partially broken. The report on it said she could not remember what had happened. I know pretty much to fact that she was text messaging and ran into a truck. We have no statistics on accidents which have been caused by text messaging or mobile phone use. Firstly, we cannot collect it because people put their phone aside or log it off, and the records do not necessarily coincide with the time of accident. So there are no records. Secondly, it is a problem in that you cannot use a camera to record it, so you need police to observe it. With that comes the fact that we have no reporting system similar to New Zealand, so it is only on observation of policemen who will catch people doing this particular problem. I find that a major problem, because as you drive around people only think it is partially illegal; they do not think it is really that bad to drive around talking on the phone and text messaging. There are no statistics, the fines are minimal, and they do not feel it is too much of a sin, but I will let Ted talk to you about the issues specifically.

Mr MARSH — It is really getting back to basics, and I think that submission I put in says it all: driving, you need all the concentration you can. And text messaging — —

The CHAIR — Ted, before you start, can I ask you, for the purpose of Hansard and the record, to tell us why you are interested in this issue and what has occurred to your family?

Mr MARSH — I will read this out. On 30 December 2001 our son Anthony was killed on the Portarlington Road at Moolap, a suburb of Geelong. It was about 11.30 a.m. on a bright, sunny Sunday morning when he was riding in the bike lane, returning from a training ride to Queenscliff. He was hit from behind by a motor vehicle driven by a young woman who was text messaging at that time. I will not go into this. This is old hat now. Obviously we have a vested interest in this issue and cannot let his death pass without making a determined effort to rectify what has become a most disturbing culture within our community.

It is impossible to obtain accurate records on accidents caused by phone use, as it is such a sneaky offence, particularly SMS messaging. We feel it is time this government approached the issue in a more serious and determined manner as, with the advent of new technology such as cameras, images on phone screens, Internet access, et cetera, phone use in vehicles will escalate to a far more alarming level if not stopped in the immediate future. That is really what we are about.

Mrs MARSH — The problem as we see it also is that it is not a problem for companies. It is not an employer responsibility when they have phones installed, for corporate companies or businessmen, for health and safety and road safety. Employees drive around with mobile phones being used, and they have not got a hands-free set and they are talking constantly, and we all know that the message which is sent on a mobile phone is a different message from somebody sitting next to you. It is relentless, and people do not concentrate. Many of you would have driven down the Geelong Road, like I do, and you see people wafting from side to side; they start slowing up, and you know that they are possibly using a mobile phone. So Ted and I drive up beside and check it, sometimes mark down the number. There is no way we can report it. There are no obvious police. There is no camera.

Mr MARSH — There is nothing you can do.

Mrs MARSH — There is nothing we can do.

Mr MARSH — This Telstra survey, which is fairly famous now, I think, shows that 1 in 3 motorists admit to using a handheld phone while they are driving; 1 in 6 admit to text messaging while driving. Only 1 in 3 felt a handheld phone was a major safety issue; 1 in 5 thought it was minor or not an issue at all. When you are getting things like that come out, it is so obvious what is going on. We talk about hands-free. Really no-one can define what a hands-free phone is. I heard Virginia Trioli on 3LO one day say, ‘If I put my phone up to my ear and
Mrs MARSH — We have a gentleman in the town we have approached on three occasions now. He is a celebrity, supposedly, in our town, and he maintains that he is too busy not to talk on a mobile phone and that he will not use a hands-free because the cords get in a muddle. The police will not do anything. What more do we do? It is just very frustrating for us. Obviously we are alerted to it and we have an agenda, but people are constantly doing this.

Two new phones are coming in, the GE3 from England, onto which you can download information from your computer, and another one with games. I can see the games being used as they drive along; I can see that happening. A $135 fine is equivalent to a night out on the tiles — that is what kids spend in a nightclub. I am not saying it is kids, because it is not. It is people right across the board, but nobody thinks it is a bad thing to do.

Mr MARSH — I have heard Mr Batchelor on the radio. When the two demerit points were originally brought in, that decision was made on the spot on ABC Melbourne.

The CHAIR — How do you mean?

Mr MARSH — He was asked by Jon Faine what he was going to do about mobile phones. His answer was, ‘Why?’ Jon Faine told him that they had increased the fines in Sydney and Mr Batchelor said, ‘Have they? Well, we will put two demerit points on it’. That decision was made on ABC Melbourne, although it was subsequently increased to three points, but nothing has happened since. He was asked what he was going to do about text messaging, and the answer was, ‘We cannot catch them. We will educate them,’ and that was the end of that conversation.

Mrs MARSH — I think education certainly has a part in this, but I really think that the fine is going to do it. The mobile phone issue is hip pocket stuff.

Mr MULDER — You spoke about Japan early on in the piece —

Mrs MARSH — Yes.

Mr MULDER — Was that just hand-held phones, or was it mobile phones?

Mrs MARSH — Mobile phones in cars are banned.

Mr MULDER — Mobile phones in cars are banned?

Mrs MARSH — They are banned. You are not allowed to use a mobile phone.

Mr MULDER — You are allowed to have them but you are not allowed to use them?

Mrs MARSH — I do not know the distinction, I am sorry.

Mr MULDER — Okay.

Mrs MARSH — I think there should be more research into a built-in machine that stops your phone from operating as you get into the car; it automatically switches off, but when you step out of the car you can operate it again. Research is being done in that field. They brought out one set here but it was a problem for people walking along the pavement, so it did not work. But I am sure that more research should be done in that direction, with immobilisers.

The CHAIR — So you are of the opinion that mobile phones should be banned from cars full stop?

Mrs MARSH — To be perfectly honest, unless you are trapped in the car I cannot see a reason — we have voicemail, phone numbers come up and we can stop at the side of the road —

Mr MARSH — Phones are banned here as well as in Japan, but it does not make any difference here.

Mrs MARSH — People do not conform.

Mr MARSH — People do not conform. Have a look around town, everyone has a phone in their hand. If they are at the head of the supermarket queue, they will answer the phone; if they are in the toilet, they will
answer it; and if they are driving their car they will answer it. They have to answer the phone for some reason. But if we had a $500 fine and six demerit points, they might think about it.

Mrs MARSH — I just think the fine is too paltry; it is the same as a speeding fine — for going 4 kilometres over the speed limit.

Mr MARSH — My daughter lives in Torquay and was caught on camera doing 4 kilometres an hour over the limit in a 50-kilometre-an-hour speed zone and received a $125 fine. She wore that because that is the law. If she had taken her car round the Western Ring Road and onto the Hume Highway, text messaging all the way to Albury and been caught, the fine would have been $10 more. It is ridiculous!

The CHAIR — So, Ted, what are you saying is the answer? What do you feel needs to happen?

Mr MARSH — We have to start off with a $500 fine and six demerit points. For text messaging a $500 fine and loss of licence for a month or two months, whatever. An editorial in the Sydney Sunday Telegraph two years ago called for just that. That was a starting point until we got something more realistic, but nothing happened up there either. The whole thing just goes on.

Mrs MARSH — Why can’t we lead the way? Why can’t Victoria be special? We have had a death here — it is not to say that there have not been other deaths, because we do not necessarily know about them. We know from constantly talking to the police that nose-to-tail accidents are caused by mobile phone use, one after another. How many times do we see people weaving into bike lanes? We see them weaving into bike lanes and we see them on their mobile phones, and it catches at our hearts. What can we do to change it?

Mr MULDER — Sue, you have raised this issue about mobile phones. What about five-stacker CDs and other types of equipment that is in vehicles and cars?

Mrs MARSH — I have spoken at length to the guys at Monash who are investigating distraction while driving. I understand there are other things, but mobile phones are our agenda and we have concentrated on that.

The CHAIR — Yes, I understand that.

Mrs MARSH — We understand the distractions of driving. People try to say to us all the time, ‘What if you have a passenger in the car? They are a distraction’, but that is nothing like a mobile phone; it is a very different sort of conversation. It has been proved that it gives you tunnel vision. I watched a guy on a mobile phone forget to do three right-hand signals. It is concentrated and it is different to a lot of things in your car, because if your boss is telling you to do something, how could you — —

The CHAIR — Or your wife!

Mrs MARSH — Or your wife.

Mr EREN — Ted, are you driving a taxi at the moment?

Mr MARSH — I sold it a week ago.

Mr EREN — The last time I was in a taxi it had a big thing — —

Mr MARSH — Yes.

Mr EREN — It did certain jobs and so forth.

Mr MARSH — Something should be done about that. They now have special fittings, but I am trying to deal with the things that are illegal now. People say that you cannot put the fines up, but it is illegal now. You can put up the fines as much as you like, but it is still going to be illegal. Somebody has to have a vested interest if they think the fine is too high. It is the same with a hands-free phone. I really do not have too much of an opinion on that, because it is not illegal and it is marginally safer, but holding your hand up holding a phone and driving is sheer arrogance in most cases. When you pull up beside such a person and make them aware, you get the finger every time.

Mrs MARSH — I am disturbed to see mothers driving over school crossings talking on their mobiles with a car full of kids, especially because I have grandchildren at school. It is very nerve-racking when you see it. They
have not got full concentration. There should be a major push by corporations and self-employed people who have mobile phones and do all their work in the car — —

Mr MARSH — They are some of the worst.

Mrs MARSH — The other day I watched a huge truck go around a roundabout while the driver was talking on his mobile phone — he was trying to get his huge truck around the roundabout. I do not know what is to be done necessarily, but I know that it has to be altered.

Mr MARSH — The Herald Sun and the Age have both written editorials on this. The Herald Sun said that the penalty for this irresponsible stupidity is a paltry $135 and three demerit points. It said that the Bracks government should boost the penalty dramatically so that the stigma of such dangerous and selfish behaviour hits home. That is right. The Age took the same line on the subject.

Mrs MARSH — If you would like to look at some of the articles — —

Mr MARSH — There has been so much publicity about phones, we cannot all be wrong.

The CHAIR — Ted, what steps have you taken to inform government of your opinion?

Mr MARSH — I think you will find in that submission there, there are quite a lot of letters.

Mrs MARSH — Barwon Water is an interesting one.

Mr MARSH — Mr Batchelor does not even acknowledge it.

Mrs MARSH — He thinks it would be an infringement of our human rights if we have a referral, a dob-in line. He does not like that idea.

Mr MARSH — The Human Rights Commission — —

Mrs MARSH — It is open for abuse, that sort of dob-in line. However, you can have it for chucking paper out of the car, so — —

Mr MARSH — With this trial that is now over, obviously the newspapers took it up. In the judge’s summation in the sentencing notes she has a crack at the government as well. You probably have not seen this:

> The use of a hand-held mobile phone while driving is prohibited, and although breach of such a law might seem to some a relatively minor offence, this case highlights that it is not because even a moment’s lapse in concentration or non-adherence to regulations governing the driving of vehicles can have grave results. The use of mobile phones generally has become so prevalent that the risk of very serious potential consequences if used when driving may have been overlooked by many people.

This case should serve as a stark warning to all that the risk is very real, and with the extent of use of mobile phones generally, more public attention should be drawn to this risk as well as to the myriad of distractions to which drivers are now susceptible with the ever-increasing technology and entertainment options in vehicles.

That is a good summation.

The CHAIR — That is a direct quote — —

Mr MARSH — That is a direct quote from the judge’s summation. There are six pages of it here. You can have this.

The CHAIR — If we could get a copy of that later on, that would be appreciated.

Mr MARSH — You are getting things like that happening, and everybody somewhere along the line is having a crack at the government over this because there is nothing — —

Mrs MARSH — It is like genetics, you cannot keep the legislation abreast of the change in genetic problems, but with this you are having a constant change in the technology. I cannot see why we cannot lead the way. There has already been a death in England. There have been deaths in America, but they have different laws, state by state. Britain has just brought in a new set of legislation this week.
Mr MARSH — They are behind the times. They are just catching up.

The CHAIR — What does that legislation say?

Mr MARSH — Just banning mobile phones.

Mrs MARSH — They have only just banned it. Thirty countries have already banned it.

Mr MARSH — We did it earlier on, but we have not gone far enough.

Mr MULDER — Banning hand-holds?

Mrs MARSH — Yes, not necessarily hands-free.

Mr MARSH — Bicycle Victoria has got right into this as well, but it is regarding it more as drink-driving, because there is a British study which shows on a simulator that mobile phone use is equivalent to a blood alcohol reading of 0.08, which is their minimum, so therefore it should be treated as drink-driving. So whichever way you go, it is pretty serious. It is worth a lot more than $135.

Mrs MARSH — But you do not have the statistics to show, that is the sad thing, because you will never get them.

Mr MULDER — Is there an issue there with, ‘All right, we will bump the fine up to $500’, but it is still a very hard offence to detect?

Mr MARSH — Yes, that is right, but I think the harder it is to detect, the more you should put the fine up. There are a lot of people out there that do not give a damn at $135, but if it was $500 and six points — two or three points do not mean anything until you get a letter from Vicroads saying you have got two left.

Mr MULDER — That is walking for a probationary driver now, is it not?

Mr MARSH — If you cop six points and a $500 fine or loss of licence for texting and maybe a loss of your phone, you are going to think about it. If you get rid of another 20 per cent, that is better than it is now.

Mrs MARSH — When you talk about education, everybody knows it is illegal. When they were surveyed, they all knew it was illegal. So what is education going to do, really? They know it is illegal, and they do it.

Mr MARSH — Ron Gray, as you know, was the policeman involved in this case. We had a barbecue down at our place the Sunday before last and he came down with his wife and two kiddies, off duty, of course. He followed a car down the Torquay road that was travelling a bit erratically, he got up beside it and here is a young girl going for her life text messaging. So his wife made her aware of the fact that they were watching her, and it was just the finger, straight up, and she just kept going, so he could not do anything either.

Mrs MARSH — I signalled to a young girl in the car next to me at the lights who was texting, and she pointed to the lights.

Mr MARSH — She thought it was legal because the lights were red.

Mrs MARSH — It was okay because the lights were red.

Mr MARSH — You can go on and on.

Mrs MARSH — We have countless examples because we are obviously alerted to it. It is very hard, though, sometimes because you really have to keep your cool. I do not want it to escalate into some road rage problem. It is very hard to keep your cool sometimes, to try and signal to people that this is inappropriate — ‘You are acting dangerously’. Half the time when you do try to signal to them, they are not seeing you. Ted had a young lady the other week where he was bipping on the horn.

Mr MARSH — I had two passengers in the car. They all knew what was going on. There were two kiddies strapped into baby seats. She had a cigarette in one hand and her elbow up here with the phone. It was on the Ballarat road. I am beside her, honking the horn and they are all shouting. She did not even see me, just kept
going; did not see me.

Mrs MARSH — One good thing we had was with Barwon Water.

Mr MARSH — I wrote a letter to Barwon Water because I was up in Jan Juc dropping a passenger off, and this car came around the corner, a ute with Barwon Water emblazoned all over it, with a guy with a collar and tie, obviously a supervisor of some sort, on the phone. I wrote to them and suggested that maybe they would have trouble with their insurance if something happened; just made suggestions. They wrote back a full page saying that they are now putting hands-free phones in all their vehicles, and there will be dire consequences for anyone caught. They are probably a soft target in that regard, but you cannot tell that to the 18-year-old blonde in the red Laser that is text messaging. Excuse me — no offence. That is what it is like. There is no-one to write to. You cannot notify the police because they cannot do anything. You just watch them.

The CHAIR — From your quote before with regard to Japan, are you advocating ultimately that phones should be banned from cars, full stop?

Mrs MARSH — No, not necessarily. I think there should be — —

The CHAIR — So you are advocating increased fines?

Mr MARSH — They are a more subservient nation. If something is banned, they generally say, ‘There is a reason why it is banned. We will not do it’.

Mrs MARSH — There is no reason why people cannot have their phone in the car with them and get it on message. We have discussed this before on many occasions. We are still undecided about it a bit, I have to say. We have approached what could be done with fitting it into cars.

Mr MARSH — I think you have to start by getting rid of things that are already outlawed. At least that is the first step, and then look at what is happening. What is the point of banning a hands-free phone when you cannot even ban a hand-held one?

Mrs MARSH — Whether it would be automatically that all cars have it fitted to some sort of system, that is beyond our ken to know, but we have talked about that.

Mr MARSH — Education in itself is not the answer. A $500 fine, or whatever you like, then education. But not a $135 fine. They would laugh at if you tried to educate them on that.

Mrs MARSH — It might take 5 or 10 years to change the culture back again. It might be like drink-driving, which took many years for people to change their culture.

Mr MARSH — But the fines are pretty heavy.

Mrs MARSH — Yes, the fines are heavy — losing your licence, this sort of thing.

Mr MULDER — But it is much easier to detect than someone using a mobile phone.

Mrs MARSH — Of course.

Mr MARSH — But that is why the fine should be higher.

Mrs MARSH — What was the number they were catching a month? Something like 40 000 to 60 000 a month, or some outrageous number that they are picking up, but people are still doing it.

Mr MARSH — That was random though. That was people who present themselves in front of or behind a police car. That is how stupid they are.

Mrs MARSH — They had a blitz where they picked up loads of people doing it.

The CHAIR — Ted, do you know what the fines are in other states?

Mr MARSH — It is comparable in New South Wales; I think it is $200 and three points.

Mrs MARSH — I still do not think it is enough.
Mr MARSH — That is nothing.

Mrs MARSH — Queensland barely considers it a problem at all. We have the second highest — —

Mr MARSH — No, we have the third or fourth highest fines, which makes it the — —

The CHAIR — But the other states are roughly comparable.

Mrs MARSH — Roughly.

The CHAIR — They are not in the levels you are talking about?

Mr MARSH — They are pretty well comparable.

The CHAIR — But none of them are talking about six demerit points and $500 fines?

Mr MARSH — No, but that is what they call for. Nobody has led the way.

The CHAIR — All right.

Mr MARSH — This state would have nothing to fear by doing that, because it is illegal anyhow. I am sure that 90 per cent of people out there would applaud it. It will not cost anything. I am sure that once we did it, the other states would follow suit very smartly. They would say, ‘They have done it there; we have got to do it’. That is generally the excuse. It just takes someone to do it.

Mrs MARSH — It is really about publicising our son’s death and alerting people to what they are seeing around them, because if you were to spend an hour standing on the corner of a road, you would see them. Many of the reporters have done that.

Mr MARSH — There was an article in the Age a couple of weeks back on this whole issue and other issues. These photos were taken in something like one hour on one street corner. That is on the third page of the Sunday Age, but no-one recognises it.

Mrs MARSH — The education section of the Age has done a full-page spread to try to educate young people. As teachers, friends of our are trying to pick up on it.

Mr MARSH — But education is only one part of it.

The CHAIR — For the fullness of the record, can you tell us what sentence the young lady got in your son’s case?

Mr MARSH — She got a two-year suspended sentence, suspended for three years, two years loss of licence, which is mandatory — and surprisingly, no fine. I had guessed a fine of between $5000 and $10 000 at least, and I was surprised that it was not.

Mrs MARSH — The fine ceiling is $240 000 for culpable driving.

The CHAIR — Yet she received no fine. What did you think of the suspended sentence?

Mr MARSH — We were happy. I think you have to separate the case from the person, and I would hope that everyone is judged on their merits. If she had had 10 prior convictions and 27 tattoos, she probably would have gone to jail — and I am sure the next one will.

Mrs MARSH — One in England has.

Mr MARSH — So that was the precedent.

Mrs MARSH — A guy in England was jailed for five years.

Mr MARSH — That was for text messaging.

The CHAIR — With all respect, your own attitude towards that young lady saved her from going to jail. You advocated that she not go to jail.
Mrs MARSH — We did, but ultimately the judge makes the judgment. But as a family we decided that.

Mr MARSH — There was some doubt that we would win that case.

The CHAIR — Unless what?

Mr MARSH — She made a submission through Ron Gray, and it was argued that she should have been cautioned first. He stood up to about 5 hours of questioning, and that issue had not been decided when she changed her plea. It was suggested that if we had won the case she might not have gone to jail anyhow. We have done a bit of research on the judge, and I will just leave it at that. So we feel, and the police and the prosecution felt, that we got the best of it because using a phone like that and killing someone will now be judged as culpable driving, and that is a plus anyway.

The CHAIR — Yes.

Mr MARSH — But we still have $135 fines. It is all out of whack.

The CHAIR — Would you like to make any further comment? If not, we thank you for your time and input into the inquiry. We will provide you with a copy of the transcript. If there is anything else that you would like to present, feel free to pass it on to me as the local member of Parliament or to the committee.

Mrs MARSH — I am sorry, we are not really researchers, we are just two parents who have lost a son and therefore we are not very skilled at this.

The CHAIR — You have done a good job today. I have heard you advocating the case on the radio a couple of times, and I commend you for the work that you have done.

Mr MARSH — We had another letter published in the Sunday Age in reply to the chief executive officer of the mobile phone association. He wrote garbage: he was trying to have it every way, but with the help of the Age reporter we had our letter published.

The CHAIR — Thank you, Sue and Ted.

Committee adjourned.